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# Architectural Sculpture

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ELIZABETH S. BOLMAN

# THE RED MONASTERY CHURCH

## BEAUTY AND ASCETICISM IN UPPER EGYPT

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# CHAPTER 7 ARCHITECTURAL SCULPTURE

The architectural sculpture of the Red Monastery church—comprising capitals and entablatures, niche frames, and two elaborate doorways—is the only such ensemble from early Byzantine Egypt that survives in situ (fig. 7.1). In its day it probably was not unusual, but the destruction and dispersal of the ornamental apparatus of churches at other sites make it uniquely important. It has long been accepted as a fixed point in the chronology of architectural sculpture in the era, close in date to its presumed model at the White Monastery.[1] Hans-Georg Severin recently withdrew from this consensus by redating the capitals dramatically later, to the reign of Justinian (ca. 530–565).[2] Severin's method and conclusions will be examined at the end of this chapter, following a description of the ornament. The date proposed here is earlier, around the turn of the sixth century.

## The Capitals

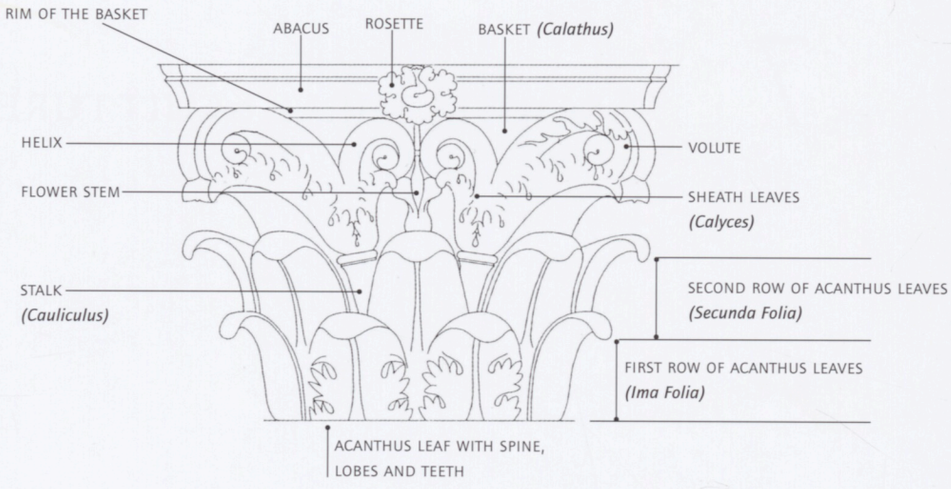
The capitals, like all architectural ornament at the Red Monastery, are of limestone, and they are all of the Corinthian type. The triconch contains three versions of the type, which for convenience will be called large, medium, and small. The fourteen large capitals sit on the reused column shafts of level I and support the lower entablature; the medium-sized capitals are above the limestone shafts on level II and support the upper entablature; and the small capitals are over the half-columns and pilasters flanking the niches on both levels and in the square drum under the dome (see fig. 6.27). The large capitals must have been made specifically for the spoliate shafts below them and must have been carved on-site, because their lower circumferences match the upper circumferences of the shafts and accommodate their irregularities (fig. 7.2).

It follows that the medium and small capitals were made on-site as well.

The large capitals are typical of late antiquity in the reduction of the standard elements of the classical Corinthian capital to three (fig. 7.3).[3] As mythologized by Vitruvius, the classical capital is in essence a cylindrical basket (*calathus*) supporting a flat tile (the abacus).[4] The basket is surrounded by two rows of acanthus leaves (*ima* and *secunda folia*). Stalks (*cauliculi;* singular *cauliculus*) emerge between the upper leaves and send out shoots, which are bent by the weight of the tile and curl into volutes (*volutae*) and helices. Leaves sprouting from the cauliculus form a sheath (*calyx;* plural *calyces*) for the spiraling shoots. The upper rim of the basket is visible between the volutes and the helices, and each side of the abacus is decorated with a rosette. The capitals in the triconch retain only the ima and secunda folia and the cauliculi (see fig. 7.1). Only the central capitals in the north and south apses have volutes; none has helices (fig. 7.4b–c).[5] In their absence, the sheath leaves take on a life of their own

7.1 OPPOSITE
Capitals at T.n.I.7 , T.n.I.11, and T.e.I.2.

7.2
A capital made specifically for its spoliate column shaft, T.e.I.8.




7.3
Elements of the Corinthian capital. After Gros 1996, 494, fig. 22.

and grow exuberantly to the top of the capital. The abacus is so far recessed from the calathus that it can hardly be seen. In place of its rosette, an unfamiliar ornament often appears above the central leaf on the capital itself. The motifs in lieu of the rosette are varied and unconventional: leaf fragments forming a V (fig. 7.4d); enigmatic rows of ovoids (fig. 7.4c); shamrocks (fig. 7.4b); stacked arches, geometric or foliate (fig. 7.4a, e); a four-petaled St. Andrew's Cross (fig. 7.4f). Further novelties occur on the lateral faces of several capitals in the north and south apses, where the secunda folia have been replaced by an abstract foliate or semifoliate pattern, upright (fig. 7.4g) or hanging (fig. 7.4h), sometimes within a circular frame (fig. 7.4i).[6] Flat and much shallower than the heavy acanthus leaves, these abstract patterns probably were easier for the carvers to execute. They are surreptitiously placed so that the capitals present the traditional formula on their principal faces and appear only to the viewer who makes the effort to examine them from the side.

Somewhat like real acanthus leaves, the stylized leaves of the Corinthian capital have symmetrical lobes on either side of a central spine, and each lobe has multiple points or "teeth." The tops of the leaves bend forward, as if weighted by gravity. On classical capitals these details might be rendered with great precision and delicacy, but in the late empire the carving of architectural ornament, like all sculpture, became more summary and schematic. In the typology established by Rudolf Kautzsch, the teeth of the acanthus leaves are stiff or soft, large (broad) or small.[7] The teeth of adjacent leaves might remain attached to one another, creating negative spaces between the adjoining lobes. Exploiting the decorative potential of these negative spaces undermined the integrity of the capital's components. A decisive move in this direction was made in the early fifth century with the broad-toothed acanthus capitals carved for the atrium of Hagia Sophia and the Golden Gate in Constantinople, on which the voids form dramatic patterns of lozenges, trapezoids, and "eyes" that overwhelm the solids of the leaves.[8] Around 450 the so-called Theodosian capital introduced a different look. Usually Composite rather than Corinthian, Theodosian capitals have fine-toothed rather than broad-toothed acanthus leaves and multiple small drill holes between the teeth that create a perforated effect.[9]

The milestones in this development are marble capitals produced on the island of Prokonnesos for use in Constantinople and exported to places around the empire, including Egypt. Limestone carvers had their own traditions, however, and it is not surprising that the capitals in the triconch do not have the signature traits of the innovative marble products of Constantinople. At Sohag the soft teeth of the acanthus leaves form continuous serrated contours that preserve the original outline of the uncut leaf.[10] The tripointed lobes are divided by conspicuous sickle-shaped cuts that do not penetrate the leaf's perimeter. The overhanging leaf tips are solid and resemble beaks; sometimes a groove has been drilled along the axis.

