

THE CHRISTIAN BASILICA OF IBIDA. ELEMENTS OF INTERIOR DECORATION

BY

DOREL PARASCHIV*, IOAN IAȚCU**

Abstract:

There are very few details known about the christian basilica within the large fortified Late Roman town of Ibida (6th century AD). In the course of time, the few archaeological excavations carried out, as well as a series of random finds, uncovered a varied range of decorative marble elements. These finds are structural elements (bases, columns and capitals) as well as pieces of liturgical apparatus (pilasters, small columns and finials of the chancel bannister). The pieces were manufactured from the best material available, Proconnesus and Aphrodisias marble. The range of decorative motifs of the finds is limited to crosses and vegetal decoration (acanthus leaves), very simplified and schematic. The occurrence of such marble pieces at the site of Ibida, proves the inclusion of this religious edifice in the wide beautification program attributed to the reign of Justinian I, which was implemented on the whole territory of the Scythia Province.

Keywords: *Scythia, basilica, marble, capitals.*

The first considerations regarding the importance of the site of Ibida to the history of the Christianity in this particular corner of the world were penned as early as 1909 by the catholic Archbishop of Bucharest Raymund Netzhammer: “A systematic research of this area of the ruins shall be of great value for the Christian archaeology as well, as the results will reveal, most assuredly, Christian vestiges, such were uncovered at Adamclisi, Axiopolis and Troesmis, and the fundamentals of a Palaeo-Christian basilica will be found, and even a Palaeo-Christian cemetery”.¹

The first Christian basilica of Ibida was uncovered soon after the Archbishop’s prediction. The ruins of the edifice were found during the First World War by the Bulgarian lieutenant-colonel Ikonomoff, a great lover of antiques, who carried out excavations inside the fortification. Following his second visit to Slava Rusă, in 1918, May 9th, Raymund Netzhammer places the Christian edifice on the topographic plan made by the engineer-surveyor Pamfil Polonic and reports the first archaeological details of the monument.²

The basilica, oriented on a W–E axis, has three aisles, the central one being separated from the lateral ones by two rows of marble columns. Netzhammer identified one column drum, 3.65 m high, with the upper

* Institutul de Cercetări Eco-Muzeale Tulcea, Muzeul de Istorie și Arheologie; dorelparaschiv@yahoo.com.

** Complexul Muzeal Național “Moldova” Iași, Muzeul de Istorie al Moldovei; iatcu80@gmail.com. For Ioan Iațcu, this work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-RU-PD-2011-3-0103.

¹ R. Netzhammer, *Aus Rumänien. Streifzüge durch das Land und seine Geschichte*, I, Verlagsanstalt Benziger & Co, Einsiedeln-Waldshut-Köln, 1909, pp. 390–391; idem, *Din România. Incursiuni prin această țară și istoria ei*, I, (Romanian edition by V. Barbu, translation from German by G. Guțu), Ed. Humanitas, București, 2010, p. 330.

² Idem, *Die christlichen Altertümer der Dobrudscha*, Ed. Socec & Co, București, 1918, p. 156, fig. 57; idem, *Antichitățile creștine din Dobrogea*, (ed. Al. Barnea; translated in Romanian by G. Guțu), Ed. Academiei Române, București, 2005, pp. 139–140, fig. 57: the author visits the “archaeological excavation site of Slava Rusă” and regrets that he did not succeed in meeting Ikonomoff; idem, *Episcop in România. Într-o epocă a conflictelor naționale și religioase*, (eds. I. N. Netzhammer, K. Zach), Ed. Academiei Române, București, 2005, pp. 785–786: “the Bulgarian officer Ikonomoff ... ordered the excavation of an exploratory trench in the area of the old fortress. The first things he uncovered were the three apses, build in crude ashlars, of a large Palaeo-Christian church 22 meters wide, adorned with a mosaic floor. It is good that the foundations of the ancient building, with one of its marvelously beautiful marble columns, were not fully uncovered, as these would now be exposed to the risk of complete destruction”. (our translation).

diameter of 55 cm and the lower one of 49 cm;³ the pavement of the monument was made in mosaic.⁴ The width of the building is around 22 m, while its definite length remains unknown. What is special about this monument is the fact that each aisle has an apse at its east end. The walls of the central aisle were 1.2 m thick.

There were several other architectural pieces found here after the first reports, of both white and purplish-white marble, following the excavations of G. G. Mateescu carried out from 1926 onward.⁵ To the excavated pieces one should add several random finds.⁶ To the present we know of five ionic capitals with impost (fragments which it is possible to calculate their dimensions),⁷ three bases of columns,⁸ three shafts of columns,⁹ a cornice fragment, a fragment of pilaster, two fragments of a diminutive column shaft as well as a small capital from a similar small column.¹⁰ Judging from their dimensions one can assert with a high degree of certitude that all 16 pieces belong to the same building.¹¹

Catalogue:

1. Ionic capital-impost (inv. 1066, Pl. 2)

Description: The find is a fragment of Proconnesus marble and originates from the excavations of G. G. Mateescu of 1920's. Its total height is 42 cm (abacus: 11 cm; decorated impost: 21.6 cm; the ionic capital proper: 10.4 cm). Preserved dimensions: the width of the impost large side, 45.6 cm; the width of the impost small side, 47 cm. Only the dimensions of the small side of the impost can be reconstructed; its width is between 74 cm (at the abacus) and 54 cm (at the capital). Only one volute is preserved from the capital's decoration, together with one of the two acanthus leaves that filled the space between the volutes. One of the sides of the impost is decorated in the center with a Latin cross, which arms have the deployed dimensions are 27 cm and 17.6 cm respectively.

References: I. Barnea, *Roman-Byzantine Basilicae discovered in Dobrogea between 1948–1958*, in *Dacia*, N.S., 2, 1958, p. 347, fig. 12/1; idem, *Les monuments paléochrétiens de Roumanie*, Città del Vaticano, 1977, p. 217, fig. 80/1; idem, *Arta creștină în România*, 1, *Secolele III–VI*, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1979, p. 222, pl. 93/1; V. H. Baumann, *Piese sculpturale și epigrafice în colecția Muzeului de Istorie și Arheologie din Tulcea*, in *Peuce*, 9, 1984, p. 219, nr. 14, fig. 39; M. Penția, N. Herz, M. Șeclăman, *Marble Provenance Study of Some Roman and Byzantine Artifacts discovered in Northern Dobruđa-Romania*, in *Actes de la IV-ème Conférence Internationale ASMOSIA IV, France, Bordeaux-Tallence, 9–13 octobre 1995, Archéomatériaux. Marbres et autres roches*, (ed. M. Schvoerer), Bordeaux, 1999, p. 158, tab. I–II, nr. 22.

³ The local lore says that at least two column shafts from the basilica were plundered by Germans during the war; if the information is true, the plunderers were probably Bulgarians, as the area was within the Bulgarian occupation zone.

⁴ R. Netzhammer, *Die Altchristliche Kirchenprovinz Scythien (Tomis)*, in *Strena Buliciana*, Zagreb, 1924, p. 408; idem, op. cit. (n. 2), 2005, p. 139, writes that “it seems that they also found a beautiful fragment of the mosaic floor” (our translation), and the numerous random finds of glass *tesserae*, on the private land that includes in the present the basilica, confirm our belief.

