


---

*Ahmad Dawa* 

Budapest, Hungary

## CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHY ADORNING CORINTHIAN CAPITALS IN SYRIA

---

**ABSTRACT:** This article explores the additional decorative elements incorporated by Christians onto Corinthian capitals found in various museums in the Syrian Arab Republic, dating back to the Byzantine era (4<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries). It outlines the symbolic significance of these elements, tracing their historical and religious contexts. The study highlights the diverse forms of crosses present on the capitals, ranging from the equal-armed cross encircled by various frames to Latin crosses and crosses formed by the contiguous folioles of acanthus leaves. Garlands, with various interpretations, emerged in Christian art and are depicted as leafy swags on the Corinthian capitals, featuring different designs. Additionally, the rare representation of grapevines, which held significant importance in Christian symbolism, connects them to biblical narratives and theological concepts. Overall, these elements could aid in dating unidentified Corinthian capitals in the area of study when analyzed alongside other components of the capital.

**KEYWORDS:** Corinthian capitals, Christian symbols, Cross, Garland, Grapevine

### Introduction

The origin of the Corinthian capital dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, resulting from Athenians' adaptations during the Hellenistic period to various earlier versions of the Corinthian capital (Schlumberger 1933, Footnote 1: 285; Abramson

1974, 6). The term ‘canonical’ refers to the Corinthian capital that contains all the essential elements of this type (Pl. 1: 1).<sup>1</sup> The classical morphology of the Corinthian capital remained relevant and significant, but there were sub-streams in the development of the Corinthian order. In some cases, one or more of these elements may be omitted or modified. In such instances, the resulting capital cannot be referred to as ‘canonical’; instead, it bears a new designation, and various terms have been used to describe these non-canonical capitals.<sup>2</sup> There are so many forms of the non-canonical Corinthian capitals, so many that Butler states: “...the Corinthian displays unnumbered forms...” (Butler 1929, 235).

Moreover, it is also possible to add one or more additional elements to any form of Corinthian capitals. The purpose of incorporating these elements varies; they may serve purely decorative purposes or hold symbolic significance. This symbolic meaning can change over time and across different cultures and religions. For instance, certain decorative motifs originally used in Roman art and later adopted by Christians in Byzantine art may undergo differing interpretations (Elsner 2011, 7; Birk 2013, 168).

This article will concentrate on the additional elements introduced by Christians to Corinthian capitals found in various museums in the Syrian Arab Republic, dating back to the Byzantine period (4<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries) (Pl. 1: 2).<sup>3</sup> The study will explore the reasons behind their choice of these elements and the motivations for incorporating them into these Corinthian capitals. Ultimately, the work will attempt to narrow down the timeframe for some of these capitals based on these additional elements, along with the capitals’ characteristics and features.

## Cross

The first and most important shape associated with Christians is the cross. Scholars have examined the emergence and development of the cross from various perspectives, exploring its historical, cultural, and symbolic significance.

Goodenough suggests that the cross symbol is closely linked to the rosette, which held symbolic importance for earlier civilizations in the eastern Mediterra-

<sup>1</sup> The earliest documented reference to these elements can be found in ‘De architectura,’ a work by the Roman architect Vitruvius (IV.I.11-12).

<sup>2</sup> Non-canonical (Ginouves 1992, 95-96); Corinthianizing (Maver *et al.* 2009, 120, 129); Free (Newcomb 1921, 56; Poljak and Botić 2018, 200).

<sup>3</sup> The word *Syria* in this paper will always refer to the current political borders of the Syrian Arab Republic.

nean region. Despite variations in interpretation across cultures, anything bearing the sign of the cross is regarded as sacred and safe (Goodenough 1968, 177-197).

Meanwhile, Johns suggests that during pre-Christian and Christian times, terms such as *Crux* (in Latin) and *Stauros* (σταυρός, meaning ‘a pointed pole’ in Greek) were associated with concepts of suffering and pain. Accordingly, the symbol of the cross was closely linked to the practice of crucifixion, which the Romans used as a method of punishment. During crucifixion, the victim’s arms were extended and fastened to wooden stakes, resulting in a cross that likely had a T-shaped appearance (Johns 2019, 46).

Despite the horrifying idea of this practice, it holds a significant position in Christianity due to the essential event of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion, as mentioned in the Gospels (Matt. 27:22, 35-38). This event has two important aspects. Firstly, it plays a central role in the Paschal Triduum, regarded as the fundamental unit of Christian theology. Secondly, it has a religio-philosophical dimension related to death and redemption. As a result, during the early centuries of the Common Era, the cross began to evolve from a sign of punishment and horror into a Christian symbol with religious and philosophical meanings. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, it had started to be used as a seal and symbol, typically represented by the letter ‘T’, which symbolized the instruments of the Passion. Subsequently, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, and later during the Byzantine era, especially as Christianity became a legal religion, new cross shapes emerged, including the familiar Greek and Latin crosses (Pl. 2: 1) (Johns 2019, 46-47).

The Greek cross, also known as the tau cross (*crux commissa*), corresponds in shape to the Greek letter tau and the Latin letter ‘T’. It consists of four arms of equal length intersecting at right angles (Finegan 1993, 352). This equal-armed cross initially emerged in the Roman East, potentially serving as a sacred seal within early Christian circles, symbolizing both the Lord and his devoted followers chosen for ultimate salvation (Garipzanov 2018, 82). In contrast, the Latin cross is similar to the Greek cross but has a vertical lower arm that is longer than the other three. Its use dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (Finegan 1993, 352).<sup>4</sup>

## Styles of cross on Byzantine Corinthian capitals

There are various styles of crosses used by Christians. The first and most common form in Byzantine art in Syria is the cross-in-circle. The circular frame

<sup>4</sup> For more details about the Latin cross, see Garipzanov 2018, 87-91.

surrounding the cross takes different shapes on the Corinthian capitals in Syria. It may feature a simple, plain circular frame without any decorations, as seen in a capital from the Tartous Museum (T.M.1) (Pl. 2: 2).<sup>5</sup> This limestone capital (Inventory number: 1693, height: 40 cm) has two rows of four acanthus leaves each, with a single caulicole and calyx on each side. Crowning the capital is a concave abacus. The cross-in-circle motif is carved onto the body of the acanthus leaves in the first row on every side. This capital was found in the Azar necropolis, situated just a few kilometers south of Tartous city, and is dated to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (Elayi and Haykal 1996, 36; Mustafa 2018, 29).

