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Álvaro Castillo Arteche, *Evolution, Use and Function of the Composite Order: The Case of* Colonia Patricia *(Córdoba, Spain)*

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Evolution, Use and Function of the Composite Order: The Case of *Colonia Patricia* (Córdoba, Spain)

Álvaro Castillo Arteche[1]

Key words: Architectural decoration, Roman capitals, Hispania, Monumental architecture, Marble architecture.

Parole chiave: Decorazione architettonica, Capitelli romani, Hispania, Edilizia monumentale, Architettura in marmo.

Abstract

This article examines the evolution, use, and function of the Roman composite order in Colonia Patricia (modern-day Córdoba, Spain). Although the composite capital is scarcely represented across the Iberian Peninsula, Córdoba stands out for the remarkable quantity, morphological variety, and broad chronological span of its preserved architectural elements. Through the compilation and detailed stylistic analysis of 31 marble capitals and fragments, many of them previously unpublished, this study identifies three distinct homogeneous sets and tracks the development of the order from the early 1st c. to the 4th c. AD. The research highlights how the composite order was predominantly used in porticoed squares and public spaces linked to imperial power, most notably proposing its application in the commercial forum near the Bridge Gate during the Flavian period. Ultimately, this comprehensive review redefines the ornamental paradigms of Cordoban architecture, challenging the traditional assumption that the Corinthian order was exclusively dominant. It also mirrors the broader urban trajectory of the provincial capital: a monumental building boom during the 1st c. AD, followed by a reduction in monumental scale and production from the Hadrianic era onward.

Questo articolo esamina l'evoluzione, l'uso e la funzione dell'ordine composito romano a Colonia Patricia (l'odierna Cordova, Spagna). Sebbene il capitello composito sia scarsamente rappresentato in tutta la Penisola Iberica, Cordova si distingue per la notevole quantità, la varietà morfologica e l'ampio arco cronologico dei suoi elementi architettonici conservati. Attraverso la raccolta e l'analisi stilistica dettagliata di 31 capitelli e frammenti marmorei, molti dei quali finora inediti, questo studio identifica tre distinti gruppi omogenei e traccia lo sviluppo di tale stile architettonico dagli inizi del I sec. fino al IV sec. d.C. La ricerca evidenzia come questi elementi fossero utilizzati prevalentemente in piazze porticate e spazi pubblici legati al potere imperiale, in particolare proponendone l'applicazione nel foro commerciale vicino alla Porta del Ponte durante il periodo flavio. In definitiva, questa revisione completa ridefinisce i paradigmi ornamentali dell'architettura locale, mettendo in discussione l'ipotesi tradizionale secondo cui lo stile corinzio fosse esclusivamente dominante. Essa riflette inoltre la più ampia traiettoria urbana della capitale provinciale: un boom edilizio monumentale durante il I sec. d.C., seguito da una riduzione della scala monumentale e della produzione dall'epoca adrianea in poi.

1. Introduction

The composite order, recognized as early as the 16th century by Sebastiano Serlio as an eminently Roman order in its own right, experienced significant development and diffusion throughout all the provinces of the empire. While in Rome the presence of this order is documented in a few monuments, such as the Arch of Titus, the Flavian Amphitheatre, the Baths of Caracalla or the Arch of Septimius Severus, and in contexts of reuse, such as the mausoleum of Santa Costanza, in the cities and provincial capitals we observe a different panorama. Specifically, in the Western provinces, the use and diffusion of this order are documented in very specific contexts and, in some cases, perfectly identified: in Nasium (Leuci) in Belgic Gaul, where the composite order is located in the porticoed square of the forum, or in *Tarraco* (Tarragona), in the cult complex, in which on the upper terrace, a *temenos* of composite order was built in Flavian times.

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Focusing on Hispania, we observe that the presence of the composite order is limited, as a general rule, to the most Romanised centres: the already mentioned *Tarraco*, *Augusta Emerita* (Mérida), *Italica* (Santiponce, Seville), or *Colonia Patricia* (Córdoba). In all these urban centres, the composite order appears as the predominant decoration of porticoed spaces related to imperial power[2].

The case study at hand, *Colonia Patricia*, presents a series of peculiarities that make it a fundamental site for understanding the development and evolution of this order in Hispania. The first of these unique features is the great quantity of fragments recovered in the city of Córdoba a total of 31 pieces which, for the first time, are presented and studied together in a single work. The second is the wide chronological span within which these pieces fall, since, thanks to the present work, we have been able to identify capitals and fragments from the early 1st c. AD until the 4th c. AD. Lastly, it is worth highlighting the great variability of dimensions and forms in Córdoba as far as the composite capital is concerned, with capitals ranging from 35 cm in height to others that reach 1.05 m.

Nevertheless, as will be seen throughout this paper, the majority of the capitals from Roman Córdoba are reused or lack an archaeological context, which conditions their study. For this reason, in the present study, we undertake a comprehensive analysis of the composite capital in *Colonia Patricia*, integrating stylistic and metrological aspects, as well as elements from the archaeological record in cases where data are available. The combination of these three perspectives will allow us to outline general trends regarding the use and characteristics of the composite capital across different chronological periods, while simultaneously delving into its use within the city of Córdoba as a paradigmatic case, for the reasons already stated, among Hispanic cities.

2. Case Study

As previously mentioned, the present study brings together a collection of 31 pieces belonging to composite capitals. Based on stylistic features and dimensions, we have been able to identify three homogeneous sets. In addition to these three sets, there are other fragments with distinct characteristics that cannot be assigned to any of the aforementioned groups. Furthermore, we must add several pieces whose poor state of preservation makes it impossible to definitively confirm their attribution to a composite capital; nevertheless, they are included here for reference. Finally, to facilitate the use of the catalogue, we have included a section at the end of the bibliography detailing the dimensions and the MACo (Córdoba Archaeological Museum) inventory number for each piece.

- 1st Set

The first set comprises fragments nrr. 2 (fig. 1)[3], 3 (fig. 2)[4], 6 (fig. 3), 7 (fig. 4), 10 (fig. 5), 11 (fig. 6), 15 (fig. 7)[5], 16 (fig. 8)[6], 30 (fig. 9), and 31 (fig. 10). Although they present varying states of preservation, all of them are carved from white marble, and their complete morphology is known thanks to the best-preserved examples:

The pieces are decorated with a double crown of acanthus leaves that covers more than half of the capital. The leaves are characterized by a central rib in the shape of an inverted Y and faintly marked flutings. In turn, each leaf is composed of 7 lobes divided into 4 and 3 leaflets each that unite at their ends, forming an eyelet in the shape of a teardrop. Above the leaves of the *ima folia*, in the free space of the *kalathos* between the leaves of the *secunda folia*, emerge individual stems open at their end from which in turn sprouts a second stem in the shape of a scroll featuring an inscribed four-petaled flower with a central button. Above the *kalathos* is arranged an astragal of biconical beads and elongated pearls, both elements connected by a fine cord, and next the classic Ionic *kymation* of eggs and lance points. The eggs, very pointed at their base, are little separated from their shells, and those of the edges are covered by barely marked half-palmettes. The abacus is divided into three bands, each one with a different type of decoration. The first corresponds to a smooth moulding, recut in the upper part of the eggs, which gives way to a second decorated with tongues. Lastly, in the upper part of the abacus, we once again find an Ionic *kymation*, less marked, formed by very schematic eggs and small arrowheads. In the central part of the abacus is a flower of ten petals and a central button. It is worth highlighting that the piece presents unworked zones where simply the elements that composed it are marked.

The location and circumstances of discovery for the majority of these fragments are completely unknown to us (nrr. 2, 3, 7, 11, 16). Others come from contexts associated with the reuse of architectural material: nr. 6 was reused as contemporary decoration in the Posada Vallinas, near the Gate of the Bridge; nr. 10 was reused in a modern wall at 9 Alta de Santa Ana Street, and nr. 15 was found in a lime kiln alongside many other fragments of various kinds. Therefore, the only two pieces in the set with a clear context are capitals nrr. 30 and 31. Both were found in the vicinity

[2] Lehmann 2018, pp. 479-485.
[3] Márquez 1998, cat. 696.
[4] Márquez 1998, cat. 204.
[5] Santos 1955, pl. XII.
[6] Márquez 1998, cat. 918.



Fig. 1. Piece nr. 2.



Fig. 2. Piece nr. 3.



Fig. 3. Piece nr. 6.



Fig. 4. Piece nr. 7.



Fig. 5. Piece nr. 10.



Fig. 6. Piece nr. 11.



Fig. 7. Piece nr. 15.



Fig. 8. Piece nr. 16.



Fig. 9. Piece nr. 30.



Fig. 10. Piece nr. 31.

of the Bridge Gate at the beginning of the 21st century, but the excavation report and the stratigraphic study for that intervention are still lacking. This, as we will see, substantially conditions our work.

Despite this, six fundamental characteristics allow us to group all these pieces into a single set, and they are as follows:

The first characteristic they present is their dimensions, all of them measuring 60 cm, approximately two Roman feet, both for the complete pieces and for the fragments with a hypothetical height of 60 cm.

The second characteristic is the decorative motif of the Ionic *kymation*, also common in all the presented fragments, composed of three large eggs between which alternate thick lance points. Thanks to the state of preservation of capital nr. 6, we know that the lance points would emerge from a small straight fillet that would unite the shells of the adjacent eggs. As we will see in the section regarding chronology this fillet would evolve towards a convex element in later specimens.

As a third characteristic, we can appreciate similarities in the astragal of all the specimens since, generally, it is formed by the traditional string of biconical beads and rounded pearls connected by a very fine thread of marble. Only fragments 11, 15 and 31 lack this marble thread, with narrower beads attached to the pearls with barely any space between them. However, we do not believe that this discrepancy in the carving of the astragal is indicative of a diverse location or chronology since different artisans can intervene in the same piece with diverse techniques and carvings that substantially modify aspects as particular as the decoration of the string. An example of this is the comparison between capital 31, an almost complete piece identical to the rest, that only differs in the decoration of its astragal.

