

# A SMALL VOTIVE CAPITAL FROM KYTHERA<sup>1</sup>

(PLATES 26–8)

## FIND SPOT

IN the course of Anglo-American excavations on the island of Kythera in the 1960s, a spolium with a volute was found close to Avlemon in the area of Kastri. At first identified as the fragment of a capital, it was later interpreted as an altar akroterion. (See publications for photographs.<sup>2</sup>) Thanks to the generosity of the British School at Athens and the Ephorate of Attica I was able to study and draw the piece in the Museum of Kastri in 1997, and can confirm the earlier identification as a capital.

## DESCRIPTION

The fragment comprises a medium-grained white marble with grey-blue striations.<sup>3</sup> At the front a volute is almost entirely preserved and its scroll coils twice around a large eye approximately 15.6 cm in diameter.<sup>4</sup> The latter is decorated with an eight-petalled rosette, the core of which (4 cm in diameter) is punctuated by a central compass-made hole of c. 2 mm diameter. The profile of the volute scroll is not symmetrically convex but only slightly convex and slants from the outside towards the inside (PLATE 26, section A–A); perhaps a provincial trait? The transition to the resting surface is made by means of a spandrel, which is decorated with an omphalos-like disk engaging a narrow taenia 2 cm high that must run the whole width of the front.

Before the cushion and resting surface are described it needs to be emphasized that the rear surface is not preserved, as the final publication had suggested, but that there is a slightly diagonal broken or split surface at the back (PLATES 26–8). The maximum preserved depth is 17 cm, the minimum 11.5 cm. The missing marble slab cannot have been too thin, which alone makes a reconstruction as an altar akroterion unlikely.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The translation was made by Alexandra Villing, with the help of Neill Adams, both British Museum, London.

The following abbreviations are used:

McGowan, 'Origins' = E. P. McGowan, 'The origins of the Athenian Ionic Capital', *Hesp.* 66 (1997), 209–33 with pls. 55–60.

McGowan, 'Votive Columns' = E. P. McGowan, 'Votive Columns of the Aegean Islands and the Athenian Acropolis in the Archaic Period' (Diss. New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1993).

Ohnesorg, 'Kapitelle' = A. Ohnesorg, 'Parische Kapitelle', in J. Des Courtils and J.-Ch. Moretti (eds), *Les Grands Ateliers d'architecture dans le monde égéen du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C. Colloque Istanbul 1991* (Varia Anatolica, 3; Paris, 1993), 111–18.

Shoe Meritt, 'Capitals' = L. Shoe Meritt, 'Athenian Ionic capitals from the Athenian Agora', *Hesp.* 65 (1996), 121–74.

<sup>2</sup> G. L. Huxley, 'Kythera: Kastri—Palaiopolis, 1963', *A. Delt.* 19 (1964) B 1, 147–8. with pl. 151 (b); J. N. Coldstream and G. L. Huxley (eds), *Kythera: Excavations and Studies* (London, 1972), 37 with pl. 3 (d). The modern place-name is Avlemon. Following them, I. E. Petrocheilos, *Ta Kýθηρα από την προϊστορική εποχή ως τη ρωμαϊοκρατία* (Ioannina, 1984), 86 no. 1.

<sup>3</sup> The grain diameter is about 2–3 mm; the marble might be Parian.

<sup>4</sup> Comparable large eyes, albeit without decoration, are found on capitals with vertical volutes in Paros: Ohnesorg, 'Kapitelle', 115–16, with pls. 21. 7, 22. 3.

<sup>5</sup> The minimum original depth should have been c. 23 cm, which also would fit in with the ornament, see below, since the marble slab that is apparently broken off cannot have measured less than 6 cm at least.

The entire side of the cushion area is covered by a net of leaves and closed off towards the front with a band *c.* 2.4 cm wide. A row of leaves decorates the side of the spandrel, a sort of abacus.

The remains of the resting surface are smoother where they are parallel to the cushion and somewhat rougher, with traces of fine chisel marks, beyond it. At *c.* 2.5–6 cm distance from the row of leaves at the side is a groove 2 mm deep, the alignment of which meets exactly the centre of the spandrel disk. This is probably a trace of weathering, perhaps from an architectural member that lay on the resting surface, which, as will be demonstrated, is the top surface. The surface opposite the resting surface is partly roughly chiselled; towards the broken edge, a roughly circular row of fine chisel marks is visible, beyond which the marble is broken, but rises somewhat (this will be discussed below).

