A Pseudo-Ionic Blocked-out Capital at Nea Paphos

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Abstract: The paper discusses recent studies on the capital of a column found in the western courtyard of the ‘Hellenistic House’ at Nea Paphos in 2008. The capital presents a very specific set of features which allows us to identify it with the architectural decoration in the Nabatean type known from Petra, Egypt and Cyprus. The comparative analysis allowed the author to recognize the capital from the ‘Hellenistic House’ as analogous to the so-called pseudo-Ionic ones, so far known only from Petra. However, this term, suggesting that capitals of that type originated from the Ionic order, seems to be inappropriate due to specific features of the pseudo-Ionic capitals. The paper discuses one of the three recognized so far types of the blocked-out capitals in the ‘Nabatean’ style from the site; the other will be presented in further papers.

Keywords: Nea Paphos, ‘Hellenistic House’, architectural decoration, blocked-out capital, ‘Nabatean’ capital

The subject of this article is the capital of a column found during archaeological works of Polish Archaeological Mission of the University of Warsaw (under the supervision of Dr Henryk Meyza) within the western courtyard (no. 13) of the ‘Hellenistic House’ in Nea Paphos (Figs 1–2).

During many years of excavations, while uncovering the city buildings, it was expected that traces of architectural decoration bearing Nabatean-type characteristics – known from other ancient Cypriot towns – would be found. The expectations resulted from a previous find in the area reported by G.R.H. Wright. He described it as an example of a Nabatean type capital found somewhere near the Apollo Hotel, perhaps connected with the underground sanctuary in Garrison’s Camp (Fig. 1).

The author’s description of the capital’s location is highly imprecise, the more so that the hotel no longer exists. Theoretically it was found to the south of the North Gate of the ancient
excavations of the western courtyard of the ‘Hellenistic House’ (Fig. 2), which had not been previously studied.\(^2\)

city walls, in the north-east part of the present Archaeological Park. The same capital has been, it seems, later seen close to the present site of Ayioi Anargyroi basilica and has most probably been covered up by thick soil layer, deposited to preserve underlying tombs and other antiquities. Personal communication of Dr Eustathios Raptou. Professor Demetrios Michaelides however refers also to other capitals in Nabatean style seen in the area of Nea Paphos: one in Agios Agapitikos (which is most probably the same as mentioned by G.R.H. Wright), and the second in the area around the North-West city gate – on the right-hand side of the ramp leading down from the city walls. The later was re-used and served for other purposes. Personal communication of Prof. Demetrios Michaelides. Author’s last verification (February, 2016) did not confirm the existence of these capitals in the places mentioned.

2. Map of the area under the concession of the Polish Archaeological Mission; major buildings: Villa of Theseus, House of Aion (grey lines) and ‘Hellenistic House’ (black lines), the western courtyard at the bottom of the drawing (processing by S. Medeksza, M. Słowińska, A. Brzozowska).
Excavations of the courtyard, whose modification is dated to the end of the first century AD, brought a series of interesting discoveries including architectural decorated elements of the type that were found for the first time on the site, and due to their close relation to capitals from Petra, may be qualified as elements of a blocked-out or Nabatean type of order.

THE BLOCKED-OUT CAPITAL FROM NEA PAPHOS

The capital was discovered in the north part of the western courtyard (Figs 3–4). Some remains of a tetrastyllos were uncovered, in the middle of which there was an impluvium—a small basin for water. Bases of columns supporting the ceiling remained in the corners of the basin. Out of the four columns, fragments of one, from the northwestern corner, have been preserved nearby. A capital and some fragments of a smooth shaft (two drums covered with a thin layer of plaster) were discovered on the north side of the basin. The diameter of the lower drum of the shaft fitted the base, which confirmed the original position of the column in the northwestern corner of the basin. On the basis of remaining fragments of the column, Henryk Meyza reconstructed the original height of the column—it measured almost 4m, probably consisted of three drums and was characterised by squat, heavy proportions (Fig. 5). Based on the hypothetical reconstruction, the north-western corner of the tetrastyllos was rebuilt. The shaft of the column was reconstructed on the preserved base; a missing drum was added and a capital was placed on the top. Unfortunately, the capital was rotated by 45° in relation to its proper position—the line connecting the capital corners should not be the same as the axes of the tetrastyllos, but 45° to them (Fig. 5).