The fourth common characteristic can be seen in the better-preserved specimens and consists of a similar decoration in the free zone of the *kalathos*, composed of rosettes inscribed in stems that emerge from the free space existing between the leaves of the *secunda folia*. In all of them, the stems look towards the interior zone and partially or completely surround the rosette. Nrr. 2, 7, 6, 10 decorate the end of the stem with a more naturalistic element, by way of a half-palmette, which is non-existent in specimens 16, 30 and 31. Furthermore, in piece 31, the rosette is completely inscribed within the stem, representing minimal differences that we must attribute to distinct hands crafting the same set. We must also mention that the stem that frames the rosette springs from a small calyx that varies in its development and shape in all the fragments, which is best observed in nr. 6.

As a fifth characteristic, the only capital of the set that has preserved the abacus is nr. 6 decorated, as mentioned in the previous section, by a double moulding. The first moulding is ornamented with a motif of strigils



Fig. 11. Piece nr. 18.



Fig. 12. Piece nr. 29.

or tongues and the second by an Ionic *kymation* in shallow relief that alternates eggs and lance points. Therefore, although the abacus of the rest of the capitals of the set has not been preserved, one must suppose that this would be composed of the same decorative motif.

Lastly, and as a sixth coinciding element, the acanthus leaves in those specimens that preserve them, nrr. 2, 7, 6, 10, 16, 30 and 31, present the same formal characteristics[7]. All of them possess fleshy leaflets that unite at their ends, forming an eyelet by way of a teardrop of vertical tendency. In all of them, the central rib is flat, decorating its base with a small relief in the shape of an inverted V in specimens 16, 30 and 31.

- 2nd Set

This second set comprises only two capitals reused in the Mosque of Córdoba, numbers 18 (fig. 11)[8] and 29 (fig. 12)[9]. Once again, the excellent state of preservation of both capitals allows for a detailed description:

In both capitals, the *kalathos* is decorated with a double crown that occupies half of the capital: of acanthus leaves the *ima folia* and of palmettes the *secunda folia*. The acanthus leaves are characterized by a straight central rib with shallow channels, fleshy and pointed leaflets, and elongated and triangular eyelets. As for the palmettes, these possess 9 lobes separated by shallow channels. The free zone of the *kalathos* is adorned with stems that support flowers of three fleshy petals. In the echinus, an astragal of wide biconical beads and elongated pearls is arranged, as well as an Ionic *kymation* of small wide eggs little separated from their shells between which alternate faintly marked arrowheads. In the centre of the abacus a lyre-shaped motif is noticeable, from whose base, an acanthizing motif extending up to the channels of the volutes emerges, transforming into a calyx with pearls. The channels of the volutes are filled with calyxes and pearls; their eye is decorated with a flower of three petals and their edge with an acanthizing leaf of fleshy lobes.

The two pieces were reused in the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba, so their original location is unknown to us.

In this set, we highlight a systematic use of the drill for the elaboration of all its elements, focusing mainly on the channels that separate the lobes of the palmettes of the *secunda folia*. It is also noteworthy that this is the only Cordoban case in which the echinus is decorated with an Ionic *kymation* of five eggs of small format instead of the traditional one of three large eggs. The only appreciable difference between the two capitals is the decorative motif of the abacus: a flower with a lyre-shaped motif in its centre in capital 29 and a small palmette of 7 lobes in capital 18.

[7] The similarities between the acanthus leaves of pieces 2 and 16 were already taken into account in Márquez 1998, p. 128.

[8] Ewert, Wisshak 1981, pp. 160-161, R21; Cressier 1984, pp. 236-237, I11; Gutiérrez 1992, cat. 741; Márquez 1993, cat. 221; Peña 2010, cat. 49.

[9] Ewert, Wisshak 1981, pp. 160-161, R21; Cressier 1984, pp. 236-237, I11; Gutiérrez 1992, cat. 744; Peña 2010, cat. 123.



Fig. 13. Piece nr. 24.



Fig. 14. Piece nr. 25.



Fig. 15. Piece nr. 21.

- 3rd Set[10]

The third set consists of only two capitals nr. 24 (fig. 13) and 25 (fig. 14)that, again, are decorated based on the same motifs[11]:

The *kalathos* is decorated with a double crown that occupies more than half of the capital: of acanthus leaves the *ima folia* and of palmettes the *secunda folia*. The acanthus leaves are characterized by possessing a rib in the shape of an inverted Y, fleshy leaflets and elongated eyelets. As for the palmettes, they bear seven lobes separated by deep channels. In the free zone of the *kalathos,* narrow stems are identified, on which flowers with four petals and central button are located. The echinus is adorned with an astragal, of biconical beads and elongated pearls, and an Ionic *kymation*, of little-separated eggs, united in their upper part by stems between which alternate lance points. In the abacus an acanthizing motif is observed in its lower part, which reaches up to the edge of the volutes. This second element presents shallow channels and a flower of four petals with a central button in its eye.

The provenance of both capitals is unknown to us, since, although nr. 24 is housed at the MACo, we have no information regarding its discovery, and nr. 25 is part of the Romero de Torres collection.

The formal characteristics of the two capitals are similar. They are characterized by possessing a great use of the drill for the carving of all their parts, which is particularly noticeable in the palmettes and in the eyelet of the vegetal motif that decorates the lower part of the abacus. In the abacus of the capital 24, we also appreciate tongues, a shallow relief that, on the contrary, develops completely in capital 25; this being the only notable difference that is observed between both pieces.

Lastly, we believe that capital 21 (fig. 15)[12], reused in the Mosque of Córdoba, also belongs to this set, although we must remark that some differences exist with the previous two. The first of these differences is that the palmettes barely have marked the channels of the lobes, although they present the same orientation as in pieces 24 and 25. Another difference is that the rosettes that decorate the free part of the *kalathos* are of three petals and have a central button

[10] While this paper was in press, a new composite capital identical to those in this group was documented during the Preventive Archaeological Intervention at the Convent of Santa Isabel de Los Ángeles. Information provided by the director of the intervention, Carolina Martín Blanco.

[11] Márquez 1993, cat. 225 (no. 24) and 226 (no. 25); Domingo 2011, cat. 293 (no. 25).

[12] Ewert, Wisshak 1981, pp. 160-161, R22; Cressier 1984, pp. 236-237, I10; Gutiérrez 1992, cat. 743; Márquez 1993, cat. 222; Peña, 2010, cat. 48.



Fig. 16. Piece nr. 4.



Fig. 17. Piece nr. 5.



Fig. 18. Piece nr. 8.



Fig. 19. Piece nr. 9.

marked with a drill, unlike in capitals 24 and 25, which possess four petals and a central circular button. Furthermore, in capital 21, under the astragal and behind the rosettes, a rope-like motif that surrounds the whole *kalathos* is noticeable. This feature does not appear in capitals 24 and 25.

The last of these differences is in the abacus, formed by a completely smooth fillet in capital 21, in contrast to capitals 24 and 25, which possess an abacus with two mouldings, the upper being decorated.

However, capital 21 presents a similar decoration in the echinus, composed of an Ionic *kymation* of identical characteristics with three large eggs. Between these, lance points emerging from convex fillets alternate with an astragal of the same type of beads and pearls as in capitals 24 and 25. Furthermore, we must add the acanthus leaves of the *ima folia* that correspond to the same typology as in the mentioned capitals, with the only difference that these are cut at their base, as a result of the reuse of the capital in the mosque.

For all these reasons, we believe it is plausible to ascribe this capital to this set, by attributing the formal differences, just as the first set, to different artisans. This change of hands would have inevitably affected specific aspects of the pieces.

- Capitals not ascribed to any set

There is also a significant number of capitals that it is not possible to attribute to any specific set since each of them possesses particular morphological characteristics; these include nrr. 4, 5, 8, 9, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 26, 27 and 28. As each one is different from the rest, we present a brief individual description.

Piece 4: Fragment of volute of a white marble composite capital in a very bad state of preservation (fig. 16).

On both sides we find the classic smooth spiral decorated at its start by a stylized half palmette. On the edge of the volute is an acanthus leaf characterized by its extreme naturalism and by the marked use of the drill in the eyelet. The latter, as a general rule, acquires the shape of a teardrop[13].

Its place of provenance is unknown and currently is housed in the storeroom of the MACo.

Piece 5: Fragment of composite capital of white marble in a very bad state of preservation (fig. 17).

The piece corresponds to the abacus of a composite capital, almost entirely lost. It is decorated with an astragal of facing triangular beads and elongated pearls. Above it is arranged the traditional Ionic *kymation* composed of styl-

[13] Márquez 1998, cat. 876.



Fig. 20. Piece nr. 17.



Fig. 21. Piece nr. 19 by C. Márquez (1993: Lám. 65).

ized eggs separated from their shells and perfectly marked arrowheads. On one of the eggs is a half-palmette, a motif that allows placing the fragment on the left edge of the piece. In turn, the only preserved part of the *kalathos* makes it possible to see the tip of a completely lost water leaf, a motif that would have decorated this zone of the capital[14]. Found at 16 Cruz Conde Street in 1946, it is currently housed in the storeroom of the MACo.

Piece 8: Fragment of volute of composite capital of white marble badly preserved (fig. 18).

It is characterized by its concave channels of good carving decorated with half-palmettes also of a good finish. Furthermore, in the eye of the volute, is situated a small flower of four petals with a drill mark in the centre. The edge of the volute is decorated with a long acanthizing leaf of fleshy lobes separated by fine lines and irregular eyelets carved using a drill. It was found during the paving works of San Felipe Street, in 1924, behind the church of San Nicolás de la Villa, and currently is kept in the storeroom of the MACo.