### RECONSTRUCTION AS AN ALTAR AKROTERION?

As mentioned above it is unlikely that this volute comes from an altar akroterion. First, at a height of 41 cm without a possible corner palmette, a thickness of at least 23 cm is too much for an altar akroterion, which as a rule—to judge by Milesian examples—would be a corner akroterion.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, there would be problems explaining the rounded appendage to the cushion: this cannot be the broken-off corner palmette, as is shown by the sketch FIG. 1 and by a comparison with Milesian and related altar volutes. Thirdly, the side of the cushion including the kyma shows that the ornament continued; although this is conceivable (and suggested in FIG. 1) for a cushion-altar, such as is occasionally found in Attica from Classical times onwards,<sup>7</sup> it does not solve the problem of the rounded appendage.

<sup>6</sup> Such altar akroteria seem to develop in the region of Miletus in the 6th c. BC; here the volutes appear at the rear corners of the altar table, sometimes also on the enclosing walls (*herkoi*): W. Koenigs, 'Bauglieder aus Milet, ii', *Ist. Mitt.* 30 (1980), 56–91, with earlier literature. The proportions of volute height to depth of these 'Milesian' altar volutes are between 2.9 : 1 and 1.9 : 1 (Koenigs 62–77, 80–2, volute akroteria nos. 1–5, 7, 9, and Monodendri), while the slimmest possible solution for the Kythera capital would already reach 1.8 : 1. For a determination of the volute depth one needs to consider that the ornament-axes of the leaf net and the kyma need to harmonize, something that is possible for both only with 5 or 10 axes respectively (see below); two leaf-net axes of 9.1 cm would result in 23 cm including the rims, but the kyma would have 5.5 axes, which could be merged by using bipartite leaves.

<sup>7</sup> So far as I know, the term 'cushion-altars' used to be applied only to examples from the Roman Imperial period, but it can also be transferred to the block altar with cover plate and a layer above, a type that apparently emerged in Late Archaic Attica. Its ends are rolled up into volutes at the back and front, albeit in another direction from that on the 'Milesian' corner akroteria, that is downwards, so

that the volutes are parallel with only the front and back sides. In this way they form cushions at the flanks of the altar. This altar type appears, for example, on the Late Archaic altar underneath the Nike bastion on the Athenian Acropolis, on a Classical (?) poros altar from the west slope of the Akropolis, and at the altar of Aphrodite Hegemone of 197/6 BC from the region north of the Hephaisteion: I. S. Mark, *The Sanctuary of Athena Nike in Athens* (*Hesp. Supp.* 26; Princeton, 1993), 54 fig. 11 and pl. 5; M. Crosby, *The Altar of the Twelve Gods in Athens* (*Hesp. Supp.* 8; Commemorative Studies in Honor of Th. L. Shear, 1949, repr. 1975), pl. 14; J. Travlos, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie des antiken Athen* (Tübingen, 1971), 79–81. It is also the commonest type of altar represented in minor arts, notably vase-painting, of the 6th and 5th cc.: E. Reisch, *RE* i (1894), 1672; D. Rupp, 'Blazing altars: the depiction of altars in Attic vase painting', in R. Étienne and M.-Th. Le Dinahet (eds), *L'Espace sacrificiel dans les civilisations méditerranéennes de l'antiquité: Actes du colloque tenu à la Maison de l'Orient, Lyon, 4–7 juin 1988* (Lyon, 1991), 57–63; F. Charpouthier, 'Leda devant l'œuf de Némésis', *BCH* 66/67 (1942/3), 1–21, esp. fig. 3; D. Aktsele, *Altäre in der archaischen und klassischen Kunst* (Internationale Archäologie, 28; Espelkamp, 1996), 8, 15–17, 88–107.

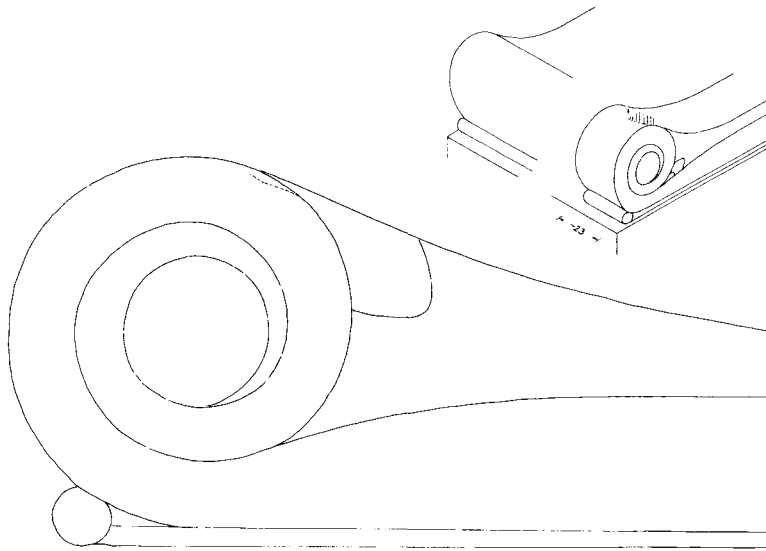


FIG. 1. Kythera, Museum inv. 16. Volute fragment from Palaiopolis, reconstructed as an altar volute, alternatively developed in one direction or as a cushion (scale  $c. 1 : 8$  and  $1 : 33$ ).