Alternatively, it can take the form of a circular braided frame, as observed in a capital from the Aleppo Museum (A.M.1) (Pl. 2: 3). This capital (Inventory number: 3427, height: 78 cm) is crafted from limestone and features two rows, each adorned with eight smooth acanthus leaves. Positioned between the leaves of the second row is the caulicole, which terminates with the calyx. Above this, helices and volutes emerge, topped by the concave abacus. The cross-in-circle motif is carved onto the body of the central acanthus leaf of the second row, appearing on only one face of the capital. It was discovered in the eastern church of Dehes in Northern Syria, dating back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD (Peña *et al.* 1987, 93-95).

In other cases, the circular frame's outline is adorned with triangles, as observed in two capitals from the Aleppo Museum (A.M.2) and the Hama Museum (H.M.1). The first capital (A.M.2) (Inventory number: 3425, height: 76 cm) is crafted from limestone and features two rows of smooth acanthus leaves, with each row comprising eight leaves (Pl. 3: 1). Among the leaves of the second row, caulicoles ending in calyxes are present, with volutes above them. Due to limited space, only the stalks of the helices are visible. The capital is topped with a concave abacus, and a garland encircles it. The cross-in-circle motif is carved onto the body of the axial acanthus leaf of the second row, appearing on only one face of the capital. Like the capital A.M.1, this one was also discovered in the eastern church of Dehes.

As for the capital housed in Hama Museum (H.M.1) (Inventory number: 3484, height: 47 cm), it is also crafted from limestone (Pl. 3: 2). Comprising two rows of smooth acanthus leaves, each row features eight leaves. Among the leaves of the second row, there are caulicoles terminating in calyxes, topped with a concave abacus. This capital exhibits a unique feature on just one of its four faces: the axial acanthus leaf of the second row is replaced by a cross-in-circle

<sup>5</sup> To facilitate defining the capitals, the initial letter of the city and museum for each will be used.

motif surrounded by the midrib of a curved acanthus leaf. The original source of this capital remains unknown.

The circular frame's outline can be decorated with small circles, as observed in a capital from Aleppo Museum (A.M.3) (Pl. 3: 3). This capital (Inventory number: 3426, height: 65 cm) is crafted from limestone and consists of two rows of toothed acanthus leaves, each row comprising eight leaves. The leaves of the second row are touching each other, causing the caulicoles to appear only in their upper part and end in calyxes. Above them, a small part of the stalks of the volutes can be seen with the scrolls in the corners of the capital, while the helices are omitted due to limited space. The capital is topped with a concave abacus. The cross-in-circle is carved on the body of the axial acanthus leaf of the second row, only on one face of the capital. This capital was also found in the eastern church in Dehes.

In the last example, the cross is encircled by three frames—the inner one is braided, the second one is plain, and the third resembles a wreath, as illustrated in a capital from the Hama Museum (H.M.2) (Pl. 4: 1). This capital (Inventory number: 3455, height: 57 cm) is crafted from limestone. It features two rows of smooth acanthus leaves, with each row containing eight leaves. Between the leaves of the second row, caulicoles emerge, terminating in calyxes formed from toothed acanthus leaves. Topping the capital is a concave abacus. The cross-in-circle motif is carved onto the body of one axial acanthus leaf in the second row, visible on only one face of the capital. Its original provenance remains unknown.

The second type of crosses on Corinthian capitals in Syria is formed from the meeting of the tips of the folioles of the lobes of acanthus leaves, as can be observed in a capital from the Tartous Museum (T.M.2) (Pl. 4: 2). This capital (Inventory number: 593, height: 76 cm) is crafted from limestone and features two rows of toothed acanthus leaves, with each row containing eight leaves. Among the leaves of the second row are caulicoles that terminate in calyxes. Topping the capital is a concave abacus. At its base, there is a decorative frame adorned with grapevines and bunches of grapes. Throughout the capital, crosses formed from the meeting of folioles are visible between the acanthus leaves of the first row. Unfortunately, the original provenance of this capital remains unknown.

Whether this formation was intentional or not, it can be said that the overall structure of the capital, along with the decorative details, conveys a strong impression of the craftsman's skill in executing such work.

Another style of crosses can be observed on a capital from the Latakia Museum (L.M.1) (Pl. 4: 3). This capital (height: 70 cm) is made of marble and consists of two rows of toothed acanthus leaves, with each row comprising eight leaves. Among the leaves of the second row are caulicoles that end in calyxes. Above them are helices and volutes, and it is topped with an abacus composed of *cavetto* and *listel*. The provenance of this capital is unknown.

On one side of this capital, there is an engraved freestanding cross on a flat surface. The shape of this cross is known as the Latin cross with an open end. The origin of this cross shape in the East Mediterranean cannot be traced back before the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD (Lübke 1887, 156; Peña 2000, 79).

On either side of the cross, there are the letters 'Α' and 'Ω'. These Greek symbols, Alpha (ἀλφα) and Omega (Ωμέγα), symbolize the eternal nature of God and represent Jesus as the beginning and end of all things (von Campenhausen 1929, 39-68).

