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The Palmette Friezes of North City Gate of Diocaesarea (Uzuncaburç)

Diocaesarea (Uzuncaburç) Kuzey Kent Kapısının Palmet Dizileri

Okan ÖZDEMİR*

Abstract: Diocaesarea (Uzuncaburç), located approximately 25 km north of Silifke in Mersin province, served during the Hellenistic period as the administrative and religious centre of the region known as the Olba Territorium. During this period, the city developed around the Sanctuary of Zeus Olbios and acquired a planned urban layout. In the Roman Imperial period, new architectural elements added around the sanctuary and the tower contributed to the formation of the urban layout discernible today. Situated at the northern end of the main street identified as the *cardo maximus* and apparently connected to the colonnaded street, the North City Gate comprises three arched passages: a central main passage flanked by two lateral passages. Although the gate has long been the subject of numerous studies, its architectural decoration has not been described and analysed in detail. A total of 32 palmette friezes have been identified in the decorative bands on the *sima* of the cornices crowning the gate's central arch. This study numbers and classifies the decorative motifs within these friezes into three main groups, closed palmettes, open palmettes, and dividing motifs, and provides a detailed description and analysis of the types distinguished within each group. Based on stylistic analysis, the study presents evidence supporting a date in the early Severan period for the palmette decoration.

Öz: Mersin ili Silifke ilçesinin yaklaşık 25 km kuzeyinde bulunan Diocaesarea (Uzuncaburç), Hellenistik Dönem'de Olba Territoriumu olarak bilinen bölgenin idari ve dinî merkezi olmuştur. Bu dönemde Zeus Olbios Kutsal Alanı çevresinde gelişen kent, planlı bir kentsel düzene kavuşmuştur. Roma İmparatorluk Dönemi'nde kutsal alan ve kulenin çevresine eklenen yeni mimari unsurlar, kentin günümüzde izlenebilen planının şekillenmesine katkıda bulunmuştur. *Cardo maximus* olarak tanımlanan ana caddenin kuzey ucunda yer alan ve sütunlu caddeye bağlandığı anlaşılan Kuzey Kent Kapısı, ortada bir ana geçit ve iki yanda birer geçit olmak üzere üç kemerli geçitten oluşmaktadır. Uzun süredir çok sayıda araştırmaya konu olmasına karşın kapının mimari bezemeleri ayrıntılı biçimde tanımlanıp analiz edilmemiştir. Kapının orta geçit kemerini taçlandıran kornişlerin *sima* kuşaklarında toplam 32 palmet dizisi tespit edilmiştir. Bu çalışmada söz konusu dizilerdeki bezemeler numaralandırılarak kapalı palmetler, açık palmetler ve ayırıcı motifler olmak üzere üç ana grupta sınıflandırılmakta; her grupta ayırt edilen tipler ayrıntılı biçimde tanımlanıp analiz edilmektedir. Üslup analizine dayanan bu incelemede, palmet bezemelerinin Severuslar Dönemi'nin başlarına tarihlendirilmesini destekleyen kanıtlar sunulmaktadır.

Keywords: Rough Cilicia • Diocaesarea • North City Gate • Architectural Decoration • Palmette Friezes

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dağlık Kilikia • Diocaesarea Kuzey Kent Kapısı • Mimari Süsleme • Palmet Dizisi

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Introduction

Diocaesarea (Uzuncaburç), located approximately 25 km north of Silifke in Mersin province, served as the administrative and religious center of the region known in the Hellenistic period as the territorium of Olba¹. The city's historical significance is defined by the Tower, dated to the Hellenistic period, and the Sanctuary of Zeus Olbios together with the Temple within it². Following the end of the priest dynasty's rule in the Early Imperial period, the city took the name "Diocaesarea". During this process, the city, which had expanded around the Sanctuary of Zeus Olbios, acquired a planned urban layout³. In the Roman Imperial period, new architectural buildings added around the sanctuary and the Tower gave the city its present form. Today, in addition to the Sanctuary of Zeus Olbios and the Tower, remarkably well-preserved remains from the Roman Imperial Period can still be traced, including the Theatre, the Nymphaeum, the Temple of Tyche, the Podium Temple, the Colonnaded Street (*cardo maximus and decumanus*), the Propylon, and the North City Gate. The Temple of Zeus Olbios, situated in the city that survived until Late Antiquity, retained its significance after being converted into a church; however, settled life in the city came to an end in the mid-7th century CE as a result of the Sasanian and Arab raids that affected Rough Cilicia as a whole⁴.

Within the plan of the ancient city stands the North City Gate, which comprises a total of three arched passages, a central main passage and two lateral passages and which appears to have connected to the colonnaded street at the northern start of the *cardo maximus* (Fig. 1). Examination of the building's sculpted repertoire reveals an elaborate decorative programme on the S-profile friezes of the lateral and central passage arches, together with the modillion cornice blocks. These friezes bear Ionic kymation and dentil motifs. The modillion cornices, which differ between the north and south façades, are decorated particularly on the south façade with Lesbian cyma, Ionic cyma, rosettes, consoles, astragal (bead and reel), and palmette friezes. In addition, on either side of the central passage there are consoles with a cyma recta profile decorated with acanthus leaves: two on the north façade and one on the south façade. At the level of the impost blocks of the central passage on the south façade are consoles in the form of undetailed Corinthian capitals composed of a double row of kalathoi.

Although the North City Gate has long been the subject of numerous studies, a detailed description and analysis of its sculpted decoration remain lacking. This study addresses the palmette friezes on the sima friezes of the central arch, one component of the North City Gate's architectural decoration. On the sima friezes of the cornices forming the crowning member of the central passage arch at the Diocaesarea North City Gate, a total of 32 palmette friezes have been identified, divided among three main groups. These palmettes are notable for the stylistic diversity they display within a single building. It is therefore understood that the variation observed among the palmettes results not from successive building phases but from the simultaneous work of local groups of craftsmen applying different styles. The absence of exact parallels for

¹ Str. XIV, IV, 10; Trampedach 1999; Gotter 2001; Trampedach 2001; Drexhage 2003; Wannagat et al. 2005; Wannagat et al. 2007; Aydınoğlu 2025, 114–115.