The complete dimensions of the capital are: 78 x 80 x 35.5cm (Fig. 6). A broad cylinder, of radius of c. three-quarters of the height (H 35.5; r 25.5cm), forms the core of the capital. Four distinct corners protrude from the upper part of the core of the capital on its two diagonals. The corners have a shape of longitudinal cuboids with the ratio of width to height 0.3 to 1 (7.5 x 26cm). They broaden delicately in a wedge form when joining the capital’s core. In their upper part, a slab—abacus—is clearly noticeable, being broadened in relation to the core and corners (the height of 5cm). When the courtyard was destroyed, probably during one of the earthquakes that afflicted Nea Paphos in antiquity, the columns crashed, the impetus broke the capital into two parts and one of the corners fell out from the capital.

The core of the capital is surrounded by a ring with a quarter-circle cross-section, and turned upwards with its flat surface with a very small drop (W c. 8.5cm; H 10cm). The ring runs more or less to the middle part of the corners and rests on them. Under the ring, there is another subtle cylinder (2.5 x 3cm) close to the core. Then above the ring, between convergent corners, there is a geometrical projection having the shape of a cuboid wedge

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3 Information obtained from Dr Henryk Meyza.
3. The western part of the ‘Hellenistic House’ (processing by S. Medeksza, M. Słowińska, A. Brzozowska).
that narrows towards the core of the capital (W 17cm; H 9.5cm; D 9cm). It is most probably the equivalent of the Corinthian *fleuron*.

On the upper surface of the capital, there are mason’s marks showing how it was designed (Fig. 6b). The longest lines run along the main axes of the capital and its diagonals. Parallel to the main axes, there are four mason’s marks that form a square with corners where its lines cross the diagonals of the capital and are drawn outside the square – they show the axes of the corners. The main axes, which were extended outside the square, mark the axes of cuboid projections between the corners. The width of the outline of the square on the upper surface of the capital is almost equal to the diameter of the capital core at its bottom part (52cm).
6. Pseudo-Ionic blocked-out capital from Nea Paphos: a. the views prepared on the basis of the 3D model; b. the inventory drawings; c. the division of the capital height into seven equal parts (a. processing by A. Kubicka; b. drawing: P. Srokowski; c. drawing: A. Brzozowska).
On examining the proportions of the capital, it may be observed that its height is divided into 7 equal parts: the *abacus* measures $\frac{1}{7}$ of the capital’s height, the corners – $\frac{5}{7}$, a geometrical projection (*fleuron*) $\frac{2}{7}$, and the ring’s height constitutes $\frac{2}{7}$ of the capital’s height (Fig. 6c).

COMPARATIVE MATERIAL FROM NEA PAPHOS

Three other unclassified corners of capitals from Nea Paphos resemble the one discussed above. After the discovery in 2008 of the whole capital, it was possible to identify two corners as coming most probably from similar capitals, and therefore from the western courtyard of the ‘Hellenistic House’ (Fig. 7a).

The third one of those corners (with no archaeological context) differs considerably from the rest – being a double corner (Fig. 7b). The block is of a very severe, geometrical form composed of two joining corners. They take the form of cuboids with a flat, slightly incised face. The corners (27 x 33 x 30cm) broaden wedge-like towards the unpreserved core of the capital. The corner to the left is larger and projects a little out in front of the face of the right one. There is also a slight difference in the inclination of both these corners – being greater in the one to the right side. Both corners have an *abacus* marked at the top and remains of a ring which probably surrounded the capital’s core. Despite that, it has practically remained only in the form of a slight impression on side faces of the corners, one can observe a clear resemblance to the form of the ring from the capital from the western courtyard. Barely visible traces of vertical mason’s marks can be noticed on the faces of the corners. On their surface there are remains of a great mass of mortar with hardly visible impressions of a slightly undulated surface – probably of an architrave that once rested on the capital. This fragment belongs to the most rough-hewn architectural details found in Nea Paphos, but it is also one of the most destroyed. That is why its present form may differ considerably from the original.