In addition to these typical styles, other forms of crosses were used in Byzantine art, such as the Chi-Rho monogram. This form predates Christianity and was originally used as a decorative and symbolic motif (Bardill 2012, 220). Later, Christians adopted this symbol, interpreting it as a combination of the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ, ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ, which translates to *Christus* or 'the Anointed One' (chi X and rho P). It became very common in early Christian art and iconography as a representation of Christ's divinity, with its usage by Christians increasing around the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. This symbol is often associated with Constantine the Great, who initiated the Christianization of the Roman Empire (Goodenough 1968, 178; Thomas 1981, 86-87; Bardill 2012, 220).

This form can be seen on the capital of what is now called Madrasa al-Halawiyya in Aleppo (Pl. 5: 1). It is believed that this part of the Madrasa was originally constructed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD on the site of St. Helen Church. The Corinthian capitals currently found in the Madrasa belong to the original Byzantine *exedrae* associated with that church. Consequently, these capitals most likely date back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD (Sauvaget 1929, 129, 133-159; Sauvaget 1941, 140-141; Guidetti 2009, 21; Neglia 2010, 138).

## Garland

In the Roman world, garlands were made from various plant materials, taking many shapes and serving multiple purposes. The Latin terms for garlands, *serta*

and *corolla*, and crowns, *corona*, often had flexible meanings, much like many Latin expressions. Therefore, to specify what the author means, the context must be taken into consideration (Dylan 2020, 4).

Garlands can be categorized into three shapes: crowns, loose hanging garlands, and garlands made of supported frames using other vegetal materials (Guillaume-Coirier 1999; Guillaume-Coirier 2002). These forms were utilized in various Roman religious rites, and they had different meanings (Laing 1963, 214; Dylan 2020, 6-7).

At the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, the crown of leaves was still used by pagans, to the point that at least some Christians considered it a profanation to use it. This sentiment is reflected in a story by Tertullian about a Roman soldier who secretly converted to Christianity and refused to wear a wreath at a certain ceremony (Tert. *De Corona Militis*, 1.1-4). However, during the same period, in the eastern regions, Jews were carving and scratching crowns onto tombstones, symbolizing the hope of immortality, akin to a form of apotheosis after death. It is possible that Christians in the eastern Mediterranean regions adopted the crown and its symbolism from the Jews (Goodenough 1968, 161-163).

The use of garlands persisted until the declaration of the Theodosian Code in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD (427), when all pre-Christian Roman religious activities, including the hanging of garlands, were banned. The inclusion of this practice in the Code serves as a clear indication of its importance. Consequently, devout Christians refrained from using chaplets and wreaths of all kinds in religious practices, as they were seen as symbols of paganism (Laing 1963, 214-215).

The concept of wreaths changed later in Christian thought, serving as a symbol of consecration and complete devotion to God, and it came to represent martyrdom and the conquest over sin (Laing 1963, 214-215; Mikayelyan 2016, 371). The new representation of the garland might have been taken from the description in the Scriptures: "crown of life" (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10). As a result, this feature, with its new meaning, was reintroduced by the Christian community, although no specific timeframe can be determined for this change.

Typically, in Corinthian capitals in Syria, garlands consist of leafy swags surrounding the capital on all sides. These garlands dangle at the corners of the capital, appearing to support the top leaflet of the corner acanthus leaves of the second row. From there, they ascend toward the axis of the faces until reaching the abacus knob. As the garland arrives at the abacus, it takes two distinct shapes. In the first case, the garland positions itself between the inner

parts of the calyxes, just above the central leaf of the second row. It then twists along the axis of the capital's face, forming a knot in this space, as seen in a capital from Aleppo Museum (A.M.4) (Pl. 5: 2). This capital (Inventory number: 5008, height: 57 cm) is made of limestone and consists of two rows of toothed acanthus leaves, each row containing eight leaves. Among the leaves of the second row are caulicoles, which end in calyxes. Finally, the capital is topped with a concave abacus. The provenance of this capital is unknown.

In the second case, the garland reaches the abacus directly without forming any knot, as exemplified by a capital that exists in Hama (Pl. 5: 3). This capital (height: 47 cm) is placed in a public park named Umm al-Hassan Park, located in the center of the city, though its original provenance is unknown. Crafted from limestone, it consists of two rows of toothed acanthus leaves, with each row comprising eight touching leaves. At the top of the garland, which surrounds the capital on all sides, volutes appear, strongly curved toward the corners of the capital. Topping it is a slightly concave abacus. An identical copy of this capital, also with an unknown provenance, is housed in Damascus Museum (Inventory number: 19827, height: 46 cm).

## Grapevines

Grapevine (*Vitis vinifera*) had great importance in many cultures, and it was often linked to a particular deity (McGovern *et al.* 1996; McGovern 2003). It was widely used in ancient depictions, including sculptures, reliefs, frescoes, and mosaics within the Mediterranean region. Grapevine was the second most-used plant in art after the acanthus (Savo *et al.* 2016).

The symbolic meanings related to grapevines were nearly identical for both Greeks and Romans. Grapes were depicted on funeral reliefs in tombs and sarcophagi, serving as offerings for the journey into the afterlife and expressing hope for a new life after death. Furthermore, beyond funeral contexts, grape and grapevine representations carried diverse symbols, all linked to richness, abundance, and prosperity (Savo *et al.* 2016, 193).

Representations of grapevines were also widely used in Christian art, especially since it was one of the metaphoric symbols in the gospel (Jensen 2000, 59). This symbol is reflected in the words of Christ: "*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in*



him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:4-5). In the statement, "I am the vine, ye are the branches," the vine symbolizes the church and the life-giving force that binds it together. It also became associated with the Incarnation of the Word and the Holy Communion. Finally, it carried strong soteriological and eschatological meanings (Mantas 2003).