Piece 9: Fragment of composite capital of white marble badly preserved (fig. 19).

It preserves only the upper zone of the *kalathos*, where a vegetal motif is noticeable. It is composed of a stem in the shape of a scroll inside which is found a flower with a double crown of petals, part of the echinus and of the abacus, where we can only distinguish an astragal separating it from the *kalathos*, decorated with a string of elongated pearls and biconical beads. The piece would have had a decoration of Ionic *kymation* of eggs and darts or arrowheads, possibly, moving upwards and following the astragal. However, the ornamentation has disappeared in this space. It has been possible to observe how the capital was cut in its upper part and reused as a mortar or basin. Its place of provenance is unknown, and it is currently housed in the storeroom of the MACo.

Piece 17: Composite capital of white marble in perfect state of preservation (fig. 20).

The *kalathos* is decorated with the traditional double crown of acanthus leaves that, on this occasion, takes more than half of the capital. The leaves are characterized by a flat rib, which is narrow at the base and widens as it ascends, as well as pointed leaflets and eyelets in the shape of a slightly inclined teardrop. Between the leaves of the *secunda folia* stems ascend. Flowers of four petals and a central button are sculpted in these. Above the *kalathos* we find an astragal and the Ionic *kymation*, the first adorned with narrow pearls and biconical beads and, the second, with eggs barely separated from their shells, united at their upper edge, between which alternate arrowheads. The volutes of smooth and flat channels are decorated in the centre with a flower of four petals and a central button, and others simply with a half-open calyx. In the centre of the abacus, a highly deteriorated flower with a lyre-shaped motif can be identified[15]. Its place of provenance is unknown and currently it is reused in the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba.

[14] Santos 1955, pl. XII; Márquez 1993, cat. 22.

[15] Ewert, Wisshak 1981, pp. 160-161, M23-24w; Gutiérrez 1992, cat. 751; Márquez 1993, cat. 218; Peña 2010, cat. 191.



Fig. 22. Piece nr. 20.



Fig. 23. Piece nr. 22 by C. Márquez (1993: Lám. 67).

Piece 19: Composite capital of white marble in good state of preservation (fig. 21).

The *kalathos* is decorated with a double crown of acanthus leaves that fill more than half of the piece. The leaves stand out for its quite marked central channel, fleshy leaflets and eyelet in the shape of a deep teardrop. The calyxes are arranged between the leaves of the *secunda folia*, from which spring stems in which we find flowers of five petals and central button. The echinus of the capital is adorned with an astragal of narrow beads and elongated pearls united to each other by a fine thread of marble. Above the astragal is located an Ionic *kymation* composed of eggs slightly separated from their shells and very pronounced arrowheads between these. The two eggs closest to the volutes are partially covered by a stylized half-palmette of three-pointed lobes. Lastly, in the abacus of the capital there are very deteriorated small tongues and a central flower, also badly preserved[16].

According to C. Márquez, it belongs to the Romero de Torres collection, but its current whereabouts are unknown[17].

Piece 20: Composite capital of white marble, in perfect state of preservation (fig. 22).

The *kalathos* is decorated with a double crown that takes half of the capital. The *ima folia* presents acanthus leaves and the *secunda folia* palmettes. The leaves are characterized by possessing a quite pronounced central channel, fleshy leaflets and an elongated and vertical eyelet. The palmettes of the *secunda folia* are composed of 7 lobes, each one well differentiated through a notable use of the drill. Between the palmettes highly naturalistic stems emerge. The echinus of the capital is adorned with an astragal, of rhomboidal beads and elongated pearls united through a thread of marble, and an Ionic *kymation*, composed of a group of three eggs separated from their shells through a pronounced use of the drill and arrows. Above the Ionic *kymation*, a naturalistic carving of small acanthizing leaves that unite with the volutes forming part of their central channel stands out. In turn, in the eye of the volute, a small flower of four petals is noticeable. Lastly, the abacus is left smooth, marking the succession of different moldings[18].

Its place of provenance is unknown and currently is found reused in the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba.

Piece 22: Composite capital of white marble, fairly preserved (fig. 23).

The *kalathos* is decorated with a double crown of acanthus leaves that occupies more than half of the piece. The leaf is characterized by a straight and pointed rib of shallow channels. It also has fleshy leaflets united at their ends, forming a triangular eyelet. The free zone of the *kalathos* is adorned with flowers of four petals with a central button. Above the *kalathos* an astragal is arranged, with narrow beads and elongated pearls with little relief, as well as an Ionic *kymation* of wide eggs little separated from their shells and lance points between these[19].

[16] Márquez 1998, cat. 219.
[17] Márquez 1998: 118.
[18] Ewert, Wisshak, 1981, pp. 160-161, R25; Cressier 1984, pp. 236-237, I7; Gutiérrez 1992, cat. 742; Márquez 1998, cat. 220; Peña 2010, cat. 45.
[19] Márquez 1993, cat. 223.



Fig. 24. Piece nr. 23 courtesy of C. Márquez.



Fig. 25. Piece nr. 26 by C. Márquez (1993: Lám. 67).

According to C. Márquez, it was discovered in the Plaza de la Compañía, but its current whereabouts are unknown[20].

Piece 23: Composite capital of white marble fairly preserved (fig. 24).

The *kalathos* is decorated with a double crown that occupies more than half of the capital. The *ima folia* presents acanthus leaves and the *secunda folia* palmettes. The acanthus leaves, despite being very deteriorated, present pointed leaflets that unite forming an elongated eyelet. The palmettes, of seven fleshy lobes, possess a great central rib and deep and separated channels. In the free zone of the *kalathos* there are stems with flowers of four petals and a central button at their ends. The echinus of the capital is ornamented with an astragal, of biconical beads and elongated pearls connected by a thread of marble, and an Ionic *kymation*, of eggs separated from their shells connected by stems in their upper part, between which well differentiated arrowheads are situated. The abacus is completely deteriorated but preserves part of an acanthizing motif[21].

According to C. Márquez, it was housed in the Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos, but its current whereabouts are unknown[22].

Piece 26: Composite capital of white marble well preserved (fig. 25).

The *kalathos* is decorated with a single crown of tall and narrow leaves with a pronounced central rib and fine leaflets separated by narrow channels. The echinus is adorned with an astragal of biconical beads and elongated pearls, and with an Ionic *kymation* of wide eggs little separated from their shells, between which are situated arrowheads. In the abacus the remains of a flower are observed, though today lost, from which acanthizing motifs bordering the edge of the volute are arranged. This element is characterized by presenting a single faintly marked channel and a flower of four petals in its centre. The upper part of the abacus has been left completely smooth[23].

According to C. Márquez, it was housed in the Provincial Delegation of Culture in Córdoba, but its current whereabouts are unknown[24].

Piece 27: Composite capital of white marble in perfect state of preservation (fig. 26).

The *kalathos* is decorated with a double crown that occupies half of the capital. The *ima folia* presents acanthus leaves and the *secunda folia* palmettes. The acanthus leaf is poorly preserved, but fleshy leaflets that form elongated eyelets can still be seen. The palmettes, of nine lobes separated by narrow channels, reach a considerable height. Between the palmettes, we find helicoidal stems with a flower of four petals in their upper part. The echinus of the capital is adorned with an astragal, of biconical beads and rounded pearls, and an Ionic *kymation*, of eggs little separated from their shells and lance points in between. The abacus is ornamented with an acanthizing motif under its flower that extends up to the channel of the volute, where it transforms into a calyx. The volute is characterized

[20] Márquez 1993, cat. 223.
[21] Márquez 1993, cat. 224.
[22] Márquez 1993, cat. 224.
[23] Márquez 1993, cat. 227; Domingo 2011, cat. 294.
[24] Márquez 1993, cat. 227.



Fig. 26. Piece nr. 27.



Fig. 27. Piece nr. 28.

by possessing narrow channels and an eye that is left undecorated. Lastly, in the centre of the abacus we find a flower of fleshy petals, very deteriorated[25].

Its place of provenance is unknown, and currently it is found reused in the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba.

Piece 28: Composite capital of white marble, in perfect state of preservation (fig. 27).

The *kalathos* only preserves the *secunda folia* decorated with acanthus leaves, which are characterized by a faintly marked central rib, elongated and pointed leaflets, and elongated eyelets of triangular tendency. The free part of the *kalathos* is decorated with stems that frame flowers of four petals with a central button. The echinus is composed of an astragal, of biconical beads and elongated pearls, and an Ionic *kymation* of eggs little separated from their shells between which lance points alternate. In the smooth abacus there would have been a central element, now lost, under which an acanthizing motif extends up to the volutes, overlapping their channels. Besides, the volutes present a flower of five petals and a central button in their eye[26].

Its place of provenance is unknown and currently is found reused in the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba.

- Pieces of uncertain attribution

Lastly, we want to highlight a total of four pieces, nrr. 1[27], 12, 13 and 14, which, although collected in the present work, might not belong to capitals of composite order.

The first of them, nr. 1 (fig. 28), is half of an egg partially covered by a half-palmette, which would allow us to locate it at the edge of the Ionic *kymation*. The problem lies in the fact that, although the type of carving and shape correspond to those of the first set, we do not know if it could have belonged to a composite capital or to an Ionic one (fig. 1).

The second fragment, nr. 12 (fig. 29), presents a strange shape with a convex astragal instead of concave and, at its edge, the remains of a possible volute. On this occasion, although we possess an element clearly associable to the composite order, the shape of this fragment does not match the morphology of the capital, so we believe that it must have formed part of another undetermined architectural element.