Fragments that are described above, as well as the majority of architectural elements from the area of Polish excavations in Nea Paphos, were carved out of a local stone –
calcarenite. It is calcareous conglomerate (2.6g/cm³, with grains of c. 2–0.1mm) the structure of which resembles sandstone. It easily erodes and is characterised by weak durability and great absorbency; all those features had unquestionably adverse influence on the condition of blocks.

The capital from the western courtyard and its related corners have on their surface more or less dilapidated remains of a very thin layer of whitewash or fine-grained plaster. Undoubtedly, there were some reasons connected with the character of calcarenite, behind the use of this substance for covering capitals. Probably it was used to change the texture from rough into smooth enabling to even the surface, and/or to emphasize the carvings in places where the stone would not allow craftsmen to reach a desired shape. The outer layer of such plaster protected also the surface of stone by cutting off the access of water or giving it insulation properties. Whitewash changed also the colour of the capitals from a natural beige-brownish into white, which could be subsequently easily painted.

COMPARATIVE MATERIAL FROM NABATEA, EGYPT AND CYPRUS

Nabatean capitals

The term Nabatean capitals refers to characteristic capitals first identified in the ancient town of Petra (Fig. 8). The appearance and development of Nabatean capitals are dated to the period from the first century BC to the middle of the first century AD.

Several types and variants have been distinguished among them; most commonly attested are Nabatean capitals type 1, 2, and 3 which are derived from Corinthian capitals and Alexandrian type floral capitals. They are all characterised by simplification of ornamental elements to blocked out forms, e.g. transformation of acanthus leaves into rings surrounding the capital core, or reduction and joining of volutes and abacus into solid corners that protrude far beyond the capital core (Fig. 9).

Pseudo-Ionic capitals from Petra

Another type of a simplified capital known from Petra is the so-called pseudo-Ionic capital, which is supposed to derive its block, simplified form from an Ionic capital (Fig. 9). The analogy between the pseudo-Ionic capital and the capital from the western courtyard of the ‘Hellenistic House’ is of paramount importance for further analysis. That is why its

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5 There are fragments of architectural detail made of other types of stone, e.g. granite or marble that were imported to Paphos. They belong to the classical orders from later buildings, most of them to the Villa of Theseus.

6 Information obtained from a geologist, Michalina Dzwoniarek-Konieczna.

7 There is no evidence of polychrome decoration on the surface of architectural details, but it may be the result of bad condition of the fragments. Painted decoration was found on the walls of the ‘Hellenistic House’ in east portico and adjacent rooms as well as on a shaft of a big column with painted fluting in the Early Roman House.


detailed description seems to be necessary. The capital is massive with a strongly marked round core, from which four distinct corners project on the lines of two capital diagonals. The width of the capital is distinctly greater than its height, which makes it rather a squat form. The corners have the shape of vertically raised quarter-cylinders that are cuboids at the top, and the relation of the height to the width is about 1 to 1/3. In its middle part, the core is surrounded by a ring, the cross-section of which is a quarter-circle, and the height equals 1/3 of the capital. It is turned up with its flat surface.

Examples of pseudo-Ionic capitals in Petra may be found, among other places, on the Deir\(^{11}\) and on the Palace Tomb\(^{12}\) (Fig. 10). Outside Petra, this type of capitals or similar ones have not been found so far on any other archaeological site. The only exception is the capital from the ‘Hellenistic House’.

