

CHAPTER FOUR

# A PROTO-AEOLIC CAPITAL FROM THE OPHEL

*Margo Karlin and Eilat Mazar*

A fragment of a Proto-Aeolic capital was discovered in Jerusalem during the 2012 excavation season at the Ophel. The volute capital was discovered in secondary use in Locus 12-740, a Herodian period stone- and earth-fill within a plastered pool (B6168, L12-788). To date, only two other volute capitals have been found in Jerusalem, out of a total of about 50 discovered mainly in Israel, and a few in Jordan.

This Proto-Aeolic capital (Fig. III.4.1), made of hard, gray limestone, had been worked on its front side, but was left in rough state on its back side. The surface on the front side is smooth, with finely finished rounded lines forming the relief of a volute near the right edge of the capital and, left of this volute, a segment of the central triangle. The fragment measures 40.7 cm in length and 30.4 cm in width. The relief lines measure approximately 3 cm in width and 2 cm in depth.

## DISCUSSION

### Typology

In 1979, Yigal Shiloh suggested a typological classification system for the Proto-Aeolic capitals found in Israel and for the one found in Mudeibi (Moab). His classification system is still in use today in spite of the many additional capitals discovered since then. The capital uncovered in the Ophel fits Shiloh's southern type E classification, which includes the capitals found in Ramat Rahel, the City of David, and Mudeibi (Shiloh 1979:19).

Type E capitals contain a central triangle outlined by three lines (for exceptions see below). The base of the triangle is not defined by a line (*ibid.*). Unlike the capitals found in the north, attributed to the kingdom of Israel, these Proto-Aeolic capitals usually contain two concentric circles (*oculi*) that flank the apex of the triangle (Lipschits 2011:212).

### Parallels

The first Proto-Aeolic capital found in Jerusalem was discovered by Kathleen Kenyon during her excavations at the City of David (Kenyon 1967:59, Pl. 20; Shiloh 1979, Pl. 15:1; Lipschits 2011:214, Fig. 4). Two fragments of the same capital were found in an accumulation of ashlar stones (Lipschits 2011:212; Prag 1987:121-122). Shiloh described this capital as the finest example of a Proto-Aeolic capital in the country, both in its proportions and finish (Shiloh 1979:10-11).



**Fig. III.4.1.** Iron Age Proto-Aeolic Capital from the Ophel.

The capitals from the City of David and the Ophel bear striking similarities in design and proportions. Both were smoothed and finely finished. The placement of the central triangle in relation to the volute is also similar on the two capitals. This positioning differs greatly from that found on capitals from northern Israel and Jordan. The angle of the triangle on the Ophel capital clearly shows that the triangle was narrow and high, similar to the triangle on the City of David capital. The relief's depth and its round section are similar on the two capitals, creating what Shiloh described as "a pleasant effect" (*ibid.*, p. 11). Nevertheless, though remarkably alike, the two capitals are not identical. The volutes on the City of David capital turn slightly further outward than the more vertical volutes of the Ophel capital.

Half the above-mentioned dimensions in size, a small fragment (11×12×17 cm) of a Proto-Aeolic Capital in the same "Jerusalemite" style was recently found in the Giv'ati

Parking Lot excavations. It was found right next to a monumental entrance of an Iron Age II ashlar building, most of which is still buried under Late Roman debris (Ben-Ami and Tchekhanovets 2015).

Another Proto-Aeolic capital was discovered at 'Ain Joweizeh, in the region of Naḥal Rephaim, in the southern outskirts of the Jerusalem area. It was discovered as an architectural element carved inside an Iron Age tunnel spring (Ein Mor 2013:98–102, Figs. 4–5). Although not yet fully exposed, it is clear from the tall, narrow triangle, from the double concentric circles (*oculi*) flanking the apex of the triangle and the general proportions of the capital that this capital is remarkably similar to those found in the Ophel and the City of David (Ein Mor and Ron 2013:100, Fig. 16). It is likely that stone cutters used the same design template to chisel out all three.

Ten Proto-Aeolic capitals were discovered during Aharoni's excavations at Ramat Raḥel, in the palace dated to the 8th–7th centuries BCE. Three more fragments were recovered during the renewed excavations (Lipschits 2011:209–212). The capitals from Ramat Raḥel are similar to those from the City of David and 'Ain Joweizeh in that their central triangle is outlined by more than one line and that two concentric circles (*oculi*) flank the apex of the triangle (Shiloh 1979:19, 9–10). The volutes are slightly more vertical than those of the City of David capital; in this regard, they more closely resemble the capital from the Ophel. Many of the capitals from Ramat Raḥel were carved in relief on both their front and back sides, similarly to the one from the City of David (Barkay 2006:40). The Ramat Raḥel capitals differ from the City of David and 'Ain Joweizeh ones in that they have a wider triangle and the *oculi* are positioned farther apart from the outer line of the triangle (the last component is not relevant to the Ophel capital).

Five Proto-Aeolic capitals were discovered at Mudeibi in Jordan (Lipschits 2011:214–215). One of the capitals was discovered as part of a gate complex, dated to the 8th century BCE (Drinkard 2001; for a different opinion on the date, see Lipschits 2011:216). The capitals from Mudeibi, together with another capital found at Ein-Sara just west of el-Kerak, resemble those from Ramat Raḥel and Jerusalem in that they also have a triangle in their center with *oculi* flanking its upper apex (Lipschits 2011:215). These similarities prompted Shiloh to categorize the Mudeibi capitals as belonging to his type E. However, there are some differences between the Mudeibi capitals and those found in Jerusalem and Ramat Raḥel: the central triangle of the Mudeibi capitals is much wider and is made up of only two parallel lines instead of three; the volutes are smaller and lean inward rather than outwards; and the central triangle is much wider than the triangle on the Jerusalem and Ramat Raḥel types (*ibid.*).

## Chronology

The fragmentary state of the Ophel capital prevents carrying out a full typological comparison with other known capitals. Moreover, the fact that it was found in secondary use does not contribute much information regarding its dating, as is also the case for the capitals from the City of David and 'Ain Joweizeh, both found in contexts lacking definitive dating. Lipschits (2011:212–213) dated the capital from the City of David from the late 8th to the early 7th centuries BCE based on a typological comparison with the capitals from Ramat Raḥel (*ibid.*). Ein-Mor and Ron dated the capital from 'Ain Joweizeh to the end of the Iron Age II based on the same typological comparisons (Ein-Mor and Ron 2013:102).

## CONCLUSIONS

The Proto-Aeolic capital from the Ophel excavation amplifies the corpus of capitals found in Jerusalem. Although a precise chronological date cannot yet be affixed to the Proto-Aeolic capitals from Jerusalem, the Ophel capital complements our understanding of the unique features that distinguish the Jerusalem capitals from other Proto-Aeolic capitals found in Israel and Jordan. The remarkable similarities between the capitals from the Ophel, the City of David and 'Ain Joweizeh are noteworthy; in fact, owing to the difference between these capitals and those from Ramat Raḥel and Jordan we suggest assigning them their own subtype.

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