

When Is a Menorah “Jewish”?: On the Complexities of a Symbol during the Age of Transition

On September 9, 2013, the archaeologist Eilat Mazar announced the discovery of a large trove of Byzantine gold coins, the latest dated no later than 602 C.E., a silver bar, and gold jewelry that was uncovered just fifty meters south of the Temple Mount, Haram al-Sharif, in Jerusalem.¹ The most spectacular of these finds was a large medallion (10 cm in diameter) suspended from an elegant Byzantine chain, of the sort that in Christian contexts is embellished with images of Christ, the Virgin, and other saints (fig. 1).² At the center of the medallion is a large seven-branched menorah flanked at left by an angular horn—likely a ram’s horn, or shofar—and on the right by an object that is not so clearly identified.³ The archaeologists suggest that the treasure was taken to Jerusalem shortly after the Sasanian capture of the city in 613 C.E., to be used to contribute to the construction of synagogues, or even to “rebuild the Temple.”⁴ It was lost, and not retrieved, they speculate, when the city reverted to the Christians. Other scenarios for the loss of such a valuable treasure are, of course, just as likely—though perhaps less romantic. The “Age of Transition” from the world of New Rome to the Islamic Caliphate was

not a smooth and peaceful development by any means.⁵

My objective in this paper is to trace the trajectory of one element of the Jerusalem medallion: its menorah. I will begin by contextualizing the image as it appears in the Roman East during the centuries encompassed by the exhibition “Byzantium and Islam”—called by some the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods, by others Late Antiquity, and by the curator of the exhibition, Helen Evans, simply, the Age of Transition. I will then discuss ways that Jewish and other communities in Palestine, beginning with the Samaritans, used this image, and continue with an exploration of the supersession of temple imagery—particularly the menorah—first by Christians and then by the Umayyads.



Figure 1. Gold medallion with seven-branched menorah, from the Menorah Treasure. Temple Mount, Jerusalem, 6th–7th century (Courtesy Dr. Eilat Mazar and the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Vladimir Neichen)



Figure 2. Bronze lepton of Mattathias Antigonus, ca. 39 B.C.E. Collection of Shlomo Moussaieff (Courtesy George Blumenthal, Center for Online Judaic Studies)

Most menorahs that appear on artifacts from Late Antiquity were placed there as markers of Jewish identity.⁶ The large and diverse Jewish population of the Roman Empire, stretching from Spain to Hungary, Asia Minor, North Africa, and the Near East, with its center in Judaea (Palestine after the Second Jewish Revolt of 132–35), used this “symbol” as a marker of identity and presence in a broad range of contexts—from synagogue decoration to ritual objects, funerary monuments to personal jewelry.⁷ This usage is known as early as 39 B.C.E., when the menorah, signifying the Temple of Jerusalem, appeared on the leptons of the last Hasmonean king, Mattathias Antigonus (fig. 2), who used the coins to fund his unsuccessful battle against the Romans and the usurper Herod.⁸ The menorah was used more broadly in first-century Judaea before the destruction of the Temple by Vespasian and Titus in 70 C.E. There it appeared in tomb decoration; on a sundial (fig. 3), etched in plaster in a patrician villa in Jerusalem; and, most publicly and so significantly, on a recently discovered object from a synagogue in Magdala on the Sea of Galilee, where it is depicted resting upon a decorated pedestal (fig. 4).⁹ The seven-branched golden menorah in the Temple of Jerusalem, on which these images are based, was something like eighteen handbreadths tall. Alight within the *naos* of the Temple, it was apparently placed on public display during the Jewish festivals much as cult objects were occasionally displayed in “pagan” temples.¹⁰ Its unique form overshadowed the other sacred artifacts in visual depictions, overpowering the less distinctive though equally significant biblical artifact the Table of the Presence.¹¹

The menorah undoubtedly became more widely known throughout the empire in the centuries that followed owing to the outstanding depiction of the golden menorah on the Arch of Titus reliefs and the public display of this artifact meters away in Vespasian’s Temple of Peace, likely until the Visigoth

sacking of Rome in 410 C.E. (figs. 5, 6).¹²

From the fourth century onward, the menorah became ubiquitous in Jewish visual culture as a cipher for Judaism and Jewishness. This usage was likely strengthened by the parallel development of the cross as a cipher for Christianity and the rather callous destruction of non-Christian religion, evidenced by the demolition of Jewish synagogues and the defacement of the menorah (fig. 7).¹³

A biblical icon of unique form, the menorah has been recognized as a sign of Jewish presence for centuries. Its depiction was so standardized during Late Antiquity that it is often difficult to distinguish the origins of a menorah in one region from that in another. Even small design elements were often consistent across vast distances, as, for example,

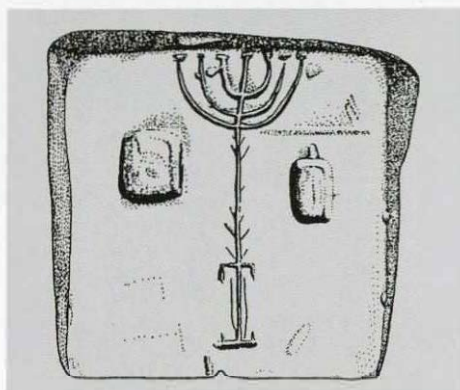


Figure 3. Drawing of a sundial with menorah decoration. Jerusalem, 1st century C.E. (from Hachili 2001: 44, fig. 11.3)



