

DECORATED ENTABLATURE AND LITURGICAL ELEMENTS FROM MOSHAV HA-BONIM

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Several fragments of decorated entablature and liturgical elements were uncovered during the excavation of the ecclesiastical complex at Moshav Ha-Bonim (see 'Ad, this volume: Plan 1). Most of the fragments were disgarded into Cistern 211, near the southern aisle of the church; none was found *in situ*.

Entablature

Several cornice fragments were found. They are all made of rather soft, whitish limestone. The non-decorated surfaces bear toothed chisel marks; the carved decoration demonstrates the work of skilled craftsmen employing various types of chisels. Two types of cornice blocks were identified.

Cornice Type 1 (Fig. 1:1–4).— Cornices of this type may be reconstructed as rectangular blocks, 0.725 m long and more that 0.5 m high. No complete examples survived, but the original height can be reconstructed as approximately 0.7–1.0 m. The *cyma reversa* (ogee, bed-mold) is over 0.1 m high and more than 0.2 m wide, and decorated with stylized palmettes, or acanthus foliage, and scrolls in high relief. The astragal molding is 0.25 m high, and is decorated with guilloche and with simple molding lines along the top edge.

Cornice Type 2 (Fig. 1:5, 6).— The fragments that were attributed to this type were also made of rectangular blocks, over 0.5 m long, 0.47 m wide and 0.26 m high. Originally, they were probably the same length as the blocks of Type 1 (0.725 m). The crowning moldings

are decorated with convex strigils, the cove-moldings with stylized tendril-scrolls.

Unfortunately, not much is left of the architectural elements that once adorned this complex. However, it seems that the two types of cornice blocks were part of a single cornice set: the Type 2 blocks were part of the upper corona, and the Type 1 were part of the *cyma reversa* (Fig. 2). No exact parallels were found for the decorative pattern, although the individual elements, such as the guilloche, convex strigil, palmette and acanthus, are common motifs, particularly in marble (Fischer 1998:47–79, Cat. Nos. 5, 6, 15–24, 32–37, 59, 63), but also in local stone carvings (Negev 1988:102, Photographs 120–122; McNicoll 1992: Pl. 15, left center).

Liturgical Elements

Spiral Fluted Column (Fig. 1:7).— This small column is the only fragment of this type found at the site. It is made of white crystalline marble, with spiral fluting and a polished surface. Such elements commonly comprised the architectural furniture of the *bema* and *ambos* in Late Antique churches. They are also found in synagogues and other public and private buildings of the period (e.g., FitzGerald 1931: Pl. XLVII:3; Stillwell 1941:164, Pl. 39:157–159; Negev 1988:106, Fig. 11:194–195, Photograph 131; Benson 1956).

Pinecone-Shaped Finial (Fig. 1:8).— This globular, limestone finial once topped a post supporting a chancel screen or a gallery banister.

