

АРХИТЕКТУРА ДРЕВНЕГО
МИРА И СРЕДНИХ ВЕКОВ

*Ancient and Medieval
Architecture*

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IMPOST CAPITALS FROM THE TAURIC CHERSONESE

In the 5th and 6th centuries Chersonesus became the destination for several hundred marble architectural details from the Proconnesian quarries of Constantinople: columns and capitals, ambos and chancel barriers, tiles for wall facings, floors and doorways. In terms of their variety and number, Chersonesus is exceptionally rich in the Pontic area and could be compared to Ravenna. Interesting in themselves as architectural decoration, they are also very important as an aid in clarifying the chronology of churches in Chersonesus and elsewhere in the Crimea. Many elements of marble decoration may have been moved, and establishing their original location is hardly possible. The capitals from Chersonesus represent virtually all known types of the Late Antique/Early Byzantine capital. They include Composite capitals with fine-toothed acanthus decoration; Corinthian capitals with two rows of acanthus leaves; variations on the Corinthian capital, Ionic impost capitals, imposts and an example of an Ionic capital. The greater part of the capitals date to the second half of the 5th century and the first half of the 6th. It was during this period that the larger basilicas, for which all these capitals, were constructed. The present article is devoted to impost capitals in the Chersonesus collection.

Keywords: Crimea, Chersonesus, Proconnesian quarries, Early Byzantine capitals, Impost, Cross-acanthus, Cross, Chrismon

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ИМПОСТНЫЕ КАПИТЕЛИ ИЗ ХЕРСОНЕСА ТАВРИЧЕСКОГО

В V–VI вв. н.э. в Херсонес были вывезены сотни мраморных деталей из мастерских, расположенных на о. Проконнес в Мраморном море, близ Константинополя. Колонны и капители, алтарные преграды и амвоны, плиты для облицовки стен и вымосток предназначались для многочисленных базилик Херсонеса. По количеству и разнообразию мраморов Херсонес является одним из самых богатых городов Причерноморья, в этом отношении его можно сравнить с Равенной. Мраморы Херсонеса, интересные сами по себе как крупная коллекция, важны также для уточнения хронологии массового строительства базилик в этом городе, как и в целом в Крыму. Многие элементы мраморного декора перемещались, и установить их первоначальное положение едва ли возможно. В коллекции мраморов Херсонеса представлены все основные типы позднеантичной/ранневизантийской капители. Это капители с тонким зубчатым аканфом, капители с двумя рядами листьев аканфа с их подтипами (стандартные капители, «лирные» и V-образные капители), импосты и ионические импостные капители; имеется также один экземпляр традиционной ионической капители. Все капители датируются второй половиной V в. – первой половиной VI в. В эту эпоху и были построены базилики Херсонеса, для которых были привезены капители. Настоящая статья посвящена импостным капителям коллекции Херсонеса.

Ключевые слова: Крым, Херсонес, Проконнесские карьеры, ранневизантийские капители, импосты, мотив «крест – аканф», мотив креста и хризмы

Chersonesus/Chersonesos, Cherson in Byzantine sources, was the largest Byzantine city in the Crimea. The ruins of more than 20 early Byzantine religious buildings

have been preserved here (Хрушкова 2004: 167–194; Khrushkova 2007: 75–125; Khrushkova 2013a: 387–402; Хрушкова 2016a: 9–46; Khrushkova 2017b: 856–872). Several hun-

dred marble architectural details, including capitals, were taken to Chersonesus from the workshops on the island of Proconnesus (Khrushkova 2008: 141–158; Biernacki 2009; Хрушкова 2011: 174–191; Khrushkova 2012c: 129–140; Хрушкова 2017a: 311–341; 2017b: 147–168; Khrushkova 2018: 51–66; Хрушкова 2019: 303–472). The main collection of marble is kept in the “Tauric Chersonese” State Historical and Archaeological Museum-Reserve in Sevastopol, Crimea¹. They are preserved in the Museum exhibition and in several storage facilities². In the second half of the 19th century, several capitals and fragments of slabs were transferred to the Historical Museum of Odessa, to the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg (Банк, Попова 1977: № 116a, б, 118a, б, 119), to the State Historical Museum in Moscow (Банк, Попова 1977: № 117, 121), and to the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow (Банк, Попова 1977: № 120). Local imitations of Proconnesian items are also to be found in the Crimea, such as a group of limestone capitals kept in the Historical Museum of Bakhčisarai in central Crimea (Khrushkova 2013b: 85–94; Хрушкова 2016b: 137–162).

