

# A menorah with a cross carved on a column of Nymphaeum A at Laodicea ad Lycum

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Laodikeia ad Lycum lies on the W edge of Phrygia. The modern villages incorporated within its territory are Eskihisar, Goncalı and Bozburun. An important city of the Lykos (Çürüksu) valley, Laodikeia was founded by Antiochus II at some time before 253 B.C. and was named for his wife Laodike.<sup>1</sup> Pliny (*NH* 5.105) states that the Antiochian city of Laodikeia was formerly called Diospolis and then Rhoas.<sup>2</sup> Its geographical importance derives from its position at the crossroads of routes from central and southern Anatolia with routes leading west. The wealth of Laodikeia hinged also on its active rôle in the textile trade (Strabo 12.8.16). It was aided by a favorable climate and the fertility of the Lykos valley. The site is surrounded by three rivers, the Lykos, the Caprus (Başlıçay) on the southeast, and the Asopus (Gümüştay-Goncalı-Deresi) on the northwest.<sup>3</sup> The city was founded on a high plateau between these rivers. Since there is no source of water on the plateau, water was a constant concern and a supply had to be brought from the Başpınar spring in Denizli, 8 km to the south. Built on a Hippodamian plan, the city suffered from frequent earthquakes throughout its history. Following the earthquake that also destroyed Aphrodisias and Hierapolis in the first half of the 7th c.,<sup>4</sup> the settlement moved to the district of Kaleiçi in Denizli.

The column which is the subject of this note belonged to the lower colonnade of the Composite order in the two-storeyed 'Nymphaeum A', which lies on the N side of the so-called Syrian road (fig. 1). An inscription on its architrave shows that the nymphaeum was dedicated to Septimius Severus (ruled 193-211).<sup>5</sup> It was repaired in the time of Diocletian and remained standing until it collapsed in the earthquake of A.D. 494.<sup>6</sup> During our excavations in 2003, a column fragment depicting a Christian cross above a menorah (7-branched lamp or *heptamyxion*) was exposed (fig. 1). It is the first known example of such a combination from Asia Minor.

The column (inv. no. AN.03.176; pres. ht. 45 cm) is of moderately porous marble, 45 cm in circumference. The twin depictions are incised on the shaft (figs. 2-3). Below is the menorah, while sitting atop the middle branch of the menorah are a globe representing the earth and a cross. To the left of the menorah is a palm frond (*lulav*) while to the right is an angular horn. The menorah with cross measures 29 cm in length and 19 cm in width. The menorah itself is 18 cm long and 11 cm wide, while the cross itself is 14 cm high, 9 cm wide, and the width of its incision is 1.7 cm. The diameter of the globe is 3.5 cm, the length of the palm frond is 13 cm, and the angular horn is 7 cm. The base of the menorah and the lowest section of the palm frond are

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- 1 Several cities named Laodikeia were founded in the Hellenistic period; this one was distinguished from the others by its epithet 'ad Lycum'. See J. Des Gagniers, "Introduction historique," in *Laodicée du Lycos: le nymphée* (Québec 1969); K. Belke and N. Mersich, *Phrygien und Pisidien* (TIB 7, Vienna 1990) 323; G. Bejor, "Per una ricerca di Laodicea ellenistica," and G. Traversari, "La situazione viaria di Laodicea alla luce degli itinerari romani," in G. Traversari (ed.), *Laodicea di Frigia I* (Rome 2000) 9-24; V. Sevin, *Anadolu'nun Tarihi Coğrafyası I* (2001) 203; C. Şimşek, "2003 Yılı Laodikeia Antik Kenti Kazısı," 26. *Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı I* (Ankara 2005) 305.
  - 2 Diospolis was named after Zeus Laodikeus, the principal deity and founding god of the city. Rhoas is an ancient Anatolian name. In our recent surveys we have found pottery, flint and cutting tools of the Early Bronze age, indicating the area was settled well before Hellenistic times.
  - 3 The Asopos and Capros rivers join the Lykos in the north below the town of Korucuk; the Lykos then goes on to join the Maeander in the west.
  - 4 E. Guidoboni, *Catalogue of ancient earthquakes in the Mediterranean area up to the 10th century* (Bologna 1994) 349-51; D. De Bernardi Ferrero, 18. *Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı II* (Ankara 1997) 87; F. D'Andria, 23. *Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı I* (Ankara 2002) 100-1; id., *Hierapolis (Pamukkale)* (Istanbul 2003) passim; Şimşek (supra n.1) 312-13.
  - 5 Şimşek (supra n.1) 308-18, figs. 9-13.
  - 6 Şimşek (supra n.1) 308-10, 312-13.