⁵ R. Vulpe, *In amintirea lui G. G. Mateescu*, in *Analele Dobrogei*, 11, 1930, 1–12, p. 125; I. Barnea, *Roman-Byzantine Basilicae discovered in Dobrogea between 1948–1958*, in *Dacia*, N.S., 2, 1958, p. 347, fig. 12; idem, *Les monuments paléochrétiens de Roumanie*, Città del Vaticano, 1977, p. 217, fig. 80. The results of the research of G. G. Mateescu are almost unknown; the History and Archaeology Museum in Tulcea acquired in 1953, several items unearthed during his excavations (V. H. Baumann, *Piese sculpturale și epigrafice în colecția Muzeului de Istorie și Arheologie din Tulcea*, in *Peuce*, 9, 1984, pp. 219–221; nr. 12–15, 21, 23–24; fig. 37–40, 47, 49). For the marble provenance analysis for some of the items, see M. Penția, N. Herz, M. Șeclăman, *Marble Provenance Study of Some Roman and Byzantine Artifacts discovered in Northern Dobruđa-Romania*, in *Actes de la IV-ème Conférence Internationale ASMOSIA IV, France, Bordeaux-Tallence, 9–13 octobre 1995, Archéomatériaux. Marbres et autres roches*, (ed. M. Schvoerer), Bordeaux, 1999, p. 158; tab. I–II; nr. 22–24, 26.

⁶ For the columns, see, V. H. Baumann, op. cit. (n. 5), p. 221, nr. 24; Z. Covacef, C. Pașca, *Sculptura arhitectonică în Dobrogea antică*, in *Pontica*, 24, 1991, p. 173, nr. 48, pl. IV/7. Some unpublished finds should be added to the above list, such are: a column base without date of acquisition, a capital with impost recovered by us (M. Iacob, D. Paraschiv) from the perimeter of the basilica in 2001, a cornice fragment uncovered in 2005, and several elements of a baluster from the chancel bannister (*cancelli*).

⁷ I. Barnea, op. cit. (n. 5), 1958, p. 347, fig. 12; idem, op. cit. (n. 5), 1977, p. 217, fig. 80; idem, *Arta creștină în România*, 1, *Secolele III–VI*, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1979, p. 222, pl. 93; V. H. Baumann, op. cit. (n. 5), pp. 219–220, nr. 12–15, fig. 37–40. The above corpus should be supplemented with the previously unreported piece mentioned above.

⁸ V. H. Baumann, op. cit. (n. 5), pp. 220–221; nr. 21, 23; fig. 47, 49, and a previously unreported piece.

⁹ R. Netzhammer, op. cit. (n. 2), 2005, p. 139; V. H. Baumann, op. cit. (n. 5), p. 221, nr. 24; Z. Covacef, C. Pașca, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 173, nr. 48, pl. IV/7.

¹⁰ I. Iațcu, *Construcții religioase creștine în provincia Scythia Minor. Secolele IV–VI p. Chr.*, Ed. Istros, Brăila, 2012, p. 72.

¹¹ *Ibida* is also the point of origin for several architectural elements in marble and limestone, found in various places, mainly during the last decade.

2. Ionic capital-impot (inv. 1067, Pl. 3)

Description: The find is a fragment of Aphrodisias marble, and originates from the excavations of G. G. Mateescu. Its total height is 37 cm (abacus, 7.6 cm; decorated impost, 19.4 cm; the ionic capital proper, 10 cm). Preserved dimensions: the width of the impost large side, 55 cm; the width of the impost small side, 31.6 cm. One of the sides of the impost is decorated with a Latin cross, out of which only the edge of an arm is preserved. Only one volute is preserved from the capital's decoration, on the side with the fragment of the cross, together with one acanthus leaf with two tips.

References: I. Barnea, *Roman-Byzantine Basilicae discovered in Dobrogea between 1948–1958*, in *Dacia*, N.S., 2, 1958, p. 347, fig. 3/a, b; idem, *Les monuments paléochrétiens de Roumanie*, Città del Vaticano, 1977, p. 217, fig. 80/3.a, b; V. H. Baumann, *Piese sculpturale și epigrafice în colecția Muzeului de Istorie și Arheologie din Tulcea* in *Peuce*, 9, 1984, p. 219, nr. 12, fig. 37; M. Penția, N. Herz, M. Șeclăman, *Marble Provenance Study of Some Roman and Byzantine Artifacts discovered in Northern Dobruđja-Romania*, in *Actes de la IV-ème Conférence Internationale ASMOSIA IV, France, Bordeaux-Tallence, 9–13 octobre 1995, Archéomatériaux. Marbres et autres roches*, (ed. M. Schvoerer), Bordeaux, 1999, p. 158, tab. I–II, nr. 24.

3. Ionic capital-impot (inv. 1068, Pl. 4)

Description: The find is a fragment of Aphrodisias marble, and originates from the excavations of G. G. Mateescu. Its total height is 33.2 cm (abacus, 5.6 cm; decorated impost, 17 cm; the capital proper, 10.6 cm). Preserved dimensions: the width of the impost large side, 38.2 cm; the width of the impost small side, 38 cm. Only the dimensions of the small side of the impost can be reconstructed; its width is between 70 cm (at the abacus) and 50 cm (at the capital). One of the sides of the impost is decorated with a cross in relief, with a three-lobed acanthus leaf between its lower arms. The arms of the deployed cross are 23.8 cm and 18 cm long respectively (the latter is reconstructed). The acanthus leaf is 14.4 cm tall. The decoration of the capital proper is mostly destroyed.

References: I. Barnea, *Roman-Byzantine Basilicae discovered in Dobrogea between 1948–1958*, in *Dacia*, N.S., 2, 1958, p. 347, fig. 12/2; idem, *Les monuments paléochrétiens de Roumanie*, Città del Vaticano, 1977, p. 217, fig. 80/2; idem, *Arta creștină în România*, 1, *Secolele III–VI*, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1979, p. 222, pl. 93/2; V. H. Baumann, *Piese sculpturale și epigrafice în colecția Muzeului de Istorie și Arheologie din Tulcea*, in *Peuce*, 9, 1984, p. 219, nr. 13, fig. 38; M. Penția, N. Herz, M. Șeclăman, *Marble Provenance Study of Some Roman and Byzantine Artifacts discovered in Northern Dobruđja-Romania*, in *Actes de la IV-ème Conférence Internationale ASMOSIA IV, France, Bordeaux-Tallence, 9–13 octobre 1995, Archéomatériaux. Marbres et autres roches*, (ed. M. Schvoerer), Bordeaux, 1999, p. 158, tab. I–II, nr. 23.

4. Ionic capital-impot (inv. 2251, Pl. 5)

Description: The find is a marble fragment originating from the excavations of G. G. Mateescu. Its preserved height is 29 cm (abacus, 6.6 cm; decorated impost, 17.4 cm; the preserved capital proper, 5 cm). One of the small sides of the impost is preserved almost in full and its dimensions vary from 72 cm (at the abacus) to 68 cm (the joining of the impost with the capital proper). The large side is preserved as a 53 cm fragment, decorated with a 13.2×10 cm egg-shaped molding.

References: I. Barnea, *Roman-Byzantine Basilicae discovered in Dobrogea between 1948–1958*, in *Dacia*, N.S., 2, 1958, p. 347, fig. 12/4; V. H. Baumann, *Piese sculpturale și epigrafice în colecția Muzeului de Istorie și Arheologie din Tulcea*, in *Peuce*, 9, 1984, p. 219, nr. 15, fig. 40.