### RECONSTRUCTION AS A CAPITAL

If, however, one explains the roughly circular appendage as the remains of the echinus of a capital, broken off at this point, almost all the problems can be resolved. In the frontal view this border is shown as a broken line; for an echinus it is relatively low. The radius that can be determined from the circular arch is  $30 \pm 6.5$  cm (FIG. 2). If one draws the resulting circle of  $60 \pm 13$  cm diameter, its tangent (lengthways) comes to rest  $c. 3$  cm in front of the volute plane. The cushion depth would then be  $c. 54$  cm ( $60 - 2 \times 3$  cm). This can be further specified through the ornamental axes. These axes can be determined for both the leaf-net stretched over the cushion's cylinder and the leaf row on the abacus spandrel: they are  $c. 9.1$  cm for the cushion and  $c. 4.3$  cm for the abacus spandrel. Five cushion leaf axes correspond to about 10 abacus leaf axes, with the small difference evened out by the different width of edge strips or leaves, so that a cushion depth of  $c. 50.3$  cm emerges.<sup>8</sup> This is 3.7 cm less than the 54 cm that had been established on the basis of the approximate radius of the remains of the echinus, so that the diameter would need to be reduced by this measure, from about 60 cm to 56.3 cm. With an additional cushion leaf, an axis of 59.4 cm can be calculated, which would also mean a larger diameter of (graphically determined) 69 cm.<sup>9</sup> With this diameter the central axis is determined, and

<sup>8</sup>  $9.1 \times 5 + 2 \times 2.4$  cm edge strip = 50.3 cm;  $4.3 \times 10 + 2 \times 3.9$  cm edge leaves = 50.8 cm, a very similar value, which would reach exactly the same 50.3 cm if the axis of the abacus-kyma was reduced to 4.25 cm.

<sup>9</sup>  $9.1 \times 6 + 2 \times 2.4 = 59.4$  cm;  $4.3 \times 12 + 2 \times 3.9 = 59.4$  cm, thus the same value; this is 5.4 cm more than the cushion depth determined on the basis of the echinus remains.

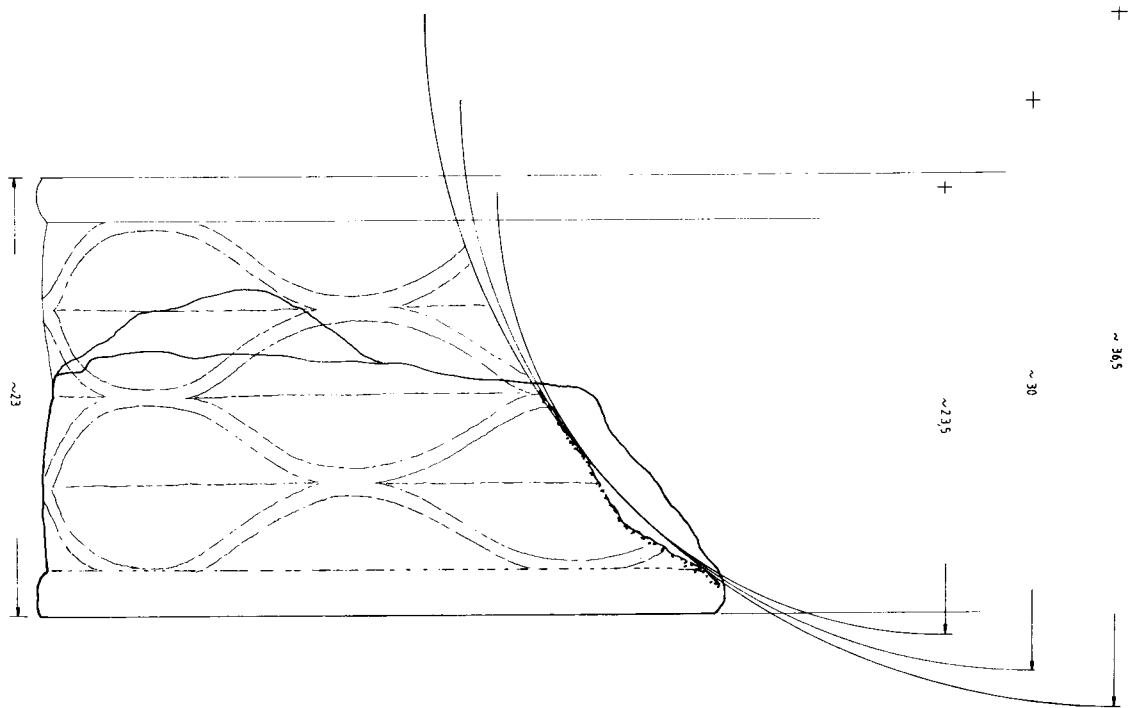


FIG. 2. Kythera, Museum inv. 16. Volute fragment. View from underside with suggested diameters for the lower element (scale  $c. 1 : 4$ ).

