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EARLY BYZANTINE PHASE OF THE LATIN CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST IN SAMARIA (SEBASTE): ARCHITECTURE AND SCULPTURAL DECORATION¹

The tomb of St. John the Forerunner beneath the Latin Cathedral in Sebaste has been venerated since the Early Christian times until nowadays. The architectural edifice itself was vastly rebuilt at least three times (Early Byzantine (5th–6th centuries CE), Crusader (11th–13th centuries CE), Late Islamic (not clear)), being used as a mosque today. During the personal survey at the site (S. Tarkhanova, H. Shkolnik 2019) plenty of Early Byzantine and Roman architectural members, secondarily incorporated into the church, or scattered near it, were noticed. Also the well-preserved Early Byzantine apse was recovered to the east from the Crusader building (both were conventionally depicted on the drawings of the 19th century of David Roberts). Although the Latin Cathedral is generally known, as it was excavated in the 1st half of the 20th century by the Joint Samaria Expedition (unpublished), its Early Byzantine phase wasn't studied properly. Thus, except of one capital, all the other decorative elements are firstly published, as well as the Byzantine monument itself is localized for the first time. The author offers preliminary description, stylistic analyses, classification and dating of the architectural remains and decorative elements. Some initial parallels show them in the context of local and Imperial artistic tendencies of the time, though the main aim of the article was concentrated on the recovering of completely forgotten pieces of Byzantine art, which once decorated one of the most important loca sancta of the Holy Land.

Keywords: Early Byzantine church, Crusader basilica, architectural members, capitals, shafts, bases, liturgical furniture, spolia, style, Sebaste, Latin Cathedral of St. John

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РАННЕВИЗАНТИЙСКАЯ ФАЗА ЛАТИНСКОГО СОБОРА СВ. ИОАННА ПРЕДТЕЧИ В САМАРИИ (СЕБАСТИЯ): АРХИТЕКТУРА И СКУЛЬПТУРНЫЙ ДЕКОР

Гробница св. Иоанна Предтечи, расположенная в подземной крипте под латинским собором в Себастии, почитается с раннехристианского периода до наших дней. Архитектурная постройка, в которой размещается крипта с часовней над ней, значительно перестраивалась как минимум три раза и в настоящий момент является мечетью (ранневизантийский период, период крестоносцев, позднесламский период). Во время недавней разведки памятника (С. Тарханова, Х. Школьник, 2019 г.) было обнаружено множество римских и ранневизантийских деталей. Отдельные из них были включены в средневековую кладку церкви или разбросаны на ее территории. Среди них были фусты колонн из проконнеского и каристейского мраморов, из ассуанского красного и троадского серого гранитов, из местного известняка, аттические и тосканские базы, коринфские капители, также из серого мрамора и известняка, элементы литургической мебели, стенки мраморных саркофагов с крестами и т. д. Помимо этого, на восток от церкви крестоносцев была обнаружена хорошо сохранившаяся апсида с арочным окном и рельефным крестом под ним, которая, по мнению автора, может быть датирована ранневизантийским периодом (V–VI вв.). Данная апсида была условно изображена на рисунках путешественников в первой половине XIX в. Латинский собор — довольно известный монумент, так как он был официально открыт в первой половине XX в. во время Объединенной экспедиции в Самарию (результаты

¹ This article was prepared in the framework of the theme no. 1.2.19, on behalf of Scientific Research Institute of Theory and History of Architecture and Urban Planning, branch of the Central Institute for Research and Design of the Ministry of Construction and Housing and Communal Services of the Russian Federation.

работ именно по этому памятнику не опубликованы). Но его ранневизантийская фаза не была изучена должным образом, в то время как перестройка крестоносцев представлена в подробной публикации Прингла. Только одна ранневизантийская капитель попала в публикацию Крауфута. Все остальные детали, представленные здесь, публикуются впервые спустя практически столетие (или больше) после их не зафиксированного в научных трудах открытия. Также предлагается локализация ранневизантийской церкви частично на восток от сохранившейся постройки крестоносцев и частично под ней. Проводятся первичное описание, стилистический анализ, предлагаются классификация и датировка архитектурных остатков и разрозненного скульптурного декора. Приведены отдельные параллели в местном и имперском художественном контексте соответствующих периодов, хотя основная цель статьи заключается в том, чтобы заново открыть совершенно забытые образцы ранневизантийского искусства, которые некогда украшали одно из важнейших *Iosa sancta* Святой Земли.

Ключевые слова: ранневизантийская церковь, базилика крестоносцев, архитектурные детали, капители, фусты, базы, литургическая мебель, сполы, стилистика, Себастья, латинский собор св. Иоанна Предтечи

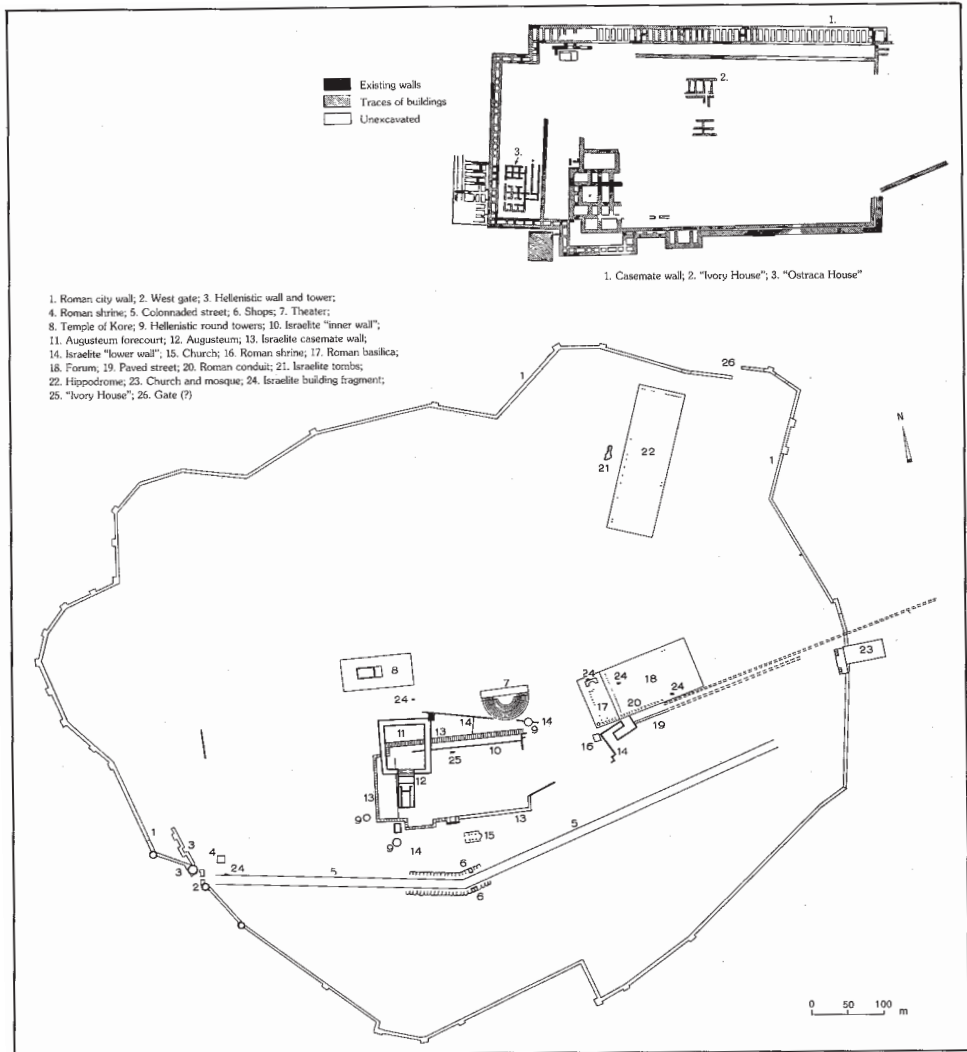
The article is devoted to the Early Byzantine architectural members, which were exposed in the Latin (Crusader) Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Sebaste (Samaria), located to the east of the ancient city walls (Avigad 1993: f1301, no. 23, il. 1). Some of the elements here are scattered near the church, the others were reused as parts of the decoration. The Cathedral itself was built during the Crusader period on the remains of the Early Byzantine church (basilica, most probably) and lately was converted into the mosque. It was excavated by the Samaria Joint Expedition during one of the archaeological seasons in the beginning of the 20th century CE (1908–10 (Reisner et alii 1924), 1931–5 (Crowfoot et alii 1942), or in 1940s (not clear)), but no archaeological report was published. The Crusader phase of this monument was investigated and the results were published by Pringle (Pringle 1998: 283–297), where he only shortly mentioned Byzantine spolia. Only two Byzantine capitals were published with very laconic description by Crowfoot (Crowfoot 1941: 150, Pl. XXVI-c), though the author was a member of the expedition and definitely was well acquainted with the monument. There is one more church in the center of ancient polis, so called Greek Orthodox church of St. John the Baptist, which was also built during the Byzantine period, rebuilt by Crusaders and used by the Greek Orthodox

Christians during the medieval period. It was also excavated, but in contrary to the Latin Church, it was published (Crowfoot 1937: 24–39; Pls. 12–17). Though there are also plenty of lacunas in its research, this article is concentrated on the other aim, which is to show and to prove the existence of the Byzantine phase under the Latin Cathedral, putting attention to both architectural and decorative testimonies, still existing at the site, as well as to bring the attention to their unique style.

1. General Historical and Archaeological Background of the Site. Biblical and Roman periods

Sebaste, also known as Samaria, is located ca. 10 km to the north-west of modern Nablus (Shechem, ancient Neapolis) in the region known as Samaria, near the triple intersection of Roman roads, connecting Neapolis with Caesarea and Galilee². The roads

² These and plenty of further observations were made with the use of a Digital Corpus of Early Christian Churches and Monasteries in the Holy Land (under the direction of Prof. Joseph Patrich and Dr. Leah Di Segni) with the permission of J. Patrich. The author of the article works on architectural members', decoration and churches' sections. The project is carried out on behalf of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Institute of



II. 1. Scheme of Sebaste/Samaria with the main buildings (Pringle 1998: 284, fig. 78)

roughly repeated those of the Biblical period, what explains, among the other reasons, why this site had become the capital

Archaeology from October 2014 with a budget allotted by the Israel Science Foundation (ISF). After completion, it will be placed on a server of the Israel Antiquities Authority and will be fully accessible for everyone.

of Kingdom of Israel during the Iron Age period (from 876 to 721 BCE), even lacking water supply (Avigad 1993: 1300–1301). The city was vastly rebuilt by Herod the Great in ca. 25 BCE, when it gained its name Sebaste in honor of the Emperor Augustus (Sebastos). In 196 CE it was granted with the status of *colonia* by Septimius Severus.