² Aydınoğlu 2024, 3-16

³ Aydınoğlu & Belge 2023, 61–78.

⁴ Sayar 2021, 436; Aydınoğlu & Uygun 2023, 28.

the palmette examples at the North Gate elsewhere in Asia Minor clearly indicates that these examples are of local character. The widespread occurrence of comparanda in Diocaesarea, an important city of the region, strengthens the possibility that this local style was first developed at Diocaesarea and subsequently spread from there across the region, and evidence for this will be addressed in the present study.

Accordingly, the palmette friezes in question will be numbered and classified typologically into three main groups closed palmettes, open palmettes, and dividing motifs with each type described and analyzed in detail within its own group. The decorative elements discussed in this article were previously treated within a master's thesis that examined the architecture of the North City Gate through a holistic approach; here, they are expanded upon and evaluated through a comprehensive discussion in light of examples from other regions⁵. Proceeding from stylistic criticism, a detailed analysis of the building's decoration will be undertaken, and evidence will be presented in support of the proposal that the palmettes were carved in the early Severan period.



Fig. 1 North City Gate

North City Gate

The City Gate, comprising a centrally emphasized high-arched main passage flanked on either side by two relatively smaller arched passages, has a height of 13.03 m, a preserved width of 29.98 m, and a depth of 1.20 m at the passages (1.73 m including the cornices) (Figs. 2–3). The central arched passage has a height of 10.78 m and a width of 6.61 m, while the lateral arched passages have a height of 5.70 m and a width of 3.52 m. The central arch consists of a pilaster base rising above a plinth, together with a column and anta capitals. The arch of the building is surmounted by an entablature composed, in sequence, of an architrave, an S-profile frieze, and a modillion cornice. The lateral passages, located to the east and west, have a pilaster base rising above a plinth, together with pilaster columns and pilaster capitals. A single-entablature arch is formed using architraves that serve as the impost blocks for the pilaster capitals. In the City Gate, the masonry of the wall up to the impost block of the central passage arch was constructed in the *opus quadratum* technique, using single-block ashlar with a depth of 1.20 m, lengths varying between 1.50 m and 0.80 m, and heights varying between

⁵ Şimşek 2026.

0.45 m and 0.71 m, with mortar used on the lateral and upper joints. From the thirteenth block onward above the pilaster base, the masonry consists of double courses of horizontal stones. Vertical stones were inserted between the double courses of stones in order to ensure structural stability. In the attic forming the uppermost two courses of the central and lateral passages, the depth of the stones varies, while the final two courses are seen to be constructed with horizontal stones as well (Figs. 4–5).

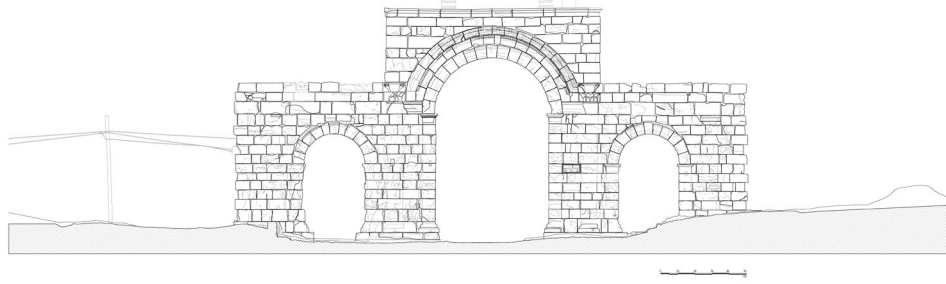


Fig. 2 South Elevation Measured Survey

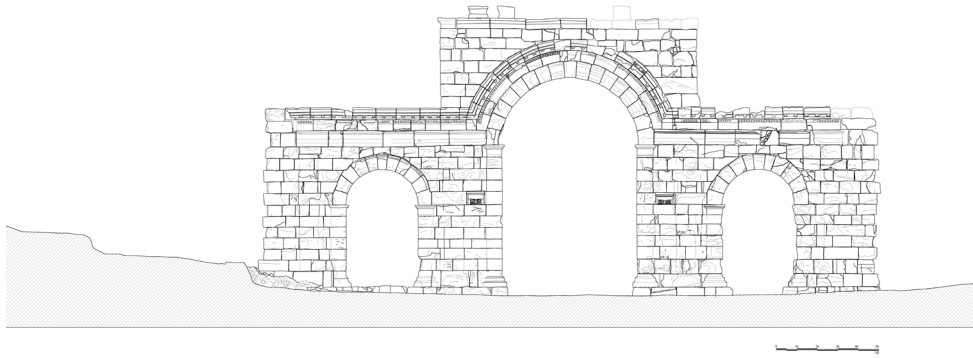


Fig. 3 North Elevation Measured Survey



Fig. 4 North City Gate, South Facade



Fig. 5 North City Gate, North Facade

Palmettes⁶

On the sima friezes of the cornices forming the crowning member of the central passage arch at the Diocaesarea North City Gate, a total of 32 palmette friezes have been identified, divided among three main groups. The palmette friezes can be grouped into three main categories: closed palmettes, open palmettes, and dividing motifs. With the exception of the palmette frieze seen on a modillion cornice block on the north façade which appears to be spoliated/reused all other palmettes are located on the south façade. On the south façade, palmettes can be traced on all preserved portions of the cornices, with the exception of three damaged blocks on the western section. Although the palmettes vary in workmanship from coarse to fine in terms of piece, carving style, and form, they generally reflect the same workshop tradition. No canonical sequence is followed in the palmette friezes; rather, a heterogeneous arrangement scheme is observed, in which a closed palmette and open palmettes are placed inverted, while closed palmettes are placed upright. Among the palmettes, palmettes and floral elements are also occasionally used as dividing motifs. These are connected to one another by lateral tendrils. Almost all of the palmettes have flat surfaces. The grooves and channels separating the leaves and lobes are carved deeply so as to emphasize the play of light and shadow.

