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A MOTHER-OF-PEARL CROSS PENDANT FROM ISSOS EPIPHANEIA: TRACING ITS JOURNEY FROM JERUSALEM TO CATABOLOS PORT

ISSOS EPIPHANEIA'DAN SEDEF HAÇ PENDANT: KUDÜS'TEN CATABOLOS LİMANINA YOLCULUĞUNUN İZİ

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Abstract

Issos Epiphaneia, located in the Cilicia Pedias plain, was an important ancient city sustained by agriculture and animal husbandry, while also serving as a strategic bridge along the land trade routes between Anatolia and Mesopotamia. Its harbor, Catabolos, became one of the central hubs of the Roman Empire's grain corridor, functioning as a site where raw materials and grain were stored, shipped to Rome, and where travelers could find accommodation in mansions. During the Byzantine and Medieval periods, Catabolos also served as a significant stop along the pilgrimage route stretching from Jerusalem to Bordeaux. In the 11th–13th centuries, Epiphaneia came under the control of the Crusader Kingdom and the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, emerging as an important regional center. Archaeological evidence further reveals that the city was a notable production site for glazed ceramics during this period. The bouleuterion-odeon, originally constructed in the 2nd century AD during the Roman era, was reused as a cemetery in the Medieval Period under Crusader and Armenian rule. Excavations have uncovered human burials and grave goods that provide insights into the cultural structure, socio-economic networks, trade relations and belief systems of the period. These elements of Crusader Kingdom material culture reveal Epiphaneia's central role in both economic and religious life from the Roman period through the Middle Ages. They also

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show that the city's cultural heritage holds significant potential for faith tourism, as it was located along a pilgrimage route in antiquity.

Keywords: Issos Epiphaneia, Catabolos, Crusader Kingdom, Armenian Kingdom, Jerusalem, Mother-of-Pearl Cross Pendant, Trade, Pilgrimage Route

Öz

Issos Epiphaneia, Ovalık Kilikia'da tarım ve hayvancılıkla geçimini sağlayan, aynı zamanda Anadolu ile Mezopotamya arasındaki kara ticaret yolları üzerinde stratejik bir köprü işlevi gören önemli bir antik kenttir. Kentin limanı Catabolos, özellikle Roma Dönemi'nde imparatorluğun tahıl koridorunun merkezlerinden biri olmuş; hammadde ve tahılın depolandığı, Roma'ya sevk edildiği ve yolcular için mansio adı verilen konaklama istasyonlarının bulunduğu bir liman yerleşimi olarak işlev görmüştür. Bizans ve Orta Çağ dönemlerinde ise Catabolos, Jerusalem'den Bordeaux'ya uzanan hacı rotası üzerinde önemli bir konaklama noktası olarak kullanılmıştır. 11.-13. yüzyıllarda Epiphaneia, Haçlı Krallığı ile Kilikya Ermeni Krallığı'nın egemenliği altında önemli bir merkez haline gelmiş; bu dönemde kentin sırlı seramik üretimi açısından da dikkate değer bir üretim alanı olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Roma Dönemi'ne ait MS 2. yüzyılda inşa edilen bouleterion-odeon, Orta Çağ'da Haçlı ve Ermeni Krallıkları döneminde mezarlık olarak yeniden kullanılmıştır. Burada gerçekleştirilen kazılar, iskeletlerle birlikte ortaya çıkarılan mezar hediyeleri sayesinde dönemin kültürel yapısını, sosyo-ekonomik ilişkilerini, ticaret ağlarını ve inanç sistemlerini anlamamıza olanak tanımaktadır. Haçlı Krallığı'na ait materyal kültür, Epiphaneia'nın Roma Dönemi'nden Orta Çağ'a uzanan süreçte hem ekonomik hem de dini yaşamda oynadığı merkezi rolü gözler önüne sermekte; kentin kültürel mirasının antik çağda Hacı rotası üzerinde olması nedeniyle inