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The Role and Meanings of Crusader Architectural Decoration: From Local Romanesque Traditions to Gothic Hegemony

Since its beginnings, the study of architectural and monumental stone sculpture of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem has concentrated on issues of stylistic influence and the modes of its derivation from European art[1]. Students of crusader art have investigated its developments in comparison with contemporaneous western art. Consequently, whenever similar forms were observed in the Holy Land, Apulia, France or Sicily the issue of influence has immediately been raised and links between specific western and eastern objects have been proposed[2].

It seems to me that these numerous hypotheses and suggestions have disregarded the fact that in the twelfth century mutual relationships existed among the various artistic centers in Europe and a common European pictorial language prevailed extensively from Apulia and Sicily in the south to the northern centers of France. This pictorial language of Romanesque art demonstrates common elements but at the same time manifests local signs and symbols. Consequently, students of twelfth-century Romanesque art have reached the conclusion that this art was created in numerous artistic centers and was not disseminated from one prominent center to several peripheries[3].

It is the contention of this paper that the Latin Kingdom of the twelfth and thirteenth century was indeed an important center of Romanesque and Gothic art, and an integral part of the contemporaneous creative processes taking place in the west. Consequently, changes in the pictorial language of sculpture in the Holy Land paralleled changes in western artistic norms.

Twelfth-century sculpture in the Latin Kingdom should be considered in the

[1] *Camille Enlart*, Les monuments des croisés dans le Royaume de Jérusalem (Paris 1928); *Bianca Kühnel*, Der Rankenfries am Portal der Grabeskirche zu Jerusalem und die romanische Skulptur in den Abruzzen, in: Arte Medievale (1987) 87–121.

[2] For further bibliography see *Kühnel*, Der Rankenfries, 87–88, notes 1–2.

[3] *Joseph Gantner, Marcel Pobe*, Gallia Romanica. Die hohe Kunst der romanischen Epoche in Frankreich (Vienna, Munich 1955) 9–27.

context of monumental Romanesque stone sculpture which in the various regions of its emergence drew on local resources. This process was facilitated in France and Italy as well as in the Holy Land by materials from earlier periods readily to hand in the immediate vicinity[4]. Two basic major motifs could be a case in point: (1) *the acanthus capital*; (2) *the inhabited vine scrolls*.

In the Latin Kingdom of the twelfth century foliated capitals of classical orders were a most prominent element of architectural decoration, especially when compared to the very few remains of figurative sculpture. The larger series of these foliated acanthus capitals still *in situ* are almost contemporaneous, probably produced in the first half of the twelfth century: (a) on the facade of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; (b) on the combined pillars of the nave of the Church of St. Anne in Jerusalem; and (c) on the combined pillars of the nave of the Church of St. John in Ramleh. An additional series is from the Cathedral of St. John in Sebaste and is the only one to have been produced in the third quarter of the century[5].

The foliated acanthus capitals of these twelfth-century series used several types of capitals produced in various periods – late antique, early Christian, Byzantine and Muslim – all of which derive from classical art and retain its pictorial models and traditions. Consequently the various series of capitals produced in the Latin Kingdom differ in their forms and techniques. The capitals from the southern portal of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are unique. They contain several variations on the types of the acanthus leaves blowing in the wind and the butterfly models, but introduce new pictorial inventions which are not known in past local artistic traditions. These are several variations of leaves made in the form of closed fingers with grape clusters spread between them[6]. (figs. 1–3)

The capital series in the church of St. Anne in Jerusalem is totally different. It also relates to early Christian local motifs of the kind that appear, for example, in fifth and sixth century churches in Syria, although here the early Christian plasticity was transformed into linear reliefs, creating schematized versions of the traditional forms[7].

In the Church of St. John in Ramleh, two kinds of capitals were placed over the combined pillars dividing the nave from the aisles. On each combined pillar there are two large middle capitals facing east and west. They seem to imitate original Byzantine capitals (several of which may have served as models and also been re-

[4] *Joselita Raspi-Serra*, Le chapiteau d'acanthe en Italie entre le V^e^ et le X^e^ siècle, in: L'acanthe dans la sculpture monumentale de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance (Publications de la Sorbonne, Mémoires de la section d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art 4, Paris 1993) 178–187.

[5] *Nurith Kenaan-Kedar*, The Cathedral of Sebaste and its Western Donors and Models, in: *Benjamin Z. Kedar* (ed.), The Horns of Hattin (Jerusalem, Aldershot 1992) 92–121.

[6] *Nurith Kenaan*, Local Christian Art in Twelfth Century Jerusalem, in: Israel Exploration Journal 23 (1973) 167–175, 221–229.

