

PHILIPP NIEWÖHNER, *Byzantinische Bauskulptur und Liturgische Ausstattung. Ein Handbuch = Byzantine Ornaments in Stone, Architectural Sculpture and Liturgical Furnishings*. Berlin – Boston: de Gruyter 2021. 188 pp., 486 ill. – ISBN: 978-3-11-068852-8 (German); 978-3-11-068853-5 (English) (€ 99.95)

- CHRISTINE STRUBE, Heidelberg University (c.strube@gmx.net)

In his preface the author presents his work as a manual which enables “everybody to engage with Byzantine architectural sculpture and church furnishings” and “such a manual is long overdue”. His book was originally conceived in German. With a second edition in English he has started a “preliminary effort” to establish a full-fledged English terminology for the extensive material “dispersed across countless publications” (p. 2). For many years the authors of books written in different European languages have often added a summary in English to facilitate the reading of them beyond their countries.<sup>1</sup> The illustrated gazetteer (*Bildlexikon*) in German could not receive such a summary and so the author decided to translate the whole book into English. The different titles of the books show that the translation of a terminology developed in German was problematic from the very beginning.

Using material from the “Bildarchiv Christliche Archäologie und Byzantinische Kunstgeschichte” at Mainz University and other archives, the author organized a book with exclusively coloured illustrations. Reminding us of his teacher URS PESCHLOW’s article “Kapitell” in the “Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum”, he connects that article with his book, which he characterizes as an illustrated gazetteer (*Bildlexikon*). The main question is, whether it was possible to create with the “arbitrary” choice of 500

1. Since 1994 I have provided my publications with an English summary. Because in the first volume of my documentation in the northern Syrian limestone massif (CHRISTINE STRUBE, *Baudekoration im Nordsyrischen Kalksteinmassiv [Damaszener Forschungen 5]*. Mainz 1993) the summary only appeared in German, in the publication of EMMA LOOSELY LEEMING – JOHN TCHALENKO, *Notes on the Sanctuary of St. Symeon Stylites at Qal’at Sim’ān (Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity 12)*. Leiden – Boston 2019, my analysis of the column capitals of the pilgrimage centre, supplemented by several types of doors and cornices (op. cit., pp. 205–250, pls 86–117), was not cited. In the meantime, a large portion of the capitals has disappeared or has been damaged.

photographs from archives a manual (Handbuch) for Byzantine architectural decoration and liturgical furnishings.

Following the introduction, the book begins with the largest part of the archive, the column capitals of the 4th–6th centuries (pp. 16–115). The chapter “*Other Architectural Elements*” (pp. 117–133) is followed in the second part of the book by the chapter “*Liturgical Furnishings*” (pp. 135–163). The final chapter “*Miscellaneous*” then presents various aspects connected with architectural decoration and liturgical furnishings (pp. 165–180).

The archives provided individual objects, each of which was originally located in a particular position within a church and during a long process of development was imbedded in the remodelling of traditional forms of architectural sculpture and ornaments. Neither the position of the capitals and liturgical furnishings in the buildings, nor the development of new forms over the centuries is discussed in this book. Different sections of the introduction lead the reader to the organisation of the material. In the following review, I deal with these sections, select a limited number of themes and discuss the merits and the problems of the methods the author has chosen in presenting a collection of roughly 500 images.

“*Organization and Layout*” (pp. 2–3). The first sentences in the introduction are decisive for the methodology of the book: “The key to understanding Byzantine stone carving is their ornamentation; it must take pride of place in the volume. Other aspects are secondary, because they become apparent only through the ornamentation. ... The accompanying text can do little more than provide guidance as to how to view the images. The book requires the *readers* to become *viewers* and thereby to make connections that cannot be adequately described with words” (p. 2). This means that the text on each page accompanying the selection of images cannot give an overview of the different positions in academic literature. However, each figure is provided with a direct bibliographical note and a secondary bibliography informs one about specialized publications.

At first glance access to the book seems to be quite difficult: The column capitals are classified into a broad chronological order of the earlier fourth, the later fourth to fifth and the sixth century. In order to explain why, for example, the lemma “*Syria*” appears between the headings “*Stiff-Pointed Leaves*” and “*Schematic Capitals*”, the author informs us that the lemmas appear, “when they became manifest for the first time” and that they are

placed “in chronological and thematic contexts that are characteristic for them” (p. 2). Thus, Syria appears at this juncture of the contents, since it is already represented by dated church buildings in the 4th century.

Before looking at the organisation of the illustrations by selecting individual lemmas (headmarks), it is worth presenting two further passages of the introduction (p. 3): The author points out that he has included a number of special terms, defined as headmarks, even though they „seem to make little sense“, but are included, because they are “well established and in wide use throughout the scholarly literature”. However, for a considerable amount of newly discovered and published material on architectural decoration and liturgical furnishings a new terminology had to be developed and there is no regular use for the terms developed by RUDOLPH KAUTZSCH. This is not only the situation for monuments in Syria, but also for buildings in Egypt and North Africa.<sup>2</sup>

The author continues: “The choice of illustrations is more or less arbitrary.... Good, possibly coloured and ideally unpublished images were selected. This explains, why a disproportionately high number of case studies is from Asia Minor” (pp. 2–3).

