

SAINT SOPHIA MUSEUM PROJECT 2009: THE COLLECTION OF BYZANTINE MARBLE SLABS IN THE AYASOFYA MÜZESİ, İSTANBUL

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The project of a Corpus of the Byzantine sculptures in the Ayasofya Müzesi at İstanbul started in 2005 and has been carried on through the following years by the universities of Rome Sapienza, Rome Tor Vergata, and, since 2007, Bologna². It is a pleasure to thank here the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey for giving us permission to work in the Museum; thanks are also due to the Ayasofya Müzesi authorities.

Research work for the year 2009³ focused on a group of marble slabs that, although few in number, display noteworthy decorative and technical characteristics, as has already been observed about the refined Middle-Byzantine slabs that are now preserved in Saint Irene and which we presented at the Kocaeli Symposium⁴.

Among the sculptures in Saint Irene figures a very interesting, but damaged and incomplete Early-Byzantine slab, inv. 388, which was briefly published by Ayten Erder in 1965⁵ (Fig. 1). Of unknown provenance, it shows a quite unusual composition

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² The research project, which in the years 2006-2008 has been already financed by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (project PRIN, national coordinator Prof. Eugenio Russo, University of Bologna), has received another financial support also for the years 2008-2010.

³ The research team of the year 2009 was composed by Alessandra Guiglia, Claudia Barsanti, Roberta Flaminio, Silvia Pedone, and Alessandro Taddei.

⁴ A. Guiglia Guidobaldi, C. Barsanti, "St. Sophia Museum Project 2006: The Marble Sculptures of the Middle-Byzantine Period", 25. *Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı*, Kocaeli 28 Mayıs - 1 Haziran 2007, Ankara 2008, 2. Cilt, 117-132.

⁵ A. Erder, "Geyikli mermer levha /Slab with Representation of a Stag", *Ayasofya Müzesi Yıllığı*, 6, 1965, 63-66. The slab measures cm 86 x 85 x 7 (along the frame, but it becomes very thin in the smooth background of the central composition). On the right it lacks the outermost framing and, on the left, the whole framing and also part of the composition; it is broken in several pieces assembled together. The slab was located in the 60s of the last century in the exonarthex of Saint Sophia together with other marble sculptures and with fragments marble and mosaic floors; afterwards, when the restoration of the exonarthex took place in 2000, it was temporarily moved to the northern gallery and was subsequently placed in the atrium of Saint Irene, without the plaster repairs and the wooden box in which it was preserved.

with a stag sculpted between two leafy trees, which are framed by an elaborate cornice decorated with a sequence of oblique, fine-toothed acanthus leaves, a row of bead-and-reel ornament, and, along the upper and lower edges, an undulating vine-shoot, whose leaves are likewise fine-toothed. The two tree-like foliages, which emerge vigorously from the background, also show the same refined carving. The stag, whose lower part is unfortunately missing, is represented as moving to the left, with its head erect and the horns parallel to the body. The smoothness of the carving of the stag, accomplished with soft light-and-shade effects, almost clashes with the more distinct rendering of the sharp contours characterising the arboreal scene.

This composition is also unusual because it has the appearance of being complete in itself, as is demonstrated by the position of a small Greek cross within a *clipeus* and a gem, both of which are placed in the outermost frames, above and below in alignment with the stag's head. As is also shown by the symmetrical convergence and divergence of the oblique acanthus leaves in the frames, the *clipeus* and gem were meant to highlight the middle of the slab, which would have thus been centred on the figure of only one stag flanked by two trees. Therefore, it follows that there existed a twin slab with a mirror-image composition and the common motif of a pair of stags symmetrically arranged on either side of a central element should be excluded.

The more complex and crowded scene sculpted on one of the extraordinary capitals coming from the Episcopal Basilica of Stobi (Fig. 2), which date to around 500 and are now in the Belgrade Museum, offers an interesting parallel⁶. It displays two running stags and other animals in a composition full of inventiveness divided by trees. It is very similar to our slab, as regards both the shape of the animals and the carving of the leaves. Also stylistically close is a marble revetment panel in two fragments, one in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and the other in the Baltimore Museum of Art, probably coming from Palestine and dating to the middle of the 6th century, adorned with two antelopes, organically modelled, drinking from the rivers of Paradise⁷. Likewise stylistically close is the composition on the silver 'capsella africana' in the Vatican Museums (dating to the late 5th or early 6th century), where the protagonists are just two stags⁸.

This chronology fits well also with the sculpture in question, if we look at the

⁶ Ch. Strube, *Polyeuktoskirche und Hagia Sophia. Umbildung und Auflösung antiker Formen, Entstehen des Kämferkapitells* (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Klasse, Abh. N.F. 92), München 1984, 47-49, pl. 11.44; V. P. Lilcik, *Corpus elementorum architecturae antiquae rei publicae Macedoniae, Pars secundae* (Monumenta Macedoniae Liber VI), Skopje 2002, 903-904, fig. 4. We like to thank our colleague prof. Valentino Pace for the photographic documentation that we publish in fig. 2.

⁷ G. Vikan, *Catalogue of the Sculptures in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection from the Ptolemaic Period to the Renaissance*, Washington D.C. 1995, 79-82, n. 33.