During these Roman phases the walls with the towers, main colonnaded roads, temple of Kore, large Augusteum, Theatre, Forum, Basilica and Hippodrome were built with the use of local limestone and imported marble. The polis became one of the most prominent in the entire Syro-Palestine region. Even though the city became prosperous again only during the Byzantine and Crusader periods, it never ceased to be occupied and plenty of rebuilding processes have been occurred.

Byzantine period

Pringle presented the exhausting investigation of the itineraries and historical sources from the 1st to the 20th century, illustrating the evolution of the Christian cult (Pringle 1998: 283–287).

Sebaste became especially popular during the Byzantine period, because the Christian pilgrims believed that St. John the Baptiste was executed and buried here, as it was firstly written by Joseph Flavius (quoted after Pringle 1998: 283) and repeated in Christian sources (Theodosius 1965, 115). Besides, prophets Elisha and Obadiah (1 Kings 18:3) were also buried in Samaria. Both of these traditions made Samaria one of the main *loca sancta* in the Holy Land in Early Byzantine and Medieval periods. Some most important facts might be repeated here for the clearance of the further description. In 361-2, during the reign of Julian the Apostate, the chapel and the bodies of St. John the Baptist, Elisha and Obadiah were burnt, though the ashes of the relics were salvaged by the monks from the monastery of Abbot Philip in Jerusalem (Philostorgius 1913, 80)). Egeria had visited the church in 384 CE (Peter the Deacon, section 6, 99). The Martyrium was firstly described by John Rufus in 512: "This place was in effect a particular chapel of the church, enclosed by grilles, be-

cause there are two caskets covered with gold and silver, in front of which lamps are always burning; one is that of St. John the Baptist and the other that of prophet Elisha; a throne, covered by a cloth, on which nobody used to sit, is also placed in that spot" (Plerophoriae 1912, 70). Also important to note that Sebaste obeyed the main bishopric of Shechem, but had its own bishops, for example, Marinus, bishop of Sebaste, had visited the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, among the other six bishops from Samaria.

Crusader period

Among plenty of medieval descriptions, some might be coordinated with the Latin Cathedral. For example, Joannes Phocas, a Cretan pilgrim, visited it in 1185, venerating St. John the Baptist: "In the middle of the city³ is the prison into which he was thrown because of the accusations against Herodias, and there also his head was cut off. This prison is underground, and has twenty steps leading down to it. In the center of it is an altar containing the spot where he was beheaded by guard <...>Above the Prison is a church in which lie two coffins carved in white marble. The one on the right contains the dust of the body of the venerable Forerunner after it was buried, and the other the body of the Prophet Elisha. Above this, in the church, the left hand of the Forerunner is displayed in a gold vessel, and this itself is completely encased in gold" (quoted after Pringle 1998: 286). In 1187 the Cathedral was robbed and converted into the mosque, but the Christians still had access to it.

³ Though this indication of the location of the church outside of the city is more coordinated with the location of the Greek Church, further description shows more similarity with the Latin one and its architectural features.



Il. 2. General view of the Latin Cathedral nowadays; to the east. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)

2. Latin Cathedral of St. John the Baptist

General Byzantine and Crusader context

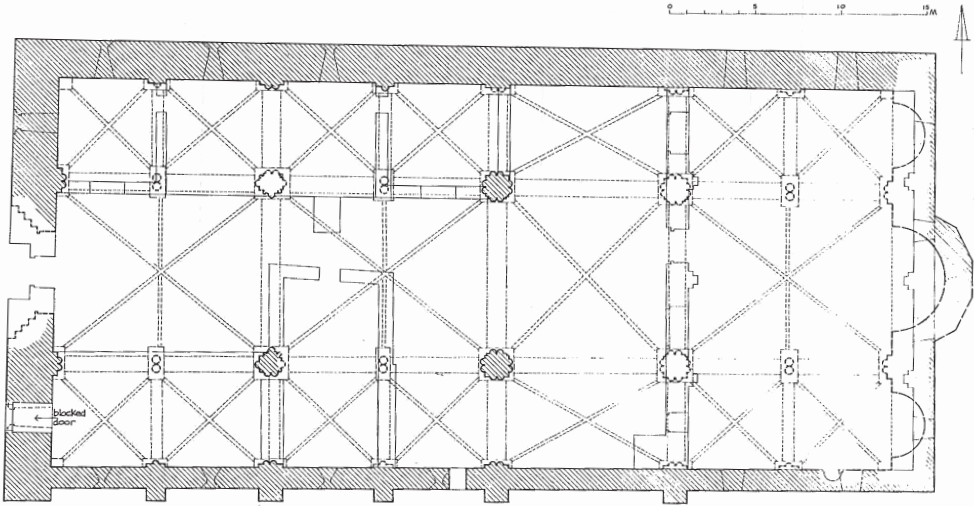
There were at least two Byzantine churches in the city, but actually no structures within it have been clearly identified as such. Two Crusader churches were discovered, usually defined as Greek Orthodox (near Augusteum) and Latin Catholic Cathedral (outside the ancient polis; il. 2)).