Figure 4. Stone object with menorah. Magdala, Israel, 1st century C.E. (Courtesy R. Steven Notley)

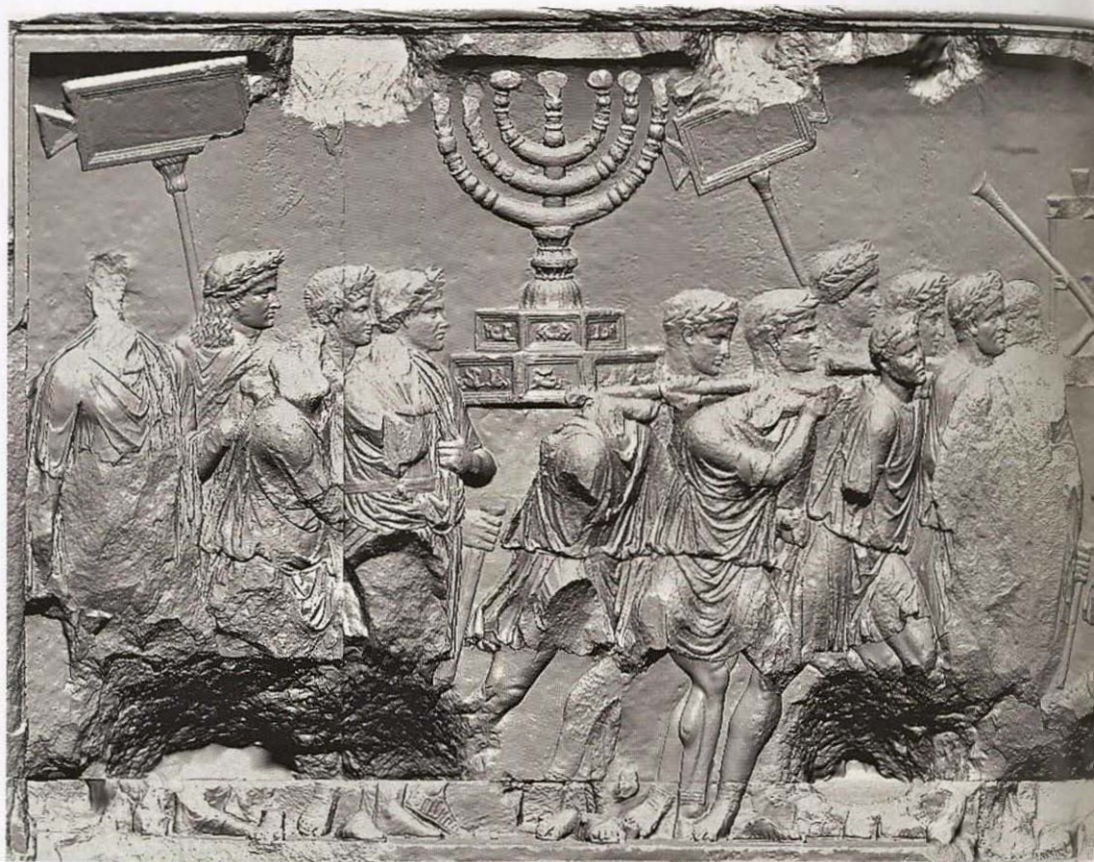


Figure 5. Stone relief on the Arch of Titus. Rome, 1st century C.E. (Arch of Titus Digital Restoration Project, 3-D scan)



Figure 6. Detail of relief on the Arch of Titus (fig. 5) (Photo: Steven Fine)

the depiction of all the flames oriented toward the central flame—a detail noted by Palestinian rabbis who claimed to have seen this configuration on the menorah in Rome and on menorah images from Palestine to Asia Minor to Rome (figs. 8, 9).¹⁴ Regional forms, however, did appear—most distinctly in depictions from Asia Minor, which show volutes beneath the branches, reflecting the localization of the image (figs. 10, 11).¹⁵ The volutes were sometimes functional, supporting the branches of the actual lamps that illuminated synagogues in Asia, as in the synagogue at Sardis (fig. 12). Full-sized seven-branched menorahs have been discovered in synagogues in Palestine as well, most notably a limestone lamp in bas-relief from Tiberias (fig. 13) and openwork limestone menorahs from Susiya and Ma'on in



Figure 7. Marble column drum with a cross superimposed on a menorah. Laodicea, Turkey, 5th–6th century (holylandphotos.org. Photo: Carl Rasmussen)

the southern Judean Hills.¹⁶ The menorah was thus both a symbolic object for Jewish communities and a functional one, illuminating the synagogue and connecting it to the Temple and to the Tabernacle from which it increasingly drew inspiration.