5. Ionic capital-impot (inv. 46.342, Pl. 6)

Description: the find consists of half of marble capital found by chance in 2001 within the perimeter of the basilica. Its massive impost is shaped as double truncated pyramid. The total height is 37 cm (abacus, 7.6 cm; decorated impost, 18 cm; the capital proper, 11.4 cm). The preserved width of the impost large side is 62 cm, while the one of the small side is 50 cm. Both the large and the small sides of the impost can be reconstructed: the width of the large side varied between 104 cm (at the abacus) and 44 cm (at the capital) while the width of the small side varied between 78.8 cm and 58.4 cm. The impost is decorated with a Latin cross accompanied on each side of its shaft by three-lobed acanthus leaves stemming from the base of the cross. The arms of the deployed cross are 25 cm and 20 cm long respectively, while the acanthus leaves are 14.6 cm long. The capital proper is decorated with a two-lobed acanthus leaves.

References: unpublished.

6. Column base (without inv. No., Pl. 7/1)

Description: The find is a marble fragment probably originating from the excavations of G. G. Mateescu. Dimensions: height, 24 cm; plinth side, 59 cm; shaft diameter, 45,5 cm. The piece is perforated at its upper end. The hole is 6.8×7 cm and 5.6 cm deep and served to the attachment of the column.

References: unpublished.

7. Column base (inv. 2172, Pl. 7/2)

Description: The find is a stone (Babadag white-yellow cretaceous limestone) fragment probably originating from the excavations of G. G. Mateescu. The shaft and the plinth were broken in antiquity. Dimensions: height, 37 cm; plinth side, 46.5 cm; shaft diameter, 32 cm. The piece is remarkable due to its elegant profile. The plinth is thick and rectangular, the *doucine* is made out of three *tori* (concave and double convex), while the shaft is thick and tall. At the base the plinth is perforated. The hole is 7,5 x 7,5 cm and it indicates that the piece was raised on a pilaster.

References: V. H. Baumann, *Piese sculpturale și epigrafice în colecția Muzeului de Istorie și Arheologie din Tulcea*, in *Peuce*, 9, 1984, pp. 220–221, nr. 21, fig. 47.

8. Column base (inv. 2173, Pl. 7/3)

Description: The find is a marble fragment originating from the excavations of G. G. Mateescu. Only half of the column base is preserved and the corners of the plinth are broken. Dimensions: height, 29 cm; plinth side, 73 cm; shaft diameter, 47 cm. The plinth is massive and rectangular, the *doucine* tall and double (convex-concave), the base of the shaft rounded with a short step at its upper end. The *doucine* is supported organically by two lateral bands, sculpted in relief from its profile.

References: V. H. Baumann, *Piese sculpturale și epigrafice în colecția Muzeului de Istorie și Arheologie din Tulcea*, in *Peuce*, 9, 1984, p. 221, nr. 23, fig. 49.

9. Column shaft (inv. 4752, Pl. 8/1)¹²

Description: Marble, preserved whole. The body is a truncated cone, simple, with a double molding at its upper end and with only one at its lower end. The diameter is 50 cm (at the lower end), and the shaft is 350 cm high.

References: Z. Covacef, C. Pașca, *Sculptura arhitectonică în Dobrogea antică*, in *Pontica*, 24, 1991, p. 173, cat. 48, pl. IV/7.

10. Small pilaster shaft from a *pergola* (without inv. No., Pl. 8/2)

Description: Marble, broken in three fragments, with only one side preserved for the whole length. The height is 39 cm and the preserved width is 18.3 cm. The best preserved side has a still visible width of 18.5 cm. The reconstructed cross-section of the pilaster is 23×18.5 cm. One of the sides is decorated with deep grooves and moldings, which are repeated on the opposite side, with the difference that here two of the grooves are curving inward. The pilaster was probably extended upwards by a small-column shaft, as indicated by the broken part at its upper end. The pilaster was certainly used in the decorative screening of the altar, as a baluster in the *cancelli* bannister. Due to the missing lower end, one cannot determine which of the sides were grooved for mounting the plates.

Several finds of this type originate from a number of Christian basilicas in Scythia Province, such were the ones of Histria (episcopal basilica¹³ and *passim*) and Callatis (the “Syrian” basilica probably), with different dimensions. These small architectural pieces were used as decorative elements for the sanctuary of the basilicas, mainly during the 5th and 6th centuries AD. Either plain or decorated with moldings, these pilasters had their upper ends adorned with vegetal decoration, roses mainly,¹⁴ or extended by small columns ending in

¹² The piece is owned by the National History and Archaeology Museum of Constanța.

¹³ O. Bounegru, I. Iațcu, *La basilique épiscopale. Éléments de décoration intérieure*, in *Histria*, XIII, *La basilique épiscopale*, (ed. Al. Suceveanu), Ed. Academiei Române, București, 2007, p. 63, pl. XI; I. Iațcu, op. cit. (n. 10), p. 170; fig. 108/a, b, 109, 110.

¹⁴ Em. Popescu, *Christianitas Daco-Romana. Florilegium studiorum*, Ed. Academiei Române, București, 1994, p. 336; nr. 4, fig. 29.a, b; nr. 5, fig. 30.a, b.

finials usually supporting an architrave. As such, this type of pilaster is found in the majority of grand basilicas of the Byzantine space: Salona,¹⁵ Philippi (basilica A)¹⁶ and Shivta (Palestine).¹⁷

References: Unpublished.

11. Small column capital (without inv. No., Pl. 8/3)

Description: Fragmentary marble capital, broken at the lower end. The preserved height is 10.1 cm (out of which is the abacus, 3.1 cm). The abacus is shaped as a square slab of 10.7×10.7 cm, with a circular hole on its upper face, 2.9 cm in diameter and 1.4 cm deep. The decoration of the four edges consists in stylized acanthus leaves, with deeply sculpted veins, which converge to the center of the field, creating thus triangular patterns. The venation is made in deep-relief, making a combined artistic effect of light-shadow. Within Scythia Province this type of capital is found at Histria (episcopal basilica),¹⁸ with the difference that the find of Histria is larger. The type of decoration is specific to the 6th century basilica.

References: unpublished.

12. Fragments of small column shafts (without inv. No., Pl. 8/4)

Description: Two small-column shafts, both fragmentary, with both ends broken. The first is 14.5 cm long, with the upper end diameter of 9.4 cm and lower one of 9 cm. The second fragment is 26.5 cm long, with the upper end diameter of 12 cm, and lower one of 10.7 cm. The two fragmentary shafts were part of the same column, which was mounded on the upper end of a baluster of the *cancelli*, and was probably terminated by a finial. Such small columns (*κίονια*) were found in the episcopal basilica of Histria (6th century AD).¹⁹

References: unpublished.

13. Cornice (without inv. No., Pl. 8/5)

Description: Marble, broken at both ends. The preserved dimensions are: height 10.7 cm, width 7.7 cm, and length 14.5 cm. Two of its sides are at right angle to each other. The decoration consists in a succession of moldings and grooves.

References: unpublished.

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The ionic capitals found at Ibida are different from the rest of similar finds within Roman Dobruja due to their large dimensions, while the range of decorative motifs is similar. Such pieces, decorated with a cross on one of the impost sides, were found at Callatis (“Syrian” basilica),²⁰ Tropaeum Traiani (“Marble” basilica),²¹ Stratonis Turris,²² Durostorum (the second basilica, in front of the Police hotel).²³ The presence of some clumsily sculpted capitals, such are the ones of Tropaeum Traiani,²⁴ might indicate the fact that for certain decorative elements of the basilicas in the province of Scythia, the marble capitals were imported as blanks and finished by mixed teams of sculptors from the Province capital city²⁵ (*sculptores marmorum*) and

¹⁵ M.-P. Flèche Mourgues, P. Chevalier, *Piliers de chancel et poteaux-colonnettes. Chapiteaux (avec ou sans reste de fût)*, in Salona, I, *Catalogue de la sculpture architecturale paléochrétienne de Salone*, (eds. N. Duval, E. Marin, C. Metzger), École française de Rome, Rome-Split, 1994, p. 227, pl. LXXI/IX.d.14.