⁸ H. Buschhausen, *Die spätromischen Metallschreine und frühchristliche Reliquiare*, Wien 1971, 242-243, n. B15; G. Morello, "Capsella africana", *Dalla terra alle genti. La diffusione del Cristianesimo nei primi secoli*, Milano 1996, 253-254, n. 127.

vegetal friezes that frame the central scene. A striking parallel can be seen in the cornices of the openwork slabs from the fragmentary ambo of Basilica A of Nea Anchialos in Thessaly; this piece dates to around 500, both in terms of the choice of motifs and as regards the carving⁹. The coupling of a classical motif, like the bead-and-reel ornament, with a festoon of fine-toothed leaves also characterizes a refined marble post in the Kütahya Museum in Asia Minor¹⁰. On the other hand, the frieze of oblique acanthus leaves belongs to the ornamental components that are usually to be found on two-zone or composite capitals having fine-toothed acanthus leaves. Among the several exemplars in Constantinople or exported from this area through the whole Empire, we can mention, in the first case, the two-zone capitals in the Archiepiscopal Museum of Ravenna¹¹, in Cherson¹² and in the Byzantine Museum of Athens, coming from Thessaloniki¹³; in the second case, we note also the composite capitals from Cherson¹⁴, those from Thessaloniki and Poreč¹⁵, and, lastly, in Constantinople, the capitals inv. 185 and 200 that are preserved in the garden of Saint Sophia Museum¹⁶. The vine-shoot of the outermost framing of the slab also finds striking comparisons in the ornamental repertory of the capitals, especially with regards to the type of *à-jour* carved panel capitals, like the ones in the Euphrasian Basilica of Poreč, coming from Constantinople and dated to the middle of 6th century¹⁷. The same type of undulating vine-shoot with fine-toothed acanthus leaves often occurs as a cornice on the openwork slabs, among which we note the Justinianic ones in Saint Sophia and in Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople¹⁸, where usually

⁹ G.A. Sotiriou, “Αι χριστιανικαι Θηβαι της Θεσσαλιας”, *Αρχηαιολογικη Εφημερις*, 1929 (1993²), 91, 93, figs. 119-120.

¹⁰ Ph. Niewöhner, “Frühbyzantinische Steinmetzarbeiten in Kütahya. Zu Topographie, Steinmetzwesen und Siedungsgeschichte einer zentralanatolischen Region”, *Istanbuler Mitteilungen*, 56, 2006, 407-473: 458, n. 90, fig. 54.

¹¹ R. Farioli Campanati, “La scultura architettonica e di arredo liturgico a Ravenna alla fine della tarda antichità: i rapporti con Costantinopoli”, *Storia di Ravenna II.1*, Venezia 1991, 249-267: 253, fig. 14a.

¹² C. Barsanti, “L’exportazione di marmi dal Proconneso nelle regioni pontiche durante il IV-VI secolo”, *Rivista dell’Istituto Nazionale di Archeologia e Storia dell’Arte*, serie III, 12, 1989, 91-220: 150-156, fig. 76; for more examples from Constantinople, see N. Firatlı, *La sculpture byzantine figurée au Musée Archéologique d’Istanbul*, Catalogue revu et présenté par C. Metzger, A. Pralong et J.-P. Sodini (Bibliothèque de l’Institut Français d’Études Anatoliennes d’Istanbul, XXX), Paris 1990, 110-112, nos. 200, 202, 205, pls. 64-65.

¹³ M. Sklavou Mavroëidi, *Γλυπτα του Βυζαντινου Μουσείου Αθηνων*, Athena 1999, 50-51, n. 52.

¹⁴ Barsanti, *L’exportazione*, 146, fig. 70.

¹⁵ J. Kramer: “Bemerkungen zu den Methoden der Klassifizierung und Datierung frühchristlicher oströmischer Kapitelle”, *Spätantike und byzantinische Bauskulptur. Beiträge eines Symposions in Mainz, Februar 1994*, edd. U. Peschlow, S. Möllers, Stuttgart 1998, 43-58: 56, pl. 13.19-21; 15, 35. For the capital in the Basilica Euphrasiana cfr. E. Russo, *Sculture del complesso eufrasiano di Parenzo*, Napoli 1991, 38-39, n. 12, figs. 14-15. The frieze of leaves folding downwards occurs also along the base of a panel capital with vegetal tendrils: *ibidem*, 60-63, n. 30, figs. 48-49.

¹⁶ U. Peschlow, “Kapitell”, *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, XX, Stuttgart 2004, 57-123: 96-98, fig. 9; C. Barsanti, A. Guiglia, *The Sculptures of the Ayasofya Müzesi in Istanbul. A Short Guide*, Istanbul 2010, 87, figs. 84-85.

¹⁷ E. Russo, *Sculture del complesso eufrasiano*, figs. 12, 13, 23, 25, 30-31, 39-43, 46-47.

¹⁸ C. Barsanti, “Le transenne”, in A. Guiglia Guidobaldi, C. Barsanti, *Santa Sofia di Costantinopoli. L’arredo marmoreo della Grande Chiesa giustiniana* (Studi di Antichità Cristiana pubblicati a cura del Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, LX), Città del Vaticano 2004, 489-529: 503-504, fig. 276; 513-515, fig. 288.

a small *clipeus* also highlights the middle of the frieze.

The practice of framing a figural scene with a luxurious frieze of fine-toothed acanthus leaves finds an interesting parallel in two fragmentary panels from the basilica of Damos el Karita and now in the National Museum of Carthage. Also dating to the 6th century, these show respectively the Adoration of the Magi and the Annunciation to the Shepherds¹⁹.

Two marble slabs, formerly in the garden of Saint Sophia and today in the storerooms of the Museum, belong to another sculptural category, that of the so-called pseudo-transennas, a kind of slab that looks like openwork screens in scheme and ornamentation, but lacks the *à-jour* carving²⁰. These two slabs display different ornamental grids, both consisting of the motif of the swastika meander. Framed with a simple plain edge, the first one, inv. 466²¹ (Fig. 3), displays an orthogonal grid of meanders that create quadrangular spaces filled with stylised vegetal motifs. In the second one, inv. 465²² (Fig. 4), framed by a triple moulding, the meander generates, also on an orthogonal grid, simple swastikas whose tips outline irregular polygonal spaces that bear vegetal elements. Since the slabs have different types of framing and nothing is known about their provenance, we cannot suppose them to belong to the same context. However, we can assert that they both draw upon a common decorative repertory.