The Jerusalem medallion is one of only two such artifacts to have survived from this period. The other gold medallion—this one without provenance—with a similarly designed menorah is in the collection of the Jewish Museum London (fig. 14).¹⁷ That piece is inscribed in Greek with a dedication by one Jacob, a pearl setter, suggesting that such artifacts had a public function. Interpreters have regarded these medallions as decorations for the Torah scroll, on the model of the modern Torah breastplate.¹⁸ Leon Yarden reasonably describes this artifact

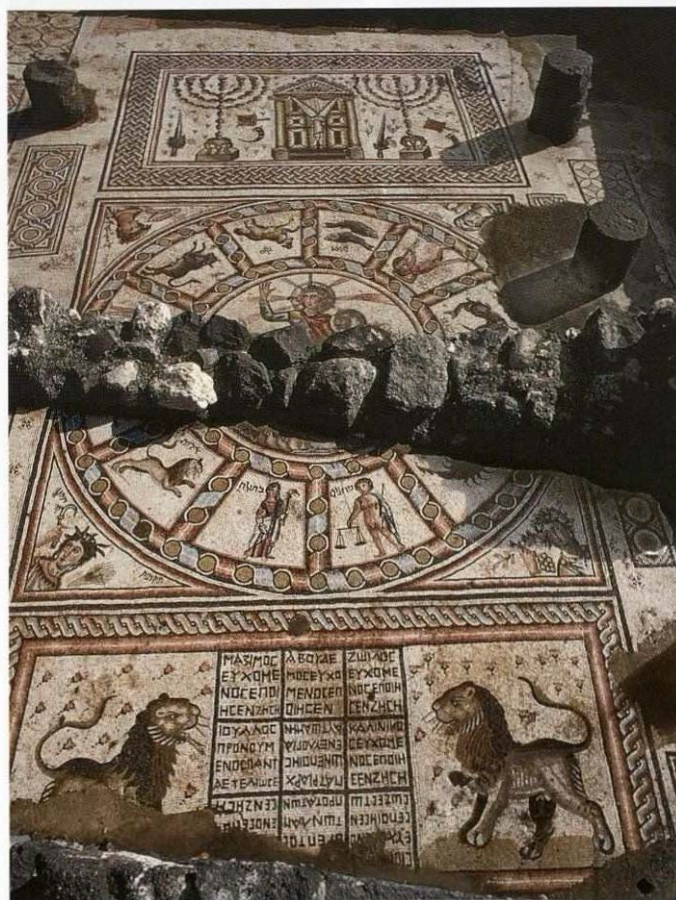


Figure 8. Floor mosaic from the Hammat Tiberias Synagogue. Hammat Tiberias, Israel, 4th–5th century (www.BibleLandPictures.com/Alamy)



Figure 9. Image with menorahs, from the Villa Torlonia Catacomb, Rome, 3rd–4th century (from Reifenberg 1937, pl. 53)



Figure 10. Stone ashlar with an inscribed menorah, Nicaea, Turkey, 5th–6th century (Photo: Marvin Labinger)



Figure 11. Stone panel with menorah and volutes beneath branches, Andriake, Turkey, 5th–6th century (from Çevik et al. 2010, fig. 27)

as “a gold disk with a hole for a necklace.” Nicholas De Lange notes, for comparison, votive plaques in Romaniot (Byzantine) rite synagogues in Greece “made of silver or base metal . . . inscribed with dedicatory texts in Hebrew and fitted with a ring at the top so that they could be attached to the curtain in front of the Holy Ark.” Erwin Goodenough is rightly more circumspect

in discussing the Jewish Museum medallion, writing simply that it is “pierced for wearing.”¹⁹ Scholars have argued that this object originated in “the Eastern Mediterranean,” perhaps Asia Minor.²⁰ The angular shofar of the Jerusalem medallion may point in that direction as well, but nothing is certain in this regard. The golden richness of these medallions is reminiscent of gold described—likely with some exaggeration—by the monk Bar Sauma in a synagogue that he destroyed in Rabbat Amman, Jordan:

There were inside the sanctuary a golden ark and a golden table, chains of gold, chandeliers, and golden lamps, not to mention the gold on the doors, the walls, and gates, [and also] silver, bronze, and precious stones, precious ornaments, linseed flax, silk and pure linen. The disciples of the illustrious Bar Sauma brought naphtha and sulfur . . . which they threw on the walls and on the roof of the house. The fire ignited immediately throughout the house and burned the wood, stone, bronze, iron, gold, silver, rich ornaments, and gemstones.²¹

Traces of gold have yet to be discovered on the stone architectural remains of ancient synagogues in Palestine, although bronze objects—which were likely brightly polished—are depicted on mosaics and small objects have been discovered. Remains identified as glue for gilding were uncovered on the Torah shrine of a synagogue in distant Ostia Antica, the port of Rome, and the now bare stones of synagogue remains were most certainly colored, perhaps brilliantly.²² It seems to me unlikely that the Jerusalem medallion was suspended from a Torah scroll, as Mazar has tentatively suggested, if for no other reason than the fact that Torah scrolls during this period were stored horizontally, not vertically.²³ I wonder, though, if such an artifact might have been worn by an officiant during some ceremonial that we know nothing about—perhaps a

priest or rabbinic figure, a wealthy pilgrim from Asia Minor, or even someone with Davidic connections in a liminal moment of deep messianic aspiration.²⁴ We will never know. It might, however, be noted that these large medallions parallel smaller glass and lead medallions and amulets worn as jewelry, usually discovered in Jewish burial contexts (fig. 15).²⁵