Judith McKenzie derives the genesis of a pseudo-Ionic capital from a classical Ionic capital and from a Ionic capital with four corner volutes (Fig. 9).\(^{13}\) She states that several capitals found near Colonnaded Street\(^{14}\) were a transitional form. Their volutes were left

\(^{11}\) McKenzie 1990: 160.
\(^{13}\) McKenzie 2001: 100–102.
\(^{14}\) McKenzie 1990: 167, 184. Finding the so-called pseudo-Ionic capitals in the neighbourhood of the Colonnaded Street does not prove its affiliation to the place – the differences of the diameters and shafts of the columns may suggest that the capitals could have originally belonged to a different building (McKenzie 1990: 132).
in the form of corners – still in a block form but in which conical spiral started to be cut out. According to her, capitals from the Deir and the Palace Tomb, were the next step in the evolution. Their form became even more simplified and was left as the intended one (Fig. 10).15

Nabatean capitals of all types are usually characterised as blocked out, having a reduced or abstract shape. Some researchers have even wrongly considered them to be unfinished, although it has been irrefutably proved that the simplification was an intentional and conscious decision of designing and not an accidental effect. It may be also confirmed by the range of this phenomenon – blocked out capitals were also found outside Petra and Nabatea, in Egypt and Cyprus.

**ANALOGIES FROM EGYPT**

Examples of capitals of the Nabatean type may be found in whole Egypt, e.g. in the temple of Augustus on the Island of Philae, in the Faiyum, or at Mons Porphyrites as well as in the most important city of Greco-Roman Egypt, namely Alexandria. In that metropolis however, the use of Corinthian capitals in the local Alexandrian type was evidently predominant in the Ptolemaic period.18

In Egypt the best, most cohesive and homogenous collection of capitals of reduced form may be found at Marina el-Alamein (Figs 8, 11).19 Interesting examples of architectural

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19 Czerner 2009: 2.
decorative elements were discovered there in the area of a necropolis outside the city, as well as in the city itself. Those from the necropolis, from pillar tombs (first century BC – first century AD), show a great resemblance to the examples from Petra, being variants of the type 2 Nabatean capital. Crowning and capitals of pilasters decorating corners of pillars took a similar form. The architectural elements from the city (first–third century AD) are distinguished by such simplifications that have not been found anywhere else, and therefore researchers classified them as the type of architectural detail from Marina el-Alamein. They appear in three variations: 1. the pseudo-Corinthian order, 2. the pseudo-Ionic order, and 3. the pseudo-Doric order from Marina. Among these, pseudo-Corinthian capitals from Marina clearly stand out. They occur in several variants, e.g. crowning the ‘engaged’ columns with pilasters characterised by a very rich form. Simplified form of capitals from Marina relates them to decorations of the Nabatean type, but their stylization is different from those found at Petra and in Nabatea. Especially capitals from city buildings, although characterised by a strongly reduced form, preserved a very clear resemblance to classical orders, far greater than Nabatean capitals. The initial form was distinctly marked with characteristic details only slightly reduced.

THE ORIGIN OF NABATEAN CAPITALS AND ANALOGIES FROM CYPRUS

The name ‘Nabatean capitals’ implies that the original place of their creation, was Nabatea. This assumption is nowadays partially negated by some scholars.20 The main controversy over the origin of this architectural order relates to the possible cultural and economic primacy of Alexandria over Petra. At present, the majority of specialists derive the origin of Nabatean forms from Ptolemaic Egypt, whose unquestionable centre was Alexandria. In those times there were no builders and artisans in Nabatea who could have constructed Petra. Therefore, at least at the beginning specialists were probably brought to the region from faraway places to create the city and to teach local craftsmen masonry. Similarity

of the architectural detail from Petra and Alexandria indicates from where those foreign builders could have been brought.

The presence of simplified forms of ‘Nabataean’ architectural elements, dated between the first century BC and first century AD, outside Nabatea – in Egypt – may confirm the thesis of the Alexandrian origin of this architectural detail. It is postulated by some scholars who connect this phenomenon with supremacy of the Ptolemies over the region. In the context of studies of the capital from the ‘Hellenistic House’, it becomes important inasmuch as Nea Paphos was also under Ptolemaic rule in the period discussed. It could be a crucial clue concerning the origin of Nabatean forms and their spreading over the eastern part of the Mediterranean basin, because the third territory (after Nabatea and Egypt) where examples of Nabatean orders were found is Cyprus (Figs 8, 12).