[7] The capitals of the Church of St. Anne were studied by *Dalia Shahak* in an M.A. thesis written in Hebrew (The Hebrew University 1974). However, they deserve reconsideration in a systematic and comparative study. At the present stage I suggest they be compared to the capitals from the Church of St. Mary in 'Abud: see *Denys Pringle*, The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus, vol. 1 (Cambridge 1993) 21 (plate IX).

used in the church). Imitations of ancient models are known in several twelfth-century churches in France, Italy and the Holy Land. (figs. 4–6) Excavations undertaken in the past few months in the Crusader church at Beth Guvrin have revealed that Constantinian pillar bases were re-used by the Crusaders for their church and that some of these were then further copied[8]. These large central capitals in Ramleh are surrounded by smaller capitals. They consist of two rows of textureless acanthus leaves, which are characteristic of numerous edifices of the Latin Kingdom[9].

The later series of the cathedral of St. John in Sebaste includes several forms of foliated acanthus capitals[10]. The first group consists of seven capitals on the western and northern inner walls. An uninterrupted frieze is set over the imposts of all seven capitals. These capitals demonstrate an awareness of classical forms combined with a greater precision in detail and an increased movement of the constituent elements. The capitals of the second group are *in situ* on the engaged pillars of the nave and the transept. They are rounder, with two rows of leaves which are bigger, flatter, and more coarsely carved than those of the first group.

In conclusion, within the relatively short time-span of the first Latin Kingdom, the production of architectural decoration in the Holy Land demonstrates not only various techniques but also the use of different models. The usage of these particular decorative elements points to a conscious relationship of the builders to classical traditions.

These trends have been observed in the west by Willibald Sauerländer, Ernst Kitzinger[11] and others, who have established that in various regions of contemporaneous France and Italy a preoccupation with classical models was reflected in the production of foliated corinthian capitals. These formed an integral part of Romanesque architectural decoration in the Provence and the Rhone valley[12]. The same is true for twelfth-century Italy where there was prolific production of the new types of corinthian capitals from Trani and Bari[13] to Florence and Pisa[14], demonstrating a knowledge of a classical repertory of forms shaped according to local models and traditions. Furthermore, foliated acanthus capitals appear simultaneously (between 1120–1180) in early Gothic churches such as those in St.

[8] Beth-Guvrin, as observed by the author *in situ* at the excavations in the summer of 1994. For earlier observations, see *Pringle*, The Churches, 95–100.
[9] *Pringle*, The Churches, 149 (plate XCII), 215 (plate CLVI).
[10] *Kenaan-Kedar*, The Cathedral of Sebaste, 99–121.
[11] *Willibald Sauerländer*, Architecture and the Figurative Arts: The North, in: Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century, *Robert L. Benson, Giles Constable* (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass. 1982) 671–710, figs. 48–73; *Ernst Kitzinger*, The Arts as Aspects of the Renaissance: Rome and Italy, ibid., 637–670, figs. 29–47.
[12] *Walter Horn*, Survival Revival Transformation: The Dialectic of Development in Architecture, ibid., 711- 759.
[13] *Benedetto Ronchi*, Die Kathedrale am Meer, tr. *Margareta Ertler* (Fasano 1987) plates 33–60.
[14] *Heinrich Decker*, Italia Romanica. Die hohe Kunst der romanischen Epoche in Italien (Vienna, Munich 1958) plates 58–61, 66–67.

Denis, the Cathedral of St. Etienne in Sens and Notre Dame in Etampes and various others[15]. Thus the production of foliated acanthus capitals in the Latin Kingdom manifests the same attitudes at the same time.

An additional example of an age-old classical motif revived in twelfth-century stone sculpture is the motif of the inhabited vine scrolls. In the twelfth century the inhabited vine scrolls appeared in stone sculpture in the Abruzzi, in Apulia[16], Pisa, Palermo and Monreale[17] as well as in Provence, in Toulouse, and on the west facade of Chartres Cathedral, and also on the facade of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela[18]. In all these places the vine scroll motif appears as an enframing frieze on portals as well as on capitals and as a decorative frieze on lintels, columns, etc. The images inhabiting the vine scrolls may be divided into five groups. (1) Naked human figures, sometimes pointing to their private parts; (2) hybrid legendary creatures, such as sirens, centaurs etc.; (3) birds of various kinds; (4) active human figures, such as hunters; (5) animals. The inhabited scrolls carved on the eastern lintel of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre include images from all five groups. Two additional friezes enframing the arches of the entrance ante-chamber to the Calvary chapel used the scroll frieze inhabited with birds only[19]. Both these friezes recall friezes in contemporaneous centers, and also probably depend on local traditions as models. Indeed, in the Holy Land the "peopled" scroll was most common in Roman and Byzantine times, as was recently shown by Judith Turenheim and Asher Ovadiah[20]. Consequently, one may venture the hypothesis that in the east as well as in the west local models were used for the production of new friezes, and that learned patrons may have made their choice of specific local models while the masons may have executed the capitals and friezes utilizing their local techniques. (fig. 7)