Jewish use of the menorah as an identity marker continued unabated under Islam. The earliest example is a lintel discovered in the Western Wall excavations (fig. 16).²⁶ At the center of the lintel Byzantine craftsmen had carved a cross within a roundel. The roundel was filled with plaster and two menorahs were painted on in red ocher, flanking the erased but now visible cross. What was once a Christian space was now a small synagogue. The effacement of a cross by Jews would have been unthinkable during the later Byzantine Empire. This symbolic transformation becomes all the more significant, however, in light of the Jerusalem medallion, bracketing the period when the medallion was buried in the shadow of the Temple Mount near the start of the Sasanian invasion and the Islamic takeover just a generation later.

SAMARITAN MENORAHS

In Roman antiquity the Samaritans—who identify themselves as the descendants of the northern tribes of Israel—were a major community in the cultural mix of Palestine, numbering, by some guesses, up to a million people.²⁷ Samaritanism is the second lobe of Israelite religion to have survived to the present. Its teachings are drawn from the Pentateuch, their singular and unique biblical text, and from traditions developed over the last two thousand years—many of which are preserved in literary sources and oral tradition. The holy mountain of the Samaritans is Mount Gerizim, above modern Nablus, which was a major center for pilgrimage and a sacrificial center in antiquity. The Jewish Roman historian Flavius



Figure 12. Stone menorah, from the synagogue at Sardis. Sardis, Turkey, ca. 5th century (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University)



Figure 13. Limestone carving of a menorah, from the Hammat Tiberias Synagogue. Hammat Tiberias, Israel. 4th–6th century (Courtesy George Blumenthal, Center for Online Judaic Studies)



Figure 14. Gold medallion with image of a menorah, ca. 5th–6th century. Jewish Museum London

Josephus relates that John Hyrcanus I destroyed a Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim in 112–111 B.C.E.²⁸ An impressive sacrificial precinct dating to the sixth century B.C.E., and active until Hyrcanus's time, was in fact discovered on the site.²⁹

The Samaritan population was concentrated in central Palestine, in a region known as Samaria, although evidence of Samaritan settlement has been discovered from the southern end of the Carmel Mountain range to the southern coastal plain cities of Emmaus and farther south to what is today Kibbutz Na'an. Diaspora communities are also well known, with archaeological evidence having

Figure 15. Menorah pendant, ca. 4th–6th century. Lead (?). Collection of Shlomo Moussaieff (Courtesy George Blumenthal, Center for Online Judaic Studies)

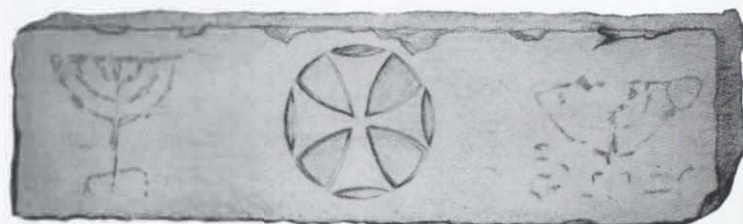


Figure 16. Byzantine marble lintel reused in a synagogue, after 636 C.E., Western Wall excavations, Jerusalem (from Mazar 2003: 177, fig. 11.5)

Figure 17. Samaritan basalt millstone, Horvat Migdal (Zur Natan), Israel, 5th century (Photo: Steven Fine)



been uncovered in Thessaloniki, Corinth, and even Dalmatia.³⁰ Examples of Samaritan visual culture in Late Antiquity were discovered during the nineteenth century, identified through Samaritan use of the ancient biblical script in Hebrew inscriptions (rather than the Aramaic, or “Assyrian,” script used by Jews). The significance and richness of Samaritan visual culture in Greco-Roman antiquity became evident only in the 1990s, with the excavation of the Samaritan ritual compound on Mount Gerizim and important synagogue sites in the West Bank.³¹ It is now apparent that the image of the menorah is ubiquitous in Samaritan visual culture of this period, to no less a degree than it is in Jewish art.

Menorahs appear on oil lamps that bear Samaritan inscriptions;³² they appear inscribed on a basalt millstone from the Samaritan community at Horvat Migdal (Zur Natan; fig. 17);³³ and, most significantly, they appear on the floor mosaics of Samaritan synagogues (as these buildings are called in medieval documents).³⁴ It is often difficult to identify artifacts with menorahs as Samaritan rather than Jewish, not only because of scholarly predilection but because Jewish examples are far more numerous. Context is often the key.³⁵

The first Samaritan mosaic was uncovered in 1949, at Salbit (today Shalavim), on the southern coastal plain of modern Israel.³⁶ Dating to the fifth century, it shows two menorahs flanking a stepped pyramid-like structure that scholars have identified, probably correctly, with Mount Gerizim. Were it not for the distinctly Samaritan inscription at the site, it is likely that this building, called a *eukterion*, or “place of prayer,” in the Greek inscription, would have been called a Jewish synagogue without hesitation, especially since this region had a large Jewish population in antiquity.³⁷