¹⁶ P. Lemerle, *Philippes et la Macédoine orientale à l'époque chrétienne et byzantine. Recherches d'histoire et d'archéologie*, II, *Album*, Bibliothèque des Ecoles française d'Athènes et de Rome 158, Ed. de Boccard, Paris, 1945, pl. XXXI, fig. 32–35.

¹⁷ A. Segal, *Architectural Decoration in Byzantine Shivta, Negev Desert, Israel*, BAR Int. Series 420, Oxford, 1988, p. 250, nr. 19 (49).

¹⁸ O. Bounegru, I. Iațcu, op. cit. (n. 13), p. 64, pl. XI; I. Iațcu, op. cit. (n. 10), p. 170, fig. 108/d, e.

¹⁹ O. Bounegru, I. Iațcu, op. cit. (n. 13), p. 64; I. Iațcu, op. cit. (n. 10), p. 172, fig. 108/c.

²⁰ I. Barnea, op. cit. (n. 7), 1979, p. 140, pl. 52; O. Tafrahi, *La cité pontique de Callatis*, in *Arta și Arheologia*, 1, 1927, 1, p. 52, fig. lower left; *Institutul de Arheologie Iași. Fondul de fotografii al Muzeului de Antichități Iași*, F 25, F 77.

²¹ I. Barnea, op. cit. (n. 7), 1979, p. 216, pl. 90.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 202, pl. 83, fig. 2.

²³ G. Atanasov, *Basiliques de l'époque du Haut Christianisme à Durostorum-Silistra*, in *Pontica*, 42, 2009, pp. 216–217, fig. 13.

²⁴ V. Pârvan, *Cetatea Tropaeum. Considerații istorice*, București, 1912, p. 104: the marble capitals with impost “which trapezoid faces are each adorned with a byzantine cross in the center, flanked by leaves ... were mostly left unfinished on the construction site”. (our translation).

²⁵ M. Kazanski, C. Morisson, J.-P. Sodini, *La culture matérielle: productions et échanges*, in *Le Grand Atlas de l'Archéologie*, (dir. H. Schweizer), Encyclopaedia Universalis, Paris, 1992, p. 138; At Histria, in the area of the episcopal basilica, it was uncovered a capital left unfinished, which was decorated with image of a dove, see Al. Suceveanu, *Cercetări recente in Histria creștină*, in *Omagiu-Virgil Cândea la 75 de ani*, II, (ed. P. H. Stahl), Ed. Academiei Române, București, 2002, p. 293; G. Milošević, *La basilique épiscopale. Catalogue des découvertes. Pièces d'architecture*, in *Histria*, XIII, *La basilique épiscopale*, (ed. Al. Suceveanu), Ed. Academiei Române, București, 2007, pp. 198–199; nr. 22; pl. LXX/22.

local craftsmen.²⁶ The decorative range followed usually sets of stencils forwarded with the marble blanks.²⁷ However, during the 6th century AD the number of pieces imported as finished parts is on the raise. Thus, out of the five marble – carrying shipwrecks uncovered within the Mediterranean basin, four consisted in finished pieces (Altinkum, Ekinlik, Kizilburun, Marzamemi) and only one (Capo Bianco) included also marble blocks with the finished columns²⁸. In the same respect, a series of ancient written sources (*Miracula Sancti Demetrii*,²⁹ *Carmen de Vita Sua, Vita Sancti Porphyrii, Miracula Sanctii Georgii*³⁰) indicate that the marble elements were purchased through the Imperial *officinae* in Constantinople and reached the destination as finished pieces.

In this context, we are partially disagreeing with the hypothesis that the decoration of these pieces was sculpted locally,³¹ taking into account the fact that upper galleries of Ss. Sergius and Bacchus basilica of Constantinople, an edifice notorious for its “à jour” marble decoration,³² includes ionic capitals with impost,³³ which quality of execution and manner of volute tracing are quite similar to the execution of the capitals found within the basilica of Ibida.

The presence of elements of Proconnesus, Aphrodisias and Naxos marble raise the issue of their transportation, from the capital city of the Empire to the final destination. The transportation of such bulky cargoes employed oversized imperial ships (*ὄχεδίαι*), as the ones described by *Miracula Sancti Georgii*³⁴ or special-purpose marble-carrying ships (*naves lapidariae*), like the shipwreck of Marzamemi (Sicily),³⁵ which navigated into the present lakes of Razelm and Babadag, up the mouth of Taița. From the offloading point, for another 10 kilometers approximately, the transportation was done by carts, a difficult stage within the process of building a religious edifice, as illustrated by the mosaic floor of an African basilica (Sainte Marie du Zit, Tunisia).³⁶

If the architectural data on this monumental basilica of the Roman Dobruja was based so far only on structural elements (bases, columns and capitals), a series of fortuitous finds revealed a series elements pertaining to the liturgical apparatus: balusters, small columns and finials from the bannister of the chancel. Consequently, in spite of lack of large-scale archaeological excavations, these finds occurring in the long interval between 1917 and 2005 provided the opportunity to demonstrate basically the existence of an extended decorative program – coincident with the reign of Justinian I – which was successfully implemented at *Polis Ibida*.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:

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²⁶ V. H. Baumann, op. cit. (n. 5), pp. 220–221: “the walled town of Ibida being one of centers within Dobruja where the Cretaceous limestone of Babadag was extracted and worked.” (our translation).

²⁷ I. Barnea, op. cit. (n. 5), 1958, p. 349.

²⁸ E. F. C. Berlinghieri, A. Paribeni, *Byzantine Merchant Ships and Marble Trade. New Data from the Central Mediterranean*, in *Skyllis. Zeitschrift für Unterwasserarchäologie*, 11, 2011, 1, p. 67, tab. 1.

²⁹ P. Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de Saint Démétrius et la pénétration des slaves dans les Balkans*, I, *Le Texte*, Édition du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1979, p. 235.

³⁰ E. F. C. Berlinghieri, A. Paribeni, op. cit. (n. 28), pp. 64–65.

³¹ I. Barnea, op. cit. (n. 7), 1979, p. 222: “about some of these one might assume that, although the marble is imported and the pieces were cut and even polished in the originating workshops, they were finished, at least in regard to decoration, by local, less skilled, craftsmen, with tool that were inadequate to the sculpting of such pieces.” (our translation).