Capitals and friezes seem to have been a significant part of the construction of the building. They were mentioned and explained by – to mention only two most prominent names – Vitruvius, whose manuscripts were widely read all through the Middle Ages, and Bishop Durandus of Mende in the thirteenth century, who declared: "The capitals of the piers are the opinions of the Bishops and Doctors. The ornaments of the capitals are the words of Sacred Scripture, to the meditation

[15] *Whitney S. Stoddard*, Sculptors of the West Portals of Chartres Cathedral (New York, London 1987) 48–49, plate XXII, figs. 1–6.

[16] See *Ronchi*, Die Kathedrale, plates 71, 75. Twelfth-century stone sculpture depicting the motif of the inhabited vine scrolls, common especially in certain landscapes of Italy, France and Spain, have not yet been surveyed, catalogued and systematically studied. A comparative study of these numerous works could shed light on the role and meaning of this motif in twelfth-century stone sculpture. Such a study would hopefully also shed light on the function of this motif in twelfth-century stone sculpture of the Holy Land.

[17] *Decker*, Italia Romanica, plates 162–163, 196.

[18] *Stoddard*, Sculptors, plate V, figs. 1–6, plate XV, figs. 1–4, plate XXIX, figs. 1–4, plate XXXI, fig. 6.

[19] *Kenaan*, Local Christian Art, 227–229.

[20] *Asher Ovadiah, Judith Turenheim*, "Peopled" Scrolls in Roman Architectural Decoration in Israel: The Roman Theatre at Beth-Shean/Scythopolis (Rome 1994).

and observance of which we are bound."[21] Indeed, in the Romanesque sculpture of the Auvergne, patrons are depicted donating capitals and columns to the church. (fig. 8)

Things changed dramatically with the transition from Romanesque to Gothic. In the leading centers of France in thirteenth century, the relationship to classical art changed completely. A few prominent artistic centers took over the place of the numerous Romanesque ones. These new centers formulated and introduced aesthetic norms which were also part of the art of the great cathedrals of Ile-de-France and the Champagne. These Gothic pictorial norms became canonical for the rest of Europe at least during the first half of the thirteenth century[22]. The acanthus capital was neglected and new sculpted images of flora became part of the pictorial canon. Foliated capitals presenting series of tree leaves and flowers reflected new studies of nature[23]. These new norms were transferred to the Holy Land, as elsewhere, by the patrons and their artists. Thus there was no fundamental continuation of twelfth-century artistic traditions in the Holy Land. New Gothic forms were introduced and became prominent. The total change in the pictorial forms of foliated capitals may demonstrate once again the sovereignty of western artistic canons in the Latin Kingdom. Two foliated capital series from mid-thirteenth century Caesarea – one from the gate in the city's eastern wall[24], and the other from the gate in the city's northern wall – which have never as yet been surveyed or described will serve as examples. These capitals form part of the building project of King Louis IX, who refortified Caesarea between March 1251 and May 1252.

The eastern gate (fig. 9)

The eastern gate-house of the wall has been restored and today shows three vaulted bays. In each of the bays the ribs of the vaults are supported on the walls with a console which is carved with floral and vegetal motifs.

The eastern wall:

Console no. 1 has not survived
Console no. 2 depicts a single open flower with large petals
Console no. 3 depicts an atlant in a bust with stylized hair and broken arms
Console no. 4 flowers

[21] *William Durandus*, The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments, tr. *John M. Neale, Benjamin Webb* (Leeds 1843) 29–30.
[22] *B. Craplet*, Auvergne Romane (La Pierre-que-vire 1978) plate 23.
[23] *Emile Male*, The Gothic Image, tr. *Dora Nussey* (New York 1958) 52–53.
[24] *Meron Benvenisti*, The Crusaders in the Holy Land (Jerusalem 1970) 137–138; *Pringle*, The Churches, 166.

