

## THE BYZANTINE ROUND FORUM OF DYRRACHIUM

The Byzantine Round Forum of Dyrrachium, modern Durrës, was discovered occasionally in the mid 80's. There were some excavations for a huge project of constructing a new building complex, close to the center of the city, and some slabs of Proconnessos marble in a depth of -2.40m from the street level, were a good sign to interrupt the works. The archaeologists, were called to make some archaeological excavations and they worked for several months in a territory with a total space of 1600m<sup>2</sup>. As result, the archaeologists, realized that they found a Byzantine Round Forum, dated in the early Byzantine period, in V<sup>th</sup>-VI<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

The Byzantine Round Forum, has a diameter of 40m and is surrounded with columns decorated with Composite capitals. Around the colonnade, the archaeologists found a passage and traces of constructions, which are a part of this Forum and enlarged the Byzantine Round Forum to a diameter of 72m. Forum is very close to the Public Roman Bath of the city,<sup>2</sup> although they are dated in different periods and of course, in different levels. *In situ*, in the Byzantine Round Forum, are found some columns of the colonnade, parts of pavement, a cistern, a 'podium' in the center and the fundaments of constructions around it. The archaeologists mentioned that, there are found three entire columns, two others columns fragments, two capitals and one impost.

In better condition is presented the base of the porticoes, which is realized in *opus mixtum*. It's thick of 0.85m and height of 0.30m. On the top, there are fixed stone blocks of rectangular shape. On five of them, there are found columns basements and in some of them, there are found acronyms ΠΑΤ, ΕΥ etc.

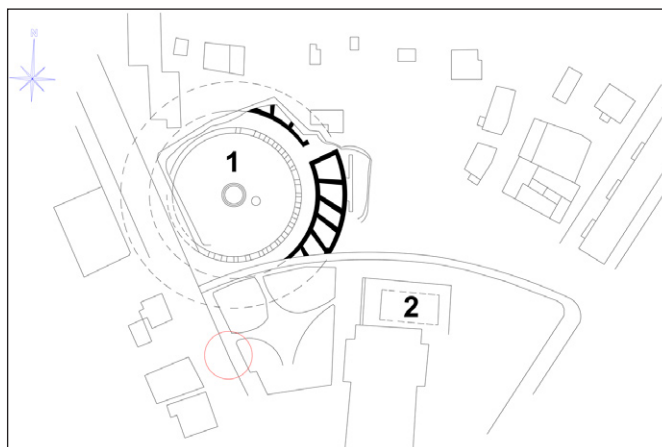
The Columns and the capitals are made of marble imported from Proconnessos. The import of Proconnessos marble from Marmara quarries, in Dyrrachium, has started since the II Century A.D. and reached its peak particularly in VI century A.D. It is seen that, this marble was not used anymore and anywhere, between the death of Justinian and the mid-or late XVI century.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hoti, A., 'Germimet arkeologjike te vitit 1987-DURRES', *Iliria* 2, (Tirana 1987) 261 (in albanian with resume in french)

<sup>2</sup> Miraj, L., 'The Roman Baths of Dyrrah', *Iliria*, (Tirana 1994/1-2) 215-247 (in Albanian with resume in french)

<sup>3</sup> Rogers, J. M., *Sinan*, (Oxford, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, 2006) 50