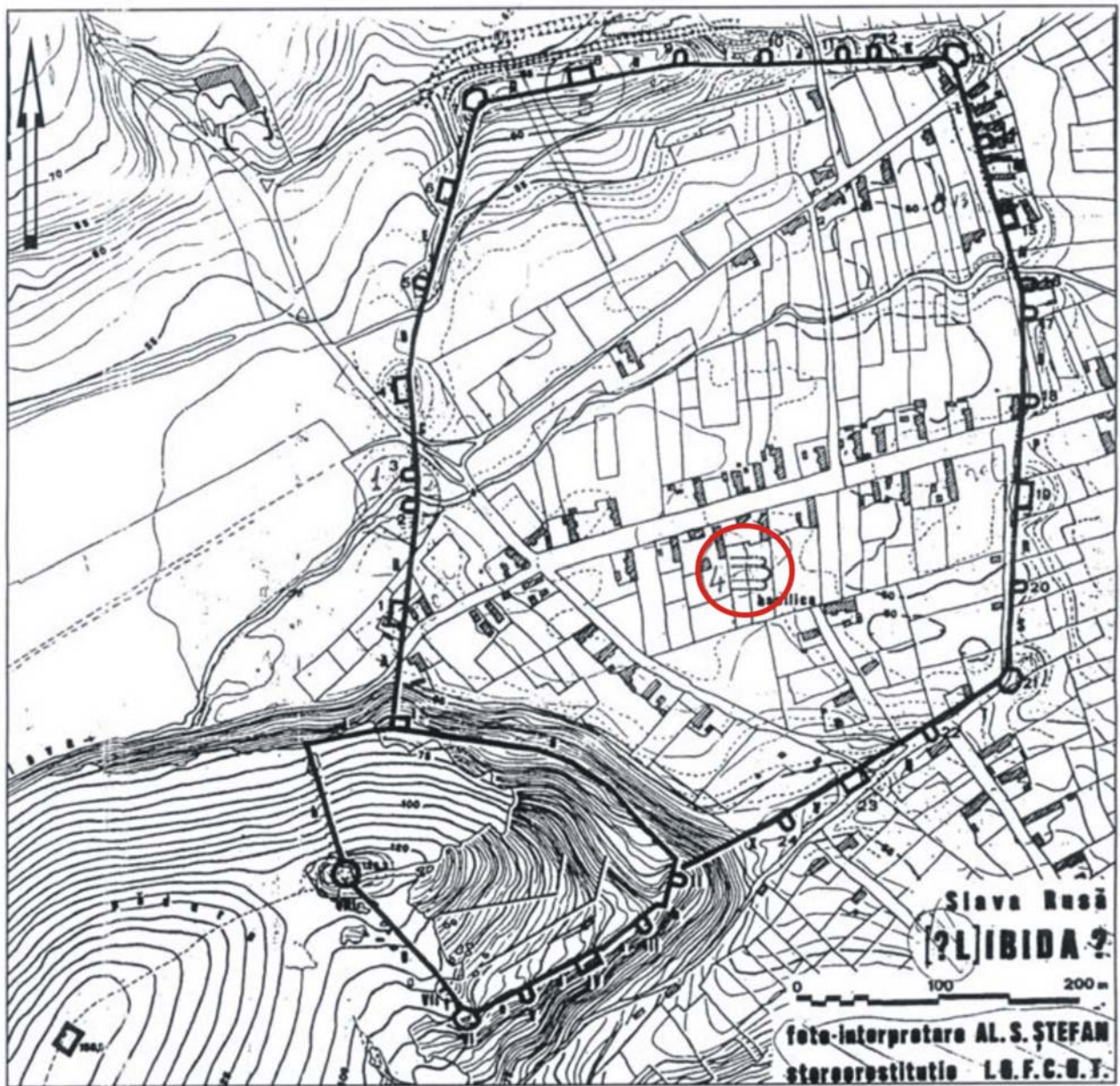
³² R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 4th ed., Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 1986, pp. 227–228, fig. 184–185.

³³ F. W. Deichmann, *Rom, Ravenna, Konstantinopel, Naher Osten. Gesammelte Studien zur spätantiken Architektur, Kunst und Geschichte*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1982, p. 556.

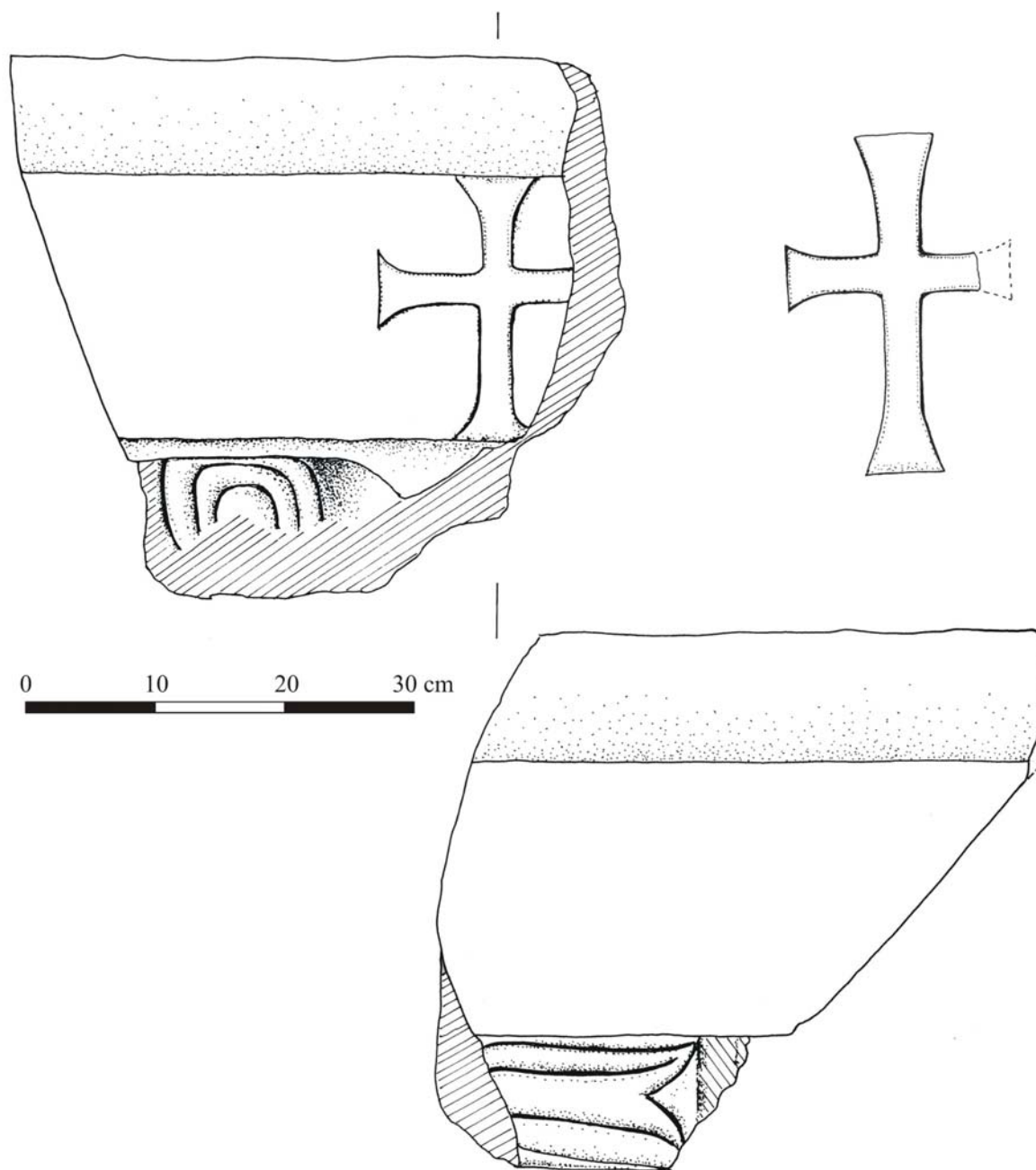
³⁴ E. F. C. Berlinghieri, A. Paribeni, op. cit. (n. 28), p. 64.

³⁵ J. P. Sodini, *Marble and Stoneworking in Byzantium, seventh-fifteenth Centuries*, in *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, (ed. A. E. Laiou), *Dumbarton Oaks Studies* 39, Washington D.C., 2002, p. 133; Y. A. Marano, *Il commercio del marmo nell’Adriatico tardoantico (IV–VI secolo d.C.)*, in *Eredità culturali dell’Adriatico. Archeologia, storia, lingua e letteratura*, (eds. S. Collodi, G. L. Fontana), Viella, Roma, 2008, p. 161; E. F. C. Berlinghieri, A. Paribeni, op. cit. (n. 28), pp. 65–71.