The medium-size capitals over the limestone columns on the second level are much simpler in design than the large capitals (fig. 7.5a–c). They have only one row of acanthus leaves (one leaf in the center of each face of the capital and one in each corner), vertical sheath leaves, and volutes. The sheath leaves come from nowhere, without cauliculi, and the volutes also seem like independent features that simply appear on top of the corner folia. Sometimes volutes from two sides of the capital meet over the corner leaf, creating the comic impression of two eyes and a beak, like a cartoon duck peering out from beneath the entablature (fig. 7.5a).

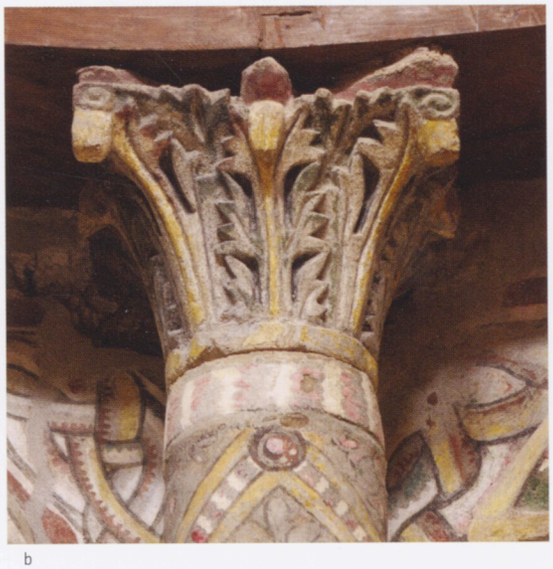
a b c

d e f

g h i

7.4
Large capitals of level I: (a) T.n.I.11, (b) T.n.I.7, (c) T.s.I.6, (d) T.n.I.3, (e) T.s.I.8, (f) T.n.I.5, (g) T.s.I.4 (right face), (h) T.s.I.8 (right face), (i) T.s.I.6 (right face).

a



b

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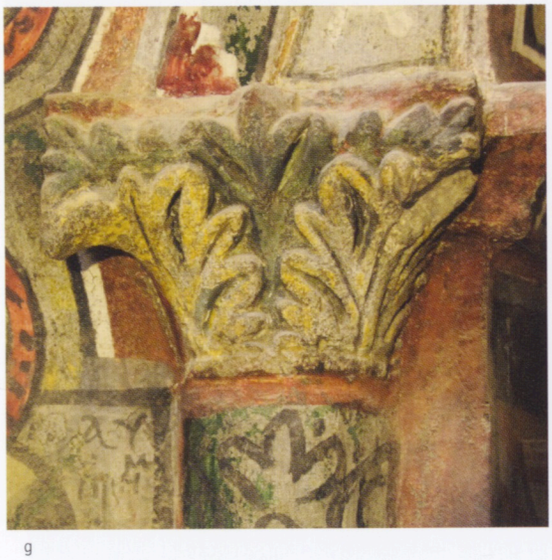


g

h

i

7.5
Medium and small capitals, not to the same scale. Medium capitals of level II: (a) T.n.II.5, (b) T.n.II.7, (c) T.s.II.8. Pilaster capitals of level I: (d) T.s.I.3 (left), (e) T.s.I.9 (left), (f) T.n.I.4 (right). Small capitals of levels I, II, and V: (g) T.n.I.6 (left), (h) T.e.I.3 (right), (i) T.e.V.2 (right).

The carving is rudimentary and often obscures the integrity of the separate components.

The same design appears on the rectangular pilaster capitals flanking the passageways in the north and south apses of the triconch (fig. 7.5d–f). Each has two visible faces, the narrow one toward the triconch and the longer one facing the passage. A standing acanthus leaf and sheath leaves, with or without cauliculi, appear on each face, with a standing acanthus leaf at each corner. The two capitals at the east end of the south apse (T.s.I.3) seem more traditional than the others: the cauliculi are plainly visible (if attenuated), and there are helices as well as volutes (fig. 7.5d).[11] By contrast, the western pilaster capitals (T.n.I.4, T.s.I.9) lack the helices, the cauliculi have been suppressed, and the acanthus leaves in the center of each side have prominent beaded spines (fig. 7.5e–f).

The small capitals have a cauliculus in the center and one acanthus leaf at each corner (fig. 7.5g–i). Volutes appear on the pilaster capitals of level I and on all capitals in the clerestory (fig. 7.5h–i). Only the front face of the small capitals is ornamented, and the carving is sketchy at best. Sometimes the cauliculus is rendered like a stylized tree, while volutes spring in a V pattern from the stem and the sheath leaves grow between them.

The facade of the triconch originally displayed thirty-six additional capitals: two on the columns under the chancel arch, twenty pilaster capitals of varying sizes, and fourteen capitals on the pilasters and half-columns framing the niches (see fig. A2.1). Only fifteen pilaster capitals and eight niche capitals survive, some in very poor condition. The large column and pilaster capitals have the same elements as the large capitals inside the triconch (ima and secunda folia, cauliculi, sheath leaves, volutes), but they show much greater variety. On the capitals under the arch the secunda folia are disproportionately tall, the lobes of the acanthus leaves are cut so that each lobe is distinct, and the outer contour of the leaf is broken by teeth that are drawn inward to touch the underside of the lobes above them (fig. 7.6a–b). The cauliculi are decorated with a spiral pattern and the spines of the central secunda folia are beaded. The sheath leaves are replaced by medallions containing a cross pattée, which sit atop the cauliculi like triumphal insignia.