Furthermore, in Christianity, wine serves as a symbol of the blood of Christ (Ferguson 1999, 1179). The Bible establishes a clear connection between consecrated wine and the blood of Christ: "*This is my blood of the[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom*" (Matt. 26:28-29).

The representation of grapes and grapevines can be found in art and architecture from the Hellenistic and Roman periods in Syria (de Vogüé and Waddington 1865, Pl. 3; Pirenne 1957). However, in the Byzantine era, this representation began to be employed on capitals, in addition to other forms of art (de Vogüé and Waddington 1865, Pl. 62; Norris 2005, 12, Fig. 4; Niewöhner 2021, 74, 106, 109, 112).

Until now, only one Corinthian capital from the Byzantine period has been found with this feature: the capital from Tartous Museum (T.M.2) (Pl. 5: 4), which has been discussed previously in this article. While the decorative frame around the capital's base is mostly damaged, some parts of it reveal vine and plant motifs, including grape clusters.

## Discussion

Some of the studied capitals in this paper belonged to churches, as in the cases of A.M.1, A.M.2, and A.M.3. Although these capitals were found lying on the ground, their original placement can be easily predicted. This is because the bases of the columns in the church are still visible, indicating their former positions. These bases once supported columns that divided the main hall of the church into three spaces: the nave in the middle and the aisles on the sides. In the middle of the nave, there is the bema, which characterizes Syrian churches in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD (Tchalenko and Baccache 1979, 202-203, 339-340).

The majority of the studied capitals feature crosses on the body of the acanthus leaf, either in the lower row, as observed in the capital T.M.1, or in the up-

per row, as in capitals A.M.1, A.M.2, H.M.1, A.M.3, H.M.2. In one instance, the cross is found on the calyxes, as in the capital of Madrasa al-Halawiyya. Finding the cross on only one side raises questions about the direction in which the face of the capital bearing the cross was oriented. The face of the capital bearing a cross was possibly directed toward the nave, where the bema is located. It is believed that the bema, with its altar, in Syrian Christian thought represents Golgotha, which may justify the direction of the crosses toward this holy feature (Lassus and Tchalenko 1951, 91; Renhart 1995, 154).

Based on this understanding, capitals of unknown origin, such as H.M.1 and H.M.2, can likely be attributed to churches in the northern region north of the city of Hama. This assumption is supported by their construction from limestone, which is prevalent in the region, as well as their similarity to capitals found in Dehes, which feature a single cross on one side.

As for the capital (T.M.2), the acanthus leaves and calyxes present a lace-like design achieved through small triangular incisions. This technique was commonly employed in the capitals of Byzantine churches in northern Syria between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries (Butler 1929, 237; Naccache and Sodini 1989, 485). Consequently, this capital can also be attributed to this area and dated to this period.

Moving to the capital found in Azar Tomb (H.M.1), crosses in Syria first appeared in houses and tombs. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, they began to appear in churches (Kitzinger 1970, 639-641, Note 10, Fig. 1). The appearance of crosses in a funeral context symbolized the salvation granted to humanity by the death of Christ (Roussin 1985, 65-66). However, there seems to be nothing directly linking the capital (H.M.1) to the tomb. The small size of this capital indicates that it was intended for a small structure. Unfortunately, there is no information available about the history of the surrounding area during the Byzantine era in Syria. Future excavations at this site and its surroundings may uncover more information about this site during the Byzantine period.

Comparing the position of crosses on Syrian Corinthian capitals in this paper with those from other regions from the same period reveals distinct patterns. Syrian capitals predominantly feature crosses on acanthus leaves, unlike capitals from Egypt and Turkey, where crosses are placed on the abacus knob (McKenzie 2007, 248, 265, 290, Figs 415, 438, 482; Niewöhner 2021, 20, Fig. 24), on the calyx (McKenzie 2007, 281, Fig. 465), or between the stalks of the volutes in capitals that do not have helices (Niewöhner 2021, Fig. 35).

The northern regions of the Syrian Arab Republic were part of the provinces of Syria Prima and Syria Secunda, both under the control of the Diocese of the

East (Pl. 1: 2) (Filipczak 2015, 1, 3, 13-14). Christians in these areas likely adhered to laws issued in Constantinople, possibly due to their proximity to Antioch, the capital of the Eastern Diocese. This adherence to laws is reflected in their commitment to a decree from AD 427, which prohibited placing crosses in locations that could desecrate them, such as on floors (Mango 1986, 36). The rarity of overt crosses in mosaic floors in northern Syria, and their absence along traffic routes or entry paths into buildings, confirm compliance with this law (Kitzinger 1970, 641, Notes 12-13; Donceel-Voûte 1988). Considering this law and the shape of the elements of the capitals, it can be presumed that the capitals adorned with garlands were made before the enforcement of Theodosius' law, likely dating back to between the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.

While these symbols may serve decorative purposes, their symbolic importance and connection to Christian thought indicate that their addition had specific goals. For example, in early Christian times, crosses clearly placed on or near doorways primarily served an apotropaic function. They blocked access to evil powers that were thought to lurk particularly at doorways and other openings (Grabar 1946, 278-283; Kitzinger 1970, 640).

Finally, it must be noted that the presence of a cross on any capital or other object does not necessarily indicate that it was made in the Byzantine period. Early Christians preferred not to use any architectural elements belonging to pagan temples in the construction of their religious buildings. This is exemplified in a story from the book *The Life of Theodosius*, where Constantine ordered the removal of every trace of the ancient pagan temple to rid the area of any abomination in order to build a church (Euseb. *Vit. Const.* III. 26. 7-27.). However, a number of examples indicate the reuse of various elements from pagan structures in Christian buildings, possibly due to the scarcity of materials (Jacobs 2010, 278; Hall 2017; Niewöhner 2021, 33). These pieces were Christianized by adding Christian symbols, removing their pagan characteristics, and making them usable in Christian society, where they symbolized purification and conversion to Christianity (Saradi 1997, 495).