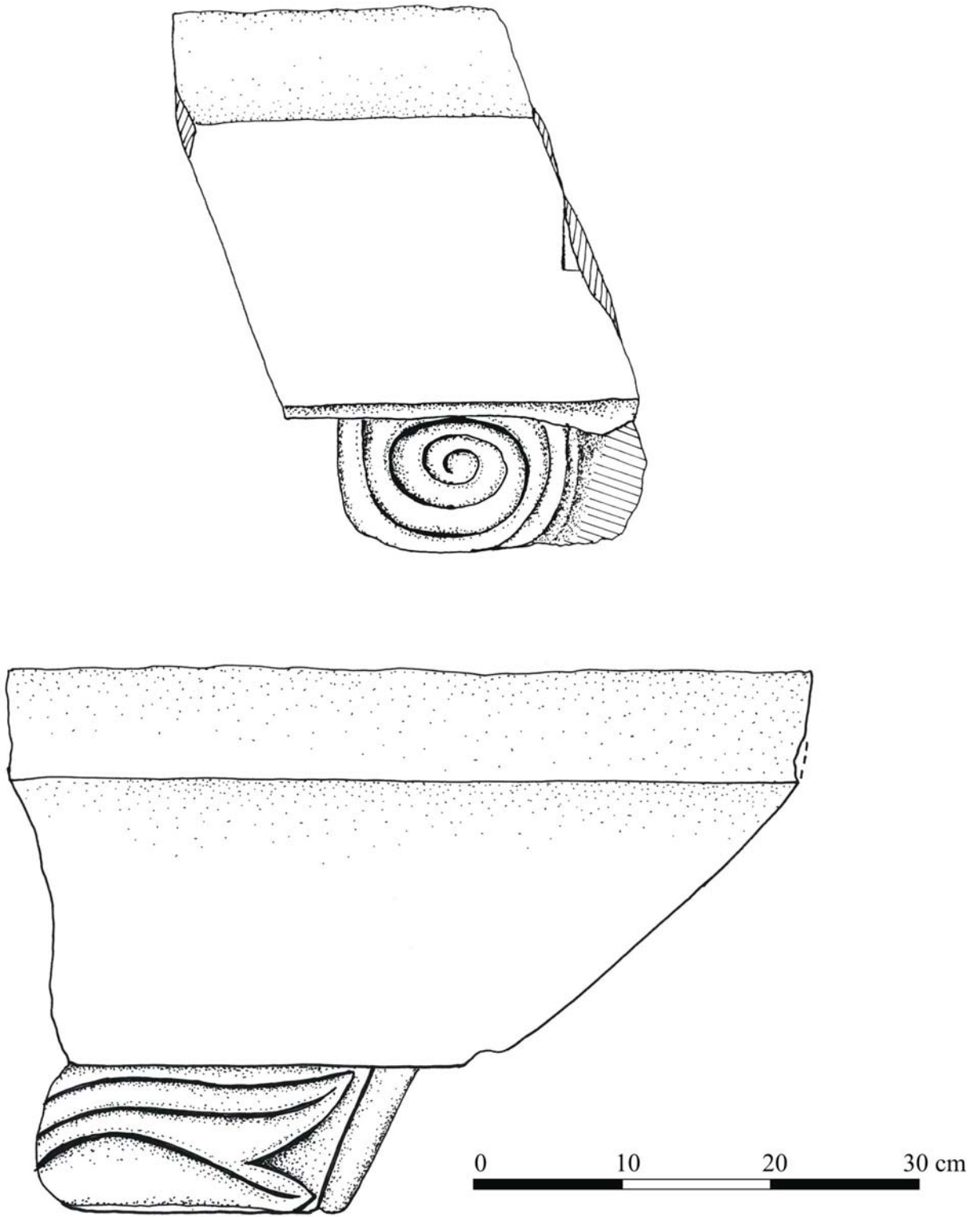
³⁶ S. Gsell, *Chantiers dans l’architecture chrétienne d’Afrique*, in *Dictionnaire d’Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, III/1, *Chainage-Chypre*, (eds. F. Cabrol, H. Leclercq), Paris, 1948, col. 339–340, fig. 2472.