Some of the large pilaster capitals are relatively close to the template of the triconch (fig. 7.6c). Others are transformed, like the example at F.I.2 (left), which shows beading on all secunda folia, pattée crosses over the cone-shaped cauliculi, and a new motif in place of the ima folia: a flat, trilobed plant enclosed in a pear-shaped double ribbon with five-pointed leaves hanging from the vestigial tip of the acanthus leaf on either side (fig. 7.6d).[12] The secunda folia exhibit a third style of carving the acanthus leaf, with small teeth that touch the underside of the lobe above them and lobes that grow outward, each on its own thin stem. Severin calls lobes of this form "leaf branches," following the definition of Kirsten Krumeich.[13] The pendant capital on the south is similar, but only the central acanthus leaf has leaf branches. The teeth are not as sharp or regular, the cauliculi lack spiral fluting, and rosettes rather than crosses appear between the helices and volutes (fig. 7.6e).[14]

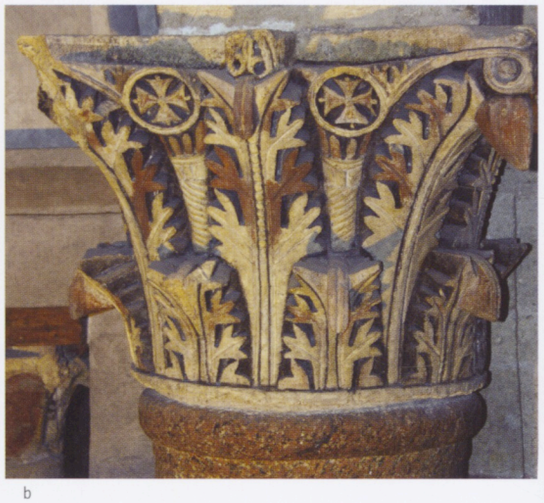
These unconventional treatments are not evenly distributed. A pilaster capital is relatively conservative and was carved in a manner close to that in the triconch, while another at ground level exhibits the novel framed plant (fig. 7.6c, g).[15] The capitals on the pilasters and half-columns framing the niches on the facade do not participate at all in the new developments. They are of the same design as the triconch's small capitals (corner leaves, central cauliculi, volutes).

The four monumental columns in front of the triconch—two aligned with the nave colonnades and two in front of the sanctuary arch—support the modern roof of the enclosed area before the facade, so the capitals cannot be seen from all sides (see fig. 6.19). The capital in line with the north nave colonnade conforms closely to the large triconch capitals in design and execution (fig. 7.7a) and is also similar to a capital previously on the ground outside the sanctuary, except that the demounted capital exhibits a cross pattée in a double circular rim over the secunda folia (fig. 7.7b).[16] Since the demounted capital is likely to be a remnant of the nave colonnade, the template of the large triconch capitals seems to have been followed also in the lower order of the nave. The capitals of the inner pair of columns, which are larger than the outer ones because they stand on taller shafts, are closer in form to the corresponding capitals under the sanctuary arch (fig. 7.7c–d).[17] They also display intrusive motifs over the cauliculi: rosettes in interlaced circles and a plant growing through a wreath on the north capital, and upright and inverted foliate forms like those on some of the triconch capitals on the south. The southern capital also has a wreath around its lower circumference.

Finally, the pairs of pilaster capitals on the elaborately decorated portals in the north and south outer walls of the basilica are related to the capitals on the triconch facade.[18] Each capital has two decorated faces, one toward the passageway and one toward the exterior of the building. The capitals of the south portal display leaf branches on the ima folia and conical cauliculi supporting pattée crosses on the exterior faces, and stylized foliate patterns in pear-shaped

7.6
Capitals of the chancel arch and sanctuary facade, not to the same scale. Capitals of the chancel arch: (a) F.I.3 (north, showing the western and southern sides), (b) F.I.3 (south, showing the northern side). Pilaster capitals of the facade wall: (c) F.I.2 (right), (d) F.I.2 (left), (e) F.I.4. Pilaster capitals of the facade wall passageways: (f) F.I.1 (right), (g) F.I.4 (left).

a



b

c

d

e

f

g

7·7
Capitals west of the sanctuary facade, not to the same scale: (a) outer northern capital, (b) nave capital, (c) inner northern capital, (d) inner southern capital, (e) northern portal, exterior (left), (f) northern portal, exterior (right), (g) southern portal, exterior (left), (h) southern portal, exterior (right).


a


b


c


d


e


f


g


h

a

b

c

7.8
Composite pediments, not to the same scale: (a) type A (T.s.I.5), (b) type B (T.e.II.5), (c) type C (T.n.I.4).

7.9
Detail of the slit-modillion cornice on the pediment at T.n.I.4.

7.10
Fragments of a slit-modillion cornice, presumably from the entablature over the nave colonnade.

frames invading the ima folia on the sides toward the passage (fig. 7.7e–f).[19] The capitals of the north portal are weathered and harder to make out (fig. 7.7g–h). There are no intrusive motifs on the ima folia but there is deep drilling between the teeth of the leaf branches of the central leaf, which also occurs on the triconch facade (see fig. 7.6d).[20]

### The Niches

The walls of the triconch and its facade contain semicircular and square-based niches crowned by composite (or "broken") pediments. This distinctively Egyptian form appears to combine pieces of two pediments: a steeply angled one at the corners and another of lesser slope—or an arch—in between.[21] All of the pediments are limestone monoliths set into the brick walls, but they differ in form and structure according to type.[22] Type A, which appears over the niches on level I of the triconch, has sharply rising lateral triangles and a central gable whose sides meet at an angle of about 135 degrees (fig. 7.8a). The design is compact, and the steep lateral points give it a vertical thrust. These pediments rest on limestone half-columns carrying the small type of Corinthian capital. Type B pediments, over the niches on level II, are vertically compressed, becoming low and broad enough to occupy almost the entire width of the space between the limestone columns separating the niches (fig. 7.8b). Compressed in this way, the pediments are wider than the niches below them, and they seem to float above their ostensibly supporting half-columns and pilasters.[23] Type C pediments occur only over the passageways on the ground level of the north and south apses (fig. 7.8c). Unlike the Type A pediments on this level, they combine lateral triangles with an arch. Under the arch is a recessed tympanum framed by an archivolt. There is no lintel, and the pediment rests directly on the medium-type capitals over the supporting pilasters. The archivolt and the cornice of the pediment both

a b c

7.11
Types of niches on the sanctuary facade: (a) F.II.2, (b) F.I.2, (c) F.III.3.

form parabolic arches, and the cornice has a concave profile. The concavity causes a slight protrusion where the arch meets the lateral points, whose surfaces are also rotated a few degrees toward the center (fig. 7.9). These manipulations are echoes of the much more three-dimensional pediments found elsewhere in Egypt; despite them, these over-doors are unusually flat.[24]

The eastern over-doors are decorated with paint, but the western ones have a carved "slit-modillion cornice" on the pediment, as well as a raised cross pattée in the tympanum (see figs. 7.8c, 7.9). The slit-modillion cornice is a low-relief evocation of a classical cornice, in which square fields filled with rosettes or other motifs alternate with oblong solids slit along their vertical axes, representing classical modillions.[25] Normally slit-modillion cornices include an astragal with bead-and-reel ornament along the bottom, but this component is absent from the over-doors.[26] The slit-modillion cornice was a common feature of Egyptian composite pediments and probably also in architecture. It is found throughout the White Monastery basilica, in the pediments as well as the entablatures on both levels of the triconch, on the nave walls, and on the outer wall of the long south hall.[27] Fragments found in the nave area of the Red Monastery are evidence that slit-modillion cornices also appeared there, possibly in the entablatures over the nave colonnades (fig. 7.10).