The same may be said of a mosaic discovered in the diversely populated city of Scythopolis (Hebrew: Beth Shean; Aramaic: Beisan), a Decapolis city in the eastern Jezreel Valley near the Jordan River. A

synagogue mosaic discovered there was identified as Jewish because of its iconographic connections to the synagogue at Beth Alpha and the fact that sections were made by named craftsmen who also worked at Beth Alpha.³⁸ This is so even though a Samaritan inscription was found in one of the side rooms. Before the Torah ark was a beautiful mosaic depiction of an ark flanked by two apparently metal menorahs surmounted by glass lamps. There is nothing particularly Samaritan about this imagery, and a similar depiction of the menorah appears in the floor mosaic of a small building of clearly Jewish provenance—likely a rabbinic study room (*beit midrash*)—also discovered at Beth Shean.³⁹ While consistent with Jewish iconography, however, one small distinction supports this identification. The Samaritan mosaic lacks the image of the palm frond bunch (*lulav*) and citron (*etrog*) so common to Jewish ritual and depictions but not used in Samaritan ritual.⁴⁰ Thus Jews and Samaritans in this city of the Decapolis employed the same imagery on their synagogue floors, with the Samaritans distinguishing theirs through the use of Samaritan script and by not including the *lulav*. These are relatively subtle differences. No doubt other signs of Samaritan-ness could have been seen by sixth-century visitors to this synagogue—on the walls, in the furnishings, and certainly in the liturgy. Today, all we have to judge by is the floor pavement, which can only hint at these distinctions.

The synagogue at El-Hirbe, near Nablus, is another fine example.⁴¹ This synagogue, with its apse oriented toward Mount Gerizim and not toward Jerusalem (as is generally the case for Jewish buildings), had a beautiful mosaic pavement at the center of its main nave (fig. 18). Now preserved at the Museum of the Good Samaritan in El-Hirbe, the mosaic depicts a large gabled shrine set at an angle so as to display its fine roof and masonry. At the center is a jeweled table arrayed with cups and foodstuffs.⁴² To the right is a large menorah flanked by horns



Figure 18. Samaritan mosaic pavement from the synagogue at El-Hirbe. El-Hirbe, West Bank, 5th century. Museum of the Good Samaritan, El-Hirbe (Photo: Steven Fine)

and an incense shovel. The menorah is carefully crafted in shades of white- and ivory-colored stone, rendering in detail the bulbs and flowers of the biblical lampstand (Exod. 37:19). The excavator, Yitzchak Magen, identifies the shrine, somewhat ambiguously, as representing a “combination of the temple’s façade and the Holy Ark.” My own sense is that it uses the image of a synagogue Torah shrine, which (as in Jewish contexts) is conceptually conflated with the biblical Ark. Magen identifies the table as the biblical Table of the Presence,⁴³ based on a similar round table in the mosaic pavement of the Jewish synagogue at Sepphoris in the Galilee, which clearly shows the twelve round breads of the Presence.⁴⁴

At El-Hirbe, however, we see a meal rather than a group of carefully arranged breads. We do not know what kinds of rituals took place in Samaritan synagogues. Nor do we know whether this image represents a meal in Late Antiquity or is simply a poor representation of the Table of the Presence. Indeed, if this arrangement had been discovered in a Jewish mosaic, the iconography could easily be interpreted as having a Jewish context, as communal meals were held within synagogues.⁴⁵ A fragmentary Jewish gold glass discovered in Rome shows a round table, circled by a sigma-shaped couch, upon which is a tray with a large

fish.⁴⁶ Rome is far from Palestine, and we do not know if this image represents a Jewish communal meal; nonetheless, the parallel is suggestive. Samaritans and Jews used very similar iconography in Late Antique Palestine, resulting in considerable overlap. I would suggest that the minority Samaritan community borrowed these forms from the far more numerous Jewish communities, just as both Jews and Samaritans took so much from the colonizing Christians, making it their own.

For this reason Samaritan art is often nearly invisible, hiding in plain sight. A fine example is a large—though fragmentary—bronze plate discovered near Naanah (Kibbutz Na'an) during the early 1880s by the intrepid Charles Clermont-Ganneau (fig. 19).⁴⁷ The rim of the plate is incised with the image of a Torah shrine as well as a menorah. This artifact was first shown in the United States in "Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World," an exhibition I curated at Yeshiva University Museum in 1996.⁴⁸ At that time, recent Samaritan discoveries were just beginning to enter the scholarly literature, and while cognizant of them, I was not aware of their implications. Following the important English



Figure 19. Bronze plate with a menorah and a Torah shrine. Naanah (Kibbutz Na'an), Israel, 4th–7th century. Musée du Louvre, Paris (Franck Raux/Reunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY; Scala)

and Hebrew secondary literature, I identified the artifact as Jewish and left it at that. Clermont-Ganneau, however, knew better. The plate had been discovered together with an Ionic capital that was inscribed in Samaritan script, the legend reading "One God" (*Eis Theos*) on one side and "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun" (Deut. 33:26) on the other. Based on the script, Clermont-Ganneau posited that the plate was of Samaritan origin. He was well aware that a similar capital had been uncovered close by, at Emmaus, to the north (fig. 20). The iconography of the Torah ark and the menorah could be either Jewish or Samaritan. Missing, however, is the telltale *lulav*, replaced by another plant—perhaps an olive branch. If the *lulav* were there, this would undoubtedly be a Jewish artifact; without it, the scales lean toward Samaritan origins. The Samaritan capital tips the balance. Most significant, the image of a plate similar to this one appears on the table of the El-Hirbe mosaic. A gray plate, also decorated with images of small flowers, appears in that mosaic on the table stand. The menorah thus symbolized not only the Jews but both Israelite peoples in Late Antique Palestine. It was shared by both communities, and each continues to claim it as its own to this day. The extent to which this was the case beyond the Holy Land is unknown, as so little Samaritan material is extant from diaspora communities and no images of the menorah appear in these contexts.