Fig. 1. Satellite photograph of Laodicea ad Lycum.

missing because the shaft is broken. It seems clear that the menorah was incised first, followed quickly by the palm frond and horn; the more deeply incised cross with its globe must have been added somewhat later. It is not evident from the carving whether the Jewish community originally financed this column or a part of the nymphaeum.

The various parts of the palm frond are inscribed differently: on the left side the lower two leaves are little more than line-drawings, while the 7 upper leaves are incised; on the right the two lower leaves are incised while the remaining 7 are like line-drawings. As the cross with the globe is incised on top of the two branches of the menorah, only three tips to the left and two on the right of the menorah are visible (fig. 3). The candles at the ends of the menorah's branches are joined with incisions; at each tip are a circle and three lines, suggesting rays of light. The lower section of the angular horn is widened and its mouthpiece is rendered rather stoutly. The cross and globe rise slightly to the right of the menorah's middle branch. They are executed in deep, V-shaped grooves. The ends of the cross terminate in a wide concave arc.



Fig. 2. Column fragment showing menorah with cross.

Fig. 3. Detail of fig. 2.

Normally (as on the Sardis menorah) the branches of menorahs are topped with a cross-piece or have upside-down triangular burners.<sup>7</sup> Our version is an exception and may represent a regional type.

The schematic style of our menorah, palm and horn is similar to those drawn on some tombs of the 1st c. A.D. in the necropolis at nearby Hierapolis.<sup>8</sup> The presence of a Jewish community at Hierapolis is hitherto attested only through funerary monuments. Jewish tombs were scattered through the Roman necropolis and evidently not confined to a segregated area. Most Jewish funerary inscriptions there lack details about the religion, so the inscription of Aelius Glykon constitutes an exception, for he prescribed the placement of a garland on his tomb on the two holy days of Azymous and Pentecost.<sup>9</sup> Rather than reflecting a lack of artistic ability, the simple style of our menorah may point to a certain restraint, shared by the Hierapolis tombs.

The menorah, which was used both as a symbol of Jewish identity and to illuminate the interior of some synagogues, symbolized the light of the community. Inscriptions from Side and Sardis attest the presence of 7-branched menorahs in synagogues.<sup>10</sup> Representations of 7-branched menorahs outnumber all other Jewish iconographic themes in the Greco-Roman diaspora.<sup>11</sup> Several other menorahs are known in Asia Minor. At Sardis, which had a very large synagogue, the Socrates menorah is a fragmentary marble 7-branched example of the 4th c.

7 S. Fine and L. V. Rutgers, "New light on Judaism in Asia Minor during late antiquity: two recently identified inscribed menorahs," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3 (1996) 18-20, figs. 5-6.

8 T. Ritti, "Jewish community in Hierapolis," in A. Peres (ed.), *Hierapolis di Frigia 1957-1987* (Rome 1987) 116-17; E. Miranda, "La comunità giudaica a Hierapolis," *Epigraphica Anatolica* 31 (1999); D'Andria 2003 (supra n.4) 60; id., "Hierapolis 2003," 26. *Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı II* (Ankara 2005) 147 fig. I.

9 Ritti *ibid.* 116-17.

10 Fine and Rutgers (supra n.7) 11.

11 L. V. Rutgers, *The Jews in late ancient Rome: evidence of cultural interaction in the Roman diaspora* (Leiden 1995) 93-95; S. Fine and B. Zuckermann, "The menorah as symbol of Jewish minority status," in *Fusion in the Hellenistic East* (exh. cat. Los Angeles 1995) 23-30.

A.D., set on a three-stepped podium and inscribed with a dedicatory inscription in Greek.<sup>12</sup> A second example at Sardis shows a menorah on a plaque.<sup>13</sup> At Priene, the synagogue has reliefs bearing 7-branched menorahs, one of them flanked by two birds. Again at Priene, a plaque depicts a menorah flanked by an angular horn, palm frond and citron.<sup>14</sup> At Pergamon, a fragment of a gable from a door or chancel-screen bears a menorah, palm frond and citron.<sup>15</sup> At Nicaea there is an inscribed menorah on an ashlar.<sup>16</sup> The Rosen Collection in New York houses a plaque of unknown provenance which is quite similar to the Laodikeian piece: it depicts a menorah, palm frond and angular horn in a large aedícula framed by two stylized columns and an arch.<sup>17</sup> All of these pieces are in the same tradition and generally dated to the 4th-6th c. The Laodikeia menorah, palm frond and angular horn seem to be of a rather earlier date.