Also there is an opinion (*Crowfoot* 1942: 37), that a civil basilica, discovered by the Harvard Expedition at the forum (*Reisner et alii* 1924, II: Pls. 12, 16), once was used as a Byzantine church. In the archaeological report it was reflected that the basilica had two apses: a large one — on the upper level, the smaller one — on the lower. The upper apse was identified as part of the Byzantine church (though oriented to

the north-west), but unfortunately it was completely dismantled during the excavations in order to reach the lower apse, which was firmly identified as a tribunal of the Roman basilica. Due to the scarcity of the information in the report, no verification of this idea might be completed.

Architecture

As it was mentioned above, it is generally considered that the Crusader Latin Cathedral in the shape of the three-aisled basilica with three small apses on its eastern side, two entrances on its western side and one on the southern — was built on the foundations of the Byzantine church, with the reuse of its details (*Pringle* 1998: 289, Fig. 79; il. 3). In the west-southern part of the church the Tomb of St. John was preserved with the staircase leading to the underground chamber. The foundations of the Byzantine walls as well as any remains of the Byzantine piers, windows or entrances are hardly



Il. 3. General plan of the Latin Cathedral (Pringle 1998: 289, fig. 79)



Il. 4. General view of the Byzantine apse; to the east. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)

traceable under the Crusader monument. Only Hamilton mentioned that under the north-eastern segment of the Crusader walls the earlier masonry of the anticipated Byzantine church might be revealed (Hamilton 1944: 35). This can't be verified because of the later rebuilding. During the recent survey, undertaken by the author of the article with the archaeologist Haim Shkolnik (2019), the well preserved apse was revealed, built from large and well elaborated ashlar (il. 4). It is standing separately to the east from the Crusader enclosure⁴. Unfortunately the outer side of the apse is blocked with the modern Arab houses and unreachable for investigation. There was no opportunity to take the measurements, so the character of the investigation might be considered only preliminary, howbeit necessary at this stage.

According to the stylistic analysis, the apse, apparently, was built during the Byzantine period. Nine courses of nicely carved curvilinear limestone ashlar



Il. 5. View of the arched window.
Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)

⁴ The apse might be seen as separately standing on the D. Roberts drawing (1839), before the site was settled (il. 8). Probably, he had no access to the monument itself, so the details are rather relative and differ on two of his drawings (Bourbon 1994: 204–5, pl. 87; 206–7, pl. 88), but still there are some realistic evidences of the time. There is a high wall with the attached to it semicolumns at the background. In its lower part it is possible to recognize the blind arcade with several arched windows. It looks that the artist couldn't understand the architectural features clearly from such a distance. But his interpretation is closely coordinated with more detailed drawing of Leon de Laborde (1847), who was able to work from a closer distance. It is obvious that they both had been drawing the apse of the Crusader church, which wasn't available in such condition already in 1944 (Hamilton 1944: Fig. 15 (reproduction of the drawing of Laborde); 39). On the Roberts's drawing (Pl.88) to the east of the Crusader apse some ruins are visible. It looks that the ruins comprised semi-circular apse with an arched window. I suppose that the artist had depicted the Byzantine apse, revealed in our survey.

have been preserved, with the complete arched window in the center (il. 5, see description further). The semi-dome of the apse collapsed in the times unmemorable and no remains of it might be traced. On the ashlar of the third course of masonry, in the center of the apse the stylized laurel medallion with the inserted into it cross was incised (il. 6). The entire surface of the inner side of the walls was covered with the thin layer of plaster (probably, Late Islamic, since it covered the defaced relief cross on the wall). There are well traceable vertical seams between the early (Byzantine?) and later (Crusader?) masonry near the western shoulders of the apse. Also the grooves and sockets were preserved on the stylobate of one-stepped bema in front of the apse (il. 7).



Il. 6. Relief medallion with the defaced cross, covered with white plaster. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)



Il. 7. View of the bema with the stylobate for chancel screen. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)



Il.8. General view of Sebasté, drawn by D. Roberts in 1839 (Bourbon 1994: 204–5, pl. 87; 206–7, pl. 88)

Gray-marble shafts were reused in the construction of the apse and in the revetment of the floors in front of it, though it occurred definitely in the later periods, when it was reused not for liturgical purposes (the apse was partially blocked with the coarsely built wall). According to the character of the masonry, the shape of the window, the style of the relief cross and construction of the bema — the apse might be dated to the Byzantine period.

Roman and Byzantine Architectural Members

A number of shafts, capitals, bases and other architectural members, which were scattered at the site or incorporated into the Crusader church, epitomizing the existence of the phases, predated the Crusader period. Some of them might be Byzantine and thus they were specially executed

for the church. The others are Roman and could be reused in the church as spolia.

a. Columns

Some column shafts were reused in the Crusader church after the Byzantine basilica. In the Byzantine church itself they were reused, most probably, after the collapse of the Roman buildings. There are plenty of members of the broken shafts; only two of them have been preserved completely⁵. All the shafts were not collected from the drums, but they were cut from one piece of stone. Five types of materials among them were recognized: Proconnesian marble (majority of the shafts) (il. 9), Carystian marble (“Cipollino verde”), Gray Troadic and Red Aswan granites (il. 11), local limestone. Some of them were found in front

⁵ Short mention of the shafts without the description see in: *Kenaan-Kedar* 1992: 109, Fig. 6.