Both compositions echo the ornamental language of the classical tradition and are widespread in sculptural production of the 4th to 6th centuries, when they appear in different types of patterns²³. The meander can be simple or complex, either developing in

¹⁹ J.-P. Sodini, “La sculpture “proconnésienne” de Damos el Karita à Carthage: avant ou après 533?”, *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron* (= *Travaux et Mémoires* 14), Paris 2002, 579-592: 590-591; R. Warland, “Hirtenverkündigung und Magierhuldigung”, *Das Königreich der Vandalen. Erben des Imperiums in Nordafrika*, Karlsruhe 2009, 348-349, n. 303, a, b.

²⁰ This category of marble slabs has been analyzed in its peculiar formal characteristics by Jean-Pierre Sodini in several articles: J.-P. Sodini, “Remarques sur la sculpture architecturale d’Attique, Béotie et du Péloponnèse à l’époque paléochrétienne”, *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, 101, 1977, 423-450: 441; J.-P. Sodini, “La sculpture architecturale à l’époque paléochrétienne en Illyricum”, *Actes du Xe Congrès International d’Archéologie Chrétienne, Thessalonique 1980, Città del Vaticano 1984, I*, 207-298: 281-282; J.-P. Sodini, C. Barsanti, A. Guiglia Guidobaldi, “La sculpture architecturale en marbre au VIe siècle à Constantinople et dans les régions sous influence constantinopolitaine”, *Acta XIII Congressus Internationalis Archaeologiae Christianae*, Split – Poreč 1994 (Studi di Antichità Cristiana pubblicati a cura del Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, LIV), Città del Vaticano 1998, 301-378: 350.

²¹ The slab, now in Depo 33, measures cm 93 x 151 x 8, but is incomplete and broken along the edges; the framing is lacking on three sides and the surface looks rather corroded; the back is smooth. The slab is briefly mentioned with the sculptures of the complex of St. Symeon Stylite the Younger near Antioch by W. Djobadze, *Archeological investigations in the region west of Antioch on-the-Orontes*, Stuttgart 1986: 104, pl. 37, fig. 147, but with the inv. 187, different from the present one. We should underline that at page 102 both the slabs are inventoried with completely wrong inv. numbers (1187 and 1188); moreover, at fig. 135 the caption identifies the sculpture as being located in the Saint Sophia Museum, while it belongs to the Adana Museum collection, also mentioned by the author at the same page 102.

²² The slab, now in Depo 33, measures cm 94 x 120 x 6 along the border and 3 in the central field; it is incomplete because it lacks the framing on the left side; it is damaged on the lower left corner; the back is smooth.

²³ G. Dimitrakalles, *Παλαιοχριστιανικοί και βυζαντινοί μαιανδροί*, Athenai 1982.

linear fashion as a frame or a border²⁴ or extending, as in our slabs, in an endless, more or less elaborate, carpet pattern having different compositional solutions. Among the most significant parallels, also pertaining to the typology of pseudo-transennas, are some fragmentary slabs from the Early Christian basilicas of Nea Anchialos in Thessaly²⁵. A slab in the Museum of Byzantine Civilization at Thessaloniki offers an interesting parallel even if the meander functions as a cornice for the central panel containing a couple of birds facing a *kantharos*²⁶.

But for a more cogent parallel for the decorative pattern of both the slabs, particularly of the second one, which seems not to find significant comparisons in the field of sculpture, we must look at the wide repertory of floor and wall mosaics. Whereas slab inv. 466 has close parallels in a mosaic panel adorning the presbyteral area of the Justinianic basilica of Sabratha²⁷ (Fig. 5) and another, virtually identical panel in the church of St. John the Evangelist at Ravenna²⁸, the scheme of slab inv. 465 – likewise to be found in Early Byzantine pavements²⁹ – also has parallels in wall mosaics, especially two soffits of the nave arcades in the Acheiropoietos Basilica at Thessaloniki³⁰ (Fig. 6).

Further observations about the chronology of the slabs can be drawn from the morphology of the vegetal fillings, e.g. the foliate calyx or the four-lily-shaped flower, which clearly belong to the extremely rich repertory of Justinianic sculpture, especially that of *à-jour* work exemplified in the precious openwork slabs and the delicate designs

²⁴ This kind of decoration is used for door frames, as in the basilica A of Nea Anchialos (G.A. Sotiriou, *Αι χριστιανικαὶ Θηβαί*, 83-86, figs. 104-105; G. Dimitrokalles, *Παλαιοχριστιανικοὶ*, 144, figs. 118-120), for chancel posts, as it is testified by two exemplars from the Acropolis of Athens, one of them in the Byzantine Museum (G. Dimitrokalles, *Παλαιοχριστιανικοὶ*, 145, figs. 126-127), and for cornices and wall revetments, like the fragment of frieze with birds in the Archaeological Museum of İstanbul (N. Firatlı, *La sculpture byzantine*, 135, n. 265, pl. 84) and the other one from the church of S. John the Baptist at the Hebdomon in Constantinople (G. Dimitrokalles, *Παλαιοχριστιανικοὶ*, 145, fig. 123), both of the 6th century; for other comparisons concerning linear meanders with fillings, see once again G. Dimitrokalles, *Παλαιοχριστιανικοὶ*, figs. 103-105, 124-125.

²⁵ G.A. Sotiriou, *Αι χριστιανικαὶ Θηβαί*, 82, figs. 99-100; G. Dimitrokalles, *Παλαιοχριστιανικοὶ*, 156-157, figs. 150-153. A small fragment with part of a swastika meander, whose development is difficult to understand, has been found in the church of the monastery of Chora at Constantinople (Ø. Hjort, "The Sculpture of Kariye Camii", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 33, 1979, 201-289: 273, fig. 102).