[25] Ewert, Wisshak, 1981, pp. 160-161, Pl. 17; Peña 2010, cat. 192.
[26] Ewert, Wisshak, 1981, pp. 160-161, S29; Cressier 1984, pp. 236-237, J3; Gutiérrez 1992, cat. 747; Peña 2010, cat. 22.
[27] Márquez 1998, cat. 239, pl. 12.



Fig. 28. Piece nr. 1.



Fig. 29. Piece nr. 12.



Fig. 30. Piece nr.13.



Fig. 31. Piece nr. 14.

The third fragment, nr. 13 (fig. 30), is a volute carved on its two faces and with smooth channels. However, this piece presents a rectangular shape in two of its edges very clearly, perhaps due to a later reuse, although we must take into account the possibility that it did not belong to a capital.

The last fragment of this group, nr. 14 (fig. 31), is a very deteriorated volute only carved on one of its edges. As was the case with piece nr. 1, this element could have belonged to either an Ionic or a composite capital given that its bad state of preservation does not allow us to draw further conclusions.

3. Evolution of the composite capital

a. General and Hispanic context

As Mª. A. Gutiérrez Behemerid already pointed out almost 35 years ago: "the composite capital appears as a typically Roman creation in which a four-sided Ionic capital and a normal Corinthian capital are combined."[28]. This Roman *inventio*, although with echoes of previous styles, is established as a constructive form in the final decades of the Second Triumvirate, between 40 and 30 BC. The first version of the composite capital has been registered for the reused specimens in the Mausoleum of Santa Costanza in Rome[29]. This first type has also been recognized in the specimens of the Augustan phase of the theatre of Ostia[30] and in some capitals coming from the theatre of Marcellus[31]. In these first composite capitals great differences are observed with respect to those elaborated in later stages: both the astragal and the Ionic *kymation* present very narrow elements and of small dimensions which translates into an increase of eggs, beads and pearls; the vegetal motif situated above the echinus of the capital, barely penetrates into the channel of the volute as indeed will occur in the capitals of Flavian times. Lastly, in the first composite capitals a clear difference is established between the abacus of the capital and its echinus unlike the later examples in which the channels of the volutes, reach to invade part of it.

[28] Gutiérrez 1992, p. 165.
[29] Strong 1960, pp. 122-124; Pensabene 2015, p. 149.
[30] Pensabene 1973, pp. 385-388.
[31] Although composite capitals *stricto sensu* have not been documented, P. Pensabene, from the characteristics of the preserved pieces, proposes the possibility that the four-sided Ionic capitals recovered were applied to a *kalathos* today lost (Pensabene 2007, p. 30).

Throughout the 1st c. AD, the canonical type of composite capital will be nuanced to derive in the composite capital of Flavian times. The capitals situated in the Arch of Titus act, therefore, as guides for the production and elaboration of later models[32]. For this reason, in the capitals of the Flavian period all the canonical characteristics of the order can be seen: the free zone of the *kalathos* decorated with two rosettes inscribed in thick stems, an Ionic *kymation* with elements of greater size, normally decorated with three eggs and arrow or lance points, volutes with vegetal motifs of great naturalism that occupy their channel practically up to their eye and, lastly, a less pronounced difference between the abacus and the volutes.

Although the composite order originates and is applied for the first time in the capital of the Empire, it will be in the provinces where it acquires a greater development and dynamism of its elements[33]. Both in the west and in the east of the Roman Empire the composite capital imitates, initially, the canonical form of the type, but, rapidly, great formal differences are noticed and applied as a result of the particular development of each zone. In this manner, in Miletus, Aezani or Ephesus we find capitals where the free part of the *kalathos* is decorated with a varied range of elements such as strigils, helices or even leaving this space completely smooth[34]. A similar case can be found in the capitals of ancient Numidia and Mauretania where a very varied typology has been documented between the end of the 1st c. AD and the beginning of the 2nd c. AD. These show ornamental modifications in all the elements of the capital, some clearly influenced by Asiatic workshops[35].

In Gaul, there are also numerous cases in which the use of the composite order has been identified. Some of the first examples of this typology registered correspond to the capitals situated in the gate of the Lions of Verona. The canonical type of composite capital is observed in Aquileia, where a well-preserved specimen has been found coming from the portico of its forum built in the early Flavian period[36], besides other specimens dated in the second half of the 2nd c. AD[37]. However, just as in other points of the empire, the composite capital in Gaul follows its own tradition that is noticeable in an increase of pieces that substitute the rosettes of the *kalathos* for tongues or strigils, as evidenced by the capitals of the already cited gate of the lions of Verona (Cisalpine Gaul) or one of the temple of Diana in Nîmes (Narbonensian Gaul)[38]. We also find this same model in a capital of Severan times of unknown provenance currently on the Palatine[39] and in another relocated in the forum of Caesar that, according to Ch. Leon, possesses certain Eastern provincial influence[40].

In Hispania, the presence of the composite capital is significantly smaller than in other parts of the empire and is limited to some particular cities. This architectural order has been documented in the provincial capitals (Tarragona, Mérida and Córdoba) and in other cities like Beja, Italica, Toro (Zamora) or Guadalcanal (Seville)[41].

Six composite capitals are preserved in the city of Mérida, dated by J. L. de la Barrera in diverse periods, from the Flavian period up to the 3rd c. AD. One of the decorative particularities of the Emeritan composite capitals is that all of them present as decoration of the *secunda folia* palmettes instead of the classic acanthus leaf, with the exception of capital nr. 108, in which an alternation between both elements is observed. Furthermore, the more advanced the chronology of the piece is, the greater is the use of the drill in the elaboration of its ornamental elements[42].

In *Tarraco,* the analysis of the composite order is limited to the capitals of the portico of the imperial cult complex to the north of the city. Thanks to the different interventions and investigations, it is now known that this *temenos* had two constructive phases[43]. The first belong to the early Tiberian period and the second to the Flavians. In this manner, through their stylistic and morphological characteristics, type 1 would correspond to the first phase and type 2 to the second[44]. We must add to these fragments of composite capital a wide collection of decorated volutes from *Tarraco*, of diverse chronologies, forms and motifs[45]. In these cases, the fundamental differences between the two

[32] Although the capitals of the Arch of Titus traditionally have been dated to the Flavian period, specifically during the reign of the emperor Domitian, just as Freyberger put into relevance these must have been elaborated in two moments: the lower part of the *kalathos* in the time of Domitian and the rest of the capital during the principate of Trajan. Only in this manner the great affinity of the composite capitals of the Arch of Titus with those of the Arch of Trajan in Benevento and their slight differences with those documented in the *Domus Flavia* are understood (Freyberger 1990, pp. 33-36, 48-52). On the dating and construction of the Arch of Titus see Pfanner 1983.

[33] Pensabene, Domingo 2019, pp. 51-56.

[34] Nassar 2008.

[35] Pensabene 1985, pp. 378-385; Herrmann 2017, pp. 351-362.

[36] Previato 2015, p. 62, fig. 23.

[37] Scrinari 1952, cat. 75-77.

[38] Tardy 1989, pp. 108-109; Domingo, Pensabene 2024, pp. 123-124.

[39] Domingo, Pensabene 2024, p. 125.

[40] Leon 1971, p. 241, taf. 93.2.

[41] Besides these centres, very particular fragments of composite capitals exist, classified by M. A. Gutiérrez as mixed, in places so dispersed as Quintanilla de las Viñas (Burgos), Clunia (Burgos), Cabezo Ladero, Sofuentes (Zaragoza), Valeria (Cuenca), Pamplona, Seville, Hontoria del Pinar (Burgos), Retorta (Ponte do Barao), Zaragoza, San Miguel de Odrinhas or Barcelona (Gutiérrez 1992, cat. 774-778, 784-791).

[42] Barrera 1984, cat. 104-109.

[43] Pensabene, Domingo, 2019, pp. 56-63; Domingo, Pensabene 2024, pp. 114-119.

[44] Domingo, Pensabene 2024, pp. 127-130.

[45] Gimeno 1992, pp. 76-86; Pensabene 1993, p. 54; Domingo, Pensabene 2024, pp. 130-134.

Tarraconensian types lie in the Ionic *kymation*, with an alternation of eggs and lance points for the capitals of Tiberian chronology and eggs and arrowheads in those of Flavian times. Furthermore, the stems on which the rosettes are arranged in the free zone of the *kalathos* also present differences. Tiberian examples are more tilted and oriented towards the interior, while Flavian specimens are more vertical and oriented towards their exterior[46].

The last of the great urban centres in which we find the composite order is the city of Italica (Santiponce, Seville). Three complete capitals and several fragments constitute the catalogue of the composite order of this city. The chronology of this decorative type traces its origins back to Augustus, as the analysis of capital l1 has demonstrated[47]. In Italica, the composite order does not reappear until Hadrianic times with capitals and fragments that directly copy the decorative motifs and forms of Villa Adriana in Tivoli[48].

b. The evolution of the composite order in *Colonia Patricia*

When comparing it with the rest of the considered Hispanic cities, we observe that the Cordoban case presents several distinctive traits that are fundamental for the study of the evolution of the composite order: the great quantity of documented capitals and fragments, a total of 31, the morphological variety, the chronological breadth of the composite order in the city and the good state of preservation of a good part of the presented pieces.

The appearance of the composite order in *Colonia Patricia* occurs at a relatively early moment, in Julio-Claudian times, grouping these pieces into what has been defined as "early" capitals; in fact, we find this first style perfectly reflected in capital nr. 17. During this initial phase, just as occurred in other Hispanic and Mediterranean examples, the elements of the composite capital were not found defined nor developed. For this reason, we can observe that the abacus and the channel of the volute are left smooth, without the characteristic vegetal decoration used in later capitals. Furthermore, the union between the echinus and the abacus presents a straight horizon that will acquire a certain curvature in the later years of the empire. We must add to these characteristics a type of acanthus leaf, of great naturalness, with a thick central rib and eyelet in the shape of a slightly inclined teardrop, as well as rosettes decorating the reserved part of the *kalathos* which, in these early stages, are not found fully developed.