the frontal view of the volutes can be represented. For the first variant with a smaller diameter, the volutes come to rest relatively close to each other, so that sixteen echinus leaves are probably appropriate; for the second variant with a larger diameter, twenty leaves can be reconstructed. Consequently, three or four leaves lie between the volutes (FIG. 3).<sup>10</sup> The relatively low bottom line of the echinus, from which follows a great frontal height for the volute scroll and echinus, can be best imagined as bridged by an integral astragalos or another moulding, and perhaps also a *Zwischenstück* (a two-tiered echinus), unless one cares to consider the rarer solution of rising volutes.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> On early Ionic capitals the number of echinus leaves and their distribution is irregular; from about the middle of the 6th c. onwards the leaves are evenly distributed, and their number usually dividable by 2 or 4. Cf. Ohnesorg, 'Kapitelle'; ead. in N. Chr. Stampolidis (ed.), *Φώς Κυκλαδικόν· τιμητικός τόμος στη μνήμη του Νικολάου Ζαφειρόπουλου* (Athens, 1999), 221 with n. 4. When the cushion depth and the diameter are enlarged, as considered in the previous note, the central axis moves away from the volute by the same difference:  $(59.4 - 50.3) : 2 = 4.55$  cm. The distance between the volutes would thus increase from  $c. 30$  to  $c. 39$  cm and one has to reconstruct 20 echinus leaves (FIG. 3 b).

<sup>11</sup> On some Attic capitals the echinus terminates at the bottom with an astragalos or a low profiled layer: Shoe Meritt, 'Capitals', 129 ff., 157 ff. (catalogue) with pls. 41 ff., 46: capitals no. 15–16 and the capital from the 'Stoa of the Athenians' in Delphi (attribution by M. Korres, 'Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der attisch-ionischen Architektur', in E.-L. Schwandner (ed.), *Säule und Gebälk: Zu Struktur und Wandlungsprozeß griechisch-römischer Architektur. Bauforschungskolloquium in Berlin vom 16. bis 18. Juni 1994* (Diskussionen zur archäologischen Bauforschung, 6; Mainz, 1996), 110–12 with fig. 32). On the Attic *Zwischenstück*, see Shoe Meritt, 'Capitals', 131–6, as well as McGowan, 'Origins', 210–18, and most