During excavations carried out in ancient Cypriot cities, on the south coast of the island, several capitals and their fragments were discovered, which bear features with the characteristic simplifications described above. In Salamis, on the south-eastern coast, the Nabatean order was used in the gymnasium. In a quarry of Xylophagou near Larnaca, a capital was found which, although unfinished, yet shows a clear resemblance to Nabatean capitals.

Capitals of supports found in the middle and western part of the south coast of the Island, in the temples of Amathous and Kourion and at Nea Paphos also acquired decoration of the same type. It is worth mentioning that stylization of all Cypriot Nabatean capitals was characterised by certain original features, not attested in other regions, either in Nabatea or in Egypt. However, all edifices found so far on Cyprus with Nabatean architectural detail were built in the orders related to the Nabatean capitals type 1. The capital from the ‘Hellenistic House’ is the exception to this rule. It is so far the only example of an architectural order outside Nabatea that shows evident similarity to the so-called pseudo-Ionic capitals. The similarity is really striking with only two small differences. The first is the rounding of the lower parts of the corners in the capitals from Petra which in Nea Paphos are cuboid. The second one concerns the ratio of the height of the corners to the height of the whole capitals. In case of the capital from Nea Paphos, the corners measure about 5/7 of the capital height whereas in the capitals from Petra they have the full height of the capital. Unfortunately, too schematic drafts and diagrams of this capital in Judith McKenzie’s publication on Petra do not allow us to complete more detailed analyses and comparisons.

THE ORIGIN OF THE SO-CALLED PSEUDO-IONIC CAPITALS

There are at least two theories of the origin of the so-called pseudo-Ionic capitals. Andreas Schmidt-Colinet considered them to descend from the Doric order – Doric capitals with ‘horns’. However, it seems that the dominant form of the corners does not allow us to treat them only as additional elements, but as an integral and specific feature of these capitals. The capitals’ core also does not share many common features with the form of the Doric capital.

Judith McKenzie classified capitals from the Deir and the Palace Tomb as derivatives of the classical Ionic order and Ionic capitals with four corner volutes. The following features of these capitals were supposed to prove the thesis: the ratio of the capital’s height to its width (the capital being clearly wider than higher), block form, corners’ placing on two diagonals of the capital, which was supposed to correspond to the localisation of four volutes of the Ionic capital, and a ring surrounding the capital’s core, considered to be a reminiscence of the *echinus*.

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29 McKenzie 1990: 117. What is more, the scheme presented in diagram 14 (McKenzie 1990: 190) varies considerably in shape and proportions from the capitals shown in the photographs of the Deir and the Palace Tomb.
30 Schmidt-Colinet 1983.
31 McKenzie 1990: 117.
One has to remember, however, several fundamental differences between a hypothetical original – a classical Ionic capital – and its probable transformation – the Nabatean pseudo-Ionic capital. The first one concerns entirely different shape of corners (longitudinal, symmetrical cuboids in case of the Nabatean capital) that, in a potential Ionic original, were volutes characterised by an irregular, sculptural form. Secondly, the so-called pseudo-Ionic capitals lack the basic attribute of the Ionic capital – namely the differentiation of the front and back sides and the lateral ones. According to McKenzie the lack of this differentiation is derived from the Ionic capitals with four corner volutes, which were also found in Petra. However, it should be remembered that such capitals were relatively rare, surely far more infrequent than the classical Ionic ones. In our opinion, these features make the McKenzie’s hypothesis difficult to accept.