CHRISTIAN MENORAHS

Christian interest in the menorah dates perhaps as far back as the Book of Revelation, where the narrator recalls, "I turned . . . and being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks" (Rev. 1:12), later identified (Rev. 1:20) with the seven churches of Asia Minor. An association between church architecture and the Jerusalem Temple appears first in a letter sent from Eusebius of Caesarea to Paulinus, bishop of Tyre (ca. 317). Eusebius praises Paulinus's reconstruction and enlargement

of his local church, drawing on Temple imagery,⁴⁹ and describes Paulinus as the new Zerubbabel, citing the name of the leader who rebuilt the Jerusalem Temple after the Babylonian captivity.

Christian awareness of the Jerusalem menorah is evident in the *Secret History* of Prokopios, who imagined that it was taken first to North Africa (or, in another legend, Marseilles), then to Constantinople, and eventually back to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.⁵⁰ Menorahs appear occasionally in obviously Christian contexts from Late Antiquity, as Marcel Simon has noted.⁵¹ A menorah flanked by crosses is seen on the sixth-century tombstone of a monk at Avdat in the Negev desert, for example.⁵² Unlike most Jewish examples, the branches of this menorah are angular rather than rounded, another indication that this is a Christian artifact—if the two flanking crosses were not enough!

It is sometimes suggested that Christian use of the menorah is supersessionist, as it undoubtedly is, although not every usage need be construed as explicitly polemical. One example is a Late Antique red slip oil lamp from North Africa (fig. 21).⁵³ Karen Stern has noted that “many to whom I have shown this image have responded in similar ways. . . . Most say that this lamp symbolizes the triumph of orthodox Christianity over Judaism.”⁵⁴ She rightly questions this identification:

Should the lamp’s “obvious” interpretation be considered definitive? Does the lamp actually reflect Christianity’s defeat of Jewish populations, or, alternatively, did an artist render its decoration to reflect a patron’s desired reality? Even more provocative is the possibility that the inverted seven-armed menorah was not a sign of Jews *qua* Jews at all. Could the image, rather, allude to intra-Christian conflicts over the role of the Old Testament in light of the New? If so, might it represent the notion that the followers

of Christ stand, and continue to stand, upon a Jewish tradition that Christians had superseded?⁵⁵

This is quite a burden for one small mass-produced North African oil lamp to bear! When I look at it I see a workshop with two molds: one of a man with a cross (likely Jesus), the second, a menorah. The artisan fit both molds onto the lamp and used the base of the molded image of Jesus as the baseline for the menorah. When viewed with the handle above, as it was drawn when last seen in 1895, the image could be taken as a reflection of Christian supersession (or, as Stern has it, internal Christian disputes). But what if the lamp is flipped, with the nozzle pointed upward? The message might be very different. The menorah and the good shepherd appear because they are both Christian symbols, sold to Christian clients. It does not seem to have been a terrifically popular model, since only one example appears to be known. Like the “usable Jew” in contemporary Christian literature, who serves as a straw man and is a projection of Christian



Figure 20. Capital from a Samaritan synagogue. Emmaus, Israel, 5th–7th century (Courtesy Sr. Anne-Françoise, Carmelite Convent, Bethlehem)



Figure 21. Oil lamp with menorah. Carthage, 6th century (?) (from Bloch 1961: 67, fig. 46)