However, although traditionally capital nr. 17 has been claimed to be the first example of a Cordoban composite capital, we believe that piece nr. 8, a fragment of a volute, is earlier than this one. Here, the channel of the volute is barely occupied by a half-palmette of different carving on both sides, to which a vegetal motif is superimposed. This motif would have decorated the upper part of the echinus, currently completely lost. An identical decorative motif is found in the volutes of the capitals reused in the mausoleum of Santa Costanza in Rome or in the composite capitals of the theatre of Ostia, both of Augustan age[49].

The capitals and fragments corresponding to what has been defined as the first set are later. All of them show signs of an already advanced composite order, in a stage of complete development. On this occasion, the Ionic *kymation* is perfectly defined by three large eggs between which are intercalated lance points, a motif of Julio-Claudian times but that remains in monuments of Flavian times, as in the capitals of the *temenos* of *Tarraco*. Furthermore, these same lances emerge from a straight fillet that, from the time of Titus onwards, will transform into a convex element present in later capitals. On the other hand, unlike the previous cases, the *kalathos* is decorated with well-defined rosettes, framed between thick stems that we find in composite capitals of Flavian times both of Rome and Hispania. Lastly, the acanthus leaf, a fundamental element for the dating of the piece, presents an eyelet in the shape of a vertical teardrop, formed from the contact between the leaflets. Furthermore, the central rib is flat and loses the characteristic inverted Y shape of Julio-Claudian times; from it emerge the lobes of the leaf marked by deep channels. In Córdoba we find the closest parallels in the leaves of the Corinthian capitals of the temple of Claudio Marcelo Street[50]. Additionally, the leaf of this set of capitals resembles type 2 described for the *temenos* of the monumental complex of *Tarraco*[51]. Therefore, this group of capitals exhibits distinctive features that can be attributed to the late Julio-Claudian or early Flavian period, as they do not show the major stylistic changes introduced from AD 80 onwards[52].

Volute nr. 4 is also consistent with this chronology, which had already been dated to Flavian times by C. Márquez[53]. As this author pointed out, although the channel of the volute is left partially smooth, the first turn barely being occupied by a half-palmette, the acanthus leaf that decorates its edge is directly related to the Tarraconensian specimens ascribed to type 2 of the cult complex and, therefore, of the second half of the 1st c. AD[54].

[46] Domingo, Pensabene 2024, pp. 127-128.
[47] Ahrens 2005, pp. 55-56, Taf. 46.
[48] Ahrens 2005, p.101, Taf. 47-48.
[49] Pensabene 1973.
[50] Márquez 1993, pp. 190-191; Díaz 1985, p. 67; Hesberg 1996, p. 167.
[51] Capital nr. 6 had been dated by some authors to the 2nd c. AD (Aparicio 1999, p. 150) but, according to the arguments presented, we believe this chronology to be unlikely.
[52] Pensabene, Caprioli 2020, pp. 170-176.
[53] Márquez 1998, cat. 876.
[54] Gimeno 1992, pp. 78-80.

We must also situate piece nr. 5 in this time period. It corresponds to an edge of the echinus of the capital. It is characterized by well-carved eggs, between which alternate fine arrowheads without a connecting link in the upper zone. The astragal presents an alternation of biconical beads and rounded pearls connected by a fine marble thread that recalls Flavian ones. However, the most outstanding element of the capital is the finial of a water leaf that would decorate the free zone of its *kalathos*, an anomalous motif in the composite capitals of Córdoba that is presented for the first time in this specimen. This element directly relates the capital with oriental workshops and establishes parallels in capitals of the cities of Ephesus, Pergamon or Aphrodisias[55], although it is a motif also documented in Rome itself [56], always dated in the last quarter of the 1st c. AD. Given this, we propose a Flavian chronology for this piece.

Moving forward chronologically, we find the capitals belonging to the second set where important differences with the previous ones are already noticeable. On this occasion, the Ionic *kymation* has lost the traditional proportions of three eggs, reducing itself substantially and alternating, between the eggs, small arrowheads emerging from little developed convex fillets. On the other hand, the channel of the volutes is completely filled up to the union with its eye and the rosettes of the *kalathos* have reduced their size and diminished their naturalism. Also, the use of the drill is generalized in the elaboration of all the elements, especially in the palmettes of the *secunda folia* and in the channels of the acanthus leaves. Lastly, the acanthus leaves of the *ima folia* possess a direct parallel in the composite capitals of Villa Adriana in Tivoli [57] besides in several Emeritan capitals also dated in Hadrianic times[58]. We can date this set in the time of the emperor Hadrian, in the first half of the 2nd c. AD[59]. We find these same characteristics reflected in capital nr. 23 where a notable use of the drill is observed in the elaboration of its different elements. Furthermore, the leaves of the *ima folia* present great similarities with others of Hadrianic times both of Corinthian and composite capitals, located in Villa Adriana and Ostia[60].

We must turn now to the third set of capitals since they present a particular problem: the great discrepancy among researchers about their chronology. A. Peña dates capital nr. 21 to the end of Julio-Claudian times[61]. However, Mª. A. Gutiérrez dates both this capital and nr. 24 in a later horizon, in the 2nd c. AD[62]. Finally, C. Márquez dates both capitals in the 3rd c. AD and proposes an even later chronology for capital nr. 25, at the end of the 3rd c. AD and early 4th c. AD[63]. In our case, we suggest a dating closer to the 2nd c. AD for the reasons outlined below.

In the first place, we must reject the hypothesis that proposes a Julio-Claudian chronology for this third set. Although the Ionic *kymation* presents an alternation of eggs and lances, a widespread motif in the 1st c. AD, these emerge from convex fillets, elements that appear for the first time in the Arch of Titus and that endure until Severan times[64]. Furthermore, in two of the capitals, nr. 24 and 25, there is a notable use of the drill in the elaboration of their different elements, less pronounced in capital nr. 21. This technique, although used on occasions during the 1st c. AD, will acquire great popularity from Flavian times onwards and will reach a point of maximum development during the principate of Hadrian[65].

Secondly, we also rule out placing them in the 3rd or 4th c. AD, as inferred from the study of the acanthus leaf, which shows well-marked leaflets that unite at their ends forming vertical teardrops. In turn, the central rib presents the shape of an inverted Y divided in two by lateral channels that adapt to its shape. We find a similar type of acanthus leaf in two Cordoban capitals of Hadrianic chronology[66], in one from Écija[67] and in a capital from Ostia, also from the 2nd c. AD[68], in which, despite the fact that the use of the drill is more pronounced, the leaf presents an identical arrangement of all its elements. Furthermore, we must highlight that, generally, in capitals from the 3rd century AD onwards, the acanthus leaf loses movement, its central rib becomes more vertical, and the eyelet between the leaflets acquires a vertical shape. To summarize, the acanthus leaf of the third set of capitals shows traits of the earlier Julio-Claudian period but, as observed in Hadrianic examples it always includes elements of the new era by way of a classicist "revival"[69].

All the aforementioned characteristics can also be applied to capital nr. 27, which, although it is not included in the third set, for reasons already mentioned, presents the same problems as these. We appreciate the presence of palmettes in the *secunda folia*, convex fillets in the Ionic *kymation*, and an acanthus leaf in the *ima folia* that, for the same reasons, can be attributed to the 2nd c. AD.

[55] Heilmeyer 1970, taf. 28 and 22.4.
[56] Freyberger 1990, p. 84, taf. 30.2.
[57] Freyberger 1990, cat. 183-185 and 189.
[58] Barrera 1984, cat. 105-106.
[59] Peña 2010, p. 137. C. Márquez proposed a later chronology for these capitals, in Severan times, however, the similarities with the Hadrianic specimens question this identification.
[60] Freyberger 1990, taf. 27-29.
[61] Peña 2010, cat. 48.
[62] Gutiérrez 1992, cat. 743 and 749.
[63] Márquez 1993, cat. 222, 225 and 226.
[64] Mattern 2001, p. 51; Peña 2009, p. 569.
[65] Of the different workshops identified in Villa Adriana, one of them is characterized by the notable use of the drill for the elaboration of all its elements (Márquez 2019, pp. 127-132).
[66] Márquez 1993, pp. 94-95.
[67] Felipe 2013, pp. 386-389, figs. 4-5.
[68] Pensabene 1973, cat. 395.
[69] Ruiz, Portillo 2020, p. 134.

Lastly, we must take into account that in the three capitals of the third set acanthus leaves are used in the *ima folia* and palmettes in the *secunda*.

In Hispania, the use of this decorative resource in composite capitals is only documented in Mérida and Córdoba, in both capitals dated to Hadrianic times. We find the same situation in other parts of the Mediterranean where, from the principate of Hadrian onwards, we witness an increase in compositional variability where the *kalathos* begins to be decorated with diverse leaves and motifs.

For all these reasons, we opt for a Hadrianic chronology for the pieces of the third set, perhaps being able to situate them in a more advanced stage of the 2nd c. AD but never in the 3rd c. AD.

The only piece dated in the 3rd c. AD is nr. 22 in which several artistic characteristics of this time can be seen. In the first place, its Ionic *kymation* composed of eggs of large dimensions, but with very fine shells between which alternate small lance points, stands out. The schematism of the acanthus leaves is barely pronounced. Completely triangular eyelets are noticeable, thus losing the classic teardrop shape so common in previous specimens[70].

