CHAPTER V

CATALOGUE AND ANALYSIS OF IVORY, BONE, AND WOOD ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

Among the materials recovered from the apsidal room are various miniature architectural elements. These include a curved sequence of finely worked ivory egg-and-dart ornament (Cat. nos. 351-378); fragments of a wood arcade covered with bone veneer decorated with erotes (Cat. nos. 479-505); ivory capitals (Cat. nos. 379-401), columns (Cat. nos. 426-430), and bases (Cat. nos. 402-425) that made up a Corinthian order; and ivory architectural moldings and bone blocks in various shapes and sizes that probably belonged with the above (Cat. nos. 506-518). The Corinthian order and the arcade, which it almost certainly supported, constitute part of the decoration of what must have been an extremely fine and elegant piece of furniture (Pl. V.1, Fig. V.22 a, b). Architectural elements of this type, forming either rows of *aediculae* or continuous arcades, were used to subdivide the surface of elaborate cupboards, or *armaria*, and chests, such as the chest from Qustul (Pl. V.2). Architectural elements were also inserted as parts of beds and of chairs—either across the back, under the arms, and/or under the seat between the legs. The miniature architecture from Kenchreai is similar in concept to a wood balustrade from Egypt in Berlin and a fine bone balustrade excavated at Kom el-Dikka, in Alexandria. Architectural elements of bone, including semicircular arcades, balustrades, and capitals, have also been recovered from a villa in Salinae (modern Droitwich, Worcestershire) destroyed at the end of the third century. Although architectural motifs were sometimes inlaid, often they were attached so that they projected from the surface.

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1 For a colonnade-like insert in the back of a chair see the relief of Peter and Mark, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Inv. no. 270-1867; Longhurst, *Catalogue of Carvings in Ivory* 32, Pl. 10; Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike* 3 141, Cat. no. 243, Pl. 111. For an arcade across the back and supporting the seat, see the cather-dra of St. Peter, Rome; Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike* 3 147, Cat. no. 260, Pl. 116. In considerably later manuscripts, but possibly reflecting older types of elaborate throne-like chairs, there are superimposed arcades; e.g., a painting of Michael VII Ducas flanked by officials, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Inv. no. Coislin 79, 2r, dated 1074-78, has five rows of arcades fitted into the broad back; Spatharakis, *Corpus of Dated Illuminated Greek Manuscripts* 30-1, Cat. no. 94, fig. 173; a representation of Gregory in a church, in a manuscript dated to ca. 1150 at the Monastery of St. Catherine, Gr. 339, fol. 4v; Spatharakis, *Corpus of Dated Illuminated Greek Manuscripts* 43, Cat. no. 146, fig. 272; and a painting of John in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Inv. no. Suppl. Gr 612, 297r, dated 1164; Spatharakis, *Corpus of Dated Illuminated Greek Manuscripts* 45, Cat. no. 154, fig. 296.


3 Rodziewicz, M. *Alexandria* 245.


5 For example, the wood *aediculae* that surround bone plaques on the casket in Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, Inv. no. 71.40; Randall, *Masterpieces* 90-1, 107, Cat. no. 135, Colorpl. 44.
Although none of the columns is preserved in its entirety, an approximation of the height can be calculated from the height of the capitals and the diameter of the preserved fragments of shafts. In his discussion of proportion, Vitruvius defined column height (shaft plus capital) as 9.5 times the column diameter.\(^6\) A recent study of the proportions of the Roman Corinthian elevation in monumental architecture confirms that the diameter of the body of the column shaft is generally one-tenth of the overall height of the column plus capital and one-eighth of the height of the shaft.\(^7\) The height of Kenchreai bases that have plinths is usually one-half or five-ninths of the column diameter, and the capital height is usually between nine-eighths and eleven-tenths of the lower diameter. Since the largest diameter of the columns in this miniature order is 1.9 cm, applying this system of proportions yields a shaft height of ca. 15 cm. The capitals are ca. 2 cm in height, not too far removed from eleven-tenths in ratio to the column diameter. The height of the bases, ca. 1 cm, is about one-half of the column diameter of 1.9 cm, a typical proportion for monumental orders. The elevation was completed by a series of blocks that fitted under the column bases. The total height—including the blocks at 2 cm, a column base of 1.0 cm, a column shaft of 15 cm, and the capital of 2 cm—yields a total height of the miniature order of ca. 20 cm, just a little more than ten times the column diameter. This calculation indicates a ratio of the complete capital to the overall order that is typical of full-size examples of the Corinthian order.\(^8\) The combined height of the Corinthian order and the Erotes Arcade it supported, of 4.5 cm, was therefore ca. 25 cm.

There is considerable variation in the height of the capitals and the bases; however, the range of variation is about the same—ca. 0.55 cm and 0.6 cm, respectively. The workshop practice apparently was to cut these small elements freehand and fit them on the finished object by matching up a slightly shorter capital with a slightly higher base. Both this procedure and added upstands above the capitals were used in monumental architecture to adjust for minor deviations in height.\(^9\) Adjustments were necessary because, at least in some cases, the component architectural elements were made as stock and later shipped to fulfill contracts, a practice that persisted at least until the sixth century.\(^10\) In this miniature order, shims might also have been inserted beneath or in-between the blocks under the column bases to adjust the height further.

The Corinthian columns must have supported the wood arcade, which was veneered in bone carved with pairs of flying erotes. There are too many capitals and bases for the section of arcade that is preserved, but the diameter of the capitals, ca. 2.0 cm at the base, is not too different from the thickness of the arcade, ca. 1.6 cm. The diameter of the dowel holes in the capitals is 0.95 cm, and the diameter of the dowel holes preserved on the arcade is ca. 1.0 cm, that is, virtually the same size. Also, there are dowels at the center of the spandrels of the arcade to which the capitals could have been fitted. The transition from the capitals to the arcade is somewhat awkward but possible. On the miniature arcade from Kenchreai, one dowel ran down from the spandrel of the erotes arcade through the capital

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\(^6\) Vitruvius, *De arch.* III, 7.
\(^8\) Ibid., 41.
\(^9\) Ibid., 40-1.