Because of the important rôle they played in trade, the Jewish populations of Laodikeia, Kolossae and Hierapolis in the Lykos valley had certain privileges, including the freedom of worship.<sup>18</sup> Christianity initially spread among the Jewish community. The early appearance of Christian groups is attested by Saint Paul's letter to the Colossians (I.2 and IV.15-16) and by the fact that it was one of the seven churches in Asia Minor (Book of Revelations III.14-22).<sup>19</sup> These cities were crucial for the spread of Christianity in the region.<sup>20</sup> In its early stages Christianity benefitted from the presence of a significant community of Jews. This may help to explain the symbolism of the Latin cross atop the menorah. The menorah has a long history of combination with Christian motifs, beginning with early Judeo-Christian communities established in the 1st and 2nd c.<sup>21</sup> Its close association here with the menorah may imply that part of the Jewish community at Laodikeia had accepted Christianity. The fact that the two motifs are virtually united may point to the presence of Jewish Christians in the town and suggest that the two groups co-existed peacefully.<sup>22</sup> It should also imply the presence of a synagogue. The interaction of Jews and Christians is thought to have been particularly intense in Asia Minor,<sup>23</sup> and the present find seems to confirm that.

The cross should date after Constantine when Christianity became the official religion. An important ecumenical council met at the city in c.380.<sup>24</sup> A very similar Latin cross with globe is carved on a capital of the Early Byzantine era (4th-5th c.) in the cathedral at Hierapolis.<sup>25</sup>

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- 12 N. H. Ramage in G. M. A. Hanfmann and N. H. Ramage, *Sculpture from Sardis: the finds through 1975* (Cambridge, MA 1978) 151-52, no. 226, figs. 391-93.
- 13 Fine and Rutgers (supra n.7) 12-17, fig. 5.
- 14 A. Ovadiah, "Ancient synagogues in Asia Minor," in *Proceedings of the Xth Int. Congress of Classical Archaeology* (Ankara 1978) 859-60, pl. 273, figs. 3-4; Fine and Rutgers (supra n.7) 12-17, fig. 4.
- 15 Ovadiah *ibid.* 857-58, pl. 273, fig. 1.
- 16 Fine and Rutgers (supra n.7) 12-17, fig. 3.
- 17 *Ibid.* 18-21, fig. 6.
- 18 Des Gagniers (supra n.1) 10.
- 19 T. Uçal, *Anadolu'ya Sesleniş* (Istanbul 2001) 105-19. There is literary evidence in Josephus and Cicero for the presence of Jews at Laodicea in the 3rd c. B.C. and the 1st c. B.C.: see M. Fano Santi, "Comunità giudaiche a Laodicea," in Traversari (supra n.1) 25-27.
- 20 T. Ritti, "Christian Hierapolis," in A. Peres (ed.), *Hierapolis di Frigia 1957-1987* (Rome 1987) 118-20.
- 21 C. Dauphin, "Encore des Judéo-chrétiens au Golan," in F. Manns and E. Alliata (edd.), *Early Christianity* (Jerusalem 1993) 77-79. See also the short discussion in M. Sartre, *The Middle East under Rome* (Cambridge, MA 2005) 337.
- 22 [Editor's note: A referee for *JRA* suggested an alternative interpretation, that the cross on globe, placed above and partly obscuring the menorah, was designed to negate or trump it, representing the triumphant superiority of the Church over the Jewish community. It would now be necessary to try to narrow down the date for this particular form of representation of the cross on a globe. The author disagrees with this interpretation because of his view that the building collapsed in 494.]
- 23 Rutgers (supra n.10).
- 24 Des Gagniers (supra n.1) 10-11.
- 25 G. Ciotta and L. Palmucci Quaglino, "La cattedrale di Hierapolis," in *Saggi in onore di Paolo Verzone* (Hierapolis scavi e ricerche IV, Rome 2002) 185-94, fig. 13c, tav. 3b.