The western wall:

Console no. 1 an "elbow" with elongated leaves
Console no. 2 four single open flowers (fig. 10)
Console no. 3 polygonal with four leaves and an open flower in its lower part (fig. 11)
Console no. 4 no flowers

The Northern Gate

The inner space of the gate is square, opening on the west toward the sea and on the south towards the town. Its ceiling does not exist any more. (figs. 12–13) Four wall pilasters with bases, bearing carved capitals, are situated in the edifice's four inner corners. Three capitals on the north-west, north-east and south-east sides are carved with vegetal motifs, and only the south-western pilaster capital has not been carved. All the capitals are polygonal and are inserted into the wall to a quarter of their depth. The upper and lower parts of the north-western capital are carved with fine profiles, while in the middle part uneven individual vine leaves are depicted, side by side. Their stems are exposed as if the leaves were growing from them. (figs. 14–15)

On the north-eastern capital only three large leaves are depicted. Each leaf is horizontally spread so that its fringes touch those of the next one. The south-east pilaster capital is larger and the leaves are depicted in two horizontal rows. They are carved almost in the round so that very deep spaces were created between the upper and lower rows. (figs. 16–17)

The floral and vegetal motifs of the capitals from the two gate houses correspond precisely to vegetal and floral capitals of the 1250s in various edifices in France, but also in Cyprus[25]. Unlike the capitals with vegetal motifs of the 1230s, which were constructed with several rows of leaves and flowers, the vegetal capitals of the 1250s are polygonal and demonstrate only one row of leaves or flowers. At the time of Louis IX, this pictorial language of vegetal and floral capitals seems to have become universal in France.

To conclude: The study of the foliated capitals suggests that artistic conceptions in the Latin east and in Europe were basically the same, and that Romanesque variety gave way to Gothic norms, in the east as well as in the west. This conclusion implies a constant flow of ideas and sculptors between west and east, rather than an artistic lag. In other words, just as it has been argued by Hans Eberhard Mayer and by Rudolf Hiestand that the chancery and church of the Kingdom of Jerusalem were largely managed by officials from the west, we may assume that the patrons of artistic projects either came from the west or were

[25] Capitals from the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Nicosia: *Camille Enlart*, Gothic Art and the Renaissance in Cyprus (trans. and ed. by *D. Hunt* [London 1982; first French ed. 1899]) figs. 50, 52, 58; *Hans Reinhardt*, La cathédrale de Reims (Paris 1963) 175–177, pl. 14.

familiar with recent developments there. In the cases of Sebaste in the twelfth century, and of Caesarea in the thirteenth, it is possible to identify the donors and patrons.

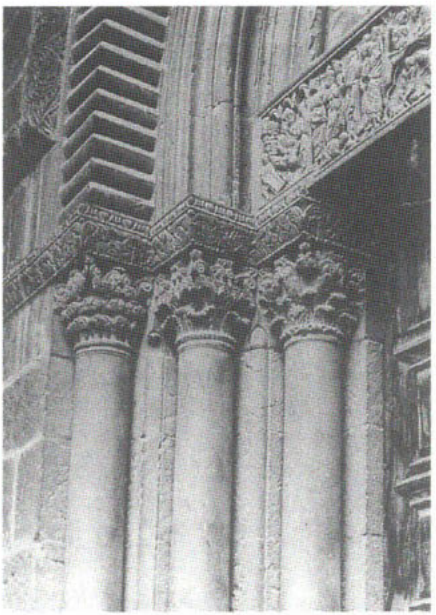

Fig. 1: Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Left side of Southern portal – Leaves Capitals

Fig. 2: Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Leaves in the form of closed fingers with grape-clusters

Fig. 3: Detail of fig. 1

Fig. 4: The Church of St. John in Ramleh. Capital from first pillar looking east (northern aisle)

Fig. 5: Composite capital

Fig. 6: A variation on Corinthian capital

Fig. 7: Frieze over the entrance door to the ante-chamber to Calvary

Fig. 8: Detail from a capital from Notre-Dame in Clermont-Ferrand

Fig. 9: Caesarea, Eastern gate, general view

Fig. 10: Caesarea, Eastern gate, console no. 2 on western wall

Fig. 11: Caesarea, Eastern gate, console no. 3 on western wall

Fig. 12: Caesarea, Northern gate, general view from west to east

Fig. 13: Caesarea, Northern gate, view toward south-east

Fig. 14: Caesarea, Northern gate, Gothic capital from the north-west corner

Fig. 15: Caesarea, Northern gate, Gothic capital from the north-west corner

Fig. 16: Caesarea, Northern gate, Gothic capital from the north-east corner

Fig. 17: Caesarea, Northern gate, Gothic capital from the south-east corner