As it has already been mentioned, on the basis of decorations from Petra, Judith McKenzie presents how the capitals were transformed: from classical Ionic capitals into Nabatean pseudo-Ionic ones we know from the Deir and the Palace tomb. An intermediate phase of simplification or reduction would include afore mentioned examples of capitals from the Colonnaded Street. Unfortunately, the photographs from Judith McKenzie’s publication illustrate only their front side, but even such a presentation, in our opinion, does not prove that there is a connection between their form and capitals defined as pseudo-Ionic.

One should also pay attention to the fact that examples of simplified capitals derived from the Ionic order are known from Egypt, e.g. Mons Porphyrites and Marina el-Alamein, as well as from Israel, e.g. Masada. Their form maintained a clear connection with the classical Ionic capital by preserving differentiation of capital sides (Figs 11b, 13f-g). Schematized Ionic capitals from Hellenistic period were also found in Cyprus. Their volutes are much simpler, nevertheless the prototype is easily recognizable (Fig. 13e).

A characteristic element of the pseudo-Ionic capitals from Petra as well as the pseudo-Ionic blocked-out capital from Nea Paphos is a geometrical projection, which most probably constitutes a simplified form of a flower – a *fleuron* decorating the middle part of the abacus. It does not appear in any Ionic capitals; neither in classical version, nor in the version with four volutes (Fig. 9), nor in the blocked-out version known from Kition, Masada or Marina el-Alamein (Figs 11b, 13e-g). It is, however, a feature of the Corinthian and floral capitals, as well as zoomorphic capitals known from Petra (Fig. 9). In those latter, the corner volutes were replaced by animal heads, e.g. elephants or goats. Judith McKenzie defines them as the Ionic capitals with animals protomes, whereas Joseph Patrich as zoomorphic Ionic capitals. It seems worth considering whether these capitals might

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32 McKenzie 1990: Pl. 49.
33 Czerner 2009: 7, 24, 68, Fig. 39.
34 Czerner 2009: 69, Fig. 42.
have been a hybrid form joining classical features: Corinthian (*fleuron*), Ionic (egg-and-tongue pattern) together with oriental – eastern features in the form of a corner volutes converted into animal heads.

Perhaps the so-called pseudo-Ionic capitals might be related to such zoomorphic capitals but with far more complicated genesis. The blocked-out form of the former and the delicate decoration (animal heads, *fleuron*, etc.) of the latter are characterised by similar
proportions and a comparable time of origin (first century AD). However, the assessment of their mutual dependence might be difficult due to the lack of the univocal and final records. In the light of the discussed data, it would be more accurate, in our opinion, to define pseudo-Ionic capitals as an independent order. Since there is no enough comparative material, it is difficult to decide about their origin which perhaps should be sought somewhere else. However, since the term pseudo-Ionic capitals is widely accepted, there is no point in changing the name, but one should keep in mind the doubts enumerated above.

PSEUDO-IONIC BLOCKED-OUT CAPITAL FROM NEA PAPHOS

Since the term ‘Nabatean’ in relation to capitals of simplified form may be rather controversial, the name ‘blocked-out’ seems more adequate. It points to the features characteristic of the capital form and not to the geographical region. The latter may be misleading, especially as far as capitals from outside Nabatea are concerned. Therefore, in the context of what has been said above, it may be proper to name the capital from the western courtyard of the ‘Hellenistic House’ pseudo-Ionic blocked-out capital from Nea Paphos. The above-mentioned double corner, without context (Fig. 7b) but showing certain similarity to the pseudo-Ionic blocked-out capital from Nea Paphos, has no direct analogies in any material, either in Paphos or other ancient cities of Cyprus, Egypt or Nabatea. It has, nevertheless, many characteristics that enable one to associate its form with different Nabatean capitals in general. The remains of the ring surrounding the core of the capital seem to be related to the pseudo-Ionic blocked-out capital from Nea Paphos and the so-called pseudo-Ionic capitals from Petra (Fig. 14a-b). The incised face of the corner makes it similar to the Nabatean capitals type 1, 2, and 3, crownings of pillar tombs from Marina el-Alamein or the Nea Paphos blocked-out capital (Fig. 14c-g). Finally, the double form of the discussed capital associates it with engaged columns, for example with many Nabatean capitals type 2a and 2b from the tombs in Petra or with a pseudo-Corinthian capital from Marina from the aedicula. Its architectural frame was formed by engaged columns with pilasters having such double corners (Fig. 14h).