S1: 1-Byzantine Round Forum, 2-Roman Bath

S1 Византијски кружни форум, 2 – Римско купатило

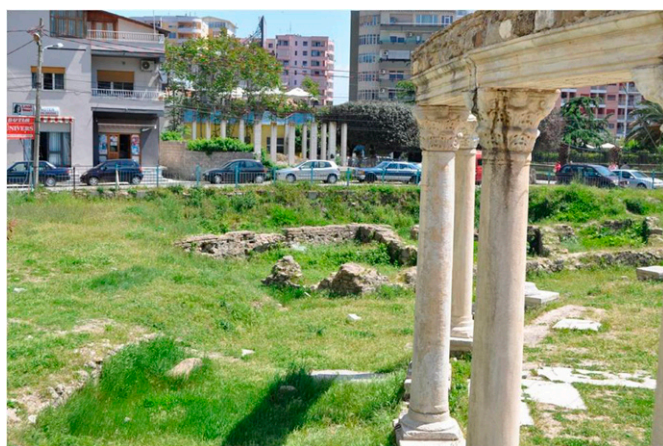


Fig. 1 Columns and composite capitals made of Proconnesian marble

Сл. 1 Колоне и композитни капители израђени од мермера из Проконесоса

Byzantine Round Forum is paved with slabs of Proconnessos marble too. The slabs have a rectangular and trapezoidal shape with different dimensions 3.20x1.15x0.05m; 2.50x0.80x0.05m; 2.00x0.90x0.04m. It is preserved only a limited number of the slabs, but it's quite enough, to create the full image of the radial structure of them. On the surface of some slabs, there are some scratches of the greek letters  $\Phi$  and the combination of  $\iota\omega$ .

In the center of the Bizantine Round Forum, is a 'podium' constructed with *opus caementicium* and we can note the use of the strong limestone mortar and its circular shape. Podium has a diameter of 4.50m and it is 0.80m height. There are three steps around it and some parts of plaster with fresco. In one of them, on the white background of the surface, there are designed small red squares of 1cm, which seems to be a mosaic imitation. Probably, this fresco has been a part of podium decorations. Close to this podium there are found some pieces of marble slabs, a piece of column and part of a marble sculpture. Some marble traces *in situ* lead us to suppose, that the podium has been a basement for any column, or perhaps a statue.

S2: 1-Forum square,  
2-Porticoes, 3-Podium,  
4-Cistern, 5-Passage,  
6-Shop's traces

S2 1-Трг форума,  
2-портик, 3-подијум,  
4-цистерна, 5-пролаз,  
6-остаци радњи

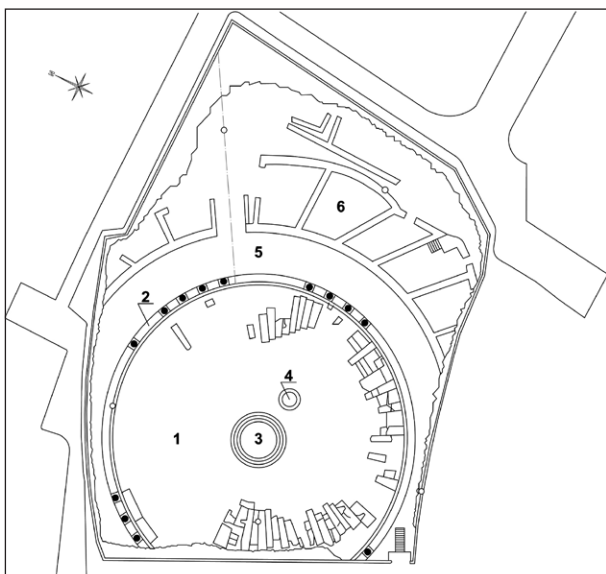


Fig. 2 Round Forum  
Сл. 2 Кружни форум



Two meters away from the podium, on the eastern part of it, is located a cistern. Its throat has a diameter of 1.20m and it's realized with *opus mixtum*. From the excavations of its pavement, there were found a number of ceramic pieces that belongs to IV<sup>th</sup> century and the early V<sup>th</sup> AD. This reveal, gave to the archaeologists a *terminus antequem* for the realization of this monument around the V<sup>th</sup> and the early VI<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>4</sup>

During the excavation, archaeologists mentioned that it's not found any construction elements, that can support the hypothesis, that this monument has been covered. The Round Forum is an unique monument of this type, found in Albania till now.

<sup>4</sup> Hoti, A., 'Germimet arkeologjike te vitit 1987-DURRES', *Iliria* 2, (Tirana 1987) 262, (in albanian with resume in french)



Fig. 3 Circular passage and shop's traces

Сл. 3 Кружни пролаз и остаци радњи

The presence of some religious buildings, around and close to the Byzantine Round Forum, affirms the greatest importance of this monument in the urban development of the city center, during the late antiquity and early Middle Ages.

The monument, with relatively large surface and probably uncovered, may be regarded as a fundamental component of the city because of its contribution as a public square. Being surrounded by trade buildings, is very presumable that it has been the market place of the city.

Following the excavations, on the east of the round colonnade porticoes, the archaeologists discovered some other architectural elements, a passage, a group of enclosed shop's spaces, located next to each other in concentric, sectors form and the main entrance of the monument.<sup>5</sup> This architectural compositional scheme enlarged the Round Forum to a diameter of 72m.