In this study, the palmette friezes on the sima friezes of the central passage arch of the North City Gate are examined through a systematic typological approach. In classifying the palmettes, the principal criteria adopted were their positional sequence along the sima course, the manner in which they emerge from the band (a plain band, direct emergence from the astragal, etc.), and whether they are upright/inverted (closed/open); each palmette has been numbered while preserving its sequential order in an east-to-west direction. The typological numbering follows an internal ordering within each of the palmettes' main groups (closed, open, dividing motif). In selecting the comparative examples, stylistic similarity was taken as the primary criterion; accordingly, both local examples from Diocaesarea and Rough Cilicia and parallel examples from other regions were included in the evaluation.

⁶ In the definition of palmette friezes, the terminology in L. Vandeput's *The Architectural Decoration in Roman Asia Minor Sagalassos: a Case Study* has been followed. See Vandeput 1997, 28-32.

Beginning from the east corner point where the arch rests on its support, the palmettes follow this sequence along the sima course on the south façade: Acanthus leaf > upright closed > upright closed > upright open > inverted open > upright closed > inverted open > upright closed > upright open > inverted open > upright closed > inverted open > upright closed > inverted separating motif > upright separating motif > upright closed > inverted open > upright closed > inverted open > upright closed > upright open > inverted separating motif > upright separating motif > inverted open > upright closed > upright open > upright closed (Fig. 6). On one block on the north façade, the sequence is: Upright closed > inverted open > upright closed (Fig. 7).



Fig. 6 Palmette sequences in the central arch of the South Facade



Fig. 7 Cornice block with palmette on the North Facade arch

Closed Palmettes

A total of 13 closed palmettes have been identified on the sima friezes of the north and south façades (Fig. 8). At the joints of the sima course on the cornice block of the north façade, there are two half-palmettes; however, since these half-palmettes share the same style as the others, they have not been treated as a separate type. There are distinct differences among the types. As with the open palmettes, these differences arise from the treatment and formal style of the lateral and axial leaves, and from the shape of the roots at the point where they emerge from the band. Unlike the open palmettes, the closed palmettes have lateral branches and curling tendrils emerging from the band.

The closed palmettes consist of a central axial leaf flanked on either side by three or four lateral leaves. They rise from a plain band on the sima course located above the astragal (bead and reel) course on the cornices. Beneath the band, the root of each leaf is carved individually, following the leaf above it, and is connected to the astragal. The root of the outermost leaf also forms the root of the lateral branch that links the palmette to its neighbor. In one inverted example, only a triangular-shaped root is present (Figs. 8, 12).

Because the closed palmettes generally fall at the joints between cornice blocks, their axial leaves are, for the most part, considerably damaged. In some of the better-preserved examples (Figs. 1, 3, 4, 8, 12), however, it can be seen that the axial leaf begins thick, narrows at the middle, swells and thickens again toward the tip, and ends in a pointed apex. In other examples, the axial leaves emerge from the central boss in a straight line and taper toward the tip, ending in a point (Figs. 2, 3, 4, 8). In one example (Figs. 8, 12), the axial leaf begins narrowly from the central boss and is carved so that the grooves are discernible toward the tip.

The lateral leaves of the palmettes rise independently of one another from the central boss in an S-shaped curve toward the tip; at their extremities they curl inward to form a spiral, and it is through these spirals that they touch the adjacent leaf. The outermost, third and smallest leaf, unlike the others, either spirals outward or ends in a truncated tip. In some examples these leaves touch the band of the neighboring palmette, while in others they touch the lateral leaves of the adjoining palmettes. In one example (Figs. 8, 12), a distinctive tendril-shaped leaf with finely carved, one-sided grooves is notable among the lateral leaves, differing from the other examples. In the same example, the stems of the lateral leaves forming the palmette have been widened while the spirals at their tips have been narrowed; furthermore, two of the lateral leaves are turned inward and one outward, with the leaf tips carved so as to touch the astragal.

No canonical workmanship is observed in the lateral leaves of the closed palmettes. The forms of the generally coarse, flat-surfaced leaves not only fail to correspond with one another but are, in some cases, altered in shape out of a concern to fit them within the available surface. The palmettes are generally connected to one another by lateral branches. Where they are not connected by a lateral branch, curling tendrils are present instead. In these examples, the curling tendrils bear leaves proportioned to the palmette and furnished with outward-curling eyes intended to fill the transitional space. These tendril-shaped leaves touch either the lower lateral leaf of the adjacent open or closed palmette, the connecting lateral branch, or the astragal. In addition, a few examples display thorn-shaped tendril leaves that extend, curling, onto the astragal (Figs. 1, 2, 4, 6, 8). In some examples, small lateral branches curl inward over the central boss to form a volute, or else end in a straight line.

With the exception of one closed palmette (Figs. 8, 12), the axial leaves are generally positioned in the sequence so as to fall at the joints between cornice blocks. Arranged in this way, the open and closed palmettes form an alternating frieze. The open palmettes (with one exception) are, in general, carved upright. Along the entire sequence, however, this canonical arrangement is not consistently maintained, and in places two closed or two open palmettes are placed side by side.