Heading “*Emperor Constantine the Great*” (figs 13–15): The text informs us about different forms of *varietas* and the selected illustrations lead from Rome via Syria to Anatolia. There are enough quality, coloured pictures from Syrian churches of the 4th century with the combination of various capitals published or existing in private archives.<sup>3</sup> It is a surprise, therefore, to see the bad and wrongly dated photo in fig. 14, although, by using the attached bibliography, the reader can ascribe the church not to the 4th but to the late 5th or early 6th century.

Lemma “*Rome*” (figs 61. 62); Lemma “*Varietas*” (figs 57–60): The text in the two entries describes the reuse of capitals in Rome, returns to the types of *varietas* and concludes that Rome possessed „the ancient flair that

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2. In Syrian workshops the transformation of traditional forms of leaves began with geometrical patterns inside the leaves and scrolls. See the typology in CHRISTINE STRUBE, *Baudekoration im nordsyrischen Kalksteinmassiv (Damaszener Forschungen 11)*. Mainz 2002, vol. II, ill. 1a-r, 2a-o.

3. It is well-known that good photographs in black and white and also in colour are characteristic for my books on architectural decoration in Syria. They are collected in my private archive, which the author cites (p. 183) and it would have been easy to select good and informative photos for this book. The same would have been possible for Egypt and – in the case of producing a manual – also for North Africa.

distinguished it from other cities“. The clear presentation of the two entries is a good example of the author’s intension to present a meaningful order of images.

Lemma “*Syria*” (figs 30–32); Lemma “*Schematic Capitals*” (figs 33–36): The text emphasises the autonomy of the Syrian workshops and the development of their own types of leaves. It would have been easy to illustrate this independent development of new forms of leaves, scrollwork and capitals – not comparable to Lycia and Cilicia – but good images were not found in the archives. The cited bibliography helps to locate the buildings to which the images belong, but quite another sequence of images would have been necessary to illustrate the autonomous development. The contrast between the rich sequences of images for Asia Minor, Greece, Constantinople and the extremely limited choice for Syria and Egypt is problematic.

Some corrections are necessary: The capital in fig. 30 belongs to the church on the southside of the baptistery. Imposts exist also in Syria, in churches constructed in brick; see, for example, the partly preserved church in Aleppo (ancient Beroea) and in the church of Qasr ibn Wardan cited in the bibliography under the Lemma “*Syria*”.<sup>4</sup>

Lemma “*Animal Capitals*”; Lemma “*Animal Capitals with Two Zones*”; Lemma “*Eagle Capitals*”; Lemma “*Peacocks*” (figs 107–109, 117–125). Following his basic opinion that “ornamentation is the key to understanding Byzantine stone carvings”, the author developed lemmas with one ornament alone or he combined the traditional term for a capital type (capitals with two zones, figural capitals etc.) with a new lemma or assigned a traditional type of capital chronologically to an earlier or later group. The somewhat haphazard creation of certain terms by means of ornaments in multiple uses (par example monograms, foliate heads, cornucopias) on different types of capital becomes also evident in their presentation of the section on terminology. When he tries, for example, to explain the great difference between the arrangement of peacocks in figures 124 and 125 and the position of animals in figures 115 and 121, the bibliography may help one to understand that not the ornament but the study of the relationship between the ornament and the general form (*Gesamtform*) of the capital would be promising.

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4. The church (today Al-Halawiyah Madrasa) is published in STRUBE op. cit. (n. 2), 1–16, pl. 1–8.

As a *reader* of the entries, I became not a viewer as the author required. The choice of illustrations concentrates wholly on Constantinople and the regions under the direct influence of the capital city with an emphasis on Asia Minor and Greece. Syria and Egypt occur as lemmas with a few illustrations, which prove that the archives employed for both provinces did not offer good illustrations. I realized that the decision to combine each lemma with bibliographies is the positive factor in this book.

“*History of Research*” (pp. 4–7). In this section of the introduction the reader can follow the activities of scholars in full biographical dates. The critic of one of the scholars of the younger generation – born in 1943 in this context allows her to belong to the younger ones – leads to publications which the author often cites.

After his overview of the research into the Early Byzantine period, the author emphasises that in the works cited the column capitals were paramount and continues that “beyond capitals, a general view of, and investigation into, all architectural sculpture (*Gesamtbild der Bauskulptur*), including entablatures etc. is provided only occasionally. Church furnishings have been recorded even more rarely” (p. 4). For a large number of Syrian churches the extensive assemblage of capitals has been enlarged by a selection of doors and mouldings and is discussed in the section “*Gesamtbild*”.<sup>5</sup> The publications built upon the works of GEORGES TCHALENKO on the architecture and liturgical furnishings of these structures. They are part of the long-standing tradition of the exemplary publication on basilicas A and B in Philippi from PAUL LEMERLE, of the publication on Ravenna from FRIEDRICH W. DEICHMANN cited by the author and all the researchers, who discussed elements of architectural decoration in the context of their former positions. It would have been useful in this introductory chapter to have provided a note on the limits and possibilities of an analysis of individual objects with reference to this tradition. The work of archaeologists always depends on concessions but, nevertheless, it was in the past and will also be in the future possible to implement studies of architectural decoration in Asia Minor or Greece in a broader context.