The discovered passage, 5.30m abroad, presented an open, circular corridor, that had an organizing function, by providing a place for people to move, to meet and mix without problems. Most importantly, all the shop's buildings have one of their entrances on the circular passage, that it was bordered by the colonnade of the porticoes and the inside walls of the shop's group.

The shop's group was created by the division of the second circular area with some radial walls. There are discovered the trails of seven shop's spaces, until now, preserving only the foundations walls realized by stone blocks and limestone mortar, with 2.30m of height and just a small part of the shop's byzantine walls with remaining height of 0.30-0.40m. Some of the bricks with 35x29x5cm of sizes have some Greek monograms Ø, π, etc.<sup>6</sup>

Tiles covered the leaning roof of the shop's spaces. This, was proved by the archaeological material discovered during the excavations inside of the foundations walls of the shops.

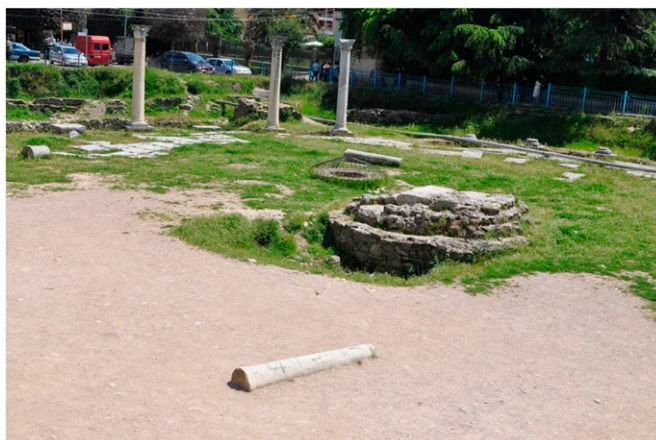
The main entrance of the monument is located on the eastern side. It was like an open corridor of 8m long and 4m wide, formed by two parallel walls.

<sup>5</sup> Hoti, A., 'Germimet arkeologjike te vitit 1988-DURRES', *Iliria* 2, (Tirana 1988) 271, (in albanian with resume in french)

<sup>6</sup> Hoti, A., 'Germimet arkeologjike te vitit 1988-DURRES', *Iliria* 2, (Tirana 1988) 272, (in albanian with resume in french)

Fig. 4 Podium constructed with *opus caementicium*

Сл. 4 Подијум израђен са *opus caementicium*



The existence of a channel from the square to the main collector of the sewage system, was established during the archaeological excavations, at the east side.

Inside the shop's spaces group and around them, at the depth from 1.80m to 2.50m underground there are found some archaeological materials consisting of ceramics, of V<sup>th</sup>- VI<sup>th</sup> century: large and small containers, lamps etc., associated with coins of Anastas and Justinian Emperors etc. Even in the upper level, at the depth of 1.80 meter, there are found parts of jewelry decorated with wide lines stripes of white and brown color.

It was found an iron hoe, a bronze steelyard, some leaden and clay weighers, a bronze scraper for horses, and some other objects of a particular type: seals for cargo control, card games, terracotta female figure, all of this made of clay.

The discovery of the fishing tools and relatively the large number of bronze coins (50 pieces) of Emperors Mauricio Tiberius (582-602), Leo VI (887-912), John I Tzimiskes (969-976) etc., leads the archaeologists, to suppose that this building was a market place.<sup>7</sup>

During the first campaign of the excavations, there were discovered several graves in a depth of 2.35-2.40 meters, inside and outside the monument's structures. Five of this graves, there were build inside the porticoes, while the others were out of the colonnade. Some of the graves had a West-East orientation (scull on the West), meanwhile other graves, had a Nord-South orientation. On the graves was noticed the body burial manner and only two of them were equipped with objects, In one of them there were founded 11 beads of type 'milefiori' and others with two temporals with twisted bronze ends. Outside the graves there were also found a fastener composed of two parts and a chain of a circular form, both of them made of bronze. All of the ornaments founded in the graves and outside of them were dated by the archaeologists in VII<sup>th</sup>-VIII<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>

During the second campaign of the excavations, there were discovered others 41 graves (depth 2.00m-3.20m). The graves had a West-East orientation

<sup>7</sup> Hoti, A., *op. cit.* (Tirana 1988) 272

<sup>8</sup> Hoti, A., *op. cit.* (Tirana 1987) 262

with a slight deviations to the NE-SW or NW-SE. In all of them was noticed the body burial manner. All skeletons were placed on the back side with stretched limbs. Most of the graves were found without inventory. Only in some of them, there were founded metal objects: an encolpion, a circular bronze object and two coins in unreadable condition.