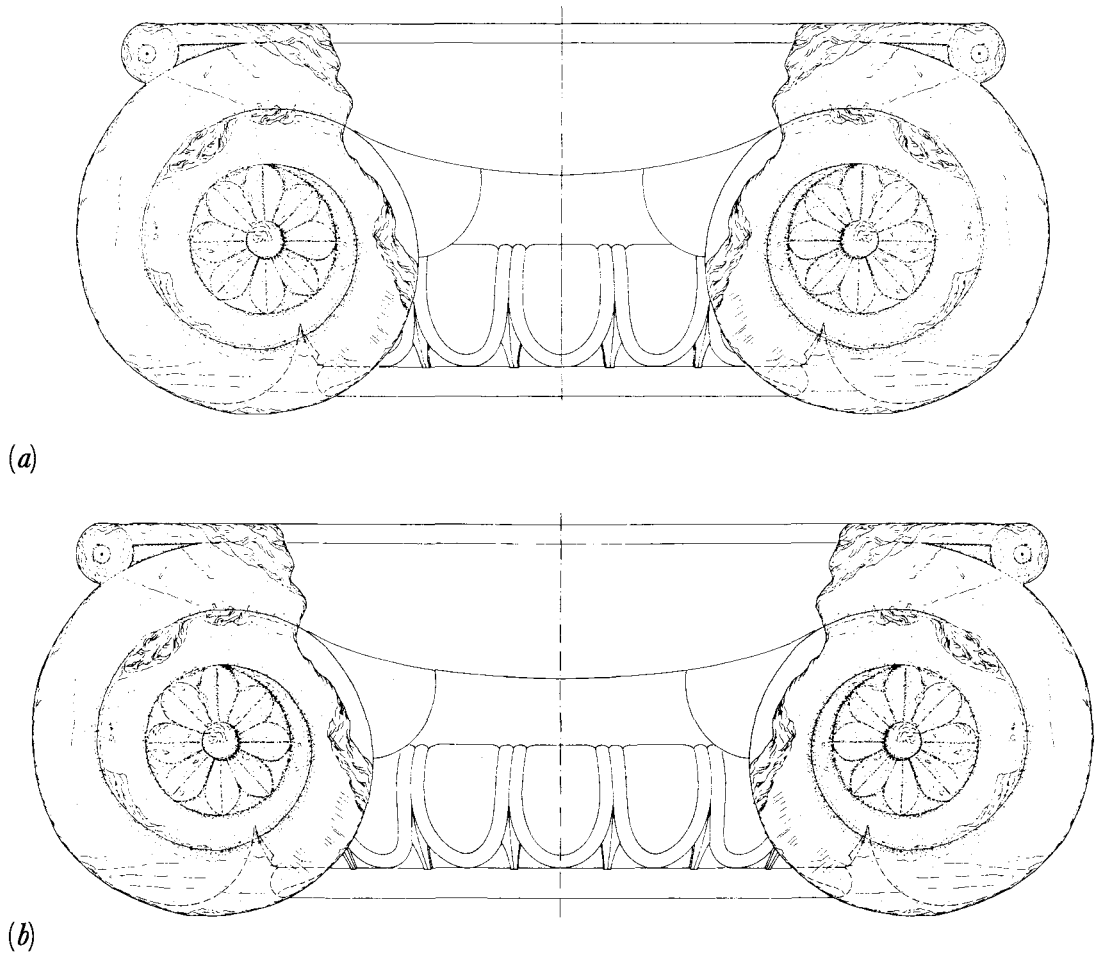


FIG. 3. Kythera, Museum inv. 16. Volute fragment. Reconstruction as a capital with (a) three or (b) four (3 + 2 half) leaf axes between the volutes (scale  $c. 1 : 8$ ).

The first reconstructed variant of the capital is steeper in proportion: the ratio of volute width of 36 cm to a central piece of  $c. 30$  cm is  $c. 6 : 5 : 6$ ; for the ratio of volute width to height (41 cm) no smooth proportions emerge, but the ratio of volute height to depth ( $c. 50.5$  cm) is approximately  $4 : 5$  (FIG. 3 a). Such compact capitals are found mostly in Attica, where the earliest examples were painted; but North Greek and Western Greek examples may be cited too.<sup>12</sup>

recently G. Gruben, 'Naxos und Delos', *JdI* 112 (1997), 365. On Sicilian and South Italian capitals the astragalos and sometimes also a part of the column shaft are integral, as is sometimes a kind of 'Zwischenstück': D. Théodorescu, *Chapiteaux ioniques de la Sicile méridionale* (Naples, 1974), passim; F. Krauss, *Die Tempel von Paestum*,

i. 1: *Der Athentempel* (Denkmäler antiker Architektur ix. 1; Berlin, 1959), 43–7 with figs. 27. 6, 45. On capitals with rising volutes, see Ohnesorg, 'Kapitelle', 115–17 with pls. 21–2, and McGowan, 'Votive Columns', 28–37.

<sup>12</sup> Attica: Shoe Meritt, 'Capitals', 121–74, esp. capitals 4, 8, 16A, B, 17A, B; McGowan 'Origins'; ead., 'Votive

For the variant with a slightly lower cushion the proportions become more 'normal': for example the ratio of the volutes and the width of the central piece would then be 12 : 13 : 12, so that this version is to be preferred (FIG. 3 *b*).

### INTERPRETATION AND DATING

The piece in Kythera would appear to be a votive capital, since it is richly and unusually decorated: the rosettes on the volute eye are reminiscent of a volute akroterion from Kyzikos, whose one volute eye also features a large eight-petalled rosette; the channel emerging from it is covered with further leaves, with a profile similar to that of our capital's rosette, even if the tips of the leaves are more pointed.<sup>13</sup> Rosettes on volute eyes are encountered also on some Archaic Samian grave stelai and on an Early Classical capital in Halikarnassos,<sup>14</sup> on several Attic and Northern Greek as well as a few Western Greek votive and architectural capitals<sup>15</sup> and, finally, also on an Archaic akroterion volute from Histria.<sup>16</sup> The unusual omphalos disk on the abacus spandrel appears to be unique; at least I have not been able to find any parallels.<sup>17</sup> The groove that runs parallel to the

Columns', 348–579 cat. no. 59–145, esp. cat. no. 64. 77 (with pls. 56–74; almost nothing can be made out on the photographs). Northern Greece: G. Bakalakis, 'Νεάπολις — Χριστούπολις — Καβάλα', *Arch. Eph.* 1936 (1937), 1–48 with figs. 10–27; R. Martin, 'Chapiteaux Ioniques de Thasos', *BCH* 96 (1972), 303–25. For Western Greece, see previous n. The variant with the slightly lower cushion and greater volute distance, considered in the previous nn., does not essentially change the proportions and is therefore not illustrated.