A remnant of the ring characteristic of the pseudo-Ionic blocked-out capital from Nea Paphos would entitle us to qualify it as belonging to the group of the pseudo-Ionic blocked-out capital from Nea Paphos type ‘a’. The category ‘a’ that we propose here would indicate the variants of the basic form, characterised by corner’s incised face. On the other hand, the fact of redoubling the corner of the capital suggests that this is a relic of a complex support, perhaps similar to those from Marina. Reconstruction, based on these two assumptions, is highly hypothetical because of the lack of any clues concerning the form of the capital’s core and of the whole support (Fig. 14i). Neither the lack of archaeological context nor a specific form of this block allow us to establish its original location, even approximately.

41 E.g. McKenzie 1990: Pls 2d, 3a, b, 4d, 5c, d, 9a, b.
SUMMARY

The capital from the western courtyard of the ‘Hellenistic House’ and its related three corners are first examples of architectural details of Nabatean origin discovered in Nea Paphos, within the area excavated by the Polish Archaeological Mission. In general,
capitals of the Nabatean type – of reduced, block or simplified abstract form – have been encountered in the territories dependent on or related in some way to the Ptolemaic Egypt, and first of all Alexandria. This situation is reflected by the time of erecting buildings with decoration ‘in Nabatean type’, the majority of which were built between the first century BC and the first century AD, irrespective of the place – would that be Egypt, Nabatea or Cyprus. It corresponds well to the political situation of Nea Paphos, which originally was an important Ptolemaic and Roman harbour on the Mediterranean Sea. It is also confirmed by dating of the western courtyard of the ‘Hellenistic House’ (before the end of the first century AD) and by the used forms of architectural decoration in the Nabatean style.

The pseudo-Ionic blocked-out capital from Nea Paphos is clearly analogous to the so called pseudo-Ionic capitals, however their forms are not identical. The simultaneity and independence of their appearance in Petra, Egypt and Cyprus may be a manifestation of some general tendency to simplify architectural detail. It could, however, manifest itself in different, specific, regional solutions.

It may be observed that both in Petra and in Paphos, and even in Marina el-Alamein, the form of architectural details depended, to a certain degree, on the building material. In each of those places, local stone of rather inferior quality was used. Perhaps difficulties in achieving planned precision of architectural detail (such as ornamental openings, delicate adornments, filigree decorations, e.g. acanthus leaves, volutes, etc.) contributed, at least initially and indirectly, to the simplification and geometrising of capitals’ forms that could have been easier to be cut out in such coarse material. With the passage of time, these reduced shapes became approved and popular, and changed into more sublime, abstract style of decoration.

An important aspect of studies on Nabatean capitals concerns connection of their form with a chiaroscuro effect. Light and shade uncover all imperfections of spatial forms, especially in the case of geometrical solids, in which – contrary to those with numerous small ornaments or openings – nothing distracts the observer’s eye and diverts his attention from the shape. In this context, the pseudo-Ionic blocked-out capital from Nea Paphos seem to speak for themselves in their geometrized form, the nuances of which light and shade unveil beautifully.

Summing up, it is worth underlining that the form of ‘Nabatean’ capitals, irrespective of the place they appear (Nabatea, Egypt or Cyprus), is a fully intentional artistic effect. The process of cutting capitals representing classical architectural orders, consisting in gradual transformation of a block form into more realistic ones, could have been stopped on every stage in order to achieve an interesting shape. The appreciation of proportions of transitional forms led ancient craftsmen to resign consciously from a classical shape and to start advanced stylization based on geometry and reduction of the form, which resulted

43 McKenzie 1990: 117.
in departure from realism in favour of abstraction. The pseudo-Ionic blocked-out capital from Nea Paphos is a perfect example of this phenomenon.

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