²⁶ G. Dimitrokalles, *Παλαιοχριστιανικοὶ*, 145, 147, figg. 130-131; J.-P. Sodini, "La sculpture architecturale", 282, fig. 41; other marble slabs with a framing meander have also been found in the *extra muros* basilica at Philippi and in the area of Asklepieion in Athens (G. Dimitrokalles, *Παλαιοχριστιανικοὶ*, respectively 145, figs. 128-129; 147, figs. 132-133).

²⁷ S. Aurigemma, *L'Italia in Africa. Le scoperte archeologiche (a. 1911-a. 1943). Tripolitania, I – I monumenti d'arte decorativa. Parte I – I mosaici*, Roma 1960, 27-29, pl. 41.

²⁸ R. Farioli, *I mosaici pavimentali della chiesa di S. Giovanni Evangelista a Ravenna*, Ravenna 1995, 46-47, figs. 14-15. For this and other mosaic pavements, like, above all, that one from the Basilica C of Amphipolis, see, again, G. Dimitrokalles, *Παλαιοχριστιανικοὶ*, figs. 396-401.

²⁹ G. Dimitrokalles, *Παλαιοχριστιανικοὶ*, 112-117. See, for example, the mosaic floor of the Early-Christian Basilica at Concordia Sagittaria, 4th century (G. Dei Fogolari, "Concordia paleocristiana", B. Scarpa Bonazza *et al.*, *Iulia Concordia dall'età romana all'età moderna*, Treviso 1978, 183-207: 189, fig. 133; G. Dimitrokalles, *Παλαιοχριστιανικοὶ*, 268, fig. 379) and another one in Aegina, date to 5th century (*ibidem*, 270, fig. 381).

³⁰ G. Dimitrokalles, *Παλαιοχριστιανικοὶ*, 326, fig. 461. They are the first two symmetrical arcades on the western side of the northern and southern colonnades.

cut upon capitals or imposts³¹.

The swastika meander is protagonist in another original slab of the Ayasofya Müzesi, inv. 610³² (Fig. 7). Here, in fact, an unusual geometrical design has been sculpted: a *clipeus* containing a christogram, with furrowed arms linked at the tips and a small six-pointed star at its centre, is encircled by a refined radial meander pattern with a perspectival effect and there are trilobed vegetal motifs at the corners. This centralized composition evokes an ornamental pattern of classical taste, which had hitherto seemed absent from the ornamental repertory of 5th- and 6th-century Constantinopolitan sculpture. It is instead documented in Greece, on a similar fragmentary slab from Corinth now in the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens (Fig. 8), that, however, shows in its centre the more classical and pagan protome of Medusa, while the cross is sculpted on the reverse; in the circular development of the meander, the swastikas alternate with animal figures³³. Also in Greece, but in Athens, was found another marble screen of this kind, which shows a meander developing in a circle as well, but of a simple type and with floral inserts; in the sole surviving corner there is a classical palmette and in the centre a Latin cross inside a refined *guilloche*³⁴. There is a significant parallel to this kind of centralized pattern in a fragmentary slab of uncertain date in the church of S. Lorenzo in Milan³⁵. Here the circular meander encloses an intertwined pattern and a christogram between *alfa* and *omega*.

As for the two above-mentioned meander slabs and the composition of slab inv. 610, their decorative roots in the genre of mosaic pavements goes back to late Hellenistic ones, such as an *opus signinum* floor at Solunto, in Sicily³⁶.

Another slab, inv. 489³⁷ (Fig. 9), shows a very unusual composition of concentric squares, the outermost and the innermost of which have a high moulding with curved profile separated by a deep groove. The innermost frame bears a square in relief on which is a “triple-8-knot” motif. Its corners are highlighted by four “L-shaped” mouldings

³¹ C. Barsanti, “Le transenne”, 494-529.

³² The slab (cm 54 x 67 x 7,5) is now in Depo 29; little more than half of the original composition and only one, simple moulded cornice are preserved.

³³ M. Sklavou Mavroeidi, Γλυπτά, 71, n. 95; N. Dimitrakopoulou-Skiloghianni, “Lastra decorata su entrambi i lati”, *Aurea Roma* 2000, 644, n. 347: the slab measures cm 48 x 49 x 3,5.

³⁴ C. Barsanti, “I plutei di Siponto, Monte Sant’Angelo e Benevento”, *1983-1993: dieci anni di archeologia cristiana in Italia*, Atti del VII Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Cristiana, Cassino 20-24 settembre 1993, a cura di E. Russo, Cassino 2003, II, 745-760: 757, fig. 10.

³⁵ C. Bertelli, “I mosaici di S. Aquilino”, *La basilica di S. Lorenzo in Milano*, Milano 1985, 145-169: 147, fig. 152; S. Lusuadi Siena, “Pluteo con cristogramma entro labirinto”, *Milano capitale dell’impero romano 286-402 d. C.*, catalogo della mostra, Milano 1990, 144-145, 491, n. 2a.37b. Both give the incorrect interpretation of this pattern as a labyrinth.

³⁶ C. Greco, “Pavimenti in *opus signinum* e tassellati geometrici da Soluto: una messa a punto”, *Atti del IV Colloquio dell’Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico*, Palermo 9-13 dicembre 1996, a cura di R. M. Carra Bonacasa, F. Guidobaldi, Ravenna 1997, 39-62: 43, fig. 5; V. Vassal, *Les pavements d’opus signinum. Technique, décor, fonction architecturale* (BAR International Series 1472), Oxford 2006, 51, figs. 5-6.

³⁷ The slab was in the garden in the 1990s, but is now located in the storerooms.

alternating with four small buttons.