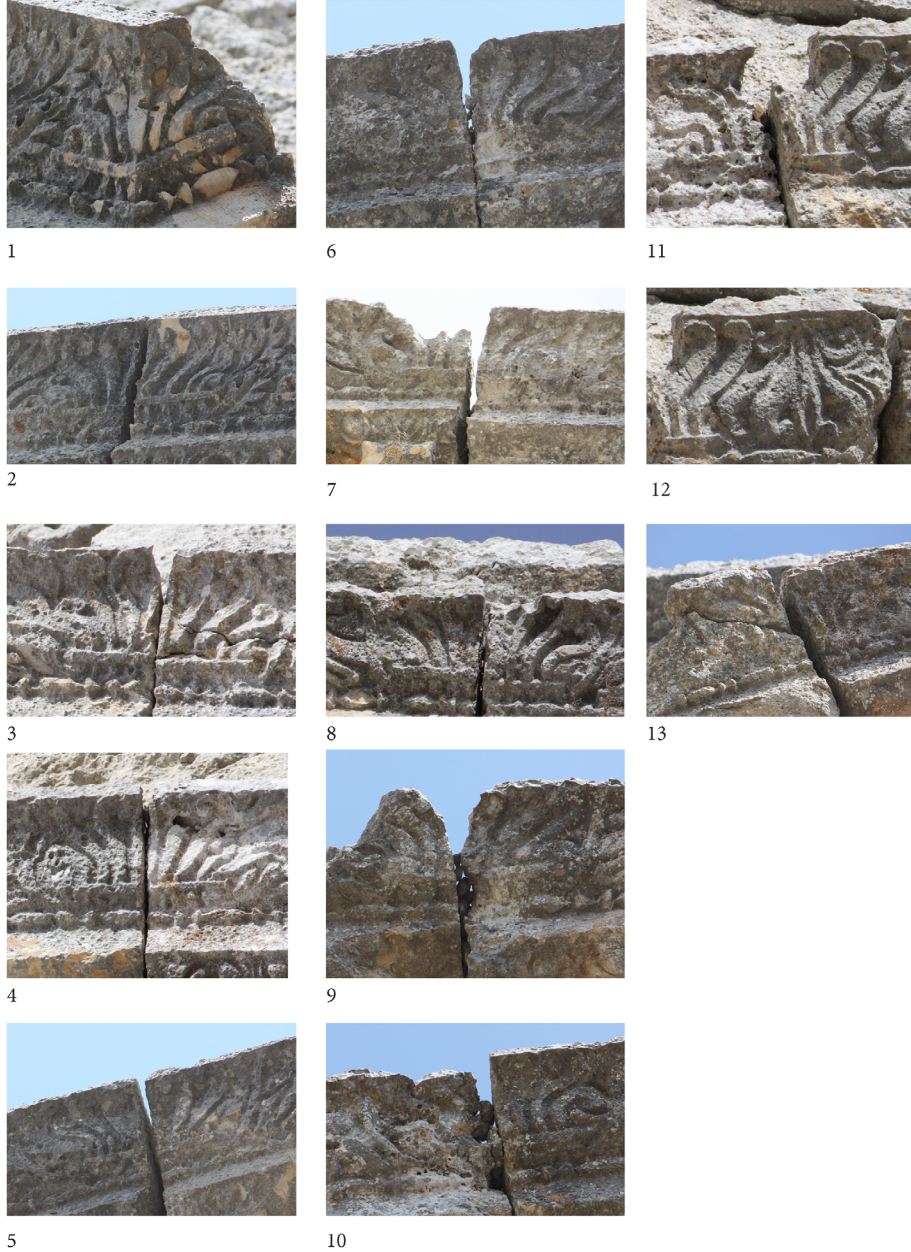


Fig. 8 Closed Palmettes

Open Palmettes (with Lateral Branches)

The palmettes in this group comprise 12 types (Fig. 9). The differences among the types arise from the treatment and formal style of the lateral and axial leaves, and from the shape of the roots at the point where they emerge from the band. In almost all of the open palmettes, unlike the closed palmettes, lateral branches emerging from the band are observed.

The open palmettes are designed in a variety of forms. In general, they consist of a central axial leaf flanked on either side by three, four, or five lateral leaves. The open palmettes rise, in inverted form, either from a plain band above the astragal course or from a band on the upper fascia of the sima course; examples that rise directly from the astragal are also present. This sequence, alternating between upright and inverted, forms a continuous flow together with the closed palmettes. Beneath the band of the upright palmettes, as with the closed palmettes, roots run parallel to the leaves and connect to the astragal. In the inverted examples, however, at the centre of the points where the lateral branches attach, either a spring in the form of the Lesbian cyma peculiar to Diocaesarea, or a triangular bud, is carved.

With the exception of three examples (Figs. 3, 9, 11), the axial leaves of the palmettes are carved as a small bud in almost all of the types. In some examples they have a flat surface and a thick form (Figs. 9, 11), while in others, after emerging from the band, they rise in a slender form between the two flanking leaves, their surface sharpened so that it swells toward the tip and narrows to a pointed end (Figs. 3, 9). In some of these examples a straight ridge line is visible (Figs. 9, 11).

The lateral leaves of the palmettes open outward on both sides in an arc form in all examples. These leaves emerge from the band sometimes as a single unified group and sometimes individually. The axial leaf, in many examples, is carved as a bud among the uppermost leaves. The lateral leaves show variation between inverted and upright examples with truncated edges (Figs. 1, 2, 4, 7, 9). In some examples the leaf tips are truncated, while in others they are pointed (Figs. 3, 5, 6, 9). There are also types in which both pointed and truncated tips are used together (Figs. 5, 9). In palmettes with both truncated and pointed lateral leaves, the leaves are generally carved individually. In some examples the lateral leaves are carved symmetrically from the band from which they emerge (Figs. 4, 9, 10), while in others their truncated tips are sharpened to a point (Figs. 5, 7, 9).

In only one example do the axial and lateral leaves depart from the general style and are carved in the form of a rosette (Figs. 8, 9). In some examples the lateral leaves emerge from the band as two separate leaves but are carved as a joined unit; from these joined sections, secondary lateral leaves in the form of a calyx or a "V" emerge, bearing a bud at their centre. In another example, again departing from the general style, each lateral leaf is carved individually from the band and the number of leaves is increased to ten. In this example the small lateral leaves are carved with truncated tips, while the other lateral leaves are acanthus-like in form, with their central veins rendered as grooves and their fingers visible. The following leaves end in a pointed tip and are connected to the band by a slender axial leaf at their center (Figs. 3, 9). There is a further example in acanthus-like form (Figs. 9, 11). Rising directly from the astragal, this palmette has three lateral leaves; its upper and lower leaves each bear three fingers, and its lateral leaves touch the adjacent closed palmettes. All of the lateral leaves have flat surfaces and coarse workmanship.