All the main types of early Byzantine capitals are represented in Chersonesus: capitals with fine-toothed acanthus leaves, “two-zone” capitals, Corinthian capitals and their variants (standard, “lyre”, “V-shaped”), impost and Ionic impost capitals. In most cases, the place where the capitals were found is unknown. An exception is the Episcopal Basilica (the so-called Uvarovskaya Basilica) (Хрушкова 2016b: 327–435) and capitals from what is known as the “Basilica of 1935”, excavated in 1935 (Хрушкова 2017b: 41–70; Khrushkova 2020: 291–301). The present article is devoted to impost capitals in the Chersonesus collection. One of the first researchers on Chersonesus, Alexander L. Berthier-Delagarde (1842–1920) (Khrushkova 2012a: 168–169), expressed the opinion that all the marbles of Chersonesus “belong to the 6th or rather to the 7th century” (Бертье-Делагард 1893: 30–31). This opinion no longer holds currency. The first generalizing work on the marbles of Chersonesus in connection with the architecture of the basilicas was published by the well-known researcher of Chersonesus Anatoly L. Yakobson (1906–1984) (Якобсон 1959).

Simple impost capitals began to be used from the 5th century, but a type of Ionic impost capital became more widespread which combined two elements in one block of stone: the impost and the Ionic section. A typology of impost and Ionic impost capitals was created by Rudolf Friedrich Kautzsch (1858–1945) (Dennert 2012b: 702), whose seminal work on late antique capitals remains significant today (Kautzsch 1936). Kautzsch’s chronology and typology are based on a consideration of the structure of the capitals, as well as a stylistic analysis of acanthus forms in the tradition of the German school of art history founded by Alois Riegl (1858–1905) (Dennert 2012a: 1079–1080). Constructing an absolute chronology of the capitals, most of which are isolated from their architectural context, is a difficult problem.

There are some capitals on the columns in the basilicas at the Chersonesus site. This is not their original position; these capitals were installed at different times during restoration work. This goes for two impost capitals on the columns of “Basilica 1935”, as well as an impost on the column of “Basilica 28”. Several capitals are located in the lapidaria and in the storage repositories of the Chersonesus Museum. During the excavations of “Basilica 1935”, an impost of unusual dimensions was discovered: its length is 1 m, width 0.85 m, and height 0.3 m. Unfortunately, the photograph of the impost remained unpublished. I have not been able to find a capital of such considerable dimensions in the Chersonesus collections. Yakobson reports that, in addition to marble impost capitals, several impost capitals and a column base made of local limestone were found (Якобсон 1959: 132). These locally made details have also remained unpublished.

The decoration of the impost capitals follows a common scheme: on the obverse side there is a cross with an elongated lower arm surrounded by acanthus leaves, and on the reverse side there is a motif of three or four cannelures framed by acanthus leaves. This pattern of decoration was widespread in Constantinople from the second half of the 5th century to the first decades of the 6th century, and was called “Cross-acanthus” or “Chrismon-acanthus”. It was common from the first half of the 5th century

¹ Further referred to as the “Chersonesus Museum”, as it was previously known for many years.

² I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Deputy Director of the Museum, Dr. Larisa V. Sedikova, for kindly giving me the opportunity to work in the Museum’s storage repositories. Translation from the Russian by John Pumphrey.

to the first third of the 6th century, both on simple impostos and on Ionic impost capitals (Kramer 1994: 9–4; Zollt 1994: 301–308, 345).

Below is a description of the impost capitals.

Impost 1 (fig. 1, a, b), Chersonesus Museum exhibition, found in the northern nave of “Basilica 1935”. State of preservation is good, dimensions: 86 × 54.6/55.7 cm, height 29.5 cm (Якобсон 1959: 140, рис. 49, 3; Barsanti 1989: fig. 88; Biernacki 2009: 279–80, tab. 102). The impost has a narrowed base with a height of 5 cm and ends in a smooth band, width 6.5 cm. On the side there is a stonemason’s mark resembling the letter “И”. The impost is decorated on the two narrow sides. On the front side, facing the central nave of the basilica, there is a cross with an elongated lower arm. The cross is surrounded by symmetrically arranged acanthus leaves. Two large leaves incline towards the upper arm of the cross; two half leaves flank the composition, and two small three-lobed acanthus leaves are placed below, under the arms of the cross. The compo-

sition fills the entire surface of the capital. A Chrismon was also depicted on the obverse side of capitals of this type.