Seven niches survive on the triconch facade: two in the tympana over the doors leading from the aisles to the side rooms (F.I.1, F.I.5), two over the passageways into the north and south apses (F.I.2, F.I.4), two flanking the spandrels of the sanctuary arch (F.II.2, F.II.4), and one over the apex of the arch (F.III.3) (see fig. A2.1). The last is not really a niche but a window, the central of three windows into the drum of the dome (fig. 7.11c). Four niches are covered by Type A pediments and three by Type B. The Type A pediments appear over square-based niches with barrel vaults; they have plain beveled surfaces and were ornamented only with paint, as in the triconch (fig. 7.11a). Type B pediments cover semicircular niches with semidomes (fig. 7.11b). Their cornices too are plainly beveled, but the niche heads below are more sculptural, with a conch shell in relief framed by an arcuated frieze, a quarter-round molding, and a slightly concave cornice. The pediments rest directly on small-type capitals, and, as also happens occasionally inside the triconch, they contain crosses carved in relief. The window frame at the apex of the facade is paradoxically (because of its distance from the viewer) the most elaborate; in fact it is almost unique among the Red Monastery niche frames in having relief ornament on the half-columns under the pediment as well as in the semidome, on the archivolt, and in the pediment itself (fig. 7.11c). The column shafts are partly reeded and partly spiral-fluted; the archivolt has a pattern of chevrons and balls; and the semidome contains a three-dimensional conch shell. In the pediment, a cross pattée is flanked by symmetrical patterns that may allude to foliate scrolls, which end in shamrocks that recall one of the patterns on the capitals in the triconch (see fig. 7.4h).

7.12
The southern portal, external facade.

7.13
Detail of the southern portal.

### The Portals

Two elaborately framed portals are positioned opposite one another in the north and south exterior walls of the church. The exterior of the southern one, which has been protected by the medieval tower that abuts this side of the basilica, is in relatively good condition; only its topmost components show significant damage (fig. 7.12). The modestly scaled door is topped by an elaborate five-part assemblage of friezes and cornices that extends considerably beyond the door jambs to terminate in shallow rectangular niches with Type A pediments. The niches are not quite as high as the horizontally stacked entablature. To compensate, a block with the relief image of a striding animal was set above each niche; the eastern one has been nearly obliterated by an inner wall of the tower.

The jambs of the south portal are constructed of limestone blocks coursed into the walls. They contain three narrow bands of relief ornament: one directly under the capitals, one slightly above the vertical mid-point of the jambs, and one about midway between the middle band and the door sill. Similar bands appear in recessed strips on the blocks of the inner face of the doorway, which is otherwise without decoration (see fig. 6.8). The capitals (discussed above) were cut from rectangular blocks, leaving a roughly triangular area under the curve of each capital that was filled with an acanthus leaf. Severin considers the leaves to be remnants of friezes of standing acanthus, which "doubtless... continued on the originally adjoining sculpted blocks."[28]

The horizontal elements of the entablature might be described as a decorated lintel, fillet, cavetto, frieze, and cornice (fig. 7.13). The lintel was made from a single reused block, whose original pharaonic reliefs are visible on its underside. The length of this spoliate block seems to have determined the width of the entire horizontal ensemble, since the upper components were carved on smaller blocks pieced together to match the length of the pharaonic one.

The lintel bears a foliate scroll that arises in the center and curls outward to form five circles on each side. The leaves sprouting from the inner sides of the tendrils resemble the teeth of the acanthus lobes on the triconch capitals, and shamrocks also resembling those in the triconch fill the interstices. The first set of blocks over the lintel displays a narrow band of guilloche containing rosettes under a row of standing acanthus leaves that alternate with spirally grooved cones, probably meant to be cauliculi. The frieze seems to have been cut off at the top.[29] The carving of the acanthus leaves is compatible with the capitals in the triconch. Although it is easily missed from the ground,

7.14
The northern portal, external facade.

the frieze has a curvature like a shallow cavetto. The pattern of the frieze above the cavetto is one of the most complex of the ensemble, a play on the basic form of interlaced circles with rosettes. Each circle has four offshoots; each offshoot extends laterally to entwine with a mate from the adjacent circle, and then curls back to sprout a triangular lobed leaf. The circles are filled by four- or five-petaled rosettes. Above this frieze the badly damaged cornice seems to have featured standing acanthus leaves and other motifs above a half-round molding carved with a rope pattern. In the best-preserved segment, acanthus leaves alternate with a geometricized form comprising ribbons that curl in circles on either side of a central stem. The carving of the acanthus differs from that on the cavetto, resembling instead the patterns recorded by Kirsten Krumeich on capitals from Oxyrhynchos: four-toothed lobes with teeth that point in several directions, some of them bending back to touch the lobe above.[30]

The well-preserved niche that marks the western termination of the entablature is a miniature version of the Type A square-based niches in the triconch. Every part of it, from the pilaster shafts to the composite pediment, is decorated in relief; there is even a slit-modillion cornice above the gabled arch. The wealth of relief makes this niche resemble those in the triconch of the White Monastery rather than the normal niches of the Red one. A small beveled cornice below the niche is carved with a simplified version of the foliate scroll on the lintel. The block with the animal above

7.15
Detail of the internal facade of the northern portal.

the niche is too damaged to say much about the design, except that it was a quadruped striding toward the center of the door. As mentioned before, the internal face of the south portal is undecorated.

The entablature of the north portal is less straightforward (fig 7.14; see also fig. 6.7). Severin dismissed it as a mélange of "unskillfully assembled, reused sculpted construction elements, whose combination reveals no understanding of classical or late antique decorative associations."[31] On closer examination, however, it appears to have essentially the same structure and design as the south doorway, albeit with four horizontal elements rather than five. One piece is lacking to bring the entablature to the level of the springing of the relieving arch that rises over it. This portal, unlike the southern one, is also decorated on the side toward the aisle of the basilica. The ornament on the inner side is sparse (fig. 7.15). There is only one band of relief and no capitals or decoration on the jambs, but this side of the door is important because it bears traces of the same plasters used in the triconch.[32] It is, therefore, probably in situ as a remnant of the original basilica.

Weathering and other damage to the outer face of the portal affect the perception of its style and quality. As on the southern entablature, the lintel is a limestone monolith and the upper three bands are matched to its length with smaller blocks, but the components are not as smoothly assembled. There are no niches, and figural sculptures are incorporated within the length of the entablature rather than being set outside it. The western edge of the entablature is irregular, and the masonry adjoining it is disturbed. The lintel exhibits a frieze of circles, one full circle alternating with two tangent half ones. The inner sides of the circles are decorated with beadlike solids, and the centers contain flowers composed of three-pointed petals and shamrocks radiating from a central disk. The center of the pattern, where two full circles stand side by side, is displaced to the left (east) part of the block. This anomaly cannot be explained by reuse because the frieze is uniformly bordered by a flat lintel and must be complete as we see it, so it may reflect a miscalculation by the sculptor. The design as a whole recalls textile patterns rather than architecture.

