



Anatolian Influence on the Architecture in Roman Thrace – Aphrodisian Handworks on Corinthian Capitals from Perinthus

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on a group of pilaster Corinthian capitals from Perinthus (now Marmara Ereğlisi). Information about them was published over a century ago (Mendel 1914, vol. III). The architectural analysis of these monuments, which were made of marble most likely acquired in the nearby quarries of Proconnesus Island (now Marmara Island), shows a unique similarity to the architectural details made by the stonemasons from the Asia Minor town of Aphrodisias. Separate groups of Aphrodisian masters traveled to a number of complexes and buildings throughout the Roman Empire. Their works are also found in the province of Thrace. The decorations of some monuments from Villa Armira, Oescus, Tomis, Odessos, Marcianopolis, and Anchialos are probably Aphrodisian. This is why the group of pilaster capitals in Perinthus are extremely important for understanding the path of Anatolian masters to Thrace. Not only the stonemason work but also the patterns of these pilaster details are very common to Aphrodisian handworks. The pilaster Corinthian capitals in Perinthus are a direct link between the original models from Asia Minor and the monuments produced in Roman Thrace. They were made in the Marmara Sea region, which is the closest place to the main center for marble mining during the Roman Imperial Era: Proconnesus.

Keywords: Roman architecture, capitals, stonemasons, decoration, marble productions coinage

Scientists have long discussed and studied the issue of the travelling groups of stonemasons who'd worked in various regions of the Roman Empire.¹ The style of the masters from

1 K. T. Erım, "The School of Aphrodisias." *Archaeology*, 20(1) (1967), p.18-28; K. T. Erım, "De Aphrodisiade." *American Journal of Archaeology* 71 (1967), p.233; K. T. Erım, *Aphrodisias: The City of Venus Aphrodite*. New York: Facts on File Publications, 1986; M. F. Squarciapino, "La scuola di Aphrodisias (40 anni dopo)." *Archeologia Classica*, 35 (1943), p. 74-87; M. F. Squarciapino, "Le sculture severiane di Leptis Magna" in *VII Congres international d'archeologie classique*, Paris, 1965, p. 229-233; J. M. C. Toynbee, *The Hadrianic School: A Chapter in the History of Greek Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934; J. M. C. Toynbee / J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Peopled Scrolls: A Hellenistic Motif in Imperial Art*, *Papiers of the British School at Rome*, 18 (1950), p.1-44; J. Mladenova, "L'école de Aphrodisias en Thrace." *Rivista di Archeologia*, 3 (1979), p.91-94; J. Mladenova, "Die römische villa bei Ivajlovgrad (VR Bulgarien) und ihre Architekturdécoration." *Das Altertum*, 27(1), (1981), p.38-48; J. B. Ward-Perkins, "Nicomedia and the marble trade." *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 48 (1980), p. 23-69; M. Tačeva-Hitova, "Handwerker und Kaufléute aus dem griechischen Osten in Thrakien (I-III Jh.).", *Acta Conventus XI "Eirene"*, Warszawa, 1970, p. 87-89.



Aphrodisias is easily recognizable in the works of these travelling stonemasons. This is due to the many characteristic decorative models in architecture the Aphrodisian stonemasons used. However, their workmanship is also as easy to recognize, such as their three-dimensional plastics, drill work, and uniquely specific method of stone carving.

The Aphrodisian stonemasons were also commissioned to work in Roman Thrace. For instance, the decorations of *Villa Armira*,² as well as certain monuments in *Ulpia Oescus*, were unarguably produced by the Aphrodisian stonemasons.³ The point here is how did they penetrate into Thrace?

The large group of 10 architectural monuments in Perinthus is exactly what can greatly facilitate the investigation of the trends and ways in which Roman architecture had developed in the 2nd century AD.⁴ The town of Perinthus itself is situated on a road, along which the marble input material, as well as the stonemasons working with this type of stone, had penetrated the Thracian lands (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Map of the Propontis region with position of Perinthus, near to Thrace and quarries of Proconnesus and on the route to Asia Minor.

The proposed study focuses on 11 magnificent marble pilaster capitals in the Corinthian style located in Perinthus and which are precise replicas of the capitals in Hadrian's Thermae

2 Mladenova, Die römische villa bei Ivajlovgrad (VR Bulgarien) und ihre Architekturdekoration, p.38-48; J. Mladenova, *Rimskata villa kraj Ivajlovgrad*. Sofia, 1991.

3 Z. Dimitrov, "Akroterii ot fonda na Nationalnija Arheologicheski Musei," *Godishnik na Natsionalnija Arheologicheski Musei*, 11 (2007), p.218-234.

4 G. Mendel, *Catalogue des Sculptures Grecques, Romaines et Byzantines III. Constantinople*, Musees Imperiaux Ottomans 1914, p.547-556, Nr. 1341-1351.

in Aphrodisias. These capitals, information about which was published in Gustav Mendel's catalogue of the monuments in the Ottoman Museum in 1914, had absolutely without a doubt been produced by a group of travelling Aphrodisian decorators.

The paper was presented at the Second Conference on Roman Thrace, held in October 2017 in Marmara Ereğlisi, and its purpose is to draw attention to these magnificent monuments, to make them again the subject of scholarly debate, and to offer a comprehensive analysis of their details in terms of the style, chronology, work models, and data that can be retrieved about them in regard to the development of stone-carving in the Roman Empire and how it spread from Asia Minor to Thrace and other Roman provinces during the period of the Principate (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Map of the Asia Minor in Roman times – with stone masonry schools centers *Ephesos, Pergamon, Nicomedia, Aphrodisias* and others.

The theme of stonemasonry within the boundaries of Roman Thrace has been studied by the following professors: Alexandru Suceveanu, Monica Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu, and Gabriela Bordenache for the regions of Histria, Tomis, and Callatis,⁵ as well as professors Lyudmil Getov, Margarita Tacheva, and John Ward-Perkins for the monuments in Odessos, Marcia-

5 See Suceveanu et al. *Les Thermes Romains* (Histria VI). Paris: Diff. de Boccard, 1982; M. Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu, "Korinthische Kapitelle von Histria". *Dacia*, 32 (1988), p.37-52; M. Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu, "Ein neuer Vorschlag für die statistische Analyse der Komposition der dorischen Kapitelle". *Dacia* (New Series), XXXVIII – XXXIX (1994-1995), p.55-108; G. Bordenache, *Sculture grece e romane*. Bucarest: Casa editrice dell'Accademia, 1969; G. Bordenache, "Attività edilizia a Tomi nel II secolo dell'E.N.". *Dacia*, IV (1960), p.255-273.

nopolis, and Nicopolis ad Istrum.⁶

An exceptional heavy-weight analytical work, as well as very important primary publications, came out in 1970s from the excavations of Yanka Mladenova and the National Archaeological Institute with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (NAIM-BAS). She studied and published the architectural materials from the Roman Villa Armira near the town of Ivaylovgrad.⁷

Even more architectural data is currently available from the territory of Roman Thrace. Prof. Ward-Perkins has correctly identified the works of the Anatolians to be easily recognizable as the masters from the regions of Ephesus, Pergamon, Nicomedia, and Aphrodisias.⁸

Within this grand phenomenal cultural exchange and contact between the two neighboring regions of Thrace and *Asia Minor*, an attempt has been made to identify the works of the specific groups who produced the stone details.

Easiest to recognize are the works of the Aphrodisian group of sculptors during the period of the Principate. The works of Aphrodisian masters have been identified and perfectly studied in the towns in Asia Minor, the capital city of Rome, and particularly so in Leptis Magna.⁹

Based on the studies of J. B. Ward-Perkins and J. Mladenova, as well as on the data obtained from a number of newly found architectural details, Roman Thrace can currently be stated to be among the regions of the Roman Empire with the most numerous monuments reliably identified as works by the Aphrodisian stonemasons. Their works are identifiable on the basis of two distinct features:

1. Exceptionally detailed and frequent drill-work on the acanthus leaves and some other elements of the architectural monuments. This drill-work produced the lacework tracery ornamentation on sculptures.
2. The other distinctive feature of Aphrodisian sculpture encountered in the architectural details is the specific architectural details that are used and moreover copied with absolute accuracy, such as the sample capitals, friezes with acanthus decoration, acroteria, and antefixes. These particular architectural models are to encountered more often than not in the acanthus decorations, such as the capitals,

6 L. Getov, "Za vnosa na sakophazi v Odessos prez rimskata epoha." *Archeologia*, 2 (1978), p.13-20; Tačeva-Hitova, *Handwerker und Kaufleute aus dem griechischen Osten in Thrakien (I-III Jh.)*, p.87-89; M. Tačeva-Hitova, "Kleinasiaten und Syrer in Nicopolis ad Istrum", *Actes I-er congrès international études balkanique II*, Sofia, 1970, p. 115-123; M. Tacheva-Hitova, "Rolyata na preselnitsite ot Mala Asia, Sirya i Egipt v ikonomicheskiya i kulturniya zhivot na zapadnopontiiskite gradove prez I-III vek", *Izvestiya na narodniya musei – Varna VIII*, 1972, p. 17-43; Ward-Perkins, *Nicomedia and the marble trade*, p.34, Nr. 4.

7 Mladenova, *L'école de Aphrodisias en Thrace*, p.91-94; Mladenova, *Die römische villa bei Ivajlovgrad (VR Bulgarien) und ihre Architekturdekoration*, p.38-48; Mladenova, *Rimskata villa krai Ivaylovgrad*, 1991.

8 Ward-Perkins, *Nicomedia and the marble trade*, p.53-58, Nr. 5-9, 14-18, Pl. XV, XVIII-XX, XXIII.

9 J. B. Ward-Perkins, "Severan art and architecture at Leptis Magna." *The Journal of Roman Studies*, XXXVIII (1948), p. 72-76, pl. VI-IX; Ward-Perkins, *Nicomedia and the marble trade*, p.53-59, Nr. 8, 11, 15, 22, 26, 27, 35, 37, Pl. XVI, XVII, XIX, XX, XXII, XVI, XVII.

friezes, statuary groups, and architectural plastics. Usually, these monuments are of the Corinthian order. These are basically pilaster wall-facing capitals and other interior elements, but also involve many column capitals.

Below I shall dwell on the works of the Aphrodisian masters from the Thracian lands that have been so far distinctly identified.

The model for some of the pilaster facing Corinthian capitals from the thermae in the town definitely possesses an Aphrodisian-like decorative scheme and carving techniques.¹⁰ This is particularly easy to see in the model of the center of the details where the helices were replaced with palmettes and other floral motifs (Plate 1.1).

The next example is the statue of Fortuna with Pontus.¹¹ The craftsmanship evident on the acanthus leaves at the bases is indisputably Aphrodisian. Furthermore, the statues of the deities themselves were modelled similarly (Plates 1.2 & 1.3).

The museum in Varna, as well as the terrain of the Odessos thermae and the ruins of Marcianopolis that are kept in the museum in the town of Devnya, have a whole series of capitals whose models are unarguably very similar to the Aphrodisian models.¹² The mastery evident in the shaping of the acanthus leaves and some other ornaments on these capitals indicate in turn that these capitals had been made by Anatolian stonemasons (Plates 1.4 & 1.5).

The frieze from *Anchialos*, which is kept at present in the Historical Museum of Pomorie, also provides perfect data about the work of Aphrodisian masters.¹³ This monument had been positioned at the entrance of a mausoleum complex decorated with the most exuberant floral ornaments which, in this case, are entirely three-dimensional and sculpted in a seamless manner (Plate 1.6).

10 Suceveanu et al., p.142, pl. 30, (3.3.T2. 45).

11 V. Kanarake, *Arheologicheskii Muzei v Konstantse*. Konstantsa, 1967, p.48. V. Canarache, A. Aricescu, V. Barbu, A. Radulescu, *Tezaurul de sculpturi de la Tomis*. Bucuresti: Editura Stiintifica, 1963, p.1-24, fig.1-9.

12 Z. Dimitrov, *Architekturna dekoratsiya v provintsiya Dolna Misija*. Sofia, 2007, Nr. 216, 230-247.

13 Z. Dimitrov, "Dekorativni elementi v grobnata arhitektura na Anhialo prez rimaskata epoha," in: Stoyanov, T. et al. (ed.), *Heros Hephaistos. Studia in honorem Liubae Ogneva-Marinova*. Veliko Turnovo, 2005, p.408-423.

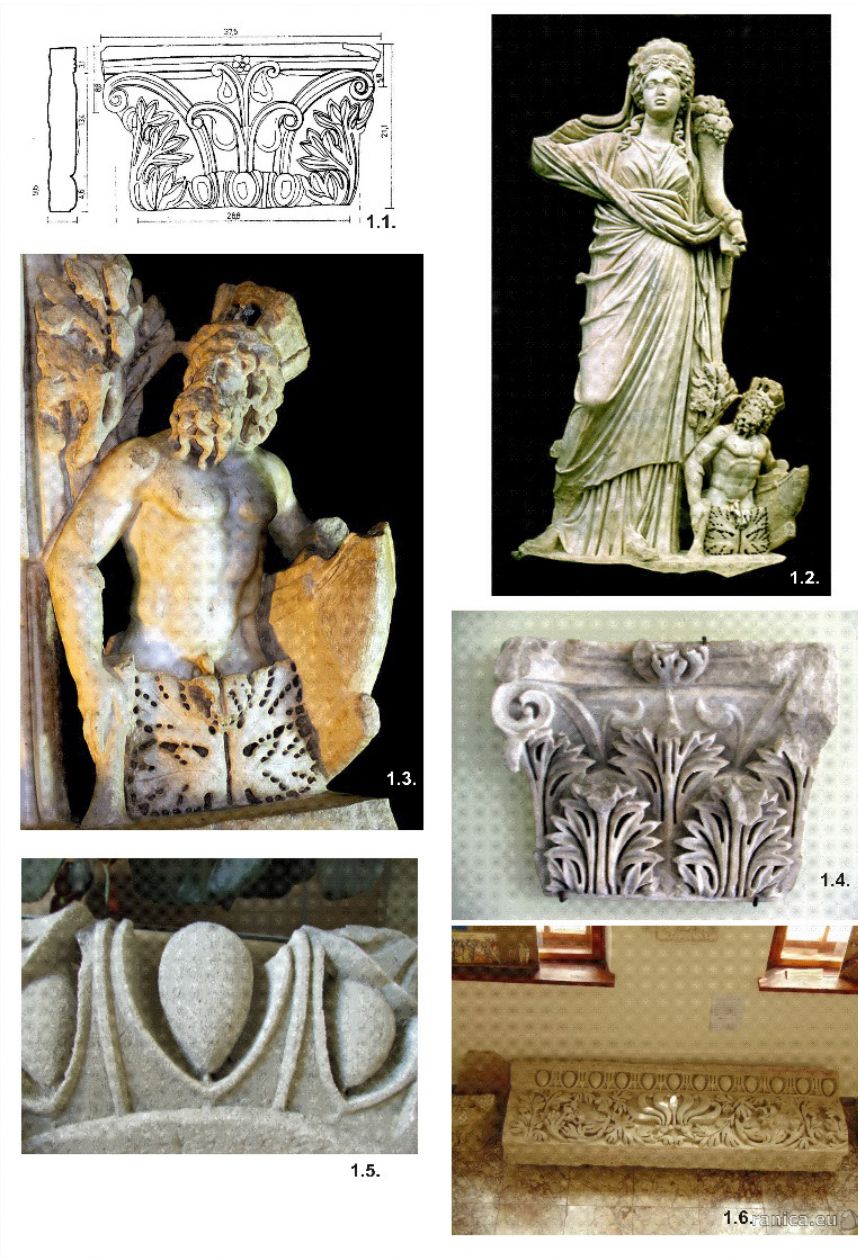


Plate 1.

The monument in *Oescus* is unique. It again is a combination of acanthus decoration and a sculptured naked female figure. It is a corner acroteria, perhaps from a temple or a lar-

ge and very expensive mausoleum. Information about this had been published in Eugen von Mercklin's 1962 catalogue, yet it has only been studied fully in recent years.¹⁴ This monument unmistakably shows a decorative scheme and stone-carving produced by an Aphrodisian group of sculptors. Easily identifiable is the drill-work all over the surface, the three-dimensional acanthus leaves, chalices, and stems connected by thin raised details and separate from the stone foundation (Plate 2).



Plate 2.

In recent years, Vesselka Katsarova from the Department of Classical Archaeology at NAIM-BAS has been excavating a new villa¹⁵ previously unknown near the village of Kasnakovo. In fact, it not far from the Villa Armira along the Maritsa River, between Hadrianopolis and Philippopolis. A Corinthian ante capital was unearthed in the complex that appears to have been decorated by Aphrodisian sculptors and stonemasons.

14 E. Mercklin, *Antike Figural kapitelle*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1962, p.39, Abb.185.

15 V. Katsarova, K. Petrova, *Archeologicheski prouchvanija na obekt "Svetiliste na nimphite i Aphrodita" pri s. Kasnakovo*, In: *Archeologicheski otkritija i razkopki prez 2016*. Sofia, 2017, p.444-447.

A whole series of capitals is found in the facing of the peristyle of Villa Armira near the town of Ivaylovgrad (Fig. 3). These are of the Corinthian order, and all of them were made by Aphrodisian masters. This is a unique complex, which is unambiguous proof that the works in the private house had been commissioned to a large group of stonemasons from Aphrodisias. The monuments represent 24 capitals; however, the other details in the marble facing must have also been produced by Anatolians. This finding is supported by data from the friezes and the column capitals. The architectural complex in Armira is one of the most opulent complexes in the entire Roman world to have been made by Aphrodisian masters and to have been perfectly preserved to the present day (Plates 3 & 4).



Figure 3. Reconstruction of the *peristyle* courtyard of the *villa Armira* with the decoration carved by the Aphrodisian stone masons and sculptors.



Plate 3. Wall facing pilaster capitals from *Villa Armira*.

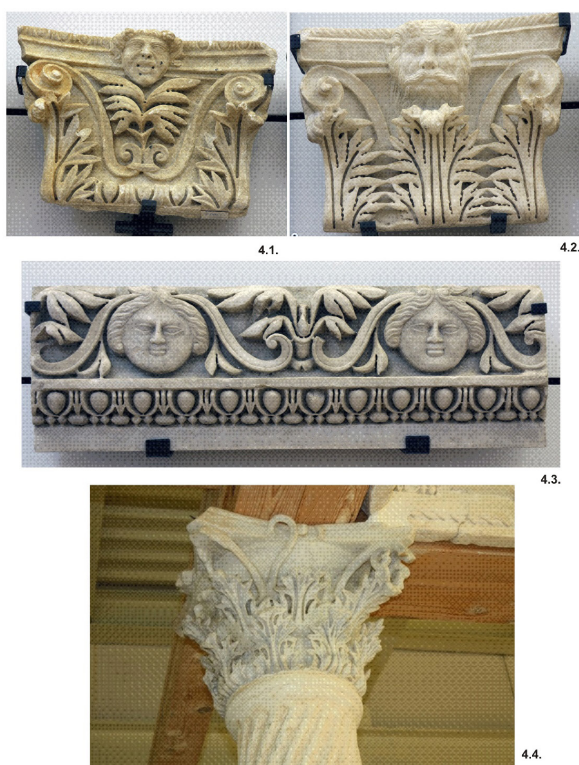


Plate 4. Wall facing pilaster capitals and other details from *Villa Armira*.

While the capitals in Villa Armira have perfectly recognizable architectural and decorative models from Aphrodisias, such as the acanthus leaves, the helices, the figures on the capitals, and especially the reptiles, they also have perfectly recognizable Aphrodisian work techniques, such as the drill-work, three-dimensional elements, and shaping of thin raised elements protruding from the stone foundation.

Interestingly, most of the Aphrodisian works in Roman Thrace have been dated to the reign of Hadrianus (117-138 AD). This is when some of the most unique architectural prototypes in Aphrodisias itself were made, such as Hadrian's *Thermae*. This fact is indicative of the almost simultaneous spread of Aphrodisian stone-carving techniques and reproduction of models in the architectural environment of Perinthus and in neighboring Roman Thrace. This is why the data about the works the Aphrodisian stonemasons produced within the borders of Roman Thrace are indeed overwhelmingly numerous. But how did they actually penetrate the Thracian lands, and when did this process take place?

The details that I comment on here involve 10 almost-forgotten stone monuments from the town of Perinthus, which is precisely on the borderline between the Thracian lands and Asia Minor (Plates 5 & 6). These monuments comprise a large group of pilaster-facing capitals in terms of the interior decoration and are made of marble, probably from Proconnesian. These were registered in the depositories of the Ottoman Museum, and information about them was published by Gustav Mendel in 1914.¹⁶ These 11 capitals are absolutely exact replicas of the monuments from Hadrian's *Thermae* in Aphrodisias, as well as a few other Aphrodisian pilaster capitals.¹⁷ With particular regard to the four capitals possessing figural decorations, two have a standing female figure and the other two have an Eros figure (Plates 5 & 6). The other six capitals possess only floral decoration such as acanthus wrappings, wide open helices, and many new motifs (e.g., rosettes and stems).

That the Corinthian capitals from Aphrodisias and the ones from Perinthus are not merely similar but absolutely identical is correct to mention here in terms of:

1. The decorative scheme for each have the same figural motifs (e.g., female figures, Eros figures), acanthus decorations, layouts and shapes of the helices, and other floral motifs;
2. The material is high quality marble, probably from Proconnesian;
3. And above all, they are similar in terms of work styles regarding the drill-work, the decorations on the figures, and the acanthus decoration on the capitals are all typical Aphrodisian.

16 Mendel, p.547-556, Nr. 1341-1351.

17 Ward-Perkins, *Nicomedia and the marble trade*, Nr. 32-35, Pl. XXV-XXVI; Erim, *The School of Aphrodisias*, p.26, fig.16.



5.1.



5.2.



5.3.



5.4.



5.5.

Plate 5. Group of the pilaster capitals from *Perinthos*.



Plate 6. Group of the pilaster capitals from *Perinthos*.

The Corinthian pilaster capitals from Perinthus fit perfectly into the gap on the map regarding the spread of Aphrodisian works along the route from Asia Minor to Thrace and Europe. The scholars who've studied the architectural decoration within the boundaries of the Roman Empire often use the phrase "travelling or visiting groups of stonemasons." The wonderful sculptors from Aphrodisias had indeed contributed quite a lot. They had produced almost the entire decoration of the Severan Forum in Leptis Magna, a fact that was proven decades ago by scholars. Aphrodisian stonemasons also produced numerous decorations and sculptures in Rome and the rich villas in Italy. Yet, now almost 40 years after Yanka Mladenova's outstanding work on *Villa Armira*, Aphrodisian stonemasons can firmly be stated to have worked under many projects and to also have been commissioned in Roman Thrace. Namely, *Villa Armira* was not an isolated phenomenon. The overall production of the Aphrodisian stonemasons in Roman Thrace is quite impressive. Their distinctly recognizable and

inimitable style of work on marble can be seen in Ulpia Oescus, Tomis, Anchialos, Kasnakovo, and Perinthus, and many new monuments will certainly be unearthed or identified while studying the museum funds and lapidaria within the boundaries of ancient Roman Thrace, which at present are in the territories of Bulgaria, Greece, and Türkiye.

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