<sup>13</sup> W. Koenigs, 'Archaische Bauglieder aus Kyzikos', *Anat. Stud.* 31 (1981), 121–8 with fig. 1 and pl. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Samos: E. Buschor, 'Altsamische Grabstelen', *AM* 58 (1933), 22–46; id., 'Altsamische Grabstelen II', *AM* 74 (1959), 6–9. Halikarnassos: H. Plommer, 'Note on the Ionic Capital/Halicarnassos Peninsula', *BSA* 50 (1955), 95, 169–71 with fig. 15 and pl. 12 (*a–b*); R. Martin, 'Chapiteau ionique d'Halicarnasse', *REA* 61 (1959), 65–76; W. Alzinger, 'Von der Archaik zur Klassik', *ÖJh* 50 (1972/73), 183 with fig. 10; D. Théodorescu, *Le Chapiteau ionique grec* (Geneva, 1980), pl. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Athens Agora, two Late Archaic 'probably dedicatory' capitals as well as Late Archaic and, probably, archaizing Classical architectural capitals, including the so-called 'Inwood capital': Shoe Meritt, 'Capitals', 144–67, nos. 3, 18–19 (cat. no. 3, pp. 144–6 with fig. 8 and pl. 36, is described as having 12 leaves but in fact has 8, as is clearly shown by the illustration); ead., 'Some Ionian architectural fragments from the Athenian Agora', in *Studies in Athenian Architecture, Sculpture and Topography, Presented to Homer A. Thompson* (*Hesp. Supp.* 20; Princeton, 1982), 82–92 with fig. 2 and pl. 12. Thessaloniki, Kavala as well as Selinus and Syracuse: G. Bakalakis, 'Thermē-Thessaloniki', *AK* 1963, Supp. 1, 30–4; Théodorescu (n. 14), pls. 1–2 (who strangely speaks of 'flat or hollow' volute eyes at Lokroi, where rosettes are certain). Lokroi: F. Costabile, *L'architettura samia di occidente* (Conferenza e

mostra 6, 5, 1997, Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene, Det Norske Institutt i Athen, etc.: Soveria Mannelli, 1997), 30–1 with earlier literature, pls. 15–23. Metapontion: D. Mertens, 'Der ionische Tempel in Metapont', *Architectura*, 7 (1977), 152–62.

<sup>16</sup> M. Margineanu Cârstoiu, 'Archaische Architekturbruchstücke aus Histria', *Dacia*, 37 (1993), 39–58 with figs. 1–5; the rosette here, however, has a strange prismatic shape.

<sup>17</sup> Volute eyes in the shape of little omphalos bowls appear, e.g., on the Archaic anta capitals in Samos and Didyma, on a corner akroterion of an altar in Patmos, on a Late Archaic corner capital of the Propylon in Delos, on the console of the Siphnian Treasury in Delphi, on an Early Classical capital in Thessaloniki Museum, as well as on the well-known grave stele from the Troad in the Boston Museum. Samos: O. Ziegenaus, 'Die Tempelgruppe im Norden des Altarplatzes', *AM* 72 (1957), 87–151 with pl. 12 and Beil. 100–1. Didyma: H. Knackfuß, 'Die Baubeschreibung', in *Th. Wiegand, Didyma* (Berlin, 1941), i. 142–50 with pls. 206–9, photographs 639–44, and drawing 83 (*b*); F. Krauss, 'Über die ursprüngliche Gestalt des Ludovisischen Reliefs', *JdI* 63/64 (1948/9), 59–60; W. Hahland, 'Didyma im 5. Jh. v. Chr.', *JdI* 79 (1964), 142–240. Patmos: G. Gruben, 'Das archaische Didymaion', *JdI* 78 (1963), 136 n. 97; Koenigs (n. 6), 79–80. Delos: *ibid.*, 169 fig. 44, and id., 'Naxos und Delos', *JdI* 112 (1997), 348–73 with figs. 79–80. Delphi: G. Daux and E. Hansen, *Le Trésor de Siphnos* (Fouilles de Delphes, ii; Paris, 1987), 124–30 with fig. 90 and pl. 58. Thessaloniki, Museum, inv. 6736: apparently still unpublished. Boston: M. B. Comstock and C. C. Vermeule, *Sculpture in Stone: The Greek, Roman and Etruscan Collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boston, 1976), 15–16 with fig. 23 and earlier literature, including Hahland, *op. cit.*, 190 with fig. 48.



kyma of the abacus on the top surface is aligned with the centre of this disc it may derive from a plinth that once extended this far. This would have been attached with a tenon, which is not preserved.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, several Western Greek capitals exhibit a cushion decorated with a scale pattern,<sup>19</sup> just as here, as well as a distinct, often massive, abacus at the front. All Western Greek examples, however, are made of limestone, while our 'capital' is of marble, probably Parian. Nevertheless this does not necessarily point to a Cycladic master.