The frieze above the lintel is comparable to the cavetto on the south portal, with standing acanthus leaves but no cauliculi. The leaves are differently carved, with beaded spines and lobes with teeth that touch the leaves adjoining them. The touching points create vertical rows of three negative lozenges, an effect that does not occur elsewhere in the church. The frieze extends without interruption onto projections at the ends of the outer blocks, which form consoles for the figural reliefs set into the band above them. The band is adorned with a well-planned frieze of eight linked circles. Each circle is filled by a quadripartite pattern of intersecting ribbons that sprout five-pointed leaves and bunches of grapes. Grapes are another feature not seen elsewhere in the Red Monastery's sculpture. The length of the circle frieze was calculated so that two blocks with figural ornament could fit over the projections at the ends of the acanthus frieze below. The ensemble of two friezes and two figured blocks therefore appears to be original to the doorway. Although the figural reliefs have been deliberately damaged, it can be seen that both represented striding horses, probably with riders and possibly with another human figure walking or crouching in front. Enough survives of the crowning cornice to show that it was a carefully carved slit-modillion cornice, not like the relatively plain examples in the triconch but resembling those at the White Monastery in having an astragal and diverse motifs filling the soffits. The surviving motifs are an equal-armed cross, a flower with alternately rounded and lancet-shaped petals, another flower with rounded and three-lobed petals, and traces of a four-petaled rosette.

The internal entablature has only one decorated component, a frieze on three blocks over the monolithic lintel (fig. 7.15). Each block shows a different pattern, but all three contain negative spaces and drill holes like the upper bands of ornament on the outer face of the door. On the left (west), a ribbon with beads along both edges forms an elongated quincunx containing flowers in the outer circles and a wreath of five-pointed leaves in the center. Inside the wreath is a one-handled vessel with a spout. A similar but looser

pattern on the right block is centered on a circle of three-pointed leaves, framed by bands, that encloses a rosette. The longer middle block exhibits two rows of three interlinked circles enclosing four-petaled rosettes and another flower whose four petals have three lobes each; floral and foliate forms fill the interstices. A section in the center of the block large enough to have contained two more circles has been effaced. The remains of two consoles appear between the blocks, and there could have been a third in the damaged part of the middle block. The relief above the east console has been obliterated, but on the left one can still make out the remains of what could have been a throne, presumably once occupied by a figure.

Both sides of the north portal show evidence of planning to fit their present locations and of damage and possible reassembly. The repertoire of ornament ranges from the traditional architectural vocabulary (standing acanthus leaves, slit-modillion cornice) to novelties that may have been borrowed from other media, especially textiles.[33] Both the north and south portals have parallels at the White Monastery in the way some elements were carved.

### Analysis

The architectural ornament of the Red Monastery appears to have followed a single comprehensive design that established templates for the separate elements, notably capitals and niche frames, which were followed throughout the building. Deviations from the template, especially on the large column and pilaster capitals, are numerous and idiosyncratic—without parallel elsewhere—and seem to be the work of craftsmen who lacked the discipline or supervision to keep to the norm. The ornament of the south portal shows some of the same deviations and is close in style to the capitals in the triconch; the north portal is even more inventive and shares some techniques of carving with capitals on the sanctuary facade.

The master design of the ornament is intimately related to the architecture. This is best illustrated by comparing the composite pediments in the triconch with those in the White Monastery, its presumed model. While the Red Monastery triconch exhibits three types of pediment, the White Monastery triconch has only one, Type A.[34] The Type C pediments at the Red Monastery have a particular function: they elevate the over-doors to the level of the Type A pediments crowning the niches in the adjoining walls. Had the over-doors been designed with semiround rather than parabolic arches, they would have risen lower than the niches; as it is, all pediments on level I rise to a line just below the entablature. On level II the vertical compression of the Type B pediments causes them to expand laterally to fill the intercolumniations. This creates an effect very different from that at the White Monastery, where the compact Type A pediments are surrounded by large, flat areas of wall. The Type B pediments, by contrast, work like the parabolic arches on level I to obscure as much of the planar surface as possible. The more crowded and plastic design produces a striking evocation of a late Roman "tabernacle facade," as discussed in Chapter 5.

In another departure from the White Monastery exemplar, the design called for much less relief decoration inside the triconch.[35] The entablatures over the granite and limestone columns have the same rudimentary profile, vertical frieze, and beveled cornice; but whereas the friezes and cornices at the White Monastery were carved with a variety of three-dimensional patterns, those in the Red Monastery were planed flat. At the White Monastery the decoration of the niche frames is likewise three-dimensional, covering the shafts of the half-columns and pilasters as well as the semidomes and semicircular vaults, the lunettes, and the arches and gables of the pediments.[36] At the Red Monastery only a few niches were accorded this sculptural treatment, and it seems to have been intended from the outset that most of the decoration would be provided in paint. The nave portals show an inverse relationship, however: the door frames in Shenoute's basilica are relatively plain, with jambs and lintels made of unretouched pre-Christian spolia, while those at the Red Monastery are laden with new carving. Their models, if any, are unknown. Similarly elaborate portals must have existed at other churches, but only those from the south church at Bawit are well studied. They are not in situ and their reconstructions in Cairo and Paris are partly hypothetical.[37] The Bawit ornament is more finely and crisply cut than that of the Red Monastery and employs a different repertoire of decorative motifs.[38]

### Typology and Dating

The demonstration that the architectural ornament at the Red Monastery differs in planning and effect from that at the White Monastery does not disprove the long-standing assumption that the two churches were built around the same time, though it does reinforce the impression that they were designed and constructed by different crews. Severin's redating of the ornament was motivated by other concerns. Since his argument is based on typology, it is important to clarify what that term means. Types are defined by common characteristics, which can be general or specific. At the most general level the Corinthian capital is a type.[39] The Theodosian capital is called a "type" by art historians

7.16
Capitals from the basilica at Hermopolis Magna (Ashmunayn). Courtesy of Patrizio Pensabene.

(although it could also be called a subtype of Composite) and capitals with broad- or soft-toothed acanthus leaves are also referred to as "types." At the Red Monastery, the opportunity to observe a large complement of capitals in situ led me to a relatively broad definition of types, which I have called templates. The template of the large capitals is most clearly recognizable in the east apse of the triconch. Consistency in its representation decreases from east to west as the template was progressively embellished or subverted, beginning with the substitution of shallow abstract patterns for lateral acanthus leaves in the north and south apses and culminating in the replacement of the ima folia on pilaster capitals on the triconch facade and the north portal (see figs. 7.4g–i, 7.6d–e, 7.7e–f.).