Il.9. Complete monolith column shaft, carved from Carystian marble near the Tomb of St. John inside the Latin Cathedral. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)

of the Crusader's church, in the courtyard or inside it (not incorporated into the walls, just lying on the surface of the floor in a certain order). Most of the Proconnesian and Carystian shafts were collected near and inside the Byzantine apse, where they might have been brought during the building of the Crusader church, in which the columns were replaced by the traditional for this period cross-shaped piers with ribs. The shafts are of different scales. All of them were decorated with apophyges superior and inferior two stepped moldings of different diameters and thickness and one wide collar respectively. They were connected to the shaft with the beveled profile.

b. Bases and pedestals

One limestone pedestal was revealed in the courtyard of the Crusader church (il. 10). Its upper and lower edges were adorned with two pairs of ovolos separated from each other with fillets. The mold-

ings were comprising pyramidal silhouettes of the edges of the high dado (reversed up down on the top).

Fragments of Attic bases (most of them carved from Proconnesian marble, two — from limestone) were revealed in the court of the Crusader church and in the area of the Byzantine apse during our survey. One of the marble bases was completely preserved (the other smaller members epitomize the same moulding, il. 11). It was comprised of the low square plinth and two tori of different diameters with a scotia between them. The moldings were separated from each other with thick fillets. The upper torus is smaller than the lower, but it is almost flat and equal by its diameter to scotia, which is Late Roman or Early Byzantine feature. On one marble and one limestone bases the traces of the lateral vertical slots were preserved, intended for affixing of the panels of the parapet or screen.



Il.10. Pedestal in front of the Crusader church. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019).

One base was unique and unusual in its decoration (il. 12). It was of the Pseudo-Attic order, comprised of the lower square plinth, nicely carved torus, scotia and short flat molding. The lower drum of the column was also cut from the same piece of stone. It had a large torus and was lavishly decorated with the “peopled scroll” pattern. The images inside the medallions were defaced. The style of the scroll looks Roman, as the stem was depicted in the naturalistic manner with asymmetrical ancillary details. Such feature as decorated lower drum was characteristic for the Lycian Roman architecture and unique for the Holy Land.

c. Capitals

Crowfoot had mentioned two capitals, found near the Latin Church, and shortly described them, comparing to the capitals of the Garizim church: “They too have the same fan-shaped leaves, a plain abacus, and a typical bud in the fork of the helices; they differ from the Garizim capital in some respects — in the Maltese cross on the boss and the sort of frill of leaflets out of which the helices rise in place of



Il.11. Limestone Attic base and Aswan red granite member of the shaft. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)



Il. 12. Base with the decorated drum of the shaft, carved from the same piece of stone. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)



Il. 13. Late Roman Corinthian capital with Early Byzantine additions. Type 1.
Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)

the old cauliculi" (*Crowfoot* 1941: 150, Pl. XXVIIIc). The description of these capitals was vastly enriched in the present article (see further, Type 1). According to Pringle, Roman and Byzantine capitals "were reused in the transept (and later mosque) and at the west end of the north nave arcade" (*Pringle* 1998: 290). One of them was published by him and dated to the Byzantine period (*Pringle* 1998: 291, Pl. CLIX, f). It was a Corinthian capital, decorated with two ranges of eight mask-acanthus leaves. The corners were protruding with canonical volutes. From my point of view, it looks rather Roman, than Byzantine.

During our survey plenty of other capitals of different styles were revealed.

In general, there were capitals of three orders: Corinthian, Composite and Pseudo-Ionic.

Further descriptions and identifications belong to the author and remain only possible among the others. The Byzantine capitals will be described before the Roman ones, being in the focus of the article.

Type 1. The most common type was presented by five limestone Byzantine capitals with three (instead of classical two) ranges of acanthus leaves (il. 13). Four of them were preserved near the Byzantine apse, one was exhibited in the Crusader church. The design of five preserved capitals of this type differs in small details from one capital to the other, but the main compositional and stylistic features are similar. The echinus was decorated with three ranges of acanthus leaves. Their proportions were slender, the character of the leaves was naturalistic, so as they were long, dried and sharp. Two lower ranges were comprised of eight acanthus leaves. The lower leaves were growing from the anticipated astragalus, which was absent or not survived; each leaf was comprised of three pairs of lateral clusters of lobes and one top wide cluster; the midrib was comparatively narrow; the lobes, lobe ribs and rib were accentuated with concave angular grooves. The leaves were joining between each other by the means of tips, which were touching each other and thus comprising a series of geometrical figures in between (mask-acanthus type). The leaves of the second range were growing from the joins of the lower leaves. They were carved in absolutely the same manner. The difference was that they were comprised not from three, but from two pairs of lateral clusters and thus the leaves were shorter; the midrib was wider. The third range of acanthus leaves was differently carved on all five capitals, though mainly it was a series of acanthus lobes, joined into vertical clusters. They were connected into one ring and were growing from the second range of acanthus leaves and from semicircular flat discs, which were replacing cauliculi and cauliculi rims. This third range of acanthus leaves had been carved with small leaves growing from them instead of canonical calyxes. Close parallels for

such third range of acanthus lobes were revealed by the author in Nablus (Jacob's Well Church, il. 14), at the Mount of Garizim (Church of St. Mary (unpublished)) and in Shiloh (Basilica church and mosque Jama as Sittim), where the Late Roman capitals were reused as spolia (Тарханова 2018: 18–36). In the last case the abaci of the capital were left in the blocked-out state, with the protrusions for the anticipated volutes, helices and fleurons. In Sebaste the abaci of the capitals were higher and were decorated with ancillary plainly carved volutes and helices with the diamond pattern between them; volutes and helices, usually different in their proportions, were equalized. Instead of central fleurons different patterns were carved: Maltese cross with or without medallion, or medallion with the monogram (all these patterns were defaced).