Given the seemingly eclectic use of unusual shapes and forms for which only very scattered parallels exist, dating is difficult; however, it is probable that the capital was made in the sixth century, probably in its latter part.<sup>20</sup> In the place of an altar volute, we have thus gained a Late Archaic Ionic capital from a votive column that presumably stood in the ancient city in the vicinity of Palaiopolis on Kythera.

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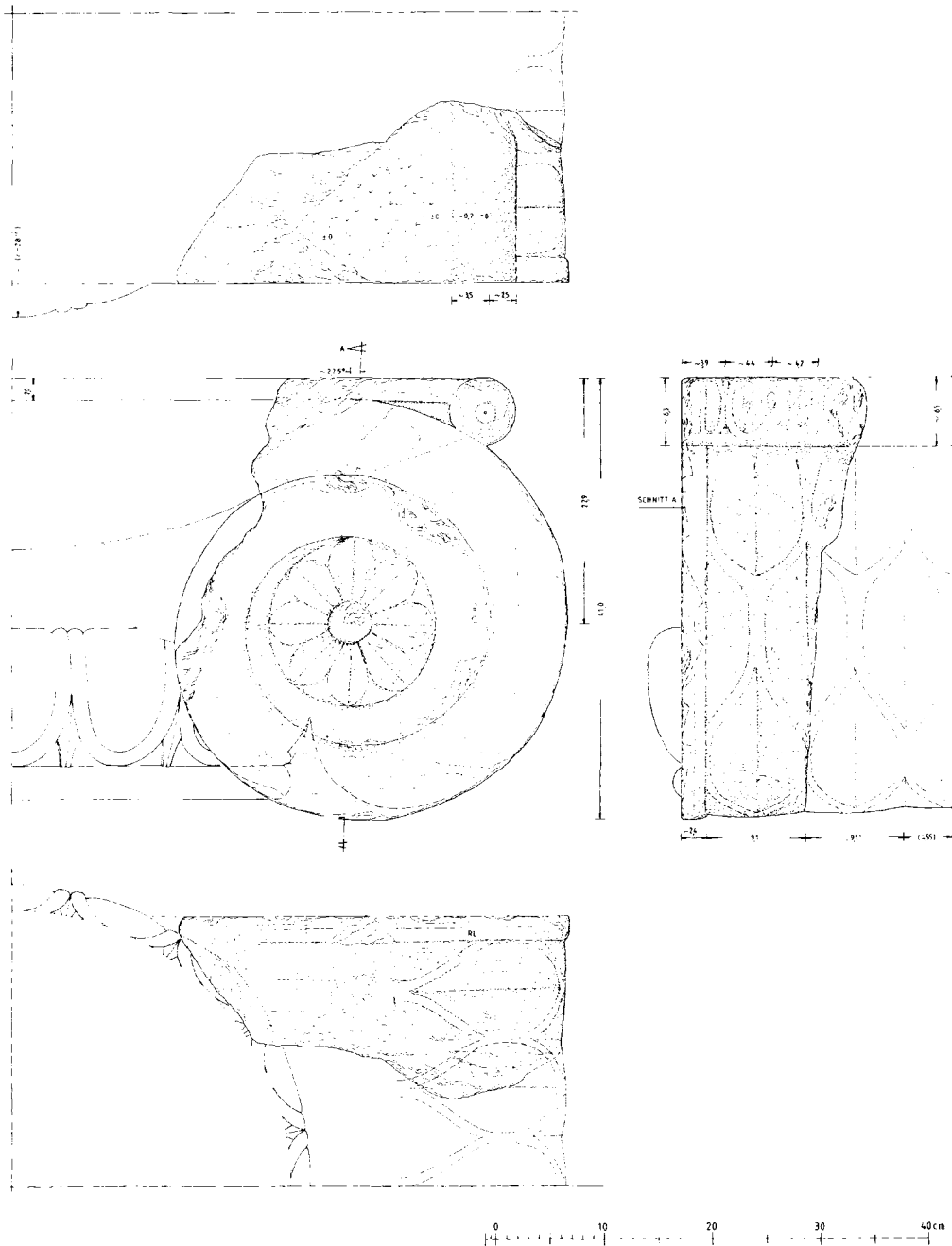
<sup>18</sup> The plinth of the (surviving) Late Archaic Delian votive sphinx, for example, features a large tenon and is set flush with the 'abacus': Ph. Bruneau and J. Ducat, *Guide de Délos*, 3rd edn. (Paris, 1983), 65 fig. 8, also McGowan, 'Votive Columns', 166–73, pl. 3.