The reverse side of our impost is decorated with three cannelures. A desire to cover the surface densely may be observed. At the edges of the capitals, there are half-leaves of acanthus. Each half-leaf consists of four shoots extending from the center of the leaf, which is located on the edge of the capital. In this way, the decoration of the capital is coordinated with its structure. A close analogy to our impost is the Ionic impost capitals from the basilica of the Stoudios Monastery, which was built in the year 453. Both narrow sides of the Constantinople capitals are decorated with the “cross-acanthus” composition (Kautzsch 1936: 167, Taf. 33, 540; Kramer 1994: 9, Taf. 1,1 a–c); these capitals belong to the early phase of the type (Vermi 1989: 68). The “cannelure” motif has analogies among the capitals of the first half and middle of the 5th century from the Pontic regions (Barsanti 1989: figs. 100–106). Impost 1 may be dated to the second half of the 5th century.



a



b

Fig. 1. Impost 1. Chersonesus Museum, exhibition: a — obverse side; b — reverse side. Photos by L. Khrushkova, 2013



Fig. 2. Impost 2 (under the first column) and impost 3 (under the second column). Chersonesus Museum, lapidarium. Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007

Impost 2 (fig. 2), Chersonesus Museum, lapidarium. The reverse section of the impost is damaged. In terms of form and decoration, Impost 2 is very similar to impost 1.

Impost 3 (fig. 2, 3, a, b), Chersonesus Museum, lapidarium. The impost is split into two parts, which have been restored with modern cement. The upper section of the impost is damaged. On the obverse side, there is a “flourishing” four-pointed cross surrounded by acanthus leaves filling the entire surface. On the reverse side of the impost, there is a “cannelure” motif in the middle, framed by acanthus leaves (one acanthus leaf is preserved). In terms of form and decoration, Impost 2 is very similar to impost 1.

Impost 4 (fig. 4) is situated in Basilica 28 at the Chersonesus site. It is mounted on a column surmounted by a Corinthian “lyre” capital. The impost is decorated only on the obverse side. In the center of the composition there is a “flourishing” cross framed with acanthus leaves; the ends of the cross are completed with triangles. Such a cross, often called “Byzantine” or “long” (or also “croix pattée”), was widespread in works of early Byzantine sculpture (Grabar 1963, 31).

Impost 5 (fig. 5), lapidarium of the Chersonesus Museum. It was found during the excavations of Chersonesus area XVIII, in medieval room 1, located to the east of “Ba-

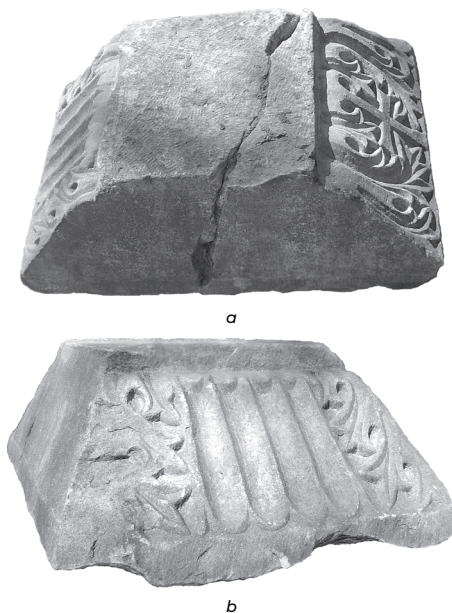


Fig. 3. Impost 3. Chersonesus Museum, lapidarium: a — obverse side; b — reverse side. Photos by L. Khrushkova, 2007

silica 1935” (Хрушкова 2017в: 53–55). The impost is distinguished by its bulk and careful finishing. Its base is formed with profiling. Both narrow sides are decorated with images. On the obverse side of the impost, there is



Fig. 4. Impost 4. Chersonesus site, in Basilica 28. Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007



*Fig. 5. Impost 5. Chersonesus Museum, lapidarium.
Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007*

a “Byzantine cross”. On the reverse side there is a Chrismon in a medallion, in the form of a monogram of the letters “iota” and “chi”. Chrismons of the “iota-chi” type are often found in the 4th–5th centuries. The same form can be seen on the 5th century Ionic impost capitals of the Episcopal (so-called Uvarovskaya) basilica (Хрушкова 2016б: 354–55, рис. 80).

Impost 6 (fig. 6), lapidarium of the Chersonesus Museum, similar in size to impost 4, but lacking decoration. The base of the impost is marked by a narrow shelf on the narrow sides.