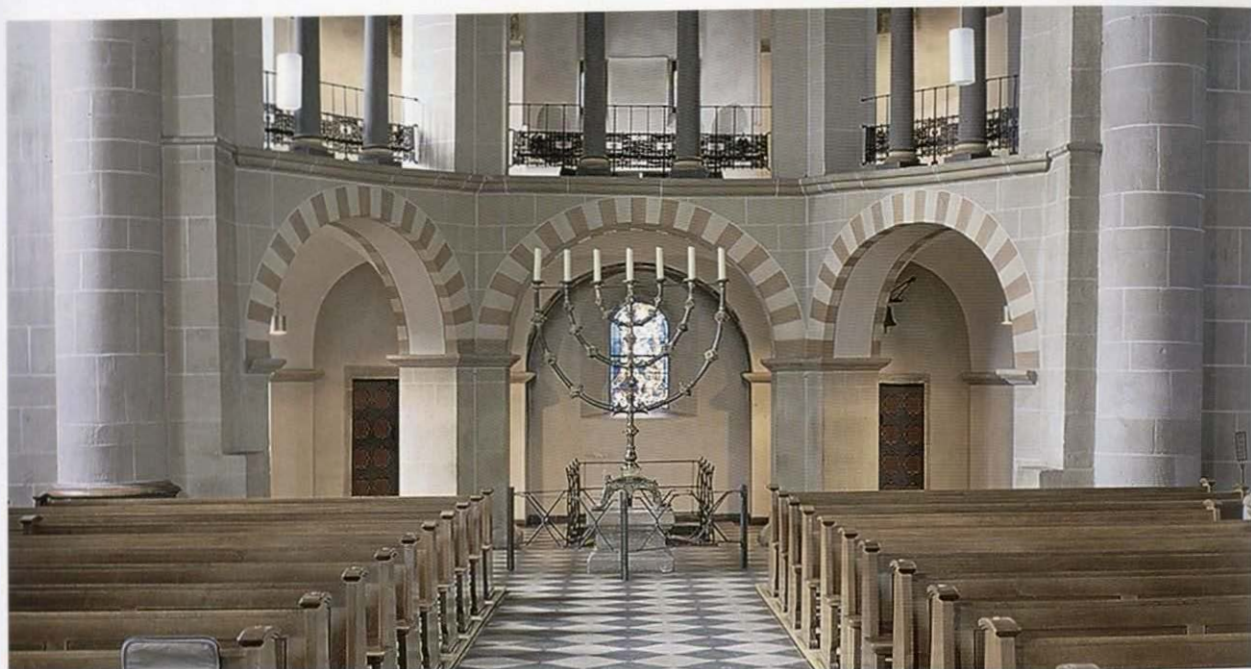


Figure 22. Bronze menorah, 973–1101. Treasury of Essen Cathedral (Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

concerns rather than the representation of a real Jew, the Christian menorah—a minor Christian symbol to be sure—was indeed a Christian symbol. Large seven-branched menorahs illuminated the new temple—the church—as early as the ninth century, albeit in the West. This tradition continued through the Middle Ages; the most outstanding preserved example, 2.2 meters in height and

with a span of 1.8 meters, still illuminates the cathedral in Essen, Germany (fig. 22). A series of blown and cast glass jugs from Jerusalem are similarly problematic.⁵⁶

THE Umayyad MENORAH⁵⁷

Early Islamic coin designers made extensive use of both Byzantine and Sasanian models, borrowing their basic iconography while adapting it to the developing aesthetic of Islam. Thus a small number of gold coins, probably minted in Damascus, copy a nomisma of Heraclios with his son Heraclios Constantine. Significantly, the prominent “cross on steps” that appears on the reverse of the Byzantine coins was transformed into a “bar on a pole on steps,”⁵⁸ thus neutralizing its overtly “idolatrous” Christian content. Stefan Heidemann notes that a new era of numismatic experimentation began with the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685–705), which coincided with his construction of the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in 691 c.e.



Figure 23. Umayyad bronze coin with menorah, after 696/97. American Numismatic Society, New York (1936.999.191)

One issue of bronze coins dated to the Umayyad post-reform era (after 696/97) may be particularly significant for our study (fig. 23). A group of bronze issues shows the image of seven- and later five-branched menorahs surmounted by a crosspiece like those that appear on many Jewish menorahs, but with the Arabic legend "There is no god but Allah alone and Muhammad is Allah's messenger"—uniquely, on both faces of the coin. Dan Barag suggests that the use of a five-branched candlestick is an attempt to move away from a Jewish or a likely Christian prototype.⁵⁹ He notes that the menorah stem of some issues is decorated with "two leaves," which he associates with Christian images of the menorah during the same period. And he speculates that the menorahs could be based on Christian rather than Jewish models, although spirals appear in the same spot on images of Jewish menorahs from Asia Minor (though not from Palestine).⁶⁰

This short-lived currency coincided with the Islamicization of Jerusalem and its folklore, with a particular interest in the Temple of David and Solomon.⁶¹ In fact, under the Umayyads the city of Jerusalem was often referred to in Arabic as *madīnat bayt al-maqdis*, "city of the Temple." As Andreas Kaplony describes it: "By integrating pieces of bedrock and ruins, architecture stresses that the Haram [Haram al-Sharif, the Temple Mount] is the Former Temple rebuilt."⁶² The coins of Jerusalem thus suggest that as the Temple was rebuilt, for one brief moment the menorah of the Temple became a possession of Islam. This would respond to both Jewish and Christian claims of having taken possession of this object. The coin iconography parallels continued Jewish use of the image under the Islamic Caliphate, as we see in the post-conquest synagogue in Jerusalem and in synagogue mosaics at Jericho and elsewhere.⁶³ This experiment in visual supersession was unique. To the best of my knowledge, the menorah appears only once in the Islamic art of Late Antiquity.

CONCLUSION

The Jerusalem medallion is indeed a spectacular discovery. Not only is this gold artifact notable in its own right, but its discovery near the Temple Mount adds a dramatic element that well expresses the transitions that took place in this Age of Transition. The medallion exemplifies a visual vocabulary developed by Jews across the ancient world, one whose significance continues to our own day. The Jewish community was not, however, the only one for whom the image of the menorah was meaningful. Samaritans developed a comparable iconography for reasons very similar to those of the Jews, and Christians adopted it as well for reasons wholly Christian. On one occasion Muslims, believing that Islam had superseded both Judaism and Christianity, took on this image as part of their own attempt to both localize and absorb the Holy City into the new Islamic Caliphate.