Closing the set of composite capitals of *Colonia Patricia* is nr. 26, dated in the 4th c. AD. In this piece, despite being covered in a layer of lime, it can be observed how all the elements of the order have been highly modified with a clear tendency towards schematism, a trait characteristic of Late Antiquity. The double crown of leaves has disappeared, being substituted by one of palmettes of great height that barely leaves the *kalathos* free, for which reason we do not find the characteristic rosettes of previous times. In the echinus, there is a clear schematism with an Ionic *kymation* of volutes and arrowheads faintly marked and an astragal of beads and pearls also little indicated. The volutes have seen their size reduced just like the abacus which is decorated with a central flower or palmette of disproportionate size. This piece counts with an almost identical parallel in the synagogue of Ostia, dated to the mid-4th c. AD, for which reason its chronological ascription is secure[71].

Capitals nr. 20 and 28 are excluded from this chronological evolution since, due to their formal and carving particularities, they do not correspond to Cordoban productions, but rather they come from other points of the Mediterranean. Specifically, capital nr. 20 presents an almost identical parallel in another produced in Mérida[72]. The similarities between these capitals are very numerous: palmettes and acanthus leaves with a similar use of the drill; volutes with their channel completely filled by vegetal motifs also elaborated by means of a drill; Ionic *kymation* of eggs and arrowheads; astragal with the same arrangement, number and shape of its beads and pearls, and an identical vegetal motif that possesses the same eyelet as the Emeritan capital. Moreover, the reuse of Emeritan capitals in the Mosque is a phenomenon that has already been documented by another example identified by A. Peña, a piece that would support our hypothesis[73]. As for capital nr. 28, we must seek its origin outside of Hispania, specifically in North Africa. As several authors have already pointed out, the model of composite capital with a single crown of acanthus leaves is not habitual in the Iberian Peninsula. Besides the capital shown here, only one capital with a single crown exists, in Italica, dated to Julio-Claudian times, and nr. 26, which, as we have argued, is a late specimen. However, as has already been mentioned in previous sections, the composite capitals of North Africa present a range of forms and styles of greater diversity, with numerous specimens decorated with a single crown of acanthus leaf[74]. Furthermore, another of the characteristics of the North African composite capital is the decrease in the proportion of the Ionic *kymation* in comparison to the models of the Urbs[75]. This particularity can be seen in capital nr. 28 of the Mosque of Córdoba, where the Ionic *kymation* takes a much more reduced space if we compare it with other capitals of the same chronology, such as nr. 17, or of a more advanced moment, like those ascribed to the first set. Lastly, we must point out that there exists a capital in the Mosque of Kairouan, dated in Antonine times, that presents some traits extremely similar to the Cordoban piece[76], for which reason its ascription to North African workshops seems clear.

4. The module of the composite capital[77]

As we have already observed, the composite capital is an evolution of the Corinthian, which is why it lacks its own distinct canon regarding dimensions. In the 16th century, Vignola had already stated that the composite order maintains and follows the same rules of symmetry, proportion and dimensions as the Corinthian one[78]. This hypothesis was also confirmed by different contemporary authors[79]. Therefore, upon attempting to reconstruct or hypoth-

[70] Márquez 1998, cat. 223.
[71] Márquez 1993, cat. 227; Pensabene 1973, cat. 399.
[72] Barrera 1984, cat. 106.
[73] Peña 2010, pp. 152-153.
[74] Herrmann, 2017, 353.
[75] Pensabene 1993, 381.
[76] Harrazi 1982, cat. 71.
[77] A preliminary study of the dimensions of the composite capital was carried out in Márquez, Castillo 2026, pp. 83-84.
[78] Vignola 1635.
[79] Wilson 1989; Wilson 1991; Wilson 2000; Chitham 2005.

esize the total height of the order and of its different elements, we run into the same issues: the non-existence of a static and strict norm that governs the construction of all the buildings of this typology. Although, undoubtedly, Roman architects followed some basic rules throughout all their history for the making of monuments, each workshop endowed the building that it was constructing with unique characteristics that, inevitably, translated into a variation of its dimensions[80].

Given this situation, M. Wilson Jones proposed the existence of four constructive schemes that guided and in which the elevation of the main preserved buildings of Corinthian order was framed: schemes A, B, C and D. These models do not follow a specific chronological order and, thus, buildings so distant in time as the temple of *Mars Ultor* or the *Hadrianeum* apply the same scheme in their construction (Scheme A)[81].

Therefore, for the correct interpretation of the sets of capitals that concern us here, it is necessary that we establish the bases from which we are going to interpret their dimensions.

In the first place, it must be noted that, despite the variety of models existing in Roman architecture, as a general rule, there exist some invariable guiding principles:

- The height of the shaft (h) has a relation of 5:6 with the general height of the column (H)
- The height of the capital (h_{cap}) is equal to the diameter of the shaft (D).

On the other hand, possessing no greater material evidence than the capital in itself, we are forced to interpret the monuments of which these pieces formed part following an ideal scheme, which would correspond with Scheme A proposed by M. Wilson Jones. In this model, the following relations are taken into account based on h_{cap}:

$h=h_{cap}\times 7.5$

Height of the base (h_{bas})$=h_{cap}/2$

(D)$=h_{cap}\times 0.9$

The proportions of the entablature vary substantially even in monuments that follow the same scheme, depending on the building that we analyse. Nevertheless, an ideal framework has been established where the height of the cornice (h_{cor}) is equal to the diameter of the shaft (D), the height of the frieze is (h_f) and the height of the architrave (h_a) is 5/7D.

The first set of capitals would present an average height of 60 cm equivalent, approximately, to two Roman feet[82]. With this measurement, we would obtain a column of 5.4 m high divided into 30 cm of height of the base, 450 cm of height of the shaft and 60 cm of height of the capital. As for the entablature, assuming it had one, it would be composed of an architrave of 38.6 cm high, a frieze of 27 cm high and a cornice of 54 cm high. Lastly, the lower diameter of the shaft would be equivalent to 54 cm.

The capitals of the second and third set would possess an approximate height of 42 cm. Following the same scheme, for this measurement, we would obtain a column of 3.78 m high divided into 21 cm of height of the base, 315 cm of height of the shaft and 42 cm of height of the capital. As for the entablature, assuming it had one, it would be composed of an architrave of 27 cm high, a frieze of 19 cm high and a cornice of 37.8 cm high. Lastly, the lower diameter of the shaft would be equivalent to 37.8 cm.

Capitals nr. 17 and 27 range around 48 cm high, from which we would obtain a column of 4.32 m high divided into 24 cm of height of the base, 360 cm of height of the shaft and 48 cm of height of the capital. As for the entablature, assuming it had one, it would be composed of an architrave of 30.86 cm high, a frieze of 21.6 cm high and a cornice of 43.2 cm high. Lastly, the lower diameter of the shaft would be equivalent to 43.2 cm.

Capitals nr. 22 and 23 range around 35 cm high, from which we would obtain a column of 3.15 m high divided into 17.5 cm of height of the base, 262.5 cm of height of the shaft and 35 cm of height of the capital. As for the entablature, assuming it had one, it would be composed of an architrave of 22.5 cm high, a frieze of 15.75 cm high and a cornice of 31.5 cm high. Lastly, the lower diameter of the shaft would be equivalent to 31.5 cm.

Fragment nr. 8 is the volute of a capital of 66 cm high, from which we would obtain a column of 5.94 m high divided into 33 cm of height of the base, 495 cm of height of the shaft and 66 cm of height of the capital. As for the entablature, assuming it had one, it would be composed of an architrave of 42.43 cm high, a frieze of 29.7 cm high and a cornice of 59.4 cm high. Lastly, the lower diameter of the shaft would be equivalent to 59.4 cm.

Fragment nr. 5 is the Ionic *kymation* of a monumental capital of 87 cm high, from which we would obtain a column of 7.83 m high divided into 43.5 cm of height of the base, 652.5 cm of height of the shaft and 87 cm of height of the capital. As for the entablature, assuming it had one, it would be composed of an architrave of 55.93 cm high, a frieze of 39.15 cm high and a cornice of 78.3 cm high. Lastly, the lower diameter of the shaft would be equivalent to 78.3 cm.

[80] Wilson 2000, pp. 143-148.

[81] Wilson 1989, pp. 41-47.

Fragment nr. 4 corresponds to the volute of a capital of 105 cm high, from which we would obtain a column of 9.45 m high divided into 52.5 cm of height of the base, 787.5 cm of height of the shaft and 105 cm of height of the capital. As for the entablature, assuming it had one, it would be composed of an architrave of 67.5 cm high, a frieze of 47.25 cm high and a cornice of 94.5 cm high. Lastly, the lower diameter of the shaft would be equivalent to 94.5 cm.

Finally, we must note that it is impossible to calculate the dimensions of capital nr. 26 due to its late chronology, a moment in which architecture ceased to be ordered by particular rules. In the same way, given their difficult ascription and poor state of preservation, we cannot calculate the dimensions of pieces nrr. 1, 12, 13 and 14.