Lateral branches emerging from the band are observed in almost all of the open palmettes. These flat-surfaced lateral branches, in the upright examples, emerge from roots that follow the leaf, just as in the closed palmettes; in the inverted examples, however, they connect directly to the band from which the palmettes emerge. In some examples, these lateral branches are also seen to begin in a spiral beneath the lower lateral leaves and to connect to the adjacent closed palmette by means of a short link

(Figs. 3, 9). In one example, even smaller branches branching off from the lateral branches opening to both sides are carved (Figs. 7, 9). Some of the palmettes in this group are notable as combinations in which different styles of lateral leaves are used together. In addition, some of the palmettes in this group, because they could not be fully accommodated on the surface, have been narrowed, and even used, in a smaller and more constricted form, as dividing motifs.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12

Fig. 9 Open Palmettes (with Lateral Branches)

Dividing Motifs⁷

Three dividing motifs have been identified in this group (Fig. 10). Dividing motifs are used together with the palmettes. What distinguishes them from the other palmettes is that they differ stylistically and are used exclusively as a dividing element between open and closed palmettes. These motifs also share certain common features: they rise from a band or from the astragal; beneath the band they possess a bud, as in the lateral-branched palmettes; and they are connected by horizontal-vertical lateral branches.

Owing to the heavy weathering of the stone surface on which they were carved, the first two examples can be discerned only in silhouette. The first of these (Fig. 10, I) consists of a four-leaved floral element carved upright, similar to those on the consoles; the second (Fig. 10, II) consists of an inverted palmette, probably with a truncated tip. The final example (Fig. 10, III) is a palmette with an axial leaf carved in the form of a flat-surfaced stem at its centre, flanked on either side by four truncated-tip lateral leaves. This motif differs from the others in that it does not emerge from a plain band but rises directly from the astragal (beed and rell).

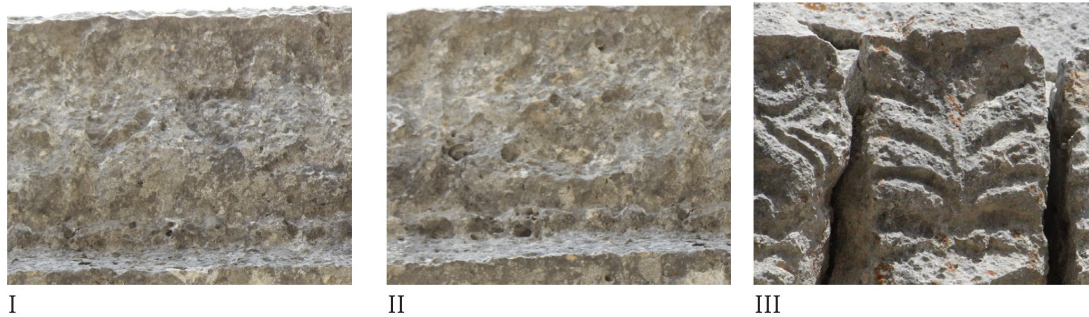


Fig. 10 Dividing Motifs

Evaluation and Conclusion

The comprehensive typological cataloguing of the sima friezes on the central arch at the Diocaesarea North City Gate documents a total of 32 palmette on the friezes, categorized into three main groups: closed palmettes (13 types), open palmettes with lateral branches (12 types), and dividing motifs (3 types). Rather than following a canonical or rigid sequence, these friezes exhibit a highly heterogeneous structural arrangement, combining upright and inverted forms alongside diverse floral separation elements.

The building inscription above the North Gate belongs to a large-scale repair carried out at the gate between 395 and 408 CE, during the reign of the Emperors Arcadius and Honorius, by F. Leontius, Dux of Isauria (400–404 CE)⁸. The building inscription of North Gate, explicitly documents a large-scale Late Antique restoration rather than the

⁷ The dividing motifs are a group that M. Spanu defined in his 2011 work on the decoration of the Diocaesarea. Spanu 2011. Theatre, and they are grouped under this name because of the multiplication of the examples and their following of the same scheme. See Özdemir 2023, 93. The North Gate motifs is also categorized under the same scheme.

⁸ Keil & Wilhem 1931, nr. 73, 71. Here, we have deliberately refrained from entering in detail into the architectural history and features of the building; this will be treated as the subject of a subsequent study.

original construction phase, and therefore cannot serve as a direct criterion for dating the building's sculpted decoration. Instead, dating relies on detailed stylistic criticism. Closed palmettes with pointed, curling leaf tips and flat surfaces find strong parallels in late Antonine to early Severan monuments across Asia Minor notably at Lycia, Pisidia, Phrygia and Pamphylian centres. On the other hand, They are also encountered in various centres in Syria, Palaestina, and Lebanon. The deeply channeled leaf surfaces and heavy shadow contrasts further confirm this stylistic placement. In terms of dating, the palmettes belonging to the second floor of the scaenae of the Diocaesarea Theatre⁹, together with the palmette friezes of the Propylon, the Colonnaded Street, and the Nymphaeum near the Sanctuary of Zeus Olbios, are of considerable importance. These examples are valuable in that they run parallel to the common friezes seen in other cities and rural settlements of Rough Cilicia, and they demonstrate, in particular, the existence of a shared character in the decorative programs of the buildings within the city.

The open and closed palmettes on the sima friezes of the North Gate have been discussed in previous studies. M. Türkmen, on the basis of the drill-carving technique used in the working of the palmettes, has proposed that the palmettes should belong to the Middle Severan period¹⁰. M. Spanu, without presenting a detailed analysis of the architectural decoration, and taking into account the North Gate's connection with the Colonnaded Street and its position within the city, has proposed a dating within a general framework alongside other buildings, dating the structure to the second half of the 2nd century CE¹¹. D. Kaplan, for his part, dates the building, together with other examples from Diocaesarea and the rest of Rough Cilicia, to the end of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd century CE¹². Given the characteristics and styles of the palmette friezes on this building, it is clear that these decorations belong to the beginning of the Severan period.