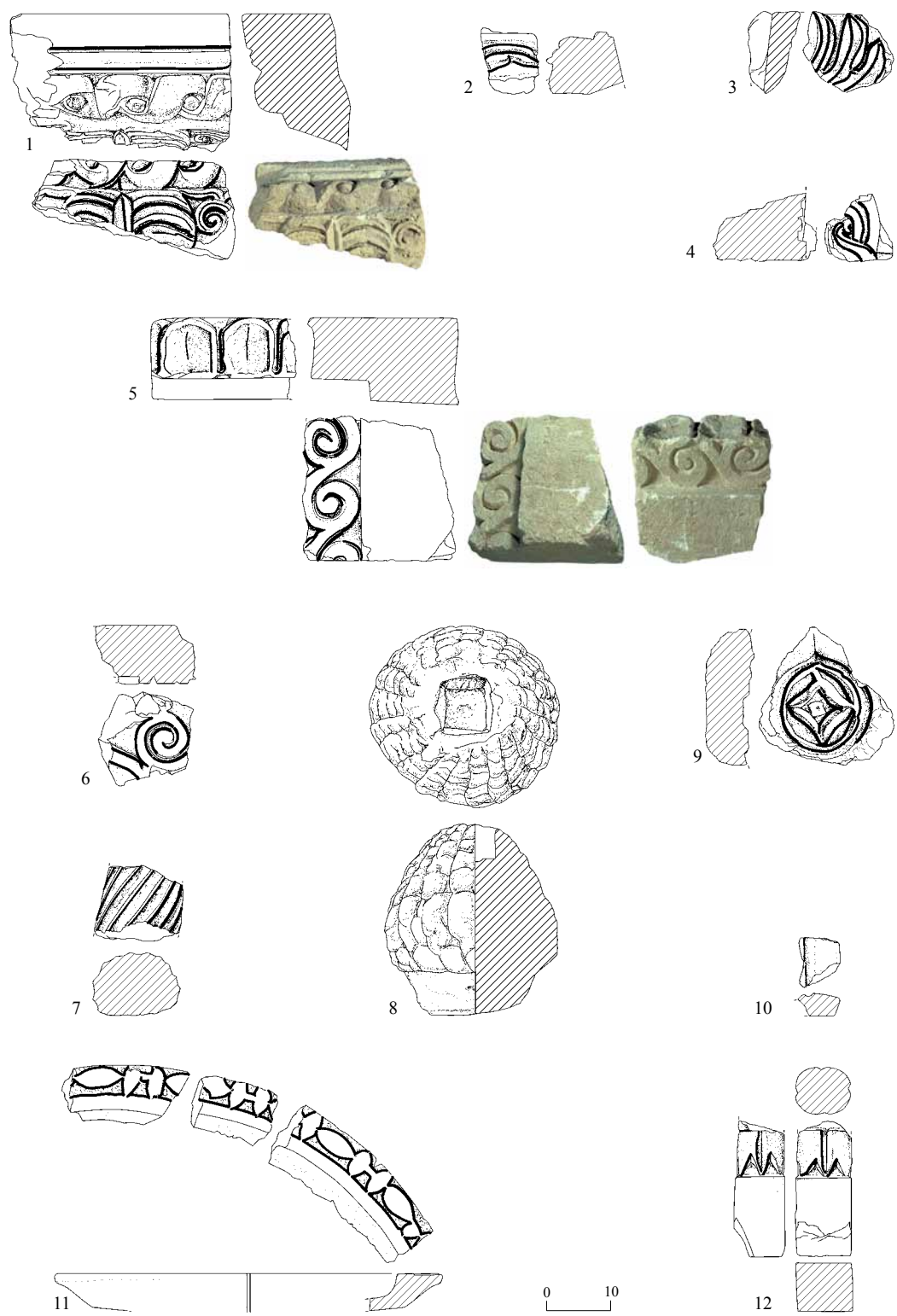


Fig. 1. Architectural and liturgical elements.

◀ Fig. 1

No.	Item	Basket No.	Locus	Material	Measurements (m)
1	Cornice, Type 1	2056	231	Limestone	L 0.725; W 0.35; H 0.46
2	Cornice, Type 1	2036/1	211	Limestone	L 0.28; W 0.16; H 0.24
3	Cornice, Type 1	2036/2	211	Limestone	L 0.16; W 0.22; H 0.24
4	Cornice, Type 1	2036/3	211	Limestone	L 0.2; W 0.33; H 0.21
5	Cornice, Type 2	2041	211	Limestone	L 0.45; W 0.465; H 0.26
6	Cornice, Type 2	2036/4	211	Limestone	L 0.32; W 0.3; H 0.18
7	Spiral fluted column	2036/5	211	Marble	D 0.27; H 0.23
8	Pinecone-shaped finial	2025	211	Limestone	D 0.53; H 0.59
9	Chancel screen or balustrade	2036/6	211	Limestone	L 0.42; W 0.15; H 0.42
10	Rectangular altar	2036/7	211	Marble	L 0.155; W 0.13; H 0.06
11	Sigma table top	2028	211	Marble	L 1.2; W 0.115; H 0.14
12	Support leg of offering altar/table	2029	211	Marble	Shaft: D 0.17 Capital: L 0.17; W 0.15; H 0.42

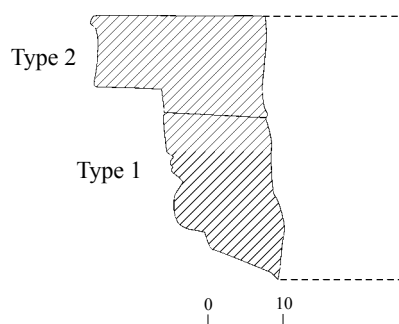


Fig. 2. Reconstruction of a cornice.

It is ornamented with carved, inclined grooves that create a surface reminiscent of a pinecone. The round base tapers and is designed to fit in the shaft-cavity of an element which is now lost. A deep square cavity at the top probably accommodated a stone or metal tip that is now missing.