The corruption of the template, or type, occurred through the insertion of new motifs and should be distinguished from changes produced by style. Thus, I consider the pilaster capitals at F.I.2 (left) and F.I.4 to be of the same type (with the same corruptions), even though they look somewhat different because of conventions observed in their execution (see fig. 7.6d–e). Changes in style also progress from east to west and are most noticeable on the pilaster capitals on the facade and on the portals. There are parallels for the pseudo-Theodosian fine-toothed acanthus leaves seen on a few Red Monastery capitals in the curved colonnade of the exedra in the narthex of the White Monastery, but the White Monastery has no parallel for the Red Monastery's standard large capital.[40] For that, the best comparisons are among the limestone capitals made for the transept basilica of Hermopolis Magna (Ashmunayn), as noted by Severin many years ago.[41]

The transept basilica—probably the cathedral—at Hermopolis Magna has not been properly excavated or published.[42] Arthur Megaw observed among its remains two versions of the Corinthian capital: one more traditional, with helices, volutes, and a projecting abacus, and one reduced like the capitals at the Red Monastery.[43] He dated both versions to the early fifth century.[44] In 1981 Severin assigned the more traditional capitals to the second or third century and the others to the same date as those at the Red Monastery, "almost certainly" the second third of the fifth century.[45] A few years later a summarily reported excavation near the north transept uncovered a well that had been sealed when the transept was built. The well contained coins that may date the construction of the basilica to as late as the end of the century, but the publication of the finds is ambiguous.[46]

In his recent reconsideration of the Red Monastery capitals, Severin reiterated the comparison with the capitals at Hermopolis Magna and continued to date the latter to

the fifth century, while pushing the former forward several decades to the time of Justinian (second third of the sixth century).[47] His argument is rooted in an evolutionary model of typology, according to which deviations from a norm (in this case, the classical Corinthian capital) constitute types that mark stages in progressive developments (in this case, the "dissolution of the Corinthian canon").[48] Severin's typology is minute. The large capitals of the triconch are classified as a type with three subtypes: the one I have called the template (C1a), those with floral patterns replacing the lateral leaves (C1b), and those with replacement patterns and volutes (C1c).[49] The capitals under the sanctuary arch and in the colonnade in front of the triconch make three additional types with subtypes (C3, C4, C5a–b); the pilaster capitals on the facade form five more (P1, P2a–b, P3a–b, P4a–b, P5); and those on the portals make two more (P7a–b, P8a–b), always on the basis of variations and recombinations of nonstandard motifs.[50] While such detailed classifications facilitate a remarkable thoroughness and exactitude of observation, they cannot reflect the work of producing the capitals, especially by an undisciplined workforce. Mistakes and spontaneous invention are disallowed.[51] It is assumed that every variation follows from a previous stage in the dissolution (or modernization) of the classical capital and precedes a subsequent stage of the same process. The telos of this teleological progression is the metamorphosis of classical ornament in the decoration made for Justinian's churches in Constantinople, with their deeply undercut, allover patterns of vines and leaf branches.

Severin identified two features of the Red Monastery capitals as diagnostic: the replacement of the ima folia by a nonconventional motif and the combination of two different leaf forms on the same capital.[52] Since the first feature occurs only at the Red Monastery, there are no external reference points by which to date it, but the combination of fine-toothed and soft-toothed acanthus leaves can be seen on an impost block of the Stoudios basilica and other fifth-century examples.[53] Severin's much later dating of the Red Monastery capitals ultimately depends not on these specific features—which do not sustain it—but on a general sense of what they were meant to achieve, that is, to what stage in the "modernization" of the Corinthian capital they correspond.[54]

I find such conceptual comparisons much less persuasive than the visual ones proposed by the same author thirty years ago. The Sohag capitals do not look Justinianic. There is no attempt to imitate the allover patterns and *à jour* carving, orientalizing motifs and new formations (impost capitals, basket capitals, folded capitals) that are a hallmark of the era of Justinian.[55] The Red Monastery capitals do look very much like capitals in the ruins at Hermopolis Magna.[56] The template is similar: ima and secunda folia, cauliculi, sheath leaves, volutes but no inner helices; the principal difference is that the Ashmunayn capitals have a more visible (though still recessed) abacus and its traditional flower (fig. 7.16 top).[57] The carving of the acanthus leaves varies at Hermopolis Magna, from flexible lobes with elongated teeth that grow in multiple directions to the uniform serration, closed contours, and internal sickle-shaped cuts seen at the Red Monastery (fig. 7.16 bottom).[58]

Many of the Ashmunayn capitals have a new motif in a quasi-geometrical frame at the base of the sheath leaves. Pensabene described it as a "little leaf, rigidly articulated in three [or five] pointed lobes," and Severin recognized it as an early moment in the "dissolution of the Corinthian canon."[59] A decontextualized capital in Beni Suef exhibits a more elaborate form of this intrusive element, an inverted multilobed pattern that recalls the flat foliate shapes on the lateral faces of some of the capitals in the triconch.[60] In his recent publication Severin attributed this capital to the first half of the sixth century and used it to date the Sohag capitals, but the argument could just as well be turned the other way.[61]

On the basis of the strong resemblances in design and execution between the large capitals in the triconch and some of those remaining at Ashmunayn, I propose that at least one of the sculptors who worked at the Red Monastery had experience at Hermopolis Magna. He brought with him the basic design of the Corinthian capital, the method of carving its components, and the sense that this ages-old form was no longer invariable. The other stone carvers who worked with him were not compelled to follow the template exactly but were allowed to improvise according to their own experience and varying degrees of skill. At least one of them may also have worked at the White Monastery, if the resemblances to the capitals in the narthex there are not fortuitous. This sculptor was aware of innovations in marble ornament made in the second half of the fifth century and tried to reproduce their effects in limestone. Pending more conclusive investigation of the date of the basilica at Ashmunayn, the work of this motley crew might be attributed to the end of the fifth century, forty or fifty years at most after the construction of the church of Shenoute.