This case can be seen in the capital (L.M.1), where the features of the capital's components suggest a dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, particularly the presence of cylindrical fluted caulicoles (Weigand 1914, 58-61; Schlumberger 1933, 293; Dentzer-Feydy 1990, 640; Kahwagi-Janho 2017, 95). It seems that during the Byzantine period in Syria, Christians reused this capital by incorporating the cross with the two letters Alpha and Omega. Based on the shape of the cross and the presence of Alpha and Omega, it can be inferred that the modification to the capital did not occur before the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The modification

of the capital appears unprofessional and simple, which perhaps indicates that its reuse was by a private individual rather than belonging to an official building.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reveals the presence of various Christian symbols such as crosses, garlands, and grapevines on Corinthian capitals in Syrian museums, dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. These elements underwent a transformation from symbols of paganism to Christian representations.

The examination highlights the widespread use of the encircled equal-armed cross, as well as freestanding Latin crosses and crosses formed by acanthus leaves. Notably, the cross-in-circle motif, often carved onto the body of acanthus leaves, appears intentionally placed toward the nave of the church, where the bema is located, suggesting a symbolic connection between them.

Moreover, the study underscores how Christians in Northern Syria adhered to decrees from Constantinople, influencing the use of crosses and garlands on Corinthian capitals.

Finally, the reuse of architectural elements from pagan structures in Christian buildings, symbolically transformed through the addition of Christian symbols, explains the early Christians' approach to incorporating elements from pagan buildings into their architecture.

## References

- Abramson H. 1974.** The Olympeion in Athens and Its Connections with Rome. *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 7, 1-25.
- Bardill J. 2012.** *Constantine, Divine Emperor of the Christian Golden Age*. New York.
- Birk S. 2013.** *Depicting the Dead: Self-Representation and Commemoration on Roman Sarcophagi with Portraits*. Aarhus.
- Butler H. C. 1929.** *Early Churches in Syria: Fourth to Seventh Centuries*. Princeton.
- von Campenhausen H. F. 1929.** Die Passionsarkophage. Zur Geschichte Eines Altchristlichen Bildkreises. *Marburger Jahrbuch Für Kunstwissenschaft* 5, 39-85.
- Dentzer-Feydy J. 1990.** Les chapiteaux corinthiens normaux de Syrie méridionale (1<sup>ère</sup> partie). *Syria* 67/3-4, 633-663.

- Donceel-Voûte P. 1988.** *Les pavements des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban: Décor, archéologie et liturgie*. Volume 1. Louvain-la-Neuve.
- Dylan R. 2020.** The Hanging Garlands of Pompeii: Mimetic Acts of Ancient Lived Religion. *Arts* 9/2, 65. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts9020065>.
- Elayi J. and Haykal M. R. 1996.** *Nouvelles découvertes sur les usages funéraires des Phéniciens d'Arwad*. Paris.
- Elsner J. 2011.** Introduction. In W. Brandes, A. Demandt, H. Krasser, H. Leppin and P. von Möllendorff (eds), *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, 1-20. Berlin–New York.
- Ferguson E. 1999.** Wine. In E. Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 1179-1180. New York. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203456187>.
- Filipczak P. 2015.** *An Introduction to the Byzantine Administration in Syro-Palestine on the Eve of the Arab Conquest*. A. Mękowski (trans.). Łódź.
- Finegan J. 1993.** *The Archeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*. Princeton.
- Garipzanov I. 2018.** *Graphic Signs of Authority in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 300-900*. Oxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198815013.001.0001>.
- Ginouves R. 1992.** *Dictionnaire méthodique de l'architecture grecque et romaine. Volume 2: Éléments constructifs: supports, couvertures, aménagements intérieurs*. Rome–Athene.
- Goodenough E. R. 1968.** *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period. Volume 7: Pagan Symbols in Judaism*. New York.
- Grabar A. 1946.** *Martyrium: recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*. Volume 2. Paris.
- Guidetti M. 2009.** The Byzantine Heritage in the *Dār al-Islām*: Churches and Mosques in al-Ruha between the Sixth and Twelfth Centuries. *Muqarnas Online* 26/1, 1-36. [https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993\\_02601002](https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993_02601002).
- Guillaume-Coirier G. 1999.** L'ars coronaria dans la Rome antique. *Revue archéologique* 2, 331-370.
- Guillaume-Coirier G. 2002.** Techniques coronaires romaines: Plantes “liées” et plantes “enfilées”. *Revue archéologique* 33/1, 61-71.
- Hall Ch. 2017.** Assimilation or Destruction: The Christianization of Late Antique Statuary. *Berkeley Undergraduate Journal of Classics* 5/2.
- Jensen R. M. 2000.** *Understanding Early Christian Art*. London.
- Jacobs I. 2010.** Production to Destruction? Pagan and Mythological Statuary in Asia Minor. *American Journal of Archaeology* 114/2, 267-303. <https://doi.org/10.3764/aja.114.2.267>.
- Johns J. 2019.** Ornamentations around the Symbol of the Cross: A Comparative Overview. *Xploe Research Journal* 10/1, 45-55.