On one of the capitals the upper medallion with the cross was connected to the lower medallion with the rosette (il. 15). The later medallion was organically inscribed into the acanthus leaves and was carved simultaneously with them. It was smaller in its diameter than the upper one; the medallion stem was accentuated with three narrow grooves, multiplying the number of the rings to four; in the upper point the stem was tied with the plain guilloche. The rosette was comprised of eight petals, growing from the central pestle. The petals were accentuated with the grooved loops, the pestle, with the small dot⁶. On the other capital instead of such medallion a separate seven lobed leaf was depicted. On all capitals the traces of red paint were preserved. According to these features and parallels, the echini and the abaci of the capitals were decorated during different periods: Late Roman and Early Byzantine respectively. It might be concluded from different stylistic

⁶ The similar rosette was attached to the volute of the capital in Shiloh.



Il. 14. Late Roman (Byzantine?) capital, preserved near the Jacob's well church (Byzantine, rebuilt during the Crusader period).
Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)



Il. 15. Fragment of the Corinthian capital with medallions with rosette (Roman) and Maltese cross (Byzantine). Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)

features applied to them, proportions and themes of the patterns, and also accurately chiseled during this secondary elaboration upper tips of the third row of acanthus leaves. Most probably, the capitals were carved in local Samarian workshops. One badly preserved but looking similar by its



Il. 16. Byzantine Composite capital. Type 2. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)



Il. 17. Roman Corinthian capital. Type 3. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)

decoration capital was reused in the Crusader church hall (now mosque). So, probably, there were six capitals of this type.

Type 2. One Composite capital was exhibited inside the Crusader church (il. 16). Its lower part was hardly chiseled, the upper part was eroded. Still, the character of the carving and general composition of the decoration might be recognized from the preserved parts as well as from other precedents: marble capitals from the church in Khirbet Midras (unpublished) and a capital from Jerusalem museum, originally from Khirbet Dubban (*Kautzsch* 1936: 115, Tafel 23 (368)). The echinus, steeply tapering towards the bottom, was decorated with two ranges of stylized mask-acanthus leaves, only four in each row. The leaves of the lower tier were only partially preserved (pairs of upper clusters and the top clusters), but according to the parallels, originally they were comprised of two pairs of lateral clusters and the top cluster, voluminous and steeply bending. The grooves, which accentuated wide midribs, ribs and lobes — were smooth; between the clusters the rounded eyes were formed by the tips of the lobes.

The acanthus leaves of the second range were larger and higher, with more thick midribs, which comprised the volutes. On the free surface of echinus between the leaves of the second range various patterns were depicted: among them the three-lobed leaf and the circular pestle with the inner circle are present. The abacus hasn't survived, but the ring with the stylized bead-and-reel and egg-and-dart patterns were still traceable. According to all of these features and aforementioned parallels, which are all dated to the Byzantine period, the capital from the Sebaste church was also carved during the same era (probably, imported from Proconnesus in the ready-made condition).

The other two types of Corinthian capitals are Roman, all carved from grayish marble. Stylistically they were very close, although with some differences in the composition of the acanthus leaves and in the decoration of the calathus rims and abaci.

Type 3. In the first type of the Roman capitals the echinus was adorned with two ranges of acanthus leaves (il. 17). The leaves are fleshy and naturalistically carved, so as they were fresh; the tips are sharp, though

short. Eight leaves of the lower range were comprised of two pairs of lateral clusters of the lobes and the top one. The midrib and the ribs were accentuated with the deeply carved grooves; between the clusters deep elongated eyes were cut. The top clusters were closely attached to the echinus. The leaves did not touch each other with the tips, but they were located on the echinus separately (the free space between them was flat and empty). The acanthus leaves of the upper range were growing from the intermediate gaps between the leaves of the lower range. They were carved in the same manner, although without the lower pair of clusters of the lobes. The tips of the lobes were longer and sharper and touched each other, comprising an endless ring. The calathus rim was decorated with the naturalistically interpreted voluminous calyxes, detailed with the deep grooves, from which the helices and volutes were stretching. The volutes as well as abacus have been very poorly preserved on the capital, which might be investigated from the close distance. Three other capitals, reused in the Crusader church, seem to be identical, although they are located too high to be sure (il. 18). Similar capitals were found in the area of the Roman basilica at the Forum of the Sebaste polis, where from they might have been taken for the decoration of the church (*Crowfoot et alii* 1942: Plate LXXXIV, no. 6).

Type 4. The other type of the Roman Corinthian capital was presented by two capitals at least. Both of them bore such outstanding feature as so called “double helices” in the center of the calathus rim. The second pair of helices was comprised comprised of the elongated inner mouths of the calyxes, which were joined⁷. This type

⁷ Kenaan-Kedar had mentioned one of the capitals of this type among the other Roman and Byzantine spolia (very generally) and erroneously dated in to the Byzantine period (Kenaan-Kedar 1992: 111–112, Fig. 8).



Il. 18. Roman Corinthian capitals reused in the Crusader church. Converted into the mosque. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)

was mostly spread in the Holy Land during the 1st–2nd centuries CE (it's production was finally ceased in the early IVth century CE). Identical capitals were found in many places, but also — in the area of the Roman basilica in Sebaste, where from they might have been taken for the decoration of the church (*Crowfoot et alii* 1942: Plate LXXXIV, no. 4–5). Actually, notwithstanding obvious stylistic similarity, the character of the acanthus leaves and even of the double helices differed much in both capitals of the type.