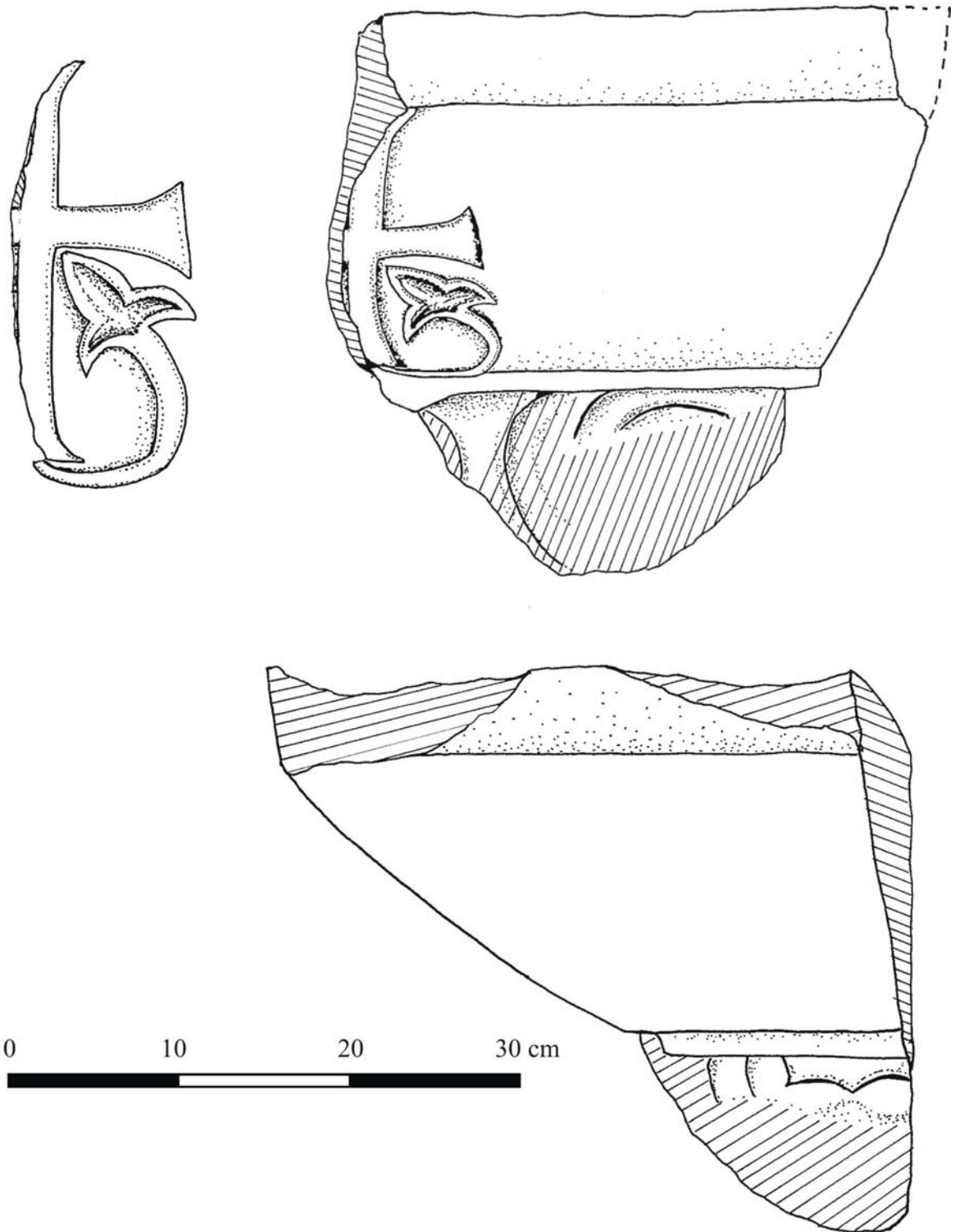
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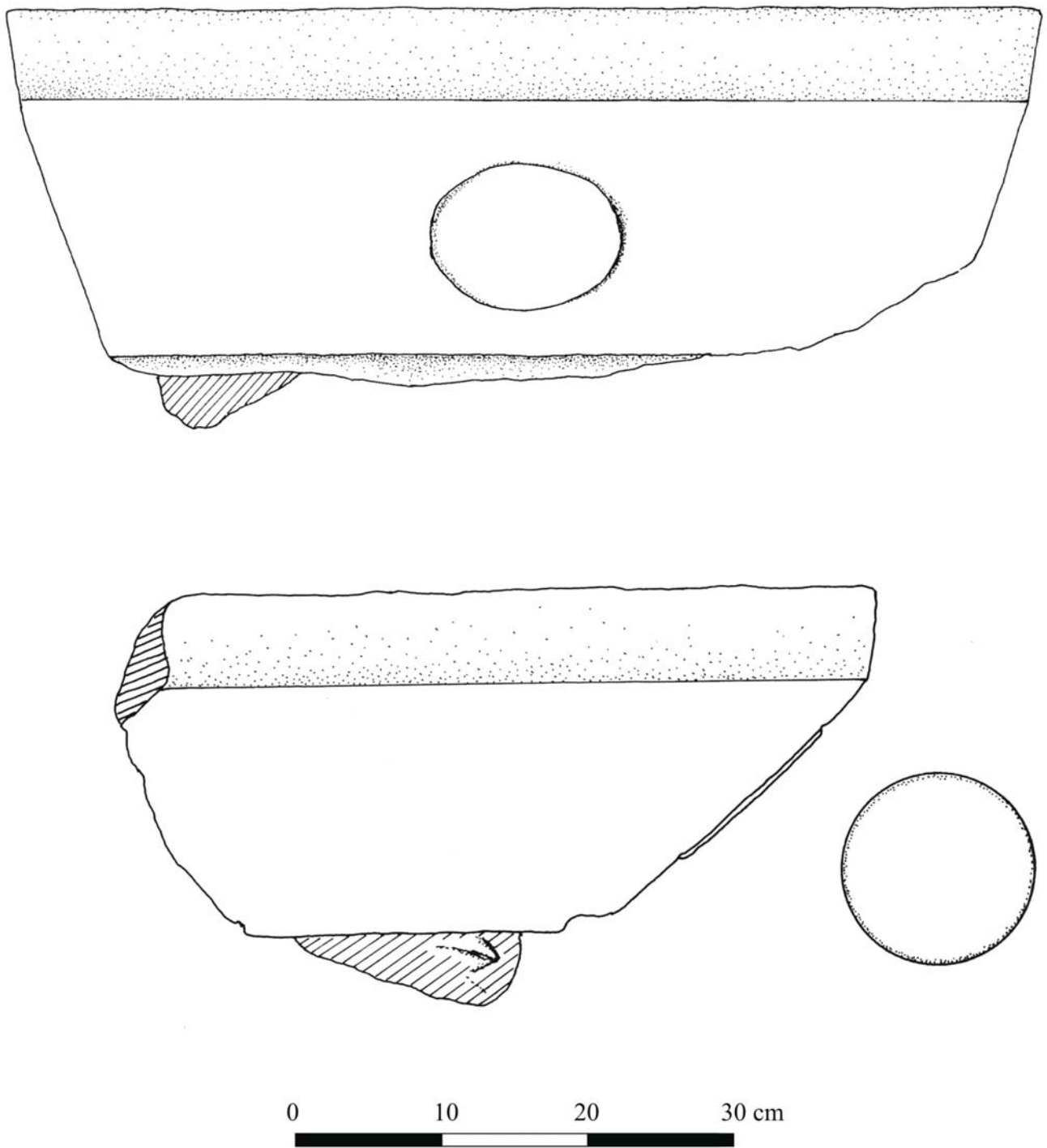
Pl. 2. Ionic capital-impost.



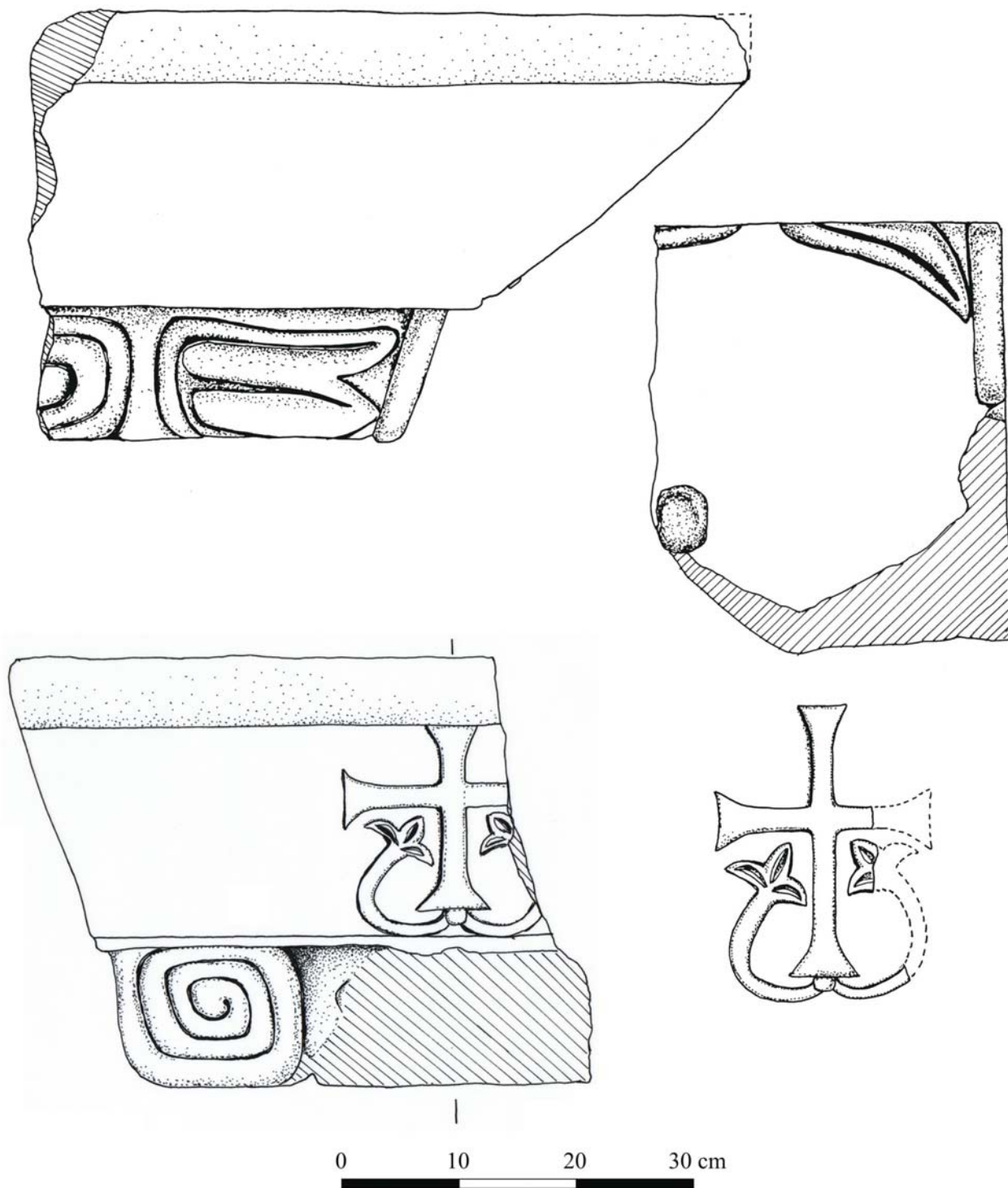
Pl. 3. Ionic capital-impost.