Pieces (fig. 32)	h_{cap}	h_{bas}	h	D	H	h_a	h_f	h_{cor}
Nrr. 22 and 23	35	17.5	262.5	31.5	315	22.50	15.75	31.5
Nrr. 18, 21, 24, 25 and 29.	42	21.0	315.0	37.8	378	27.00	18.90	37.8
Nrr. 17 and 27	48	24.0	360.0	43.2	432	30.86	21.60	43.2
Nrr. 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15, 16, 30 and 31.	60	30.0	450.0	54.0	540	38.57	27.00	54.0
Nr. 8	66	33.0	495.0	59.4	594	42.43	29.70	59.4
Nr. 5	87	43.5	652.5	78.3	783	55.93	39.15	78.3
Nr. 4	105	52.5	787.5	94.5	945	67.50	47.25	94.5

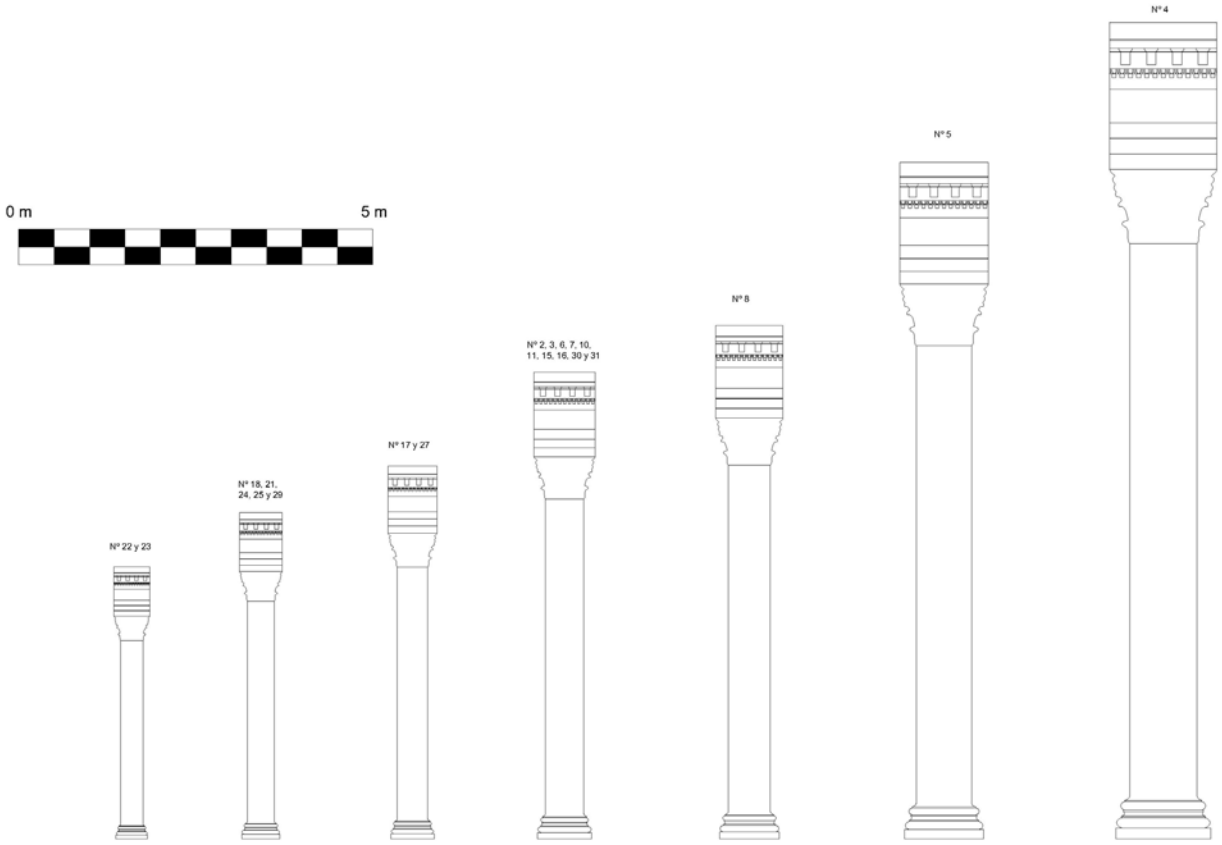


Fig. 32. Hypothetical reconstruction based on the calculated dimensions for each piece.

[82] We start from the premise that a Roman foot measures 29.6 cm.



Fig. 33. Map of the city of Córdoba indicating the location of the pieces with a known findspot.

5. Interpretation

The interpretation and localization of the archaeological remains in Roman Córdoba present great difficulties both due to the lack of data relative to old excavations and due to the high degree of reuse of the pieces that alters their archaeological context. Of the 31 presented cases we only know the provenance of 11 of them (nrr. 1, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 22, 30 and 31). The rest were discovered in old excavations, poorly documented, or in contexts of reuse (fig. 33). Pieces 1, 5 and 14 appeared during the excavations of Cruz Conde Street in the 1940s. As C. Márquez has pointed out[83], a lime kiln must have existed in this zone of the city. The kiln must have systematically reused the marble elements of the nearby Forum, of the *Forum Novum* and of other monuments of the city, so the pieces could have come from a different location.

Capital nr. 10 was also documented in a context of reuse coming from 9 Santa Ana Street, embedded in a wall of modern times. Likewise, nr. 8 was recorded in the year 1924, as coming from San Felipe Street, a time when shallow paving works were carried out. Roadworks also unearthed fragment nr. 6, also reused, rescued in 1999 from the Posada Vallinas[84], close to the Bridge Gate, where it formed part of the decoration of this building.

In summary, we only know the archaeological context of capitals nrr. 30 and 31 thanks to the information gathered in the database of the museum of San Vicente of the Mosque-Cathedral[85]. Both pieces come from the excavation carried out on the plot of Caño Quebrado Street, supposedly in Early Imperial levels. We do not yet have the excavation report.

In light of these data, the first set of capitals can be clearly attributed to the surroundings of the Bridge Gate. In this same space, in the early 2000s, an intervention was carried out that allowed the documentation of a large porticoed square from the time of the emperor Claudius. The square, of which barely a strip of ashlars of its foundation and a slab of local limestone *in situ* have been preserved, was delimited by a portico of which we possess scarce data (fig. 34)[86].

[83] Márquez 1998, p. 208.
[84] Aparicio 1999, pp. 147-150.
[85] We thank the archaeologist Raimundo Ortiz for having provided us with this information.
[86] Carrasco *et al.* 2000, pp. 286-289.

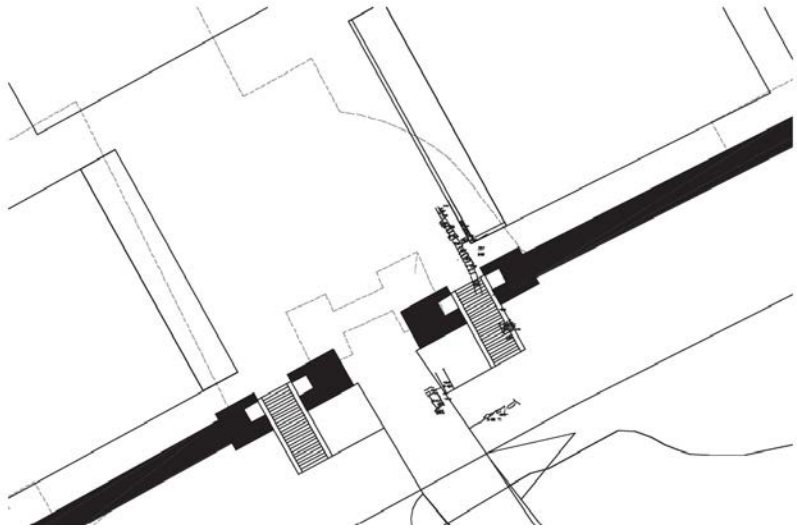


Fig. 34. Hypothetical reconstruction of the porticoed square around the Bridge Gate, proposed by Carrasco *et al.* (2000, fig. 1).

In the 2nd c. AD this porticoed square would fall out of use or, at least a part of it, would have been divided and compartmentalized into several *tabernae* located in various points of the surroundings[87].

The composite order, as has already been mentioned, is widespread throughout all Eastern and Western provinces. Specifically, in Hispania and Gaul, we find this order in the decoration of porticos related to imperial power: *Tarraco*, Beja, Aquileia, Nasium or Nyon are some of the cases that illustrate this dynamic.

In *Colonia Patricia* the environment of the Bridge Gate played a key role in the economic development of the city due to the *Baetis* river being the gateway of entry and exit for all types of merchandise. The porticoed square, as several authors have pointed out, would act as an element of ennoblement of the space, on axis with the Bridge Gate itself, a monumental access of three openings uniting the bridge with the city[88]. In this context, the composite order would possess a clear symbolic message related to victory and prosperity[89], used in a space that is not only a case of architectural ostentation, but that, possibly, acted as a commercial forum of the city of Córdoba[90].

Therefore, based on this premise, the space of approximately 40 x 35 m would possess a portico composed of columns 5.4 m high, only enclosed on three of its sides, given the connection with the city gate, configuring itself as a commercial hub.

As for the chronological gap, the dating of the square to Claudian times and the first set of capitals to the late Julio-Claudian or early Flavian periods, could be due to several reasons. It could well result from a prolonged construction process that culminated in Neronian-Vespasianic times, a phenomenon that has been proposed for other monuments of the city such as the temple of Claudio Marcelo Street[91]. On the other hand, this chronological mismatch could indicate the carrying out of a reform of the Julio-Claudian square in Flavian times. We believe the first option to be more accurate because it is a phenomenon documented in the city, while the second option proposes dates too close between the principate of Claudius (41-54 AD) and the beginning of the reign of Vespasian (69-79 AD), in which it would make no sense to carry out any reform.

As for the rest of the pieces, the presence of monumental capitals, nrr. 4 and 5, which allow reconstructing columns of large dimensions, 9.45 and 7.83 m respectively, offers us a renewed image of the public building of this time. Given that, as has already been argued, the presence of the composite order is limited to triumphal arches and porticoed enclosures, the group of monuments in which it is possible to locate these columns of colossal size in *Colonia Patricia* is quite reduced, barely constituted by the imperial cult enclosure of Claudio Marcelo Street and that of Morería Street, also denominated as *Forum Novum*.

The temple of Morería Street would have included a portico closed on three of its sides with columns of 82 cm in diameter which, applying the formulas outlined previously, would result in a capital 91 cm high. These dimensions are quite similar to those proposed for piece nr. 5, reconstructed at 87 cm high, barely varying by 4 cm. Furthermore,

[87] Casal, Salinas 2004, p. 714.

[88] Murillo, Vaquerizo, 2010, pp. 474-476. In the Bridge Gate itself, part of a marble torso of difficult classification and dating was discovered. Hypothetically, it has been related to the decoration of this porticoed space (Garriguet 2013, pp. 382-384; Garriguet 2014, pp. 93-94).