The ornamental components, very similar to those on the slab in question, can be found on the 6th-century monumental marble sham doors in the south gallery of Saint Sophia. There they look like the metallic brackets used to strengthen the structure of the wooden doors³⁸. In both cases the bosses evoke metallic studs. The panels of the partition screen differ from our slab for their rectangular shape. Moreover, as they are arranged in sequence, the “L-shaped” motifs become “T-shaped” along the edges. They closely resemble the 6th-century marble wings reused in the later church of the monastery of Chora, but there are differences in pattern, such as the latter group’s lack of bosses³⁹. This kind of marble partition is echoed in two peculiar, small panels, also 6th-century in date, that were reused on the western wall of the Kalenderhane Camii and exhibit two *aediculae* framing the same kind of miniature door⁴⁰.

These parallels point to a 6th-century date for the slab in question. If that is correct, then this marble slab would be among the first examples displaying the well-known motif of the “triple-8-knot”. This is a pattern of classical tradition, as many floor mosaics attest, but it does not seem to have been a part of the repertory of Byzantine sculpture so early⁴¹.

However, slab inv. 489 is not unique. In fact, during recent research carried out in the Küçük Ayasofya Camii (the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus built by Justinian), there came to light among the numerous marbles recovered a sculpture of great interest showing the same composition of four L-shaped motifs that frame a christogram sculpted on a boss⁴² (Fig. 10).

A significant chronological indication for the 6th century comes from a small marble fragment found in 1953 during restoration work on the court of the Fatih Camii. Here only one of the “L-shaped” motifs survives, together with the central boss decorated by a christogram stylized in form of ivy leaves (Fig. 11). This slab most likely should

³⁸ R. Flaminio, “Gli elementi marmorei di reimpiego”, A. Guiglia Guidobaldi, C. Barsanti, *Santa Sofia*, 533-648: 638-645, figs. 340, 344, 346-347.

³⁹ R. Flaminio, “Gli elementi marmorei”, 642-643, fig. 345, but especially Ø. Hjort, “The Sculpture”, 222-223, figs. B,1-3, 5, 8-9, 12-14, 16-18-19. This kind of marble doors was also re-used, perhaps in the 10th century, in the monumental façade of the Boukoleon Palace at Constantinople: C. Mango, “Ancient Spolia in the Great Palace of Constantinople”, *Byzantine East, Latin West*, Studies in Honour of K. Weitzmann, edd. C. Moss, K. Kiefer, Princeton 1995, 645-649: 647, figs. 11-13.

⁴⁰ U. Peschlow, “Altar und Reliquie. Form und Nutzung des frühbyzantinischen Reliquienaltars in Konstantinopel”, *Architektur und Liturgie*, Akten des Kolloquiums vom 25. bis 27. Juli 2003, Greifswald, Wiesbaden 2006, 175-202: 184-185, fig. 11-12.

⁴¹ C. Barsanti, “Ancora sulla lastra con i monogrammi del monaco Giacinto, il presunto fondatore della Koimesis di Nicea”, *Annuario dell’Istituto di Storia dell’Arte*, n. s. 1, 1981-1982, 5-16.

⁴² A. B. Yalçın, “Constantinople after the Fall: Some considerations on the use of Byzantine *spolia* sculpture in early Ottoman buildings (1453-1500c.)”, *Constantinopla. 550 años de su caída*, eds.

E. Motos Guirao, M. Morfakidis Ficaltós, Granada 2006, 3, *Constantinopla Otomana*, 67-77: 76, fig. 15. The slab, inv. 2078, is kept today in the garden of the Amcazade Hüseyin Paşa Külliyesi, west of Saraçhane. It is a pleasure to thank our friend, dr. Ferudun Özgümüş, for the picture here published at fig. 10, and for taking us to this small, but very important, open-air museum.

have belonged to the great Justinianic church of Holy Apostles⁴³.

This kind of decoration with “L-shaped” motifs recalls in a different way the ornamental repertory of luxury arts, such as jewellery - a well-known instance is the book-cover of Theodolinda’s Gospel in Monza⁴⁴ - and textiles⁴⁵. Among these, the curtains and liturgical table-cloths offer the widest range of parallels. First, because of the presence of small discs between the “L-shaped” motifs, we remark a miniature of the Menologion of Basil II in the Vatican Library (gr. 1613, fol. 107), where there is an altar covered by a richly embroidered cloth⁴⁶. But in most of represented textiles the “L-shaped” motifs are enriched by two round pendants, as we can see either in the well-known mosaic of S. Apollinare Nuovo, on the curtains of the middle arch of Theoderic’s Palace⁴⁷, or in the mosaic of the Offering of Abel and Melchisedec in S. Vitale⁴⁸, on the altar-cloth, both in Ravenna. Related to this kind of textile ornamentation, but to the decorative structure of the marble sham doors as well, are also two of the five refined bronze doors that open to the narthex of Saint Sophia, dating from the Justinianic period⁴⁹.

Coming back to sculpture, we can find this particular decorative solution in at least two fragmentary reliefs, one at Syracuse⁵⁰, in Sicily, and the other at Corinth⁵¹, both, however stylistically far from the Ayasofya Müzesi slab.

Completely different is slab inv. 177⁵² (Fig. 12). Inside a panel framed by a moulded framing, this piece displays an uncommon composition centred upon a disc bearing a whirl, surrounded by four half-circles shaped like a close row of concentric mouldings, not overlapping but merging where they touch one another. It is a kind of

⁴³ S. Eyice, “Les fragments de la décoration plastique de l’église des Saints-Apôtres”, *Cahiers Archéologiques*, VIII, 1956, 63-74: 70, n. 8, fig. 9d (the reference in the text to fig. 7 is clearly a mistake).