Type 4a. Echinus of this capital was decorated with two ranges of mask-acanthus leaves, eight leaves in each row (il. 19). In the lower range the leaves were comprised of two pairs of lateral clusters of the lobes and the top one. The lower clusters were much smaller than the upper ones, in which the lobes were presented in a fan-like manner. The tips of the lobes of the neighboring leaves were touching each other, comprising the geometrical figures. The upper lobes of the upper clusters were accentuated with the deep grooves, carved to the very bottom of the whole leaf. The other lobes were articulated with angular grooves. Between the clusters the tips of the lobes comprised nice eyes. The upper range of the acanthus leaves were quite different. They were almost absent, except



Il. 19. Roman Corinthian capital with double helices. Type 4a. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)



Il. 20. Roman Corinthian capital with double helices. Type 4b. Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)

of the upper cluster of the lobes. Their tips were rounded. Only two unfinished vertical grooves and the lateral eyes between the clusters defined the anticipated lower range of the lobes, which were presented only in the blocked-out state (eight flat semicircular segments). The fleshy and voluminous cauliculi and calyxes on the calathus rim were carved in the naturalistic manner. The helices were plain and didn't



Il. 21. Late-Roman Corinthian capital, incorporated into the Late Islamic wall. Type 5 (mixed). Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)

touch each other. The volutes were of the same design, though larger than the helices, articulated and, most probably, covered the abacus partially. The abacus was decorated with horizontal groove.

Type 4b. This capital, sustained better in those parts that were preserved worse in the described above one and v.v. (Type 4a), was almost the same, only the acanthus leaves of the second range were carved in more detail, with the upper and lower pairs of clusters of the lobes, also touching each other (il. 20).

Type 5. In the late (Ottoman?) room, which was built to the north from the Byzantine apse, among the other details a half-capital, or pilaster cap, was incorporated into the eastern wall (il. 21). The room was closed during our survey, therefore some details might be hardly identified. But according to the available picture, the lower part of the capital was decorated in the same manner as capitals of the Type 3 (ca. 1st — 2nd century CE). The character of the acanthus leaves was the same, though the tips of the lobes in the lower range were touching each other. An outstanding feature of this capital is that the



Il. 22. Pseudo-Ionic capital. Type 6a.
Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)



Il. 23. Pseudo-Ionic capital. Type 6b.
Photo credit: S. Tarkhanova (2019)

abacus was decorated in the same manner as the capitals of the Type 1 (ca. late 3rd — early 4th century CE). So, it seems that this capital combines acanthus leaves of two different periods of Roman era and apparently was decorated also with the cross during the Early Byzantine epoch. This theory needs further survey at the site with the opportunity to reach the capital under concern.

Type 6. Two Pseudo-Ionic blocked-out capitals were preserved at the site⁸. Both were comprised of the bars of all canonical elements of Ionic morphology: on the frontal sides of echinus — volutes and acroteria growing from them; on the lateral sides — pulvini, tied with baltei and tapering towards the mid part. To both capitals the upper drums of the shaft were attached, carved from the same piece of stone. Besides these common features, there were considerable differences between two capitals. The height of the drums were different: in one case it was higher than the capital itself (Type 6a, il. 22), in the other case — v.v. (Type 6b, il. 23). The capital no. 6a is more slender in its proportions and more

laconic in its details. The echinus was considerably protruding, its lower edge was quite well traceable. No egg-and-dart pattern or astragalus were cut, though the volume of the echinus seems to be enough for these elements. The acroteria were cut very generally: just only the fan-like segments were attached to the inner sides of the volutes. There were no baltei on the pulvini. But the character of the bar was close to the Classical proportions in many aspects: the volutes were cut not in the shape of the complete circle, their inner sides were truncated by the acroteria. Between the volutes the canalis was presented, connecting the anticipated spirals of them. So, theoretically, the Classical Ionic capital might have been cut from this bar. The capital no. 6b was not so Classical in its composition and proportions, thus the Ionic capital in its Classical view couldn't be produced from it. The bar elements became independent from the final result. The general proportions were stumper and thicker. The short drum was almost of the same diameter as echinus. Between them ovolo molding was carved, anticipating astragalus pattern. Actually the echinus was almost completely covered with the closely set volutes and acroteria, growing from them (they seem

⁸ Might be compared to the Herodian capital, published by the Harvard expedition (*Reisner et alii*, 1924: 191, Fig. 111; Pl. 8).



Il. 24. Marble chancel screen post, reused as a threshold. Photo credit: A. Zelikman (2019)

to touch each other in the center). Non-classical features are also the volutes cut in the shape of the complete circles, the absence of canalis, as well as of abacus. The baltei were decorated with the twisted-rope pattern, the acroteria had pestles. But these details couldn't change the general non-classical character of the bar. Thus, I suppose, that the capital 5a was earlier than the capital 5b (Late Roman and Early Byzantine respectively).

d. Window frames

In the center of the Byzantine apse at the height of the 5th course of the wall the window sill was located (il. 5). Three lower stones of the window jambs were inseparable part of the wall masonry. It was topped with the arch, built from seven small voussoirs. The keystone reached the height of the anticipated 10th course of masonry, which was not preserved. The walls of the window were parallel to each other (not ra-

dial). From the inner side the window was undecorated (the external side is not available for survey).

e. Screen posts:

In front of the Byzantine apse one-stepped stylobate of the bema has been preserved. It projected towards the west from the line of the apse chord. Two sockets for the posts were preserved: one of them was close to the north end of the stylobate and it was cut separately, without the adjacent grooves for panels; the other one was located to the south, thus comprising the lateral entrance to the apse. The latter was joined with the long groove for the panel (according to the configuration of the chancel screen, the preserved apse might be southern).

