

CHRISTINE STRUBE, *Baudekoration im Nordsyrischen Kalksteinmassiv*. – Band I: *Kapitell-, Tür- und Gesimsformen der Kirchen des 4. und 5. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* Ph. von Zabern, Mainz, 1993. – 288 S., Tafel 124. *Damaszener Forschungen*, 5.

There is certainly no place in Syria and in the whole Near East where there would be so many Early Christian monuments to see as in the “massif calcaire” of Jebel Barisha, Jebel Sim'an and Jebel Zawiye. This rocky and trackless region has remained until very recently practically uninhabited, preserving hundreds of nearly intact buildings made of local limestone and belonging, with rare exceptions, to the period from the fourth to sixth centuries A.D. There are but few monuments of the Roman period before Constantine, and practically none of the Islamic Age. While most visitors content themselves with seeing the huge basilica of St. Simeon, and few ever go as far as the magnificent churches at Qalb Loze and Turmanin, there is a whole countryside in the eastern parts of ancient Antiochene and Apamene, only superficially explored, staying in the background of those famous sites.

The lifetime work of Georges Tchalenko (1905–1987) to whom this book is dedicated, covered many of these *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord* (vol. I–III, 1953–1958), as well as their churches (*Eglises syriennes à bema*, vol. I–III, 1979–1990), and provided not only extensive documentation and restoration

sketches, but also a brilliant attempt at understanding the economic and social reasons behind the astonishing development of the region in Early Byzantine times. Only recently some of his conclusions have been checked and partly modified as a result of excavations in Dêhès and Serdjilla (cf. J.P. Sodini, G. Tate et al., *Dêhès. Campagnes 1976-1978. Recherches sur l'habitat rural*, Syria 57, 1980, 1, 1-304), conducted by the same Institut français d'archéologie du Proche-Orient which has sponsored the work of Tchalenko throughout the years.

Christine Strube collaborated with Tchalenko and thankfully acknowledged her debt to him. However, her work concerns a matter that did not yet receive the treatment it certainly deserves. We wait still for the major book on architectural decoration in Syria prepared by Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy (whose published work is concerned mostly with the Southern part of the country); however, this *Habilitationsschrift*, or rather the first part of it, brings a thorough and complete description and stylistical analysis of architectural decoration of North Syrian churches (in this volume – capitals, door frames and cornices of fourth-fifth centuries).

After studying in the first chapter the not-so-many remains of the I-III century decoration from Antiochene und Apamene, S. shows the major break between these more or less standard East Roman pieces and the capitals or mouldings used in churches from mid-fourth century on. The latter could not have been developed from the former. They were introduced in the region together with the basilica with aisles divided by arcades on columns, and represent, according to the author, the style of lost contemporary monuments of Antioch or other great Syrian cities. The churches of the limestone massif would thus preserve the Christian architecture of the Syrian metropolis, in a similar way as the Campanian painting or funerary monuments of Petra are reputed to reflect the glories of Alexandria. While the great sanctuary of St. Simeon had certainly nothing to concede to the churches of Antioch and is shown convincingly in this book to be the work of masons and stone-cutters from the capital, the builders of village churches imitated the same models in a rather uncertain way. The radical novelty of these buildings, as well as the unrewarding roughness of the local stone, resulted, at least in the beginning, in vernacular versions that make one think of South Syrian decoration of the first century, for instance in Gerasa or the Hawran, which was likewise a reflection of contemporary urban style of great Greek cities.

Michał Gawlikowski

Instytut Archeologii UW
Widok 10
PL-Warszawa