<sup>19</sup> The capitals of the Early Classical Ionic temples of Metapontion and Lokris bear a scale pattern: Mertens (n. 15), 152–62 and id., 'Der ionische Tempel von Metapont. Ein Zwischenbericht', *RM* 86 (1979), 103–40, as well as id., in G. Pugliese Carratelli (ed.), *The Western Greeks* (Milan, 1996), 330; Costabile (n. 15), 30–1 with pls. 18–22. Isolated Classical capitals, including votive capitals, with scale pattern have been found in Selinus and Syracuse: Théodorescu (n. 11), 13–51, 32 with pls. 8–17; G. Cultrera, 'Sicilia IX. Siracusa. Scopere nel Giardino Spagna', *N. Sc. n.s.* 4 (1943), 79–82. In Asia

Minor, too, namely in Ephesos, fragments of foliated cushions (as well as double-torus-like architectural elements with scales) were found, although these appear to be Late Classical: St. Altekamp, *Zu griechischer Architekturornamentik im 6. und 5. Jh. v. Chr.* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991), 109–10 with earlier literature. Last but not least there are (Archaic) Attic capitals with scale decoration on the cushions or on the vertical surface above the cushion below the abacus: R. Borrmann, 'Stelen für Weihgeschenke auf der Akropolis zu Athen', *JdI* 3 (1888), 269–85, esp. 277 with fig. 18; G. Kawerau, 'Eine ionische Säule von der Akropolis zu Athen', *JdI* 22 (1907), 197–207 with fig. 1 and pl. 4. 2, also McGowan, 'Votive Columns', 75, 380–2 cat. no. 68, 386–9 cat. no. 70.

<sup>20</sup> Coldstream and Huxley (n. 2), 37: 'Late Archaic'.

PLATE 26



OHNESORG

A SMALL VOTIVE CAPITAL FROM KYTHERA

Kythera, Museum inv. 16. Volute fragment from Palaiopolis. Top, front, underneath and right side view.  
(scale c. 1 : 6.666)





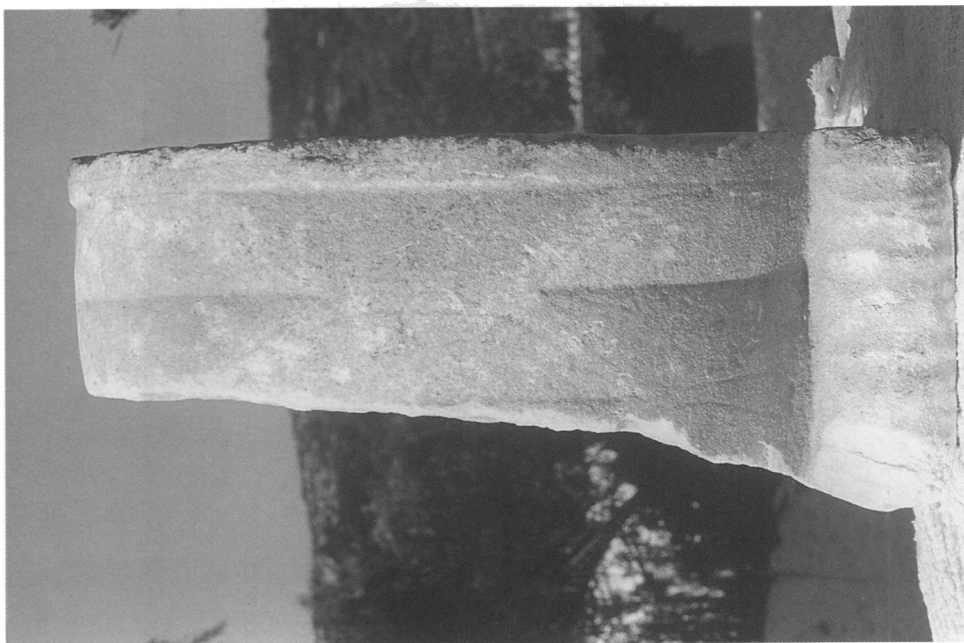
(a)



(b)

OHNESORG  
A SMALL VOTIVE CAPITAL FROM KYTHERA

Kythera, Museum inv. 16. Volute fragment from Palatiopolis. Front and underneath view. (scale c. 1 : 4).



(a)



(b)

OHNESORG  
A SMALL VOTIVE CAPITAL FROM KYTHERA

(a-b). Kythera, Museum inv. 16. Volute fragment from Palaiopolis. Side and back view.