This essay is dedicated to my mentor Selma Holo, former director of the Museum Studies Program of the University of Southern California.

1. "Rich History Unearthed" 2013. See now: Mazar 2013.
2. See, for example, Weitzmann 1979: 312–13, 316, 319–21. A useful parallel is a medallion showing on one side the Annunciation and the Baptism of Christ, also from the eastern Mediterranean and found in Palestine, dated to the fifth–sixth century. See Iliffe 1950: 97–99, and Israeli and Mevorah 2000: 148–49, 223.
3. The excavators identify the object to the right as a Torah scroll, although the image of a biblical scroll from antiquity is known to have had a stave. Wooden rollers are mentioned, however, in the Jerusalem Talmud Megillah 1 (71b–72a) and elsewhere. See Mazar 2013: 36, and Reuben 2013: 93. See also Sukenik 1932: 30–31; Fine and Rutgers 1996; and Schiffman 2014: 107.
4. Mazar 2013: 101–2.
5. See my comments in Fine 2013: 14–15.
6. *Ibid.*: 148–65.
7. The range of objects is surveyed in Hachlili 2001.
8. Fine 2013: 149–50.
9. See Notley 2014.
10. Mishnah Hagigah 3:8; *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 840. See Fine 2013: 152, and Kruger 2005, esp. 94–144, and the bibliography cited by each. Recent publications include Anderson 2008, and Z. Safrai and C. Safrai 2011. Compare Fraade 2009.
11. Fine 2013: 149–50. For sources, see Weiss 2007.
12. The most recent discussions of these sources are Boustan 2008 and Sivertsev 2011: 125–38.
13. Fine 2013: 195–214.
14. *Ibid.*: 81–82.
15. Fine and Rutgers 1996.
16. Hachlili 2001, figs. 11.10, 11.11.
17. Barnett 1974: 4; Cohen–Mushlin 1979: 82; De Lange 2002; Ameling 2004: 40–42.
18. Barnett 1974; Cohen–Mushlin 1979.
19. Yarden 1971: 31; De Lange 2002: 54; Goodenough 1953–68, vol. 2 (1953): 222.
20. See the previous note.
21. Nau 1913: 384–85.
22. Floriani Squarciapino 1963; Fine and Della Pergola 1994: 54; Runesson 2001: 53; Fine 2012b.
23. See Yaniv 1997: 16–33, and Mazar 2013.
24. See Fine 2013: 81–94.
25. See Goodenough 1953–68, vol. 4 (1954): 1019, 1020, 1023, and Dan Barag in Spaer 2001: 173–85, pls. 29, 30.
26. See Mazar 2013: 163–86.
27. On the Samaritans in general, see Pummer 1987; Crown 1989; and E. Stern and Eshel 2002.
28. Magen, Misgav, and Tsfaia 2004: 1–16.
29. Contemporary Samaritans object to the identification of this precinct as a "temple," as their tradition does not include such a building, which they see as a usurpation of the role of the biblical Tabernacle.
30. Noy, Panayotov, and Bloedhorn 2004: 27–28, 100–105, 186–89.
31. On Samaritan synagogues, see Magen 2008: 117–80, and Pummer 1999.
32. Sussman 2002; Magen 2008: 243–48.
33. Neidinger, Matthews, and Ayalon 1994: 6.
34. Fine 2012a.
35. See the trenchant comments of Leah Di Signi (1999: 51).
36. Sukenik 1949; Reich 1994.
37. Sukenik 1949.
38. Zori 1967.
39. Bahat 1981; Fine 2013: 132–36.
40. Jacoby 2000.
41. Magen 2008.
42. *Ibid.*: 134–37.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Weiss 2007.
45. Z. Safrai 1995: 196–97.
46. Cohen–Mushlin 1979: 381–82, no. 348; Fine 1996: 158.
47. Clermont–Ganneau 1884: 78–79, no. 62.
48. Fine 1996: 172.
49. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 10.4.36, as cited in White 1997: 95, 97.
50. See note 12 above.
51. Simon 1962: 181–87.
52. Hachlili 2001: 272.
53. K. Stern 2008: ix–x. This discussion is based on my review of Stern's volume; see Fine 2009.
54. K. Stern 2008: x.
55. *Ibid.*
56. See Evans 2012: 92, 110, nos. 60, 72.
57. Barag 1988–89.
58. Heidemann (2010: 160) notes that "Hard evidence suggests for these imitations a date not much later than 680 CE."
59. Barag 1988–89: 47.
60. *Ibid.*: 44.
61. Soucek 1976; Kaplony 2009: 105–14, 123–25.
62. Kaplony 2009: 106.
63. On the Jericho synagogue, see Foerster 1993.

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Frontispiece, page ii: Carved limestone fragment. In situ,
archaeological site of Qasr al-Mshatta, Jordan (Courtesy of
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Frontispiece, page xii: Christ Pantokrator, 6th–7th century,
The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt

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