The transformation of the Round Forum to a burial place during VII<sup>th</sup>-VIII<sup>th</sup> AD, shows that this monument has been destroyed at this time, most probably after a strong earthquake<sup>9</sup> that shocked the city during the third decade of the VI century,<sup>10</sup> although “The emperor donated a lot of money to repair the damages”. There is a probability that this emperor <sup>11</sup>has been Justinian I, even though constructions belonged to this period are not included in Procopius list. Procopius (mid-sixth century AD) wrote in Greek a book *De Aedificis*, about the buildings erected by Justinian in the eastern Empire and in East Illyricum too. Yet it was not with buildings alone that he fortified this land, but he also established very considerable garrisons of troops in all the strongholds and thereby warded off the assaults of the barbarians.<sup>12</sup>

The Sixth Century, and more specifically, the reign of Justinian, is the one that witnessed the explosion of Christian art in Byzantium. It's golden period, both in the Capital and in the provinces, involving Dyrrachium.

Regardless of the various architectural elements and numerous discoveries scattered among the ruins of the Byzantine period, we have to admit that we don't know much about the city during this period.

The Byzantine Round Forum of Durrës, a monument of great importance is in poor conditions and is necessary of immediately preventions for its conservation and restoration.

We are working to draft a detailed restoration project for the preservation, protection and evaluation.

Byzantine Round Forum seem to be, so much similar with the huge oval Forum Cardo of Jerash Ist century AD, known as Gerasa of the Decapolis (located on the banks of the river Chrysorhoas, about 42 km north of modern Amman Jordan),<sup>13</sup> which was at the southern end of the main street. It was largely enclosed by Ionic colonnaded porticoes, and beautifully paved with heavy stone blocks in concentric circles. Underneath the pavement was a complex system of drains. There may have been a fountain or cistern at the center. It is over 80 meters long. Although it is consistently referred to as a Forum, the function of the area is still very uncertain. The purpose of this plaza, the reason for its peculiar shape, and its date are all problematical. No doubt it was a kind of

<sup>9</sup> Guidoboni, E., *I terremoti prima del Mille in Italia e nell'area Mediterranea* (Bologna 1989) 690

<sup>10</sup> Miraj, L., ‘The Chapel in the Amphitheater of Dyrrachium and its Mosaics’, *Antichità Alto Adriatiche-L III* (Trieste 2003) 245-291

<sup>11</sup> Miraj, L., ‘Some new data on the construction date of Dyrrachium's Byzantine walls, *Nis and Byzantium* (Nis 2012) 208

<sup>12</sup> Procopius, *Building book IV (part 2)*, edited and translated into English by Dewing, H. B., (Dewing 1935) 279

<sup>13</sup> Kraeling, C. H., *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis* (Yale University, British school of Archaeology in Jerusalem 1938) 12, 13

public meeting place for festivities and public ceremonies, or simply a market place. (Rostovtzeff thinks that the Forum was the market place where the caravan camels were unloaded, the goods placed in storerooms, and the travelers assumed clean attire before entering the clean and elegant city).<sup>14</sup> It was probably destroyed in an earthquake in 746 - 747 AD.

One other similar example is Constantine's porphyry column, which was placed in the emperor's new forum, a large oval (or possible round) space laid out in front of the old gate of the city. In the Madaba Mosaic Map (Jordan), it's a column stay not in a forum but in a gateway square, following the eastern custom where such spaces functioned in a civic capacity much like Roman forum. A mosaic of Kastron Mefaa (ancient city of Amman) shows a similar situation with the column, acting as an identifying feature for the city, just outside the gate in the square between castrum and the city.<sup>15</sup>