The closed and open palmette examples on the friezes of the Diocaesarea North Gate constitute decorative examples displaying stylistic diversity within a single building. These differences are not confined solely to the sima friezes but hold true for all decorative groups on the building¹³. It should therefore be considered that the variation observed on the palmettes of the North Gate results not from successive building phases but from the simultaneous work of local groups of craftsmen applying different styles¹⁴. It is understood that, although the styles of the open and closed palmettes generally

⁹ In an earlier study of the Theatre, M. Spanu suggested that the scaenae building was single floorred, and, in addition, presented several palmette types belonging to the scaenae building Spanu 2011, 93. A recent study of the Diocaesarea Theatre by O. Özdemir, however, has reached different conclusions from those of M. Spanu: it has been established that the scaenae building was in fact two floor, and that the palmettes in particular had previously been treated in a very limited fashion. The study has further demonstrated that the building possesses an extensive repertoire of palmette decoration. For this reason, O. Özdemir's PhD dissertation has been adopted as the reference work for the Diocaesarea Theatre, and it is frequently cited throughout the present study.

¹⁰ Türkmen 2007, 50; Türkmen-Peker 2013.

¹¹ Spanu 2013a, 632-635.

¹² Kaplan 2013, 147-153; 2019, 68-69.

¹³ Şimşek 2026.

¹⁴ Ertel 2002, 187.

share a common manner of workmanship, they do not follow a canonical arrangement or a homogeneous style¹⁵. This diversity in the decoration is, in essence, a reflection of the diversity in architectural decoration that persisted in Asia Minor from the beginning to the end of the 2nd century CE¹⁶. However, the absence of exact parallels for the palmette examples of the North Gate elsewhere in Asia Minor clearly indicates that these examples are of local character¹⁷. Indeed, in the region of Rough Cilicia, and particularly in the buildings of Diocaesarea, sima frieze decorations similar to these palmettes are encountered. Among these groups of buildings, the palmette friezes belonging to the scaenae of the Diocaesarea Theatre stand out in particular for providing a firm chronology and for containing elements attributable to local workshops¹⁸. The discussion surrounding the dynamics underlying the stylistic diversity observed on the palmettes of the North Gate has been addressed by only a limited number of scholars in the literature; the principal reason for this is the continuing scarcity of excavation data in the region that might shed light on the matter. Nevertheless, the evidence offered by the city itself is noteworthy. The inscription attesting that the Diocaesarea Theatre was built by the city itself, together with the building's exceptionally rich decorative repertoire, points to the existence of a strong and productive local workshop tradition in the city. Accordingly, it should be considered that the stylistic diversity observed at the North Gate was, in all likelihood, transmitted to the other public buildings of the city through this same local workshop tradition. It is certainly possible sub-groups were active within a single workshop; however, the available evidence is not sufficient to support so specific a distinction, and the discussion is therefore confined to the more general premise of a local workshop tradition. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that this stylistic diversity was, in the region and particularly in the Severan period a widespread decorative tendency; indeed, the fact that the formal choices of the palmettes do not follow a canonical order suggests that the craftsmen, while aiming for careful workmanship, were at times obliged to narrow or simplify the figures out of a concern to fit them within the available surface. The fact that the closest parallels for the North Gate examples are found, once again, within the city itself on the cornices of the Theatre, the Propylon, the Nymphaeum, and the Colonnaded Street constitutes the strongest evidence confirming that this local workshop practice was sustained consistently at the scale of the city. Crucially, the closest and most consistent parallels for the North Gate palmettes are found within Diocaesarea itself: on the Propylon, the Nymphaeum, and the Colonnaded Street. The pronounced stylistic variations observed across a single structure do not reflect successive building phases, but rather the simultaneous activity of local stonemason groups working within a shared workshop tradition. The absence of exact, identical matches elsewhere in Anatolia underscores the distinctly local character of this repertoire.

The upright open and closed palmette friezes found at the North Gate first appear in Asia Minor as early as the Trajanic and early Hadrianic periods, and these friezes were widely used throughout the 2nd century CE. In Cilicia, examples of these palmette

¹⁵ Koenigs & Radt 1979, 334-335.

¹⁶ Vandeput 1997: 159.

¹⁷ Young 2003; Kaplan 2013, 201-219; Spanu 2013b; Yurtsever 2021, 260; Özdemir 2023, 219-222.

¹⁸ Özdemir 2023, 220.

friezes dated to the 2nd century CE can be seen on the Trajanic Cenotaph at Selinus¹⁹ and on the cornices of the Donuktaş Temple at Tarsus²⁰. Among the closed palmettes at the North Gate, examples in which the axial leaf overlaps the lateral leaves and the leaf surfaces are flat find parallels in buildings dated to the 2nd century CE in Pamphylia²¹. At the same time, they show similarities with the palmettes on the cornice simas of the Temple of Apollo at Hierapolis in Phrygia, dated to the Severan period²². Closed palmette examples with pointed, curling leaf tips and flat surfaces can also be traced on the cornice simas of the West Street at Rhodiapolis in Lycia, dated to the last quarter of the 2nd century CE; on the cornice simas of the Asklepieion-Hadrianeum Stoa in the Late Agora, dated to the Hadrianic period²³ and on the cornice simas of the Lower Agora at Laodikeia, dated to the Late Antonine-Early Severan period²⁴. Another example closed palmettes whose late Antonine to early Severan characteristics are marked by deeply channeled leaf surfaces and heavy shadow contrasts show clear stylistic affinities with contemporary cornice simas in Pamphylia and Pisidia (such as at Perge and Sagalassos). However, while these regional parallels reflect the broader Asia Minor decorative repertoire of the period, the specific execution and heterogeneous combination of closed and open palmettes at the North Gate remain unique to Diocaesarea. Lateral leaves take the form of a volute, finds parallels on the cornice sima of the Nymphaeum north of the Lower Agora at Sagalassos, dated to 160–180 CE²⁵. The sima friezes of the cornice blocks of the Temple of Asklepios-Hygieia, dated to the third quarter of the 2nd century CE²⁶ and on the cornices of Temple D (of the Emperors and Jupiter-Serapis) at Adada, dated to the end of the 2nd century CE²⁷. Palmette examples in which the lateral leaves are connected to the astragal can be seen on the sima friezes of the first-storey cornices of the Aspendos Theatre²⁸. The spiral form taken by the tips of the lateral leaves in the closed palmettes is a characteristic feature of closed palmettes that emerged in the Antonine period but were used more extensively in the Severan period. This is significant in that it indicates the palmettes in question were produced in the Severan period²⁹. Indeed, similar examples are found on the sima friezes above the gate arch of the mausoleum in the West Necropolis at Side, dated to the end of the 2nd and beginning of the 3rd century CE, and on the crowning member of the door jambs of the Perge Theatre, dated to the Late Antonine-Early Severan period³⁰.