[89] Numerous authors attribute to the composite order this message of victory, hence its widespread use in triumphal arches.

[90] Márquez, Castillo 2026, p. 83; Vaquerizo 2024, pp. 122-139.

[91] Garriguet 2014b, pp. 257-266.

some authors have proposed a Flavian dating for the construction of the cult enclosure based on its dimensions and morphology[92]. Despite everything, just as A. Portillo notes, the Flavian ascription of this enclosure is extremely complicated, opting for a pristine case of Tiberian times regarding the dimensions of the portico[93]. However, given the dimensions of piece nr. 5, which fit perfectly with the scheme of the enclosure of Morería Street, and the existing doubts for its early chronological framing, we believe it plausible to date this square in the Flavian period. Its columns would have been decorated, therefore, with capitals of composite order[94].

Piece nr. 4, although considerably larger than the previous one, could also be framed within this complex, perhaps as part of a monumentalized access that required columns of a higher module.

Another possibility is the localization of these composite order capitals in the π-shaped portico of the monumental complex of Claudio Marcelo Street. This space of the city, which presents great similarities with its namesake in *Tarraco*, was composed on its upper terrace by a portico to which, traditionally, the Corinthian order has been assigned, despite the fact that the capital fragments are extremely scarce and are very deteriorated[95]. In a recent work, we proposed the reconstruction of the column of the portico at around 8 m high, similar to the one calculated for the portico of Morería Street and for the column of piece nr. 5. Furthermore, some authors have proposed a Flavian chronology for this complex that would reinforce the presence of the composite order in this space for the reasons already presented[96]. However, given that in none of the excavations carried out in this environment have remains of composite order capitals been documented, we are not in a position to be able to confirm this hypothesis, although the dimensions of the pieces and the chronology endorse it thus.

Lastly, the localization of the rest of the composite capitals presented here is extremely complicated. All of them present very reduced dimensions that are not ascribed to any of the large public complexes unearthed in *Colonia Patricia*. However, given the association of this order with public architecture and its absence from other social contexts, we prefer to ascribe it to public buildings that are not yet documented[97].

It is worth noting the chronology of the capitals of smaller dimensions, all of them dated from the time of Hadrian onwards and one, specifically, from the 3rd c. AD onwards, a moment in which the reform and *refectio* of some spaces of the city has been documented: the *Forum Novum*[98] and the *porticus in summa cavea* of the city's theatre[99]. Given that, for Hadrianic times, *Colonia Patricia* did not suffer large processes of urban modification[100], the presence of these capitals could be framed as part of some of these maintenance works or small interventions in the already existing spaces since the 1st c. AD.

6. Conclusion

The comprehensive review of all the fragments and composite capitals documented in *Colonia Patricia* has allowed us to establish some guidelines for perceiving and understanding the state of this architectural order over time. In turn, the exhaustive search in the collections of the MACo and in other Cordoban collections has enabled us to recover the 31 fragments that we have presented here. In this regard, we wish to recall the words of M.ª Ángeles Gutiérrez Behemerid, who, in a seminal article for our work, wrote already more than 35 years ago that "just as in the rest of the Roman world, the composite capital is scarcely represented in the Iberian Peninsula[...] barely thirty [...]"[101]. Therefore, our main objective has been fulfilled which was to unearth and present jointly the totality of the fragments of the order that are preserved in Córdoba.

Córdoba is situated, thus, as a centre of special importance for the study of this specific order in Hispania in particular and in the Mediterranean more broadly. The singularity of the Cordoban set lies in the wide chronological distribution of the composite capital in the city, from Augustan times until the 4th c. AD. This characteristic is unusual in other Hispanic cities where the presence of this architectural type is restricted to very particular spaces and chronologies.

[92] Peña 2009, p. 575.

[93] Portillo 2016, pp. 90-91.

[94] A. Peña already proposed this possibility based on the fragment of volute nr. 4 (Peña 2009, p. 575).

[95] Barely 6 very deteriorated capital fragments are preserved (Gutiérrez 2015, p. 191).

[96] (Márquez 2004, p. 121-122; Jiménez 1996, p. 246) J. A. Garriguet opts for a Neronian dating for the complex but, very accurately, notes that there must have been a certain dilation between the beginning of the works and their culmination due to the historical events that characterized the principate of Nero (Garriguet 2014, pp. 247-266).

[97] Although the majority of composite capitals are associated with honorary arches, porticoes, or similar structures, there are groups of pieces attributed to temples, primarily in the eastern provinces of the empire (Stinson 2023, pp. 347-353).

[98] Portillo 2015, pp. 71-82; Ruiz, Portillo 2020, pp. 137-138.

[99] Márquez 2002, pp. 256-260.

[100] Although the latest advances in the study of Roman sculpture of Córdoba show extensive works of embellishment of public spaces in the first half of the 2nd c. AD (Márquez 2020, p. 389; Márquez 2023, p. 214), this dynamic has not been verified in the field of architecture, beyond reforms or small modifications of already existing buildings.

[101] Gutiérrez 1985, p. 81.

Furthermore, the detailed analysis of all the fragments has allowed the revision of the architectural decoration of some public spaces of the city. The most paradigmatic case is that of the porticoed square of the environment of the Bridge Gate, which, with certainty, would have been decorated with this architectural order. Secondly, other public monuments like the environment of the *Forum Novum* or the monumental complex of Claudio Marcelo Street would also have been ornamented with this type of capital, although the defence of this hypothesis is more complicated. However, we hope this work serves to reconsider certain questions relative to the architectural ornamentation of the city, which, as a general rule and widely, is associated with a specific architectural type: the Corinthian order, even though, on many occasions and in diverse places of the Roman Mediterranean, other architectural forms are used, even if the latter was predominant.

On the other hand, the revision of the composite order has confirmed previous assumptions about Roman architecture of *Colonia Patricia*. In the first place, it highlights the undeniable monumental power and the development of a building program fully linked to the imperial regime for chronologies of the 1st c. AD. Furthermore, a dynamic already studied in the other provincial capitals like Mérida and Tarragona has been verified, consisting of the remodelling or construction of their main centres in Flavian times. This dynamic is perfectly reflected in Córdoba with the presence of a homogeneous group of composite capitals of 2 feet in height and of other fragments that suggest capitals of greater size. The reduction in size and output from Hadrianic times onwards has also been confirmed. This situation, as has already been outlined, does not differ at all from the evolution of a city that, having already designed and constructed its main public buildings, dedicates its resources to the embellishment of certain particular sites or to the restoration of those in need of it.

To summarize, the purpose of this work has been to open a new line of research that allows reviewing in a gradual manner the general rules of the architectural ornamentation of *Colonia Patricia*. We suggest that the meticulous analysis of the available material record, whether unpublished or previously published, will yield relevant results to expand our knowledge about the ornamental landscape of the Roman city of Córdoba.

Catalogue Data

Piece 1 - Height: 14.5 cm; Width: 7 cm; Depth: 5 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: 9611.
Piece 2 - Height: 57.5 cm; Width: 45 cm; Depth: 45 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: 31291.
Piece 3 - Height: 15.9 cm; Width: 13.2 cm; Depth: 13 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: SN.
Piece 4 - Height: 21.5 cm; Width: 31 cm; Depth: 11.5 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: 2558.
Piece 5 - Height: 22 cm; Width: 42.5 cm; Depth: 28 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: 9501.
Piece 6 - Height: 60 cm; Width: 79 cm; Depth: 79 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: 33103.
Piece 7 - Height: 61 cm; Width: 54 cm; Depth: 54 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: SN.
Piece 8 - Height: 23.3 cm; Width: 15 cm; Depth: 8.5 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: 3765.
Piece 9 - Height: 32 cm; Width: 52 cm; Depth: 17 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: 31390.
Piece 10 - Height: 49 cm; Width: 54 cm; Depth: 54 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: SN.
Piece 11- Height: 16.2 cm; Width: 14.5 cm; Depth: 9 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: SN.
Piece 12 - Height: 19 cm; Width: 20 cm; Depth: 5 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: 2511.
Piece 13 - Height: 17.2 cm; Width: 17.5 cm; Depth: 5 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: 2510.
Piece 14 - Height: 14 cm; Width: 11 cm; Depth: 16 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: 9714.
Piece 15 - Height: 21 cm; Width: 23.5 cm; Depth: 9.5 cm. Registration nr. of the MACo: 9760.
Piece 16 - Height: 46 cm; Width: 50 cm; Depth: 50 cm.
Piece 17 -: Height: 48 cm; Width: 57 cm; Depth: 23 cm.
Piece 18 - Height: 42 cm; Width: 60 cm; Depth: 60 cm.
Piece 19 - Unknown measurements.
Piece 20 - Height: 41 cm; Width: 54 cm; Depth: 54 cm.
Piece 21- Height: 42 cm; Width: 48 cm; Depth: 48 cm.
Piece 22 - Height: 35 cm; other measurements are unknown.
Piece 23 - Height: 33 cm; other measurements are unknown.
Piece 24 - Height: 38 cm; Width: 37 cm; Depth: 37 cm.
Piece 25 - Height: 39 cm; Width: 37 cm; Depth: 37 cm.
Piece 26 - Height: 22 cm; other measures are unknown.
Piece 27 - Height: 47 cm; Width: 60 cm; Depth: 42 cm.
Piece 28 - Height: 42 cm; Width: 59 cm; Depth: 59 cm.
Piece 29 - Height: 41 cm; Width: 61 cm; Depth: 61 cm.
Piece 30 - Height: 47.5cm; Width: 50 cm; Depth: 50 cm.
Piece 31 - Height: 47.5cm; Width: 50 cm; Depth: 50 cm.

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