When built, the Jerusalem column would have carried a statue of an emperor on top,<sup>16</sup> which in the Christian city seems to have been replaced by an image of a head with a cross or perhaps a cross alone. The Madaba Map shows neither, but a drawing of Jerusalem, likely after Arculf,<sup>17</sup> found in a twelfth century manuscript in the Munich Staatsbibliothek depicts the column supporting a cross and nimbed head.<sup>18</sup> This image of a column and statue is similar to descriptions of Constantine's column at Constantinople, as the centerpiece in the Forum of Constantine a grand colonnaded plaza decorated with statues of pagan gods and Christian saints, circular in shape (unlike the Roman forums) with two monumental gates to the east and west, built at the foundation of Byzantium immediately outside of the old walls, which speak of seven rays of light around the emperor's head.<sup>19</sup> The *Tabula Peutingeriana* depicts the column with a statue of Constantine dressed and adorned as Apollo, carrying a lance and a globe.<sup>20</sup> The classical precedents are clear in Constantine's depiction as Helios; as well, written sources state that Constantine marked the city's foundation there by performing a sacrifice and naming the Tyche. At the same time, Christian content

<sup>14</sup> Rostovtzeff, M., *Caravan Cities* (Oxford 2008) 75

<sup>15</sup> For another similar mosaic, in the Church of the Lions, Umm al-Rasas, see: Piccirillo, M., *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman 1993) 337

<sup>16</sup> Avi-Yonah, M., *The Madaba Mosaic Map*, 52; has the opinion that the statue was of Hadrian

<sup>17</sup> Meehan, D., ed. Adamnan's *De Locis Sanctis* (Dublin 1958) 1-13

<sup>18</sup> The drawing is accompanied by part of Bede's description of Jerusalem from his *Liber de Locis Sanctis*, see: The Venerable Bede, *DE LOCIS SANCTIS*, c. 690 C.E., BAE-DAE, *LIBER DE LOCIS SANCTIS*. CORPUS SCRIPTORUM ECCLES. LATINORUM, XXXVIII, ITINERA HIEROSOLYMITANA, SAECULI IIII-VIII, ed. Paul Geyer, 1898, Transl. Arnold vander Nat, 2001

<sup>19</sup> Malalas, J., *Chronographia*, (1831)13.320, PG, 97.480; offer a similar observation without enumerating the rays. On Constantine's column at Constantinople, now known as the Burned Column, see: Dagron, G., *Naissance d'une capitale*, (Paris 1974) 36-40; 58; 98-99; idem, *Constantine's Porphyry column and the Chapel of St. Constantine*, Krautheimer, G., *Three Christian Capitals*, (California 1983) 55-57; 60-64

<sup>20</sup> A second century map revised in the fifth century and existing in a thirteenth-century copy. For the Constantinople Tyche, see: Dagron, G., *Naissance d'une capitale*, (Paris 1974) 57-58; Krautheimer, G., *Three Christian Capitals* (California 1983) 56-57.

is also apparent: the sacrifice was bloodless, and as Krautheimer points out, it was unlikely that the Tyche was a goddess but rather the city's Fortune.<sup>21</sup> The column was transitional, its traditions to do with both pagan Rome and the new Christian capital. Clearly, the Jerusalem column had been set up earlier by pagan emperors yet, as the Madaba Map and Arculf suggest, it seems to have become a Christian landmark as well. As there are various gaps in our understanding of the Jerusalem monument, it is useful to look more closely at the one in Constantinople.

Long traditions of kingship and empire associated with Roman victory columns,<sup>22</sup> were integral to the Constantinople example, causing some Christians confusion and perturbation, for it was not always clear whether it was the kingship of Christ or of Constantine that was being venerated at the emperor's column. From the start, relics which imply syncretism were said to be embedded in the structure: fragments of the true cross from Jerusalem were hidden away in Constantine's statue in order to assure the security of the Constantinople, and at the same time the archaic Palladium was understood to have been transferred from Rome and buried beneath the column base. And as both the Christian liturgy and personal supplications to Constantine's image took place at the column base,<sup>23</sup> the waning tradition of the deified emperor appears to have been imbued with Christian meaning. After the new religion had taken hold, the column remained a symbol of the city. During an earthquake in 533 the residents of Constantinople fled to the forum to chant litanies all night and in the morning to invoke the „crucified one [to] save us and the city.“<sup>24</sup> It was a spontaneous gathering in what was clearly deemed to be the place of civic refuge and unity in times of trouble. The porphyry column was known to mark „the very spot where Constantine ordered the city to be built,“<sup>25</sup> the *mundus* of the new Constantinople; as it was also believed that the column would endure until the end of the world, all of history was summarised in this monument. He was Roman in its origin, but culturally and linguistically Greek, and essentially Christian.