Pl. 4. Ionic capital-impost.



Pl. 5. Ionic capital-impost.



Pl. 6. Ionic capital-impost.

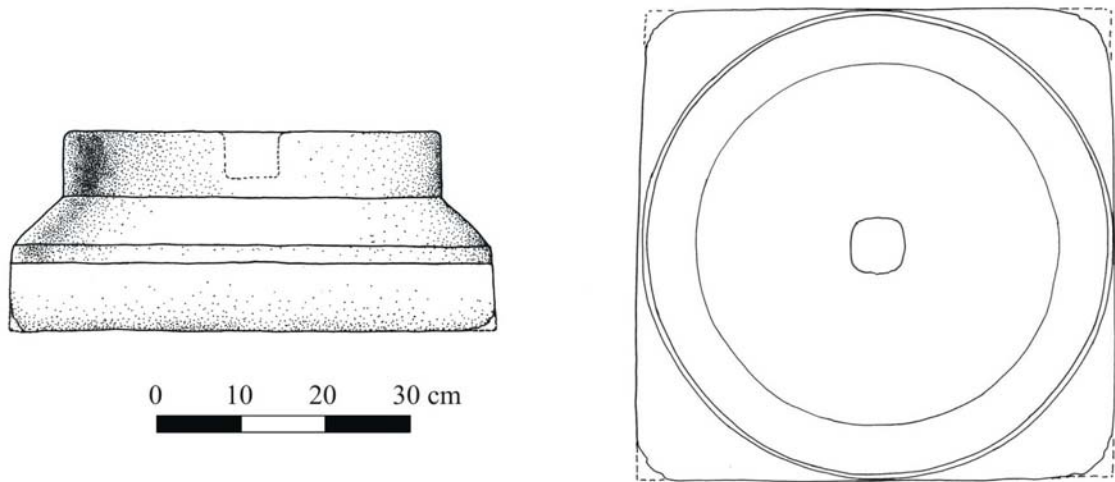


Fig. 1

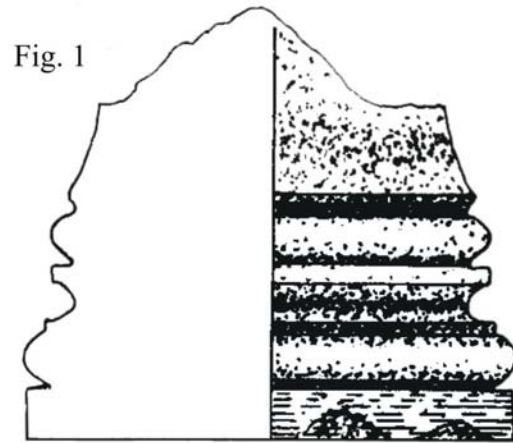


Fig. 2

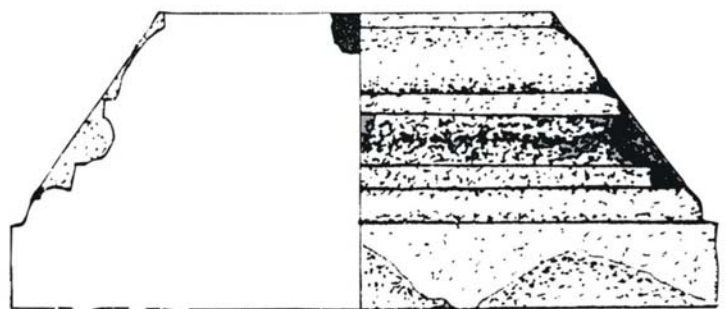


Fig. 3

Pl. 7. fig. 1. Column base (scale 1:4); fig. 2. Column base (*apud* V. H. Baumann, *op. cit.* [note 5], nr. 21, fig. 47); fig. 3. Column base (*apud* V. H. Baumann, *op. cit.* [note 5], nr. 23, fig. 49);



Fig. 1

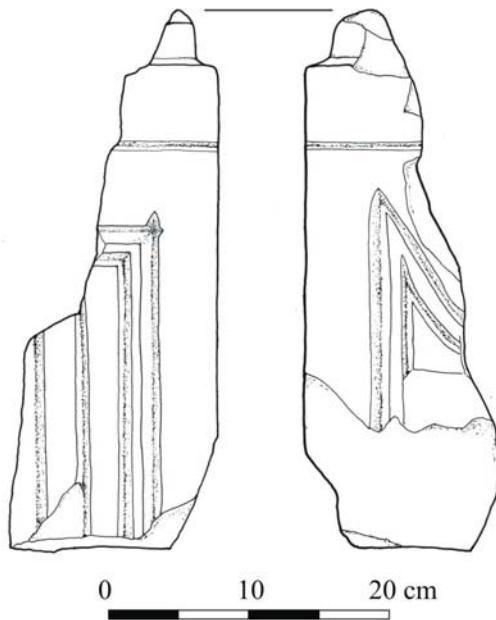


Fig. 2

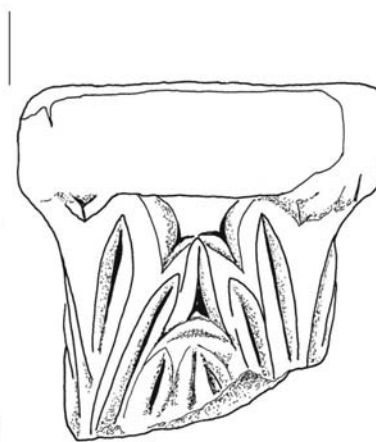
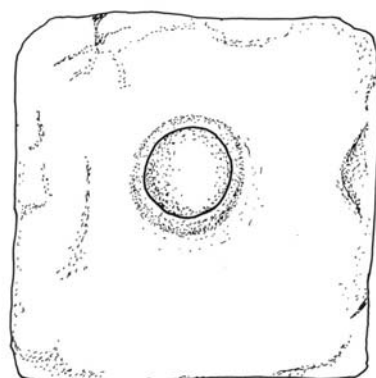


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

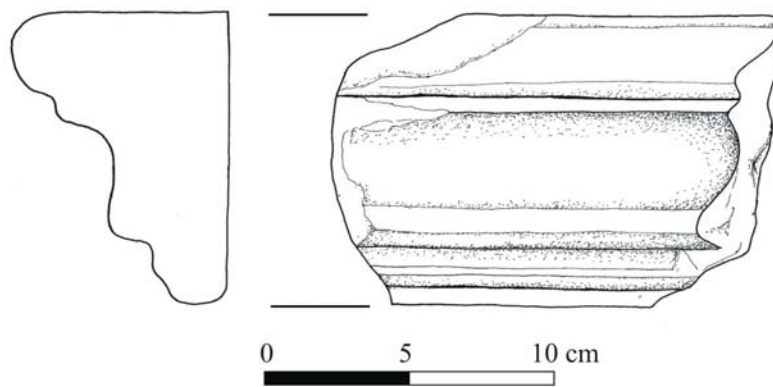


Fig. 5

Pl. 8. fig. 1. Column shaft (*apud* Z. Covacef, C. Pașca, op. cit. [note 6], pl. IV/7); fig. 2. Small pilaster shaft from a *pergola*; fig. 3. Fragments of small column shafts; fig. 4. Small column capital; fig. 5. Cornice.