30 For conservation reasons, the original floor slabs of the northern nave were covered in November 2013 with a geotextile membrane and lime screed. At the same time, a new floor was designed and installed by the author using 15-cm-thick (6-in.-thick) limestone slabs in the sanctuary and on the platform, and 7.5-cm-thick (3-in.-thick) slabs in the side chambers.
31 Clarke 1912, 160; Evers and Romero 1964, pl. G.
32 More examples of short, single columns with cavities can be found at Dayr al-Shuhada, Esna, and Saqqara. Leroy 1975, pl. 49; Quibell 1907–1923, 4: pl. XV.
33 For comparable blocks from Luxor and Aswan, see Monneret de Villard 1925–1926, 2:124–125, fig. 177; Pensabene 1993, 485, nos. 765–766, pl. 85. The basilica at Qasr Ibrim (ca. 600) has similar base blocks in its nave; Aldsworth 2010, 50, pl. 74, 58, pl. 97.
34 See Monneret de Villard 1925–1926, 2:97; Severin 2008, 85, n. 48; Grossmann 2006, 43.
35 In this context it should be noted that the late antique nave enclosure walls may have contained a continuation of the banding before their reconstruction, and that the emplacements for horizontal banding can also be seen in the nave of the White Monastery church.
36 For Egyptian examples of the late antique use of timber lacing to improve earthquake resistance, see the structures of Karanis in the Fayyum. The basilica at Qasr Ibrim also preserves palm timber lacing; Aldsworth 2010, 149–153, figs. 77, 78.
37 For a more detailed analysis of the problems, see Warner forthcoming b.
38 For the White Monastery church, see Clarke 1912, pl. 48, fig. 2. For the Red Monastery church see Grossmann 1969, fig. 3; Grossmann 2006, fig. 2.
39 My thanks to Fabio Barry for directing my attention to this alternative.
40 The evidence of door pivots may be secondary.
41 Rababeh 2005, 129–134.
42 Pyke 2013.
43 See Grossmann 2002a, pl. XIIa.
44 For further details about how the sanctuary may have been lit, see Warner forthcoming b.
45 A dated graffito provides the terminus ante quem year. See Appendix 1, NLR.n.i-1.
46 See Kinney, Chapter 7 in this volume.
47 Severin 2008, 77, 108.
48 Crum 1904b, 552–569; Monneret de Villard 1925–1926, 1:28–29, 31.
49 Variants of the trilobe form in Egypt can be traced back at least as far as the western portal of the Mosque of al-Nasir Muhammad in the Citadel of Cairo (1318–1335), but Mamluk examples commonly display a greater use of complex internal forms such as the muqarnas squinch.
50 Pococke 1743, 79.

### Chapter 7. Architectural Sculpture

1 Monneret de Villard 1925–1926, 1:55: "à peu près contemporain au précédent [= Couvent Blanc]." Second third of the fifth century: Severin 1981, 320. Second half of the fifth century: Krumeich 2003, 1:20–21; Török 2003, 95; McKenzie 2007, 281. Last third of the fifth century: Pensabene 1993, 441 (but cf. 53, penultimate decade); Severin 1993, 76. Late fifth or early sixth century: Severin 1977a, 249.
2 Severin 2008.
3 Peschlow 2004, 90–91; normally there are four elements, including the volutes.
4 Vitruvius, *De architectura* IV.i.9; Vitruvius 1931, 1:209–211.
5 The capital at T.n.I.11 has a single volute on the side toward the eastern conch.
6 T.s.I.4 (Severin 2008, CC11), T.s.I.6 (Severin 2008, CC12), T.s.I.8 (Severin 2008, CC13).
7 Kautzsch 1936, as codified by Peschlow 2004, 91–96: *starrzackige* (stiff-toothed), *weichzackige* (soft-toothed), *großgezackte* (broad-toothed), *kleingezackte* (small-toothed). In French, *weichzackige* is *acanthe molle* and *großgezackte* is *acanthe épineuse;* in English, they are often, confusingly, called "crowded acanthus" and "mask acanthus," respectively; Pralong 2000, 83, nn. 11–12; Severin 2008, 78, n. 24.
8 Peschlow 2004, 93–94; Russo 2007; Russo 2009, 26–27, figs. 18–21. The dates are disputed; Russo argues for 413–415 for Hagia Sophia and ca. 425 for the Golden Gate.
9 Strube 1983, 85–86; Peschlow 2004, 96–98. "Fine-toothed" (*feingezahnte*) is different from "small-toothed" (*kleingezackte*).
10 Pensabene 1993, 441, describes the lobes and teeth as "*acanto spinoso con influssi del tipo dentellato*" (spiny acanthus influenced by the dentellated type).
11 The eastern capitals in the northern lobe (T.n.I.10) are badly damaged.
12 Severin 2008, PC1, PC2.
13 Severin 2008, 104; cf. Krumeich 2003, 1:43–45 (*Blattgeäst*).
14 Severin 2008, PC3.
15 Severin 2008, PC11, PC14.
16 Severin 2008, CC33, CC34. The capitals are, respectively, 55 and 58 cm (21.7 and 22.8 in.) tall.
17 Severin 2008, CC31 (north), CC32 (south); 70 and 74 cm (27.6 and 29.1 in.) tall.
18 Severin 2008, PC24–25 (north), PC26–27 (south).
19 Severin judged them "reworked and rehewn," but I saw no evidence of this; Severin 2008, 100.
20 For additional photos see Severin 2008, figs. 33, 34.
21 On "broken" pediments, see McKenzie 2007, 262–270. "Composite pediment" seems more accurate: Krumeich 2003, 1:126; Severin 2008, 93–97. McKenzie calls the lateral points (German *Sprenggiebel*) "half pediments." On the history and Egyptian character of the composite pediment, see Severin 1993; Krumeich 2003, 1:125–131.
22 Severin distinguished four types on the basis of the plan and vaulting of the niches; Severin 2008, 93–97. My three categories pertain only to the shape of the pediments.
23 The 12-cm (4.7-in.) interval between the pediments and the capitals is sometimes occupied by a rectangular beam hole, the purpose of which is discussed by Warner, Chapter 6 in this volume.
24 Krumeich 2003, 1:130, n. 920, noted that the composite pediments in both of the Sohag churches are flatter than elsewhere.
25 See the diagram in McKenzie 1996, 129, fig. 1e. McKenzie calls the Sohag modillions "flat-grooved"; Krumeich 2003, 1:116, calls them "rafter-like"; Severin 1993, 80, uses the term "slit consoles" (*geschlitzten Konsolen*).
26 Krumeich 2003, 1:122, figs. 30a–b, 52.
27 Other sites: McKenzie 2007, 262–269, figs. 431a, 432, 436, 447. White Monastery: Akermann 1977, 30, 32, 34, 72, 86, 94, 112, 118; McKenzie 1996, 136, figs. 5c, 5d, 137; Krumeich 2003, 1: figs. 26, 43, 44, 47, 50, 52; McKenzie 2007, 275–279, figs. 456–457, 459.
28 Severin 2008, 101.
29 A frieze from Bawit in the Metropolitan Museum shows the complete design: www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/445965?rpp=20&pg=2&ao=on&ft=Coptic&what=Limestone&pos=37.
30 Krumeich 2003, 1:30–34.
31 Severin 2008, 98.