Impost 7 (fig. 7), lapidarium of the Chersonesus Museum. In shape and proportions, it is close to impost 6. On the narrow sides,



*Fig. 6. Impost 6. Chersonesus Museum, lapidarium.
Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007*



*Fig. 7. Impost 7. Chersonesus Museum, lapidarium.
Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007*

the base of the impost is accentuated by a narrow shelf.

Impost 8 (fig. 8), lapidarium of the Chersonesus Museum. Similar to imposts 6 and 7. Distinctive features of impost 7: massive base, significant gradient of the narrow sides.

Impost 9 (fig. 9), territory of the Chersonesus site. The corner of the capital is broken off. The base is separated from the body by a narrow shelf; the obverse side is decorated with a "Byzantine cross".

Impost 10 (fig. 10), storage repository of the Chersonesus Museum. Partially broken off on one narrow side. The base of the impost is marked by a narrow shelf. The obverse side is decorated with a "Byzantine cross".

Impost 11 (fig. 11), territory of the Chersonesus site. The capital is in a moderate state of preservation: one corner is broken off; any images have been effaced. The base of the impost is separated from the body by a shelf. On the obverse side there is a me-

dallion containing a scarcely visible equal-armed cross.

Impost 12 (fig. 12), storage repository of the Chersonesus Museum. All sides without images.

Impost 13 (fig. 13) is mounted on a Corinthian capital on the right-hand column adorning the entrance to the Chersonesus Museum.

Impost 14 (fig. 14) is mounted on a Corinthian capital on the left-hand column adorning the entrance to the Chersonesus Museum. The base of the impost is accentuated by a narrow shelf.

Impost 15 (fig. 15), mounted on a Corinthian capital in "Basilica 1935". The top of the capital terminates in a shelf with two Greek letters carved on one side, "theta" and "eta". The narrow obverse side is decorated with a "Byzantine cross".

Impost 16 (fig. 16), mounted on the Corinthian Capital in "Basilica 1935", is similar to

Fig. 8. Impost 8. Chersonesus Museum, lapidarium. Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007



Fig. 9. Impost 9. Territory of the Chersonesus site. Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2013



Fig. 10. Impost 10. Storage repository of the Chersonesus Museum. Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2013



a



b

Fig. 11. Impost 11. Territory of the Chersonesus site: a — main view; b — detail. Photos by L. Khrushkova, 2013

impost 15. The obverse narrow side of the impost is decorated with a "Byzantine cross".

Impost 17 (fig. 17), Chersonesus Museum exhibition. This impost was possibly a part of the altar barrier. All sides of the impost

are decorated with a four-pointed cross inscribed within a frame.

Impost 18 (fig. 18), Chersonesus Museum exhibition. This impost possibly was part of the altar barrier. The base is round, the faces are elongated in height, and on all four sides



Fig. 12. Impost 12. Storage repository of the Chersonesus Museum. Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2013



Fig. 13. Impost 13. Right-hand column of the entrance to the Chersonesus Museum. Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007



Fig. 14. Impost 14. Left-hand column of the entrance to the Chersonesus Museum. Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007



Fig. 15. Impost 15. Mounted on a Corinthian capital in "Basilica 1935". Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007



Fig. 16. Impost 16. Mounted on the Corinthian Capital in "Basilica 1935". Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007



Fig. 17. Impost 17. Chersonesus Museum exhibition. Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007



Fig. 18. Impost 18. Chersonesus Museum exhibition.
Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007

a large trefoil is inscribed within a frame-work relief.

Impost 19 (fig. 19), Chersonesus Museum exhibition. The base of the impost is round, narrowed in comparison with the body; the end takes the form of a shelf. On one broad side of the impost there is a “flour-



Fig. 19. Impost 19. Chersonesus Museum exhibition.
Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2007



Fig. 20. Impost 20. Territory of the Chersonesus site.
Photo by L. Khrushkova, 2013

ishing” cross framed by acanthus leaves. The leaves transfer to the narrow side of the impost, which is divided into two parts by a band-shaped relief. This detail indicates that the impost crowned the column of a window opening.

Impost 20 (fig. 20), territory of the Chersonesus site. The impost crowns a fully preserved column which is oval in cross-section. The base of the column is fixed on a rectangular plinth. The broader side of the column is divided by a band-shaped relief over its entire length, which transfers to the impost. This band would have adjoined to the window frame. The narrow side of the column is decorated with a “Byzantine cross”.

The whole group of impost capitals from Chersonesus, comprising 20 specimens, dates from between the second half of the 5th century and the first half of the 6th century.

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