“*Terminology*” (p. 8). The development of terms for architectural sculpture and ornaments in German was a problem for the publication of the

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5. The author has included the publications of STRUBE (op. cit. n. 1.2) in the bibliographies on pp. 6 and 182. These also include the publications of PAUL LEMERLE and FRIEDRICH W. DEICHMANN. For the publication of GEORGES TCHALENKO see p. 149 and n. 7 below.

author's book in English. Even for terms such as "Bauskulptur, Kapitellkörper, Gesamtbild", the author had to find equivalent formulations and sometimes the reader has to go back to the German text to understand the meaning of translated passages. For one group of terms for new leaf types, discussed in the chapter *organisation and layout* (p. 3. 8), it would have been a good solution to make a typology, as was done for the new leaves and scrolls developed in Syrian workshops.<sup>6</sup> The description of some capitals would have been ameliorated and it would not have been necessary to make headmarks for these terms.

It is important to point out the status of the Middle and Late Byzantine sources which is particularly well tangible in the two final sections of the introduction. With the works of MARTIN DENNERT and CATHERINE VANDERHEYDE and the author's new documentation, an assemblage of architectural decoration and liturgical furnishings is available as an important basis for further research. Further below, I shall return to necessary corrections to liturgical furnishings.

"*Other Architectural Elements*" (pp. 118–133). The whole chapter is characterised by the sometimes random and often restricted photographic material from archives listed in the introduction. Even with the bibliographies of the entries, the reader cannot gain an impression of the richness of door and window forms, entablatures / archivolts and architraves, leaf- and scroll-friezes etc. of the Early Byzantine period.

"*Liturgical Furnishings*" (pp. 136–163). It is interesting to see that in this second part of the book it was easier to implement an illustrated gazetteer for the material collected in the archives. It was extremely useful to publish the unknown finds of altars, ciboria, ambos and reliquaries etc., even though I miss at least a small selection of reliquaries from Syria and Egypt. Many objects are published here for the first time

Most illustrations by far comprise ambos in Constantinople and Asia Minor. It would have been beneficial to have connected their presentation with the finds of Syrian bemata, since in several Syrian churches in the 6th century the bema was replaced by an ambo.

It is a considerable loss in this part of the book that the text volume of GEORGES TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes à bema* is not mentioned.<sup>7</sup>

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6. See STRUBE (op. cit. n. 2).

7. GEORGES TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes à bema I–III* (Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 105). Paris 1979 (II: Planches), 1980 (III: Album), 1990 (I: Texte).

Hitherto it is the only publication recording liturgical furniture in the architectural context of some forty Syrian churches. The bemata are closely connected with Antiochia, the capital of Syria, and not ambos, but bemata lead back with datable buildings into the 4th century. The significance and function of the bemata go beyond that of the ambos. Unfortunately, it is too late to add the publication to the bibliographies and also to correct the faults in the texts of certain lemmas (pp. 6–7, 149).

I return to the theme to which I referred at the beginning of this review: The author has not created a manual of “Byzantine Ornaments in Stone” or “Byzantinische Bauskulptur und liturgische Ausstattung”. Even with a better choice of images from Egypt and Syria, it would not have solved the problem that a manual cannot be realized with a good selection of illustrations. In a handbook the elements of architectural decorations and liturgical furnishings should be discussed in the context of at least a selection of better preserved buildings.

The author has successfully produced an illustrated gazetteer (Bildlexikon) for a greater part of the material discussed in the encyclopaedic article of URS PESCHLOW cited in the preface. Decisive for the reader of the illustrated gazetteer is the combination of the images with the bibliographies on each page. But these bibliographical works were written in different European languages. There will still be researchers who will not only read literature in English. But whether the author with the English version of his book will succeed in enabling a wider circle of readers to form their own opinion on Byzantine architectural sculpture and liturgical furnishings remains to be seen.

#### **Keywords**

architectural sculpture; Byzantine architecture; liturgical furnishing

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The quotation for the three volumes follows the preface of TCHALENKO for volume I. The misleading title « Églises de village de la Syrie du nord » by EDGAR BACCACHE, the editor for volume I and II, was refused by TCHALENKO. Decisive for the use of the publication is the text volume. On the processes surrounding this book’s publication, see LOOSLEY LEEMING – TCHALENKO, *op. cit.* (n. 1) pp. 25–26 and also CHRISTINE STRUBE, review of GEORGES TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes à Bema*. *JbAC* 35 (1992) pp. 222–228.