⁴⁴ R. Farioli, *La cultura artistica nelle regioni bizantine d’Italia dal VI all’XI secolo*, in *I Bizantini in Italia*, Milano 1982, 137-426: 410-411, n. 208, fig. 279.

⁴⁵ Among the many examples, especially from Egypt, we note a fragment of tunic or shroud with the 5th-century Judgement of Paris (W.A.P. Childs, in *Age of Spirituality*, catalogue of exhibition, New York 1979, 138-139, n. 116) and two large clothes dated to the 6th century, now in the Louvre Museum (M.H. Rutschowskaya, *Au fil du Nil, couleurs de l’Égypte chrétien*, Nantes 2001, 108-109, 118-119, nn. 76, 82).

⁴⁶ P. Canart, in *Oriente Cristiano e Santità*, catalogue of the exhibition, Venice 1998, 152-156, n. 6, fig. at page 153.

⁴⁷ W.F. Deichmann, *Ravenna. Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes. Bd. III. Frühchristliche Bauten und Mosaiken von Ravenna*, Wiesbaden 1958: fig. 108

⁴⁸ Deichmann, *Ravenna*, figg. 322-323.

⁴⁹ A. Guiglia Guidobaldi, C. Barsanti, “Le porte e gli arredi architettonici in bronzo della Santa Sofia di Costantinopoli”, *Le porte del Paradiso. Arte e tecnologia bizantina tra Italia e Mediterraneo*, a cura di A. Iacobini, Roma 2009, 81-123: 86, figg. 10, 13.

⁵⁰ G. Agnello, *Le arti figurative della Sicilia bizantina*, Palermo 1962, 27-28, n. 2, fig. 7; R. Farioli, *La cultura artistica*, 286-287, n. 140, fig. 204, dated to the 6th-7th century.

⁵¹ C. Vanderheyde, “Les sculptures découvertes lors des fouilles de trois églises byzantines à Corinthe: un témoignage en faveur d’une occupation continue de la ville du VII^e au XII^e siècle”, *La sculpture byzantine. VII^e XII^e siècle*, Actes du colloque international, Athènes 2000, éd. par Ch. Pennas et C. Vanderheyde, *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique, Supplément* 49, Paris- Athènes 2008, 341-357: 351, fig. 9, of problematic chronology.

⁵² The slab came from the Archaeological Museum in 1939 and has remained in the garden until few years ago when it was stored in Depo 33; it measures cm 84 x 72 x 7; the moulded framing measures cm 9, the central whirl is cm 25 in diameter; the back is smooth.

pattern for which suitable parallels have not been found to date, with the exception of generic references to the decorative repertory of middle Byzantine sculpture, where the whirl is really ubiquitous and protagonist in every kind of sculptural furnishing⁵³. A possible clue to attempt a proposal of chronology can be found in the decoration of one of the edges of the slab: here an elegant undulating vine-shoot with three-fingered half leaves is sculpted (Fig. 13). It can be significantly compared with the undulating rinceau along the base of the dome in the church of Christ Pantepoptes (Eski Imaret Camii) at Constantinople, founded by Anna Dalassena, mother of the Emperor Alexios I Komnenos, at the end of the 11th century⁵⁴.

Closely linked with the slabs, the moulded marble handrails are less striking artefacts devoted to the secondary function of slab crowning. They can be found in homogeneous series in the church of Saint Sophia in Constantinople⁵⁵ and in the church of S. Clemente in Rome⁵⁶, here imported from the Byzantine capital. As a rule they are simply moulded and undecorated, but in a few cases they exhibit on the upper face simple crosses or a disc with a cross, as can be seen in the items from Knidos⁵⁷, from Anchiasmos in Albania⁵⁸ and from Cherson in Crimea⁵⁹. So, the small fragment of marble handrail inv. 487⁶⁰ (Fig. 14) looks really exceptional. It arouses particular interest because of its rich ornamentation consisting of large vine leaves spread on both the oblique opposite sides. The stylistic rendering of the leaves has parallels in the sculptural production of the Justinianic age, such as the capitals of two churches at Tirilye in Bithynia⁶¹ (Fig. 15), and this fact may help to date this small but virtually unique relief.

This short but significant selection of sculptures very nicely illustrates the quality and the documentary value of the marble collection of the Ayasofya Müzesi *vis-à-vis* the wider background of the artistic trends of the Byzantine capital.

⁵³ A. Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines du Moyen Age. II (XIe-XIVe siècle)*, Paris 1976; E. Parman, *Ortaçağda Bizans Döneminde Frigya (Phrygia) ve Bölge Müzelerindeki Bizans Taş Eserleri*, Eskişehir 2002; *La sculpture byzantine. VIIe XIIIe siècle*, Actes du colloque international 2008.

⁵⁴ R. Flaminio, "La decorazione scultorea della chiesa di Cristo Pantepoptes (Eski Imaret Camii) a Costantinopoli", *La sculpture byzantine*, 39-53: 41, 44, figg. 4, 8. For this type of vine-shoot with leaves having the same form, see *inter alia* a pilaster in St. Sophia of Ochrid and a slab in the Berlin Museums (A. Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines*, 71-72, 95-96, nn. 69, 80, pls. XLIIa, LXIV).

⁵⁵ C. Barsanti, "Le cimase", A. Guiglia Guidobaldi, C. Barsanti, *Santa Sofia*, 475-487.

⁵⁶ F. Guidobaldi, C. Barsanti, A. Guiglia Guidobaldi, *San Clemente. La scultura del VI secolo* (San Clemente Miscellany IV,2), Roma 1992, 229-232.

⁵⁷ F. Guidobaldi, C. Barsanti, A. Guiglia Guidobaldi, *San Clemente*, 231, fig. 363.

⁵⁸ C. Barsanti, "Le cimase", 486, fig. 272.