In a similar sort of archetypical attribution, the Jerusalem column was reported by Arculf to stand in the place where the sun of the summer solstice casts no shadow, demonstrating that Jerusalem is at the centre of the earth. Arculf's comment is a curious one, for there is no doubt that Golgotha was believed by Christians to mark the sacred centre of the earth; this is clear in the Madaba Map. Yet, the column was also a centre, rooted in fundamental disclosures of geocentricity as well as Greco-Roman traditions associated with its milestone function and the widespread civic meanings of such a column in classical culture. In representing the light and longevity of the sun's rays, the column was not

<sup>21</sup> Krautheimer, G., *op. cit.*, 56

<sup>22</sup> On victory columns see: Vogel, L., *The Column of Antoninus Pius* (Washington D. C. 1973) 23-25.

<sup>23</sup> Krautheimer, G., *op. cit.*, 62

<sup>24</sup> Malalas, J., *Chronographia*, (1831)18.478, 97.693

<sup>25</sup> Theophanes, *Chonographia* 5816, quoted in Krautheimer, G., *Three Christian Capitals* (California 1983) 62

directly specific to Christian solar symbolism, yet it did signify the validating of Christian belief by natural phenomena. Eventually the column became associated with Christian content, accruing legends, often to do with miracles concerning the cross, which rendered it part of the Christian topography of the city. Philippe Verdier has interpreted the column and its nimbed bust as manifesting the continuity of the symbolic linking of the cross and Christ with the sun and Helios;<sup>26</sup> for this he is particularly reliant upon the drawing of Jerusalem in the Munich manuscript. Verdier's research demonstrates the complexity of the transformation of pagan institutions by Christianity of which a reorientation of the column within the traditions of the cross at Golgotha is an example. Like many similar cases, some residue of Greco-Roman culture persists which in terms of the Jerusalem column, as with its counterpart in Constantinople, has to do with the basic and ancient practice of marking the centre of the city.

Dyrrachium, the most ancient city of the Adriatic Sea, the head bridge of Egnatia Antique Highway, was a very important part of the Byzantine Empire.

According to Thomas F. Mathews,<sup>27</sup> one of the most famous byzantologists George Ostrogorski described the Byzantine Empire like this: "Roman government, Greek culture and Christianity are the key foundations of the Byzantine development. A lack of any of those elements would unhinge the very existence of Byzantium. Only by the congregation of Hellenic culture and Christianity with the Roman statehood could emerge such a historical entity that we call the Byzantine Empire."

Ентела Даци

#### ВИЗАНТИЈСКИ ОКРУГЛИ ФОРУМ У ДРАЧУ

Средином 80-их, током ископавања за изградњу новог блока зграда, у близини центра града Драча, наишло се слој мермерних плоча из Проконесоса. Изградња је била прекинута и археолози су спровели кампању ископавања која је довела до открића кружног централног форума града који припада византијском периоду V-VII века.

Византијски кружни форум са пречником од 40 м, оивичен је стубовима са коринтским капителима, а иза њих, пронађени су трагови продавница, које су саставни део овог централног градског трга, што је увећало кружни форуму до пречника од 72 м. Форум је заиста близу јавног римског градског купатила, али у различитим нивоима.

Увоз Проконесос мемера у Драч је почела још од II века нове ере и достиже свој врхунац нарочито у VII веку нове ере. Након снажног земљотреса који је потресао град, „Цар је поконио много новца да поправи штету“. Постоји вероватноћа да је овај цар Јустинијан I, иако конструкције које припадају овом периоду нису укључени у Прокопијевој списак.

Овај споменик од изузетног значаја је у лошим стању и неопходна је хитна превенција и конзерваторско - реставраторски радови. Радимо на изради предлога детаљног пројекта реставрације за очување, заштиту и евалуацију, како би се на достојанствен начин презентовао јавности.

<sup>26</sup> Verdier, Ph., *La colonne de colonia Aelia Capitolina* (1974) 17-40

<sup>27</sup> Mathews, Th. F., *Byzantium, From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York, 1998)