- Kahwagi-Janho H. 2017.** De Baalbeck à Anjar: A propos de quelques séries de chapiteaux antiques. *Topoi* 21/1, 83-103. <https://doi.org/10.3406/topoi.2017.3124>.
- Kitzinger E. 1970.** The Threshold of the Holy Shrine: Observations on Floor Mosaics at Antioch and Bethlehem. In P. Granfield and J. A. Jungmann (eds), *Kyriakon. Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, 639-647. Münster.
- Laing G. J. 1963.** *Survivals of Roman Religion*. New York.
- Lassus J. and Tchalenko G. 1951.** ambons syriens. *Cahiers archeologiques* 5, 75-122.
- Lübke W. 1887.** *Ecclesiastical Art in Germany during the Middle Ages*. L. A. Wheatley (transl.). Edinburgh.
- Mango C. 1986.** *The Art of the Byzantine 312-1453: Sources and Documents*. Toronto.
- Mantas A. 2003.** The Iconographical Subject "Christ the Vine" in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art. *Tόμος* 24, 347-360.
- Maver A., Müller H. and Rižnar I. 2009.** Roman Capitals from Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia). *Starinar* 59, 119-148. <https://doi.org/10.2298/STA0959119M>.
- McGovern P. E. 2003.** *Ancient Wine: The Search for the Origins of Viniculture*. Princeton–New Jersey. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400849536>.
- McGovern P. E., Stuart J. F. and Katz S. H. 1996.** *The Origin and Ancient History of Wine*. New York. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203392836>.
- McKenzie J. 2007.** *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt: 300 BC-AD 700*. London.
- Mikayelyan L. 2016.** Depictions of Glory Wreaths in the Early Medieval Armenian Sculpture and Their Parallels in the Art of Byzantium and Sasanian Iran. In S. Marjanović-Dužanić (ed.), *Proceedings of the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Congress of Byzantine Studies: Belgrade, 22-27 August 2016: Plenary Papers*, 2-7. Belgrade.
- Mustafa B. 2018.** Funerary Architecture from Amrit (Syria): New Mausoleum in Ard al-Bayada Cemetery. *Scientific Culture* 4/2, 25-33.
- Naccache A. and Sodini J.-P. 1989.** Le décor architectural en Syrie byzantine. In J.-M. Dentzer and W. Orthmann (eds), *Archéologie et histoire de la Syrie. Volume 2: La Syrie de l'époque achéménide à l'avènement de l'Islam*, 477-491. Paris.
- Neglia G. A. 2010.** The *forma urbis* of Aleppo (Syria) during the Middle Ages. In J. Schryver (ed.), *Studies in the Archaeology of the Medieval Mediterranean*, 115-153. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004187245\\_007](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004187245_007).
- Newcomb R. 1921.** *The Volute in Architecture and Architectural Decoration*. Champaign.
- Niewöhner Ph. 2021.** *Byzantine Ornaments in Stone: Architectural Sculpture and Liturgical Furnishings*. Berlin.
- Norris M. 2005.** *Medieval Art: A Resource for Educators*. New York.
- Peña I. 2000.** *Lieux de pèlerinage en Syrie*. Milan.

- Peña I., Castellana P. and Fernandez R. 1987.** *Inventaire du Jébel Baricha: Recherches archéologiques dans la région des Villes Mortes de la Syrie du Nord*. Jerusalem.
- Pirenne J. 1957.** Le rinceau dans l'évolution de l'art sud-arabe. *Syria* 34/1-2, 99-127.
- Poljak D. M. and Botić D. B. 2018.** Five Roman Capitals from Kaštel Sućurac. *Vjesnik Za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku* 111/1, 191-213.
- Renhart E. 1995.** *Das Syrische Bema. Liturgisch-Archäologische Untersuchungen*. Graz.
- Roussin L. A. 1985.** *The Iconography of the Figural Pavements of Early Byzantine Palestine*. PhD dissertation, Columbia University in the City of New York.
- Saradi H. 1997.** The Use of Ancient Spolia in Byzantine Monuments: The Archaeological and Literary Evidence. *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 3/4, 395-423. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12138-997-0008-4>.
- Sauvaget J. 1929.** L'enceinte Primitive de la ville d'Alep. *Mélanges de l'Institut Français de Damas. Section des Arabisants* 1, 131-159.
- Sauvaget J. 1941.** *Alep: Essai sur le développement d'une grande ville syrienne, des origines au milieu du XIXe siècle*. Paris.
- Savo V., Kumbaric A. and Caneva G. 2016.** Grapevine (*Vitis vinifera* L.): Symbolism in the Ancient Euro-Mediterranean Cultures. *Economic Botany* 70/2, 190-197. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12231-016-9347-x>.
- Schlumberger D. 1933.** Les formes anciennes du chapiteau corinthien en Syrie, en Palestine et en Arabie. *Syria* 14/3, 283-317.
- Tchalenko G. and Baccache E. 1979.** *Églises de village de la Syrie du Nord: Planches*. Paris.
- Thomas Ch. 1981.** *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500*. Berkeley-Los Angeles.
- de Vogüé M. and Waddington W. H. 1865.** *Syrie centrale: Architecture civile et religieuse du I<sup>er</sup> au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Volume 2. Paris.
- Weigand E. 1914.** *Baalbek und Rom, die Römische Reichskunst in Ihrer Entwicklung und Differenzierung*. Berlin. <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.44616.8>.