⁵⁹ A. B. Biernacki, *Wczesnobizantyjskie elementy i detale architektoniczne Chersonezu Taurydzkiego (The Early-Byzantine Architectural Elements and Details of Chersonesus Taurica)*, Poznan 2009, 69-72, pls. 202-203.

⁶⁰ The sculpture is kept in Depo 29; it measures cm 38 x 28 x 12 (three leaves survive intact on each side and there is a fourth in fragmentary condition; they are ca. 10 cm high).

⁶¹ Y. Ötügen, *Forschungen im nordwestlichen Kleinasien: antike und byzantinische Denkmäler in der Provinz Bursa* (Istanbul Mitteilungen Beiheft 41), Tübingen 1996, 203, 207, nn. M27, M28, M30, pl. 38,2-3; *ibidem*, 230-232, n. M22, pl. 42,2. A. Guiglia Guidobaldi, "Da Costantinopoli a Genova e a Varese: insolito itinerario di una scultura bizantina del VI secolo", «*Alle gentili arti ammaestra*» *Studi in onore di Alkistis Proiou*, a cura di A. Armati, M. Cerasoli, C. Lucani (Testi e Studi Bizantino-Neellenici, XVIII), Roma 2010, 97-124: 104-113, figs. 2, 6-8; in the footnote 17 a short mention of the Ayasofya Müzesi handrail.



Fig. 1: İstanbul, Ayasofya Müzesi, Atrium of Saint Irene, marble slab inv. 388.



Fig. 2: Belgrade, National Museum, two-zone capital from Stobi.

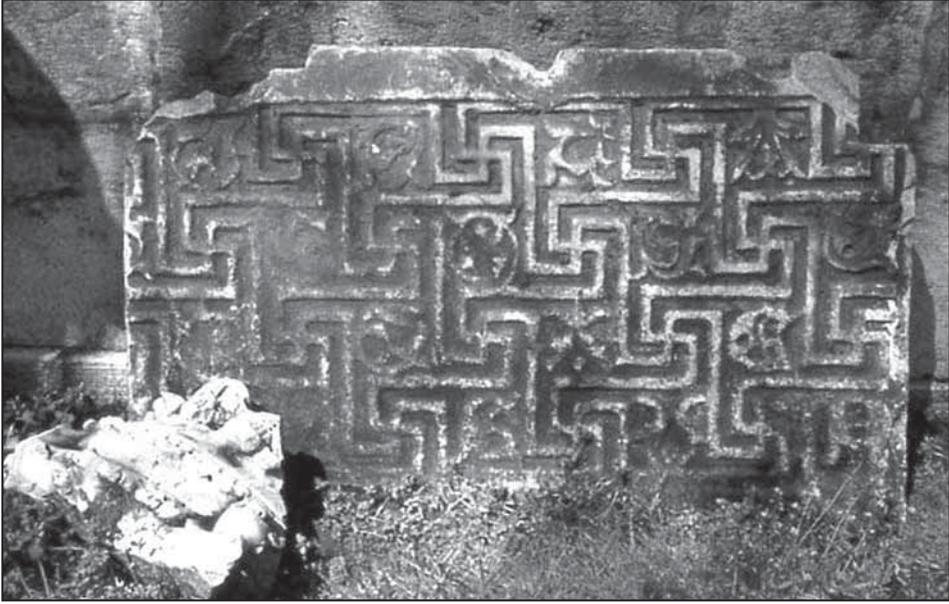


Fig. 3: İstanbul, Ayasofya Müzesi, marble slab inv. 466.

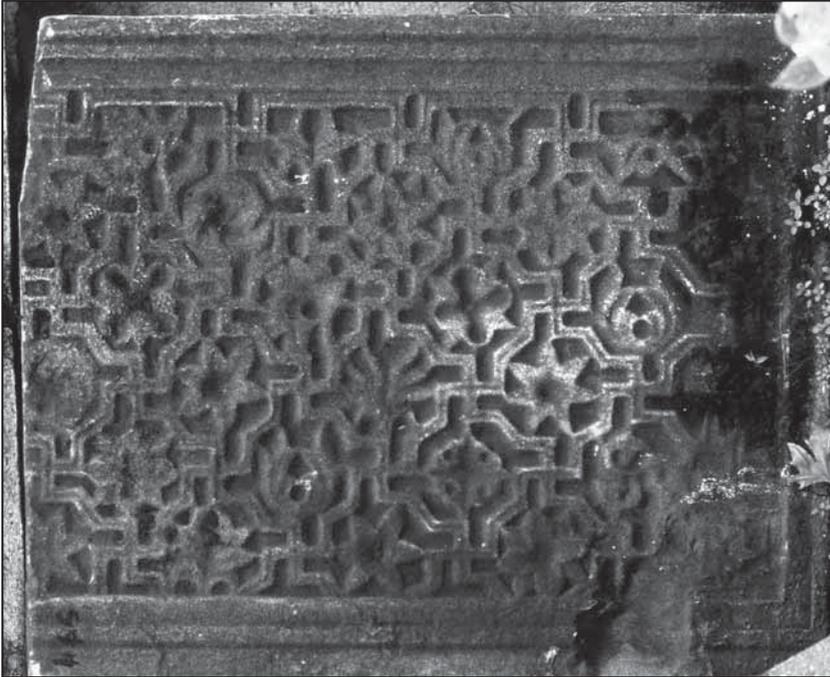


Fig. 4: İstanbul, Ayasofya Müzesi, marble slab inv. 465.