32 Poggi 2008b, 24–26.
33 For the standard architectural repertoire, see Duthuit 1931, 50–52.
34 For technical reasons, it was not possible to illustrate the comparanda; the reader is referred to illustrations in the cited publications. There is one Type B pediment at the White Monastery in the narthex (Akermann 1977, 114–115; Severin 1993, 77, fig. 16; Hodak 2008, 234, fig. 20.2d). There are no Type C pediments: Krumeich 2003, 1:129.
35 Note that the White Monastery's ornament has been mutilated in one or more disasters; Grossmann 2002a, 533–534; McKenzie 2007, 275–276.
36 Akermann 1977, 18–33, 38–53, 58–75; Krumeich 2003, 1: figs. 26, 54; McKenzie 2007, 276–277, figs. 458, 459, 460 (diagram of niche heads). According to Akermann 1977, 5, some of the decoration is in stucco.
37 Giroire, Ibled, and Lafay 1997; Torp 2006, 26; McKenzie 2007, 295–305, with bibliography and photographs.
38 The date of the Bawit sculpture is disputed. Severin 1977b: partly fourth century (reused), partly sixth century; Torp 2006, 17–33: middle or third quarter of the sixth century; McKenzie 2007, 302: fifth or sixth century.
39 Vitruvius, *De architectura* IV.i.10: *Corinthii generis;* Vitruvius 1931, 1:209 ("order").
40 Monneret de Villard 1925–1926, 1: fig. 20.
41 The connection had already been made by Megaw; Wace, Megaw, and Skeat 1959, 78–79; Severin 1981, 320–321, 322, figs. 3–4.
42 Wace, Megaw, and Skeat 1959, xi–xii, 1–3; Barański 1990, 44–46.
43 Wace, Megaw, and Skeat 1959, 64–67, 79.
44 Wace, Megaw, and Skeat 1959, 79.
45 Severin 1981, 320; likewise Krumeich 2003, 1:47 (second half of the fifth century).
46 Barański 1991, 21, mentions "pottery sherds and coins from the end of the 5th century AD," but cf. Barański 1996, 102: coins and shards "date the abandonment of the well to the middle of the fifth century." Severin 1998a, 101, and McKenzie 2007, 286, entertain the later date; others maintain the earlier one: Pensabene 1993, 437–439 (second third of the fifth century); Grossmann 2002a, 443 (mid-fifth century).
47 Severin 2008, 102, n. 81, 105 ("after the middle of the fifth century").
48 Severin 2008, 105. On Severin's preference for typology over style, see Török 2003, 92–93.
49 Severin 2008, 79.
50 Severin 2008, 83–92.
51 Severin 2008, 105.
52 Severin 2008, 110, 106.
53 Strube 1983, 89–91, pl. 20b; she argues that the Stoudios block should be dated ca. 470–480.
54 Severin 2008, 107.
55 For an overview see Sodini, Barsanti, and Guiglia Guidobaldi 1998.
56 Pensabene 1993, nos. 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567; 438–440, pls. 65–66.
57 The type is described by Megaw: Wace, Megaw, and Skeat 1959, 65–66, pl. 27, 10 (not, as in their reference, pl. 27, 6); a photograph is in DOICFA, J. Harris neg. # 1. Pensabene 1993, 438, no. 560 ("probabilmente dalle gallerie" because of its size), pl. 65. I am very grateful to Patrizio Pensabene for allowing me to reproduce his photographs here.
58 Pensabene 1993, 438, no. 561, pl. 66 ("probabilmente dalle gallerie").
59 Pensabene 1993, 438, no. 559, pls. 65 (nos. 559, 560, 562), 66 (nos. 561, 563, 564); Severin 2008, 105; similarly, Krumeich 2003, 1:49, n. 326.
60 Severin 1981, 323–325, figs. 6–7; Severin 2008, 98, fig. 39.
61 Severin 2008, 105, n. 104.

### Chapter 8. Artistic Working Practice and the Second-Phase Ornamental Program

1 My use of the terms *decoration*, *ornament*, *motif*, and *pattern* follows the definitions established by Trilling 2003, 21–46.
2 Bolman 2010.
3 Roberts 1989; Thomas 2002; Bolman 2006a.
4 On the "mushrooming of churches" in early Byzantine Egypt, see Wipszycka 2007, 333–334.
5 Plaited rope pattern (at T.n.II.6, etc.): Saqqara, sixth century, now in Coptic Museum, Cairo, 8450, in Rutschowscaya and Bénazeth 2000, 119, entry 90; Bawit, ca. sixth to eighth century, in Clédat 1999, 85, fig. 79. Interlace pattern (on frieze at T.e.I.2–8): Saqqara, ca. sixth to seventh century, in Quibell 1907–1923, 4: pl. IX; Rutschowscaya 1992, 60. Square geometric dado panels (at T.n.I.6, etc.): Bawit, seventh to eighth century, now in the Louvre, Paris, E 26823, in Rutschowscaya 1992, 21 (color), 78 (b/w), entry 54.
6 Lucchesi-Palli 1990.
7 Vine scrolls (at T.n.I.8, etc.): Lateran Baptistery, Rome, fifth century, in Brandenburg 2004, 48–49, figs. 18–19. String of interlacing horns (at T.e.I.3, T.e.I.7): San Vitale, Ravenna, sixth century, in Maguire 1987, figs. 89, 92. Circle pattern (T.s.II.6, etc.): silk textile from Reliquary of Saint Isidore, Real Colegiata de San Isidoro, León, seventh to eighth century, in Bolman 2002d, 75, fig. 4.41.
8 Submitted to ARCE in January 2012.
9 De Cesaris and Sucato 2008, 21, fig. 25.
10 De Cesaris and Sucato 2010, 12, figs. 15–16.
11 Discovered under a detached piece of plaster adjacent to the niche pediment at T.e.II.7-right. The plaster fragment has since been replaced. De Cesaris and Sucato 2010, 12.
12 De Cesaris and Sucato 2010, 12–13, figs. 18–19.
13 Blue capitals: Poggi 2004, 35, 53; De Cesaris and Sucato 2007b, 18–19, fig. 24; De Cesaris and Sucato 2010, 11–12, fig. 14. Colored bases and shafts: De Cesaris and Sucato 2007a, 18, fig. 23; De Cesaris and Sucato 2010, 11.
14 Thomas 2000, 29–30; Blanc 1998b, 64. A similar arrangement seems to have been followed in Pompeii and Herculaneum: painters of images were hired separately from those who executed other parts of the decorative ensemble of a villa; Leach 2004, 238–241.
15 Edict VII.8 (*parietario*), VII.9 (*imaginario*); Frank 1940, 338 (English, Latin), 339 (Greek). The literal translation of *pictori parietario* is "wall painter." I follow Roger Ling in understanding the term to signify a painter of both backgrounds and ornament; Ling 1991, 213, 215. Nicole Blanc makes the same assumption; Blanc 1998b, 64.
16 Observed by Itskok Fikhman, cited in Wipszycka 1971, 218–219, but without reference to new categories of painters.
17 Mayer 1981, 312; De Cesaris, Sucato, and Ricchi (hereafter the conservators) also assume the encaustic painters used a brazier; personal communication.
18 Pliny, *Natural History* 35, 149; Pliny 1952, 370–371. Brush marks are still visible on some of the encaustic paintings; personal communication with the conservators.
19 Mayer 1981, 312.
20 Anthony Cutler has commented on our "utter ignorance" of the men "who (we assume) introduced the elaborate theology that is often perceived as underlying the layout and execution of schemes of decoration." He concludes, however, that "those mysterious creatures, rather desperately described by art historians as