Posts with plain globular finials, made either of marble or of local stone, are common finds in ecclesiastic buildings in the region, and were used to decorate chancel screens around the *bema* and gallery balustrades (Negev 1988:106–107, Fig. 11:196; Patrich 1988:119–120, 124, Pls. IX:40, X:48, Ills. 180, 190a, b; Aviam 1993:59–60; Magen 1993:195, 194

photograph bottom right; Peleg 2003:146–150, Fig. I.12, Pl. I.26:1–5). The closest parallel for the finial from Ha-Bonim comes from the northern church at Rehovot-in-the-Negev, and is associated with Patrich's Type B (Patrich 1988:120, Pl. X:40, Ill. 180).

Chancel Screen or Balustrade (Fig. 1:9).— This fragment, made of soft white limestone, was a chancel screen or balustrade. The front is decorated in relief, while the back is only roughly smoothed. The partially preserved decoration presents a rhombus with a central dot inscribed within a circle. A closely related interlaced design was found on a limestone chancel screen from Rehovot-in-the-Negev (Type A; Patrich 1988:110, Pl. VIII:27, Ill. 166).

Rectangular Offering Altar (Fig. 1:10).— A small fragment of a rectangular offering altar was found. It has a square rim and an inner molding, made of white crystalline marble. Such altar tops were very common throughout the Mediterranean area in Late Antiquity (Chalkia 1991:54–55), particularly in the Levant (cf. Patrich 1988:128, Pl. X:59, Ill. 200; Netzer and Birger 1990:197, Fig. 10; Piccirillo and Alliata 1994:305, Cat. No. 44).

Sigma Table Top (Fig. 1:11).— Four fragments (two joining) of a large, sigma table-top were found within the fill in cistern 211 (see ‘Ad, this volume: Fig. 12). It has a wide flattened rim and a flat base, made of white crystalline marble. The fragments are all from the rounded part of the horseshoe-shaped table. The rim has a continuous astragal design along its upper face, made in the champlévé technique. The face of the relief is flat, and the background, which is roughly chiseled, was once filled with colored material, such as a mixture of pigment with lime and resin (for the champlévé technique, see Boyd 2007:236–238). Some features of the carving, for example the unevenness of the astragal beads, indicate a rather inexperienced hand. The table is of a common type (Type D; Chalkia 1991:45–47, Fig. 26; Magen and Talgam 1990:108, Fig. 22; Piccirillo and Alliata 1994:305, Cat. No. 44), but the champlévé technique is extremely rare in decoration of marble table-tops. The only other published example I am aware of was found at the basilica of Campanopetra (Salamis-Famagusta, Cyprus; Roux 1973:152–158, Figs. 70, 73, Pl. 36). It is quite possible that the decoration was carved by a local craftsmen in an attempt to embellish an undecorated table top.

Support Leg of an Offering Altar or Table (Fig. 1:12).— This fragment belongs to a support leg

from an offering altar or a table, made of white crystalline marble. Only part of the nearly round shaft surmounted by a stylized trefoil capital is preserved. The capital is carved in low relief; the upper, rectangular part of it is plain. Support legs of this type are common finds in ecclesiastical contexts in the Levant. Similar legs were found in the ‘Ayn al-Kanisah church on Mount Nebo (Acconci 1998:534, No.153), in the sixth century CE church of Bishop Sergio in the St. Stefan complex at Umm al-Rasas (Piccirillo and Alliata 1994:306, Cat. No. 54) and in a late fifth–early sixth century CE context at Antioch (Stillwell 1941:156, Pl. 36:57, 58).

Addendum

Many architectural fragments of marble, granite and limestone are located in private courtyards at Moshav Ha-Bonim. Among them are a marble chancel screen decorated with a cross, a flower in each intersection of its arms (Fig. 3:1); columns of gray granite and of marble (diam. 0.5–0.7 m; Figs. 3:2, 3, 4 bottom); colonettes (diam. 0.2–0.3 m; Fig. 3:4 top); marble column bases (diam. 0.5–0.8 m; Figs. 3:5 top; 6); and parts of a limestone architrave (Fig. 3:5 bottom). It is likely that at least some of these items were originally part of the furnishing of the nearby church.

Fig. 3 ▶

No.	Description
1	Marble chancel screen decorated with a cross with flowers between its arms, within a circle
2	Column, gray granite
3	Column, gray granite
4	Top: colonette, white marble Bottom: column, gray granite
5	Top: column base, white marble Bottom: fragment of an architrave, local limestone
6	Column base, white marble



1



2



3



4



5



6

Fig. 3 Architectural elements located in Moshav Ha-Bonim.

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