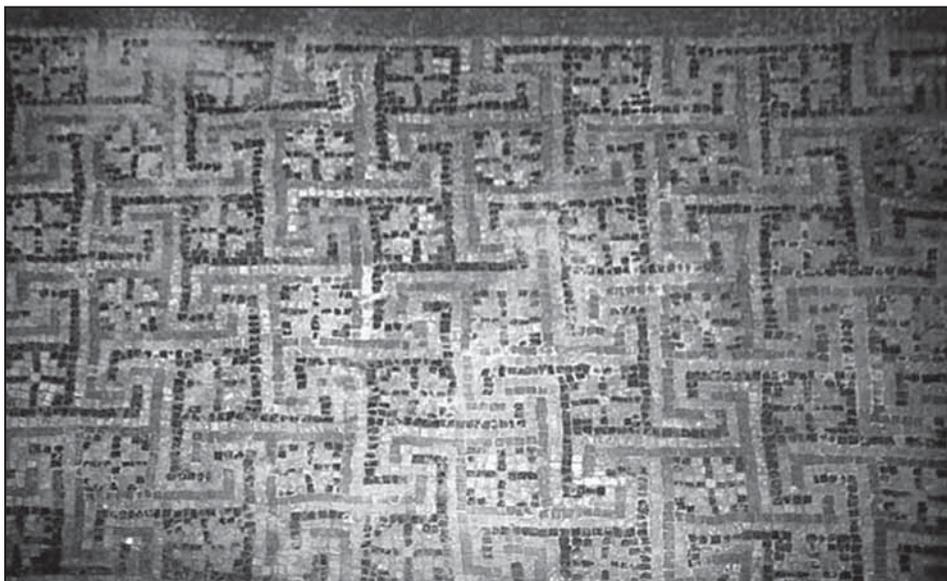


Fig. 5: Sabratha, Justinianic Basilica, floor mosaic in the chancel area.



Fig. 6: Thessaloniki, Acheiropoietos Basilica, mosaic of the soffit of the first arcade in the north aisle.



Fig. 7: İstanbul, Ayasofya Müzesi, marble slab inv. 610.



Fig. 8: Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum, marble slab from Corinth (inv. BM 577.T28).



Fig. 9: İstanbul, Ayasofya Müzesi, marble slab inv. 489.

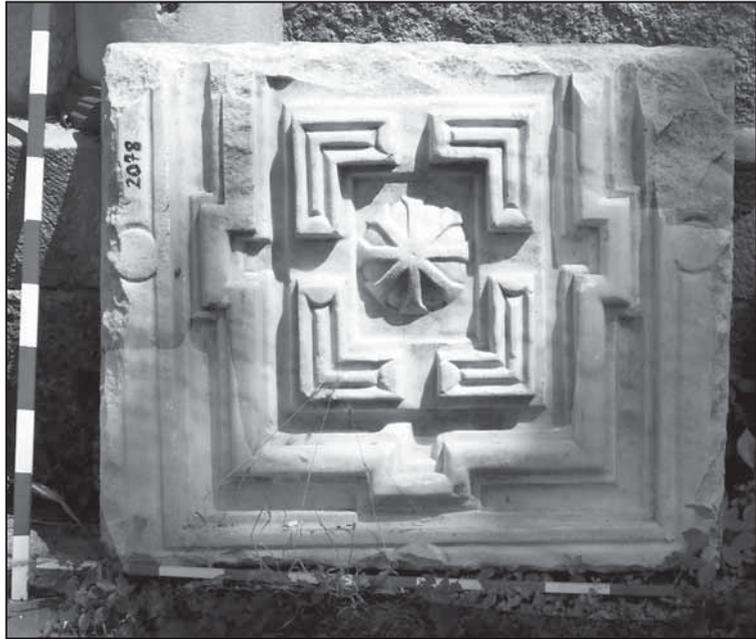


Fig. 10: İstanbul, Amcazade Hüseyin Paşa Külliyesi, marble slab inv. 2078.



Fig. 11: Fragment from the excavation in the court of Fatih Camii (after Eyice 1976).

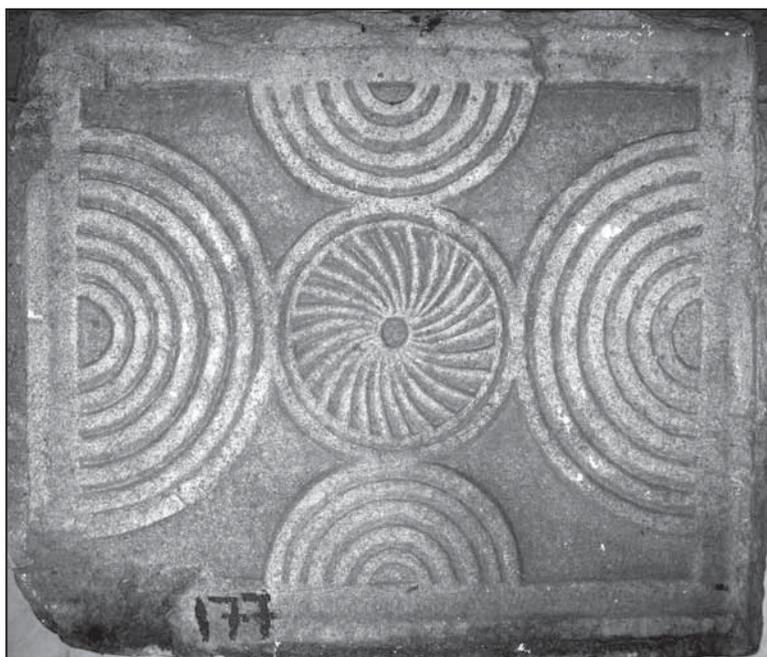


Fig. 12: İstanbul, Ayasofya Müzesi, marble slab inv. 177.



Fig. 13: İstanbul, Ayasofya Müzesi, marble slab inv. 177.



Fig. 14: İstanbul, Ayasofya Müzesi, handrail inv. 487.



Fig. 15: Tirilye (Zeytinbağı), Pantobasilissa (Kemerli Kilise), ionic impost capital.