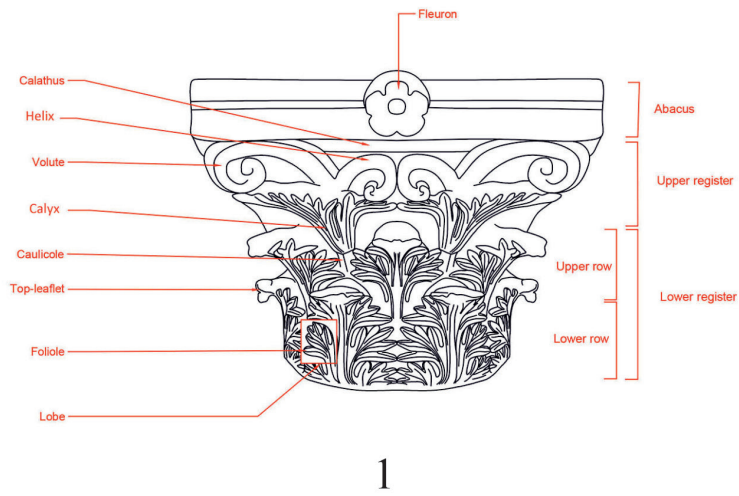
Ahmad Dawa

Doctoral School of History

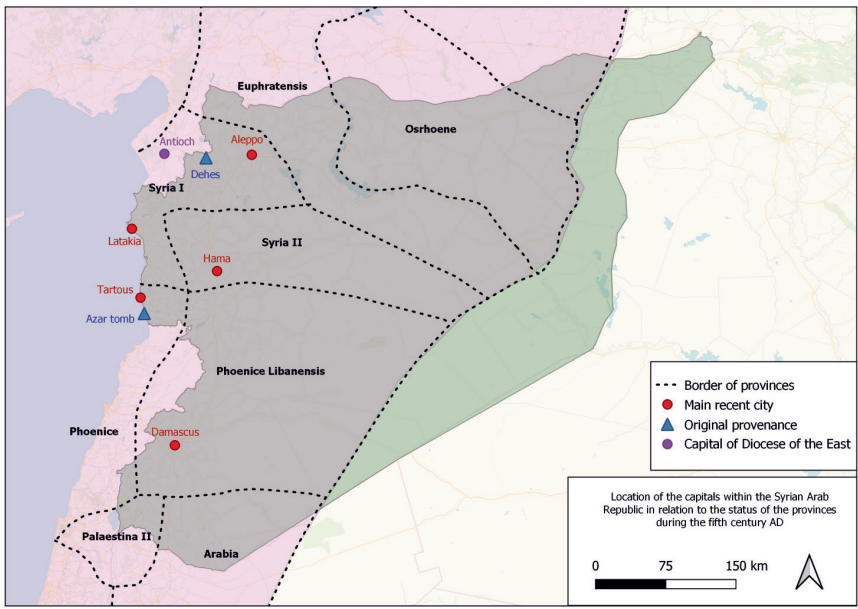
Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, Hungary

[amadsdawa@gmail.com](mailto:amadsdawa@gmail.com)

PLATE 1



1



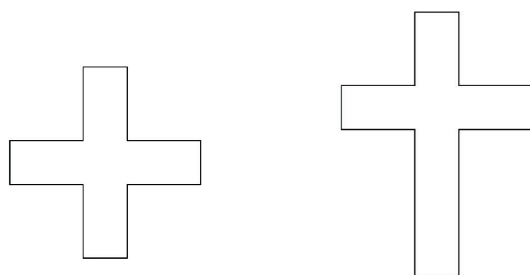
2

Pl. 1: 1 – Elements of the Corinthian capital (drawn by the author)

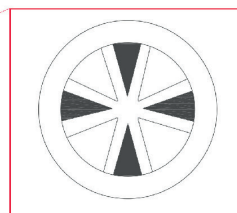
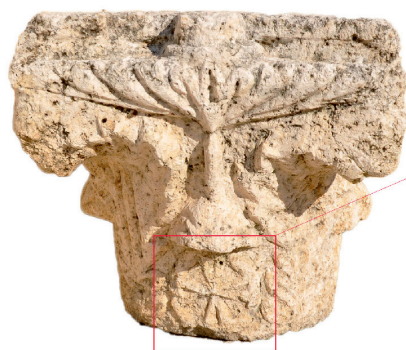
Pl. 1: 2 – Location of the capitals within the Syrian Arab Republic in relation to the status of the provinces during the fifth century AD (drawn by the author)



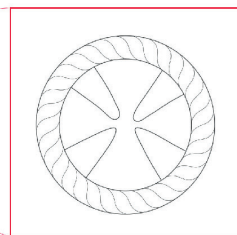
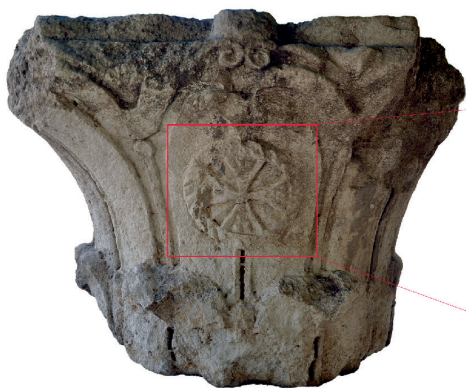
**PLATE 2**



1



2



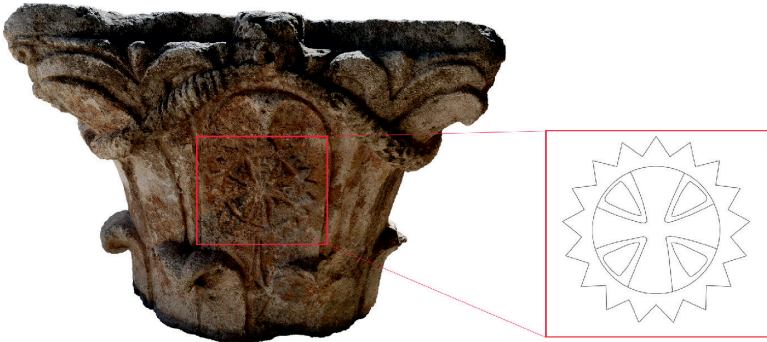
3

**Pl. 2: 1** – Greek cross to the left and Latin cross to the right (drawn by the author)

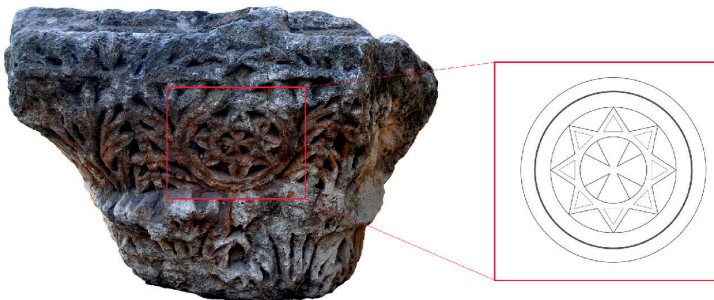
**Pl. 2: 2** – Cross-in-circle with plain frame (Tartous Museum – photo by the author)