The threshold of the doorway, which led into the Tomb of St. John the Baptist (Late Islamic construction), was decorated with marble chancel screen post (il. 24).



Il. 25. Marble chancel screen panel, reused as a threshold. Photo credit: A. Zelikman (2019)

The passage way was shallow, so the post was cut into two parts and only one half was reused. Its frontal side was adorned with traditional molded rectangular frames, one inside the other, repeating the outer rectangular perimeter. The outer frame was comprised with the shallow groove, outstanding from the edges of the post. The next profile was presented by cavetto. Inside it a convex molding (ovolo) was cut with the sunken edges. The short side (lower or upper) had a dove-tail concave shape.

f. Screen plates:

In the threshold of the passageway, which led to the other (northern) tomb, the member of the marble panel was reused for revetment (il. 25). It was decorated with three narrow grooves, forming a stepped molding towards the sunken central field of the panel. The corner member was preserved.

g. Revetment plates

The wall of the northern crypt, which is still venerated as the Tomb of St. John, was revetted with the gray marble slabs, most apparently, being the fragments of Early Byzantine sarcophagi (il. 26). The surface of the panel was smoothed, and the technique of the carving was very delicate. Three slabs were attached to the wall vertically. The anticipated size of each of the slabs was $2 \times 0.85 \text{ m}^9$. The slabs were enframed with the double moldings on their edges. The external molding was presented by plain fillet, the internal — by ovolo; both narrow. On the central field of each slab three round plain medallions with Maltese crosses, inscribed into them, were carved. Their arms were widening towards

⁹ Their general drawing without the description or attribution was published by Enlart (*Enlart* 1925: 348, Pl. 168, Fig. 527).



Il. 26. Marble sarcophagi, reused as revetment. Photo credit: A. Zelikman (2019)

the “dove tail” ends. All the vertical arms were defaced during the iconoclastic period. Interesting, that the pilgrims in the 14th–16th centuries CE (John Poloner, Francesco Suriano, Fr. B. Morosini) described the tombs of the saints decorated with the marble panels (Pringle 1998: 287).

The floors of the southern crypt were partially revetted with the marble tiles in opus sectile technique (il. 27). The revetment consisted of marble tiles of different colours, including white, gray, ochre/terracotta, black. Except of the terracotta tiles, all the other tiles were cut from the imported marble species. The frame was decorated with the row of square and half-square figures, the field was decorated with the interlacing octagons with the small square patterns in the center of each of them. The revetment was only partially preserved and originally it could decorate the entire crypt. Most probably, it was laid in Roman

or Byzantine period. The marble revetment plates without decoration might be seen reused in several parts of the floors of the Crusader church.

Near the entrance, inside the Crusader church the limestone slab was reused for the floor pavement. Its decoration was considerably erased after centuries of use, but two rows of chevrons on the upper and lower edges with two rows of interlacing circles between them, all densely depicted, still might be traced. The slab is Byzantine or Early Islamic.

h. Other

In the crypt the basalt tomb door was reused (il. 28), which could be only imported from Golan or Galilee, as the basalt quarries are not met in Samaria lithography. It had a shape of a rectangular slab with the door axis on the right side. Its surface was decorated with protruding rectangle with four sunken coffers. They were arranged



Il. 27. *Opus sectile* floors in one of the crypts.
Photo credit: A. Zelikman (2019)



Il. 28. Basalt tomb door. Photo credit: A. Zelikman (2019)

by their vertical axes. Between them the plain collar was placed, dividing the surface into two parts. By its style, it is dated to the Roman or Byzantine period and could be used for more convincing identification of the Martyrium with the original place of Forerunner's or prophets' burials.

3. Conclusions

After the recent personal survey of the site (2019) it became possible to reveal, that plenty of unknown before Byzantine evidences have been preserved in the Latin Cathedral in Sebaste: well preserved Byzantine apse, located to the east of the Crusader enclosure, and plenty of Byzantine architectural members, which were reused in the Crusader church as spolia. These observations give us firm basis for

localization of the Byzantine edifice partially to the east of the present Latin Cathedral and partially beneath it. Plenty of Roman details (capitals, columns, bases) were originally part of a certain colonnaded structure, which couldn't be built on the site, as it was located outside of the city walls and contained plenty of Roman and Byzantine tombs (cemetery). Most probably, they were brought here intentionally for the building of the Byzantine church. Especially interesting to outline the stylistic features of the Corinthian capitals capitals of the Type 1, which were cut in local Samaritan workshops during the Late Roman period (3rd — early 4th century CE), but their almost bold abaci were finished during the Early Byzantine period, and only after this completion they were reused in the church. Some parallels and

stylistic analyses make this theory quite likely. The other details (marble elements of the liturgical furniture, limestone details) were specially imported from Proconnesus or executed in local workshops during the Byzantine period. But not only the architectural memory of the early edifice might be revealed. The cultic memory was also transferred from one generation to the other: the tombs of St. John Forerunner, prophets Elisha and Obadiah are still venerated (mostly by Muslims) on the spot.

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