Examples displaying similar formal characteristics in which the axial and lateral

¹⁹ Winterstein 2026, 202 33-38.

²⁰ Jes 2001, 44; Held 2008, 177-179.

²¹ Strocka 1988, 300; Pülz 1989, 42; Öztürk 2009, 27; Gliwitzky 2010, 47; Türkmen-Peker 2013; Yurtsever 2021, 241-254.

²² Ismaelli 2017, 279-392.

²³ Kökmen Seyirci 2016, Kat. No. 214, Kat. No. 230

²⁴ Yener 2019, Levha 24. Kat. No: TN-GS-2

²⁵ Vandeput 1997, Pl. 41. 1

²⁶ Kökmen seyirci 2016, Kat. No. 226 Levha 81

²⁷ Mörel & Özdemir 2024, 77-79.

²⁸ Can 2005, 92, Fig. 8.

²⁹ Başaran 1990; Başaran 1995, 132-142; Kaplan 2013, 152; Özdemir 2023, 84-96.

³⁰ İnan et al. 2000, 285-340; Gliwitzky 2010, Abb 344-347.

leaves of the open palmettes are separate and open in an arc form can be traced in buildings in Lebanon, Palaestina, and the region of Israel. These can be seen on the closed palmettes above the right side-door lintel of the outer hall of the Gerasa Agora, dated to the last quarter of the 2nd century CE³¹. They can also be observed in Lebanon, at the citadel entrance in Byblos and on the cornice simas of the Colonnaded Street³²; and at Scythopolis, on the simas of the Theatre cornices, dated to the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century CE. Among the closed palmettes at the North Gate, one example is notable in which the outermost lateral leaves curl to take the form of a volute; parallels for this example are found on an architrave crown identified at Gerasa³³ and on cornice simas attributed to the Hadrianic period that were reused as spolia in the entrance doors of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre³⁴.

Leaf-shaped curling tendrils are also present on the closed palmettes. These curling tendrils are used, on both the open and closed palmettes, not as connecting elements but rather as free-floating branches opening to both sides. Although they display formal similarities in this respect to the palmette decorations encountered on many buildings in Asia Minor, no exact parallels for them have been found. While curling tendrils are found on many buildings in Asia Minor, the examples at the Diocaesarea Theatre depart from the general practice in that they are designed in the form of shoots. This style is thought to be an innovation that emerged in the Late Trajanic-Early Hadrianic period³⁵. In this respect, its use at the North Gate is significant as it reflects a form characteristic of that period, and it is a noteworthy piece of evidence that this decorative feature was chosen for a building dated to the Severan period. The presence of classicizing influences also indicates that the craftsmen working here were familiar with the artistic currents of the period³⁶; indeed, this can also be interpreted as a reflection of the baroque tendency seen in the Antonine period³⁷. Further evidence for this within the city is also available: on the frieze blocks within the Sanctuary of Zeus Olbios, leaves in the same style can be seen emerging from the roots of the curling tendrils³⁸. This style of leaf usage, in fact, also appears on the capitals of the Temple of Zeus Olbios³⁹. Therefore it should be considered that the source of this classicizing influence derives from the adoption and subsequent spread of the usage found on the capitals of the Temple of Zeus Olbios, one of the city's most impressive buildings. An ivy-leaf motif, meanwhile, appears frequently and in various forms within the coffers of the Diocaesarea Theatre⁴⁰. It is also possible that this motif was employed for the purpose of providing figural variety. The acanthus leaf located at the corner of the cornices is another notable example of a dividing motif. The two-lobed form of the leaf, and the formation of eyes between the lobes in the shape of long, relatively broad, triangle-like slits, are typical characteristics of Severan-period acanthus leaves. This same acanthus

³¹ Goicoechea 1986, 26 pl. IIIa.

³² Pensabene 1997, 288-314

³³ Kraeling 1938, 289.

³⁴ Ousterhout 2003, 19.

³⁵ Köse 2008, 751.

³⁶ Kaplan 2015, 79-88

³⁷ Can 2005.

³⁸ Kaplan 2013, 139.

³⁹ Rumscheid 1994, 86.

⁴⁰ Özdemir 2023, 160.

leaf is also found in identical form at the corners of the pediments of the rock-cut tomb-temples of Rough Cilicia.

Among the closed and open palmettes, uncomplete palmette types are also found. Some of these display a formally regular and carefully carved style, while others remain entirely unworked (rough-hewn). Examples of this type of palmette find exact parallels at the Diocaesarea Theatre and are dated to the Early Severan period⁴¹. At first glance, these examples resemble the careless/degenerate examples attributed to the Severan period; however, their occurrence within the same frieze constitutes evidence that they, too, belong to the Severan period.

The lateral-branched palmettes were used within the sequence as open lateral-branched, open inverted, and dividing motifs. There is no standard sequential correspondence or arrangement between the dividing motifs and the palmettes. For this reason, these examples display an arrangement distinct from the lateral-branched, inverted-upright closed palmette friezes frequently encountered in the 2nd century CE⁴². In terms of their general characteristics, it is possible to date these examples to the Severan period. In the North Gate examples, however, the dense drill holes and filigree detailing that are the defining features of this period are not observed. At the North Gate there are, instead, relatively plain palmette friezes, inverted and upright, connected by generally flat-surfaced lateral branches typical of the Severan period; while some examples display careful workmanship, this care is absent in others. Moreover, the dense, fragmented appearance given to the palmettes through deep drill grooves, together with the application of light-and-shadow effects and the combined use of different types of palmette dividing motifs, is suggestive of the baroque style employed in the transition from the Antonine to the Severan period. The best examples of these characteristics can be traced on the cornice simas of the Bath-Gymnasium Complex at Sardis, dated by its inscription to 211–212 CE⁴³. Comparative examples of palmettes, particularly the lateral-branched ones, are quite common in Rough Cilicia. These examples can be found on the cornices of the Propylon at Diocaesarea⁴⁴; on the cornices of the Nymphaeum at Diocaesarea⁴⁵ and on the cornices within the Sanctuary of Zeus Olbios⁴⁶; on the cornices of the temple at Seleucia ad Calycadnum, dated to the middle of 2nd century CE⁴⁷; on the pediments and cornices of the Demircili I⁴⁸ and Demircili II⁴⁹ rock-cut tomb-temples at the settlement of Demircili, dated to the end of the 2nd and beginning of the 3rd century CE; and on the door-lintel simas, and the pediment and cornice simas, of the M 36 rock-cut tomb-temple at the settlement of Kümbetbeleni⁵⁰. The most characteristic feature of these palmettes is that they are connected, in the same manner, by vertical and diagonal flat-surfaced lateral branches. The occurrence of

⁴¹ Özdemir 2023, 84-92.

⁴² Başaran 1995, 27-92; Vandeput 1997, 159; Yurtsever 2021, 254-257.

⁴³ Yegül 1986, 132-133-134-135.

⁴⁴ Kaplan 2019, 68-70.

⁴⁵ Dörl-Klingenschmid & Kayser 2009: 97-129.

⁴⁶ Kaplan 2013, 147.

⁴⁷ Başaran 1995, Lev. 42.

⁴⁸ Kaplan 2013, 149-150.

⁴⁹ Kaplan 2013, 150.

⁵⁰ Mörel 2019, 223.

an exact parallel for one of the closed palmette types at the Demircili I rock-cut tomb-temple is significant evidence, in that it constitutes a model for local workshops. As noted above, the fact that some examples have flat surfaces, that the separating palmette is connected by flat-surfaced lateral branches, and that they were made in different styles, creates an impression of complexity, irregularity, and degeneration within this group, an impression that itself reflects the characteristics of the Severan period.

Examples of pointed-leaf palmettes are also found on other buildings at Diocaesarea, and these constitute the closest known parallels. Within the city of Diocaesarea, such examples can be traced on the Scaenae of the Diocaesarea Theatre⁵¹, on the sima friezes of the Propylon⁵², on the sima friezes of the cornice fragments in front of the Nymphaeum, which were relocated there at a later period⁵³ and on the cornices belonging to the Colonnaded Street⁵⁴. These cornices differ from that of the Diocaesarea Theatre Stage Building in that the number of lateral leaves on their palmettes has been increased by one. At the Diocaesarea Theatre, the two-leaved examples of these palmettes present a broad repertoire; here, by contrast, the reason they are carved with three leaves is entirely due to the increased length of the cornice. Although the examples at the North Gate differ in size, they display the same form stylistically; this is significant in that it indicates these examples belong to the same period as the second floor of the Theatre.

When one moves further into the period indicated by earlier studies that have offered views on the decoration and architecture of the gate, the importance of developing a perspective specific to Rough Cilicia becomes apparent. Given that the comparative examples discussed in the analysis of the palmettes occur more densely in the city of Diocaesarea and in the region of Rough Cilicia, it is possible to say that a decorative conception dominated by local elements prevails in the region. Recent studies on the Diocaesarea Theatre have concluded that decoration of this kind, reflecting a local conception, generally falls within the Early Severan period⁵⁵. The principal reason for this is that the connection of the palmettes by lateral branches and the use of light-and-shadow effects are stylistic features that became widespread in the Late Antonine-Early Severan period. Accordingly, the fact that the palmette decoration of the North Gate is widely encountered in Diocaesarea, an important city of the region, strengthens the possibility that this local style was first developed at Diocaesarea and subsequently spread from there across the region. Indeed, the North Gate is a transitional point connecting Diocaesarea with other regions, and, in terms of workmanship, it is a building with a style specific to the region, unique and aesthetically distinctive. In conclusion, we propose that all of the palmettes on the sima course of the North Gate should be dated to the Early Severan period (193–200 CE).

The presence of an inscription related to the structure's construction during Late Antiquity might suggest that its decorative elements also belong to this period; however, the broader region of Rough Cilicia offers significant evidence regarding this matter, and relevant examples have been included in this study. In Late Antiquity,

⁵¹ Özdemir 2023, 82-83.

⁵² Kaplan 2019, 68.

⁵³ Dorl-Kligenschmidt & Kayser 2009, 99-102.

⁵⁴ Kaplan 2013, 147.

⁵⁵ Spanu 2013b, 102; Özdemir 2023, 80-97.

palmette motifs on friezes typically feature leaves in lower relief, and while grooves may exist between the transitions, drill marks are generally not visible⁵⁶. The ornamentation often lacks proportion and fails to follow a canonical order; elements are sometimes exaggerated in size or executed without regard for aesthetic concerns. In this respect, the palmette friezes of the North Gate differ from the typical sequences characteristic of that era. The high concentration and building diversity of these palmette friezes within Diocaesarea strongly suggest that the city acted not merely as a passive recipient of imperial trends, but as a primary regional workshop centre in Rough Cilicia. Consequently, this distinctive decorative style originated in Diocaesarea during the early Severan building boom and subsequently spread across the surrounding Cilician hinterland, establishing the North City Gate as a key monument of regional architectural identity.

⁵⁶ See Westphalen 2006, 391-401; Gliwitsky 2010, 185-189; Durugönül 2013, *et al.* 272-274; Elton *et al.* 2019, 813-116.

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