**Pl. 2: 3** – Cross-in-circle with braided frame (Aleppo Museum – photo by the author)

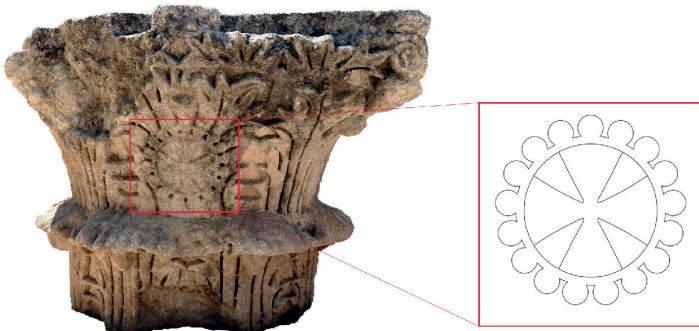
## PLATE 3



1



2



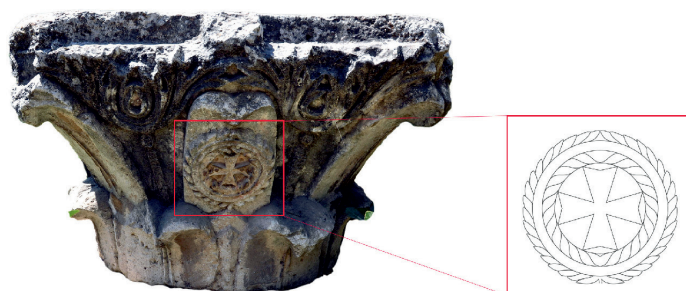
3

**Pl. 3: 1** – Cross-in-circle with frame adorned with triangles (Aleppo Museum – photo by the author)

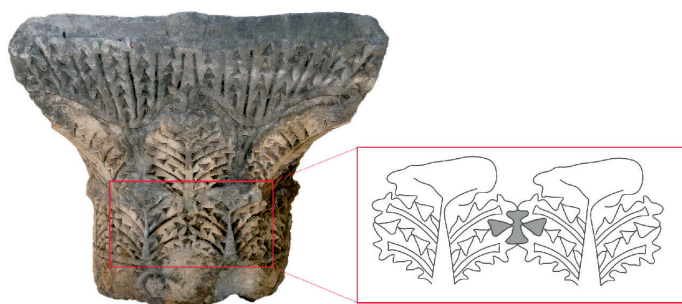
**Pl. 3: 2** – Cross-in-circle with a frame adorned with triangles enclosed by a circular stalk of acanthus leaves (Hama Museum – photo by the author)

**Pl. 3: 3** – Cross-in-circle with a frame adorned with small circles (Aleppo Museum – photo by the author)

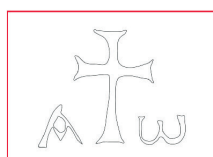
# PLATE 4



1



2



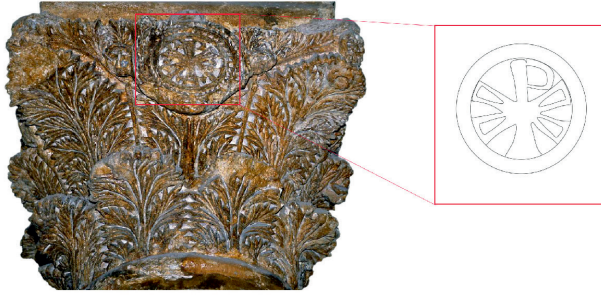
3

**Pl. 4: 1** – Cross-in-circle encircled by three frames: braided, plain, and a circular wreath (Hama Museum – photo by the author)

**Pl. 4: 2** – A cross formed by the meeting of the tips of the folioles (Tartous Museum – photo by the author).

**Pl. 4: 3** – A free-standing Latin cross with open ends, featuring the two letters Alpha and Omega on both sides (Latakia Museum – photo by the author)

## PLATE 5



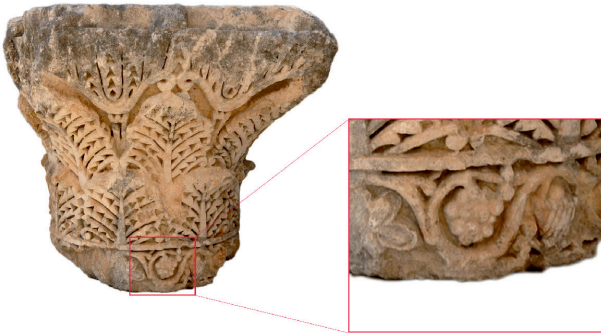
1



2



3



4

**Pl. 5: 1** – A capital adorned with a Chi-Rho monogram (Madrasa al-Halawiyya, Aleppo – photo by the author)

**Pl. 5: 2** – Twisted garland between the inner parts of the calices (Aleppo Museum – photo by the author)

**Pl. 5: 3** – The garland moves over the parts of the calices and reaches the abacus (Hama Museum – photo by the author)

**Pl. 5: 4** – A decorative frame of grapes and plant motifs surrounding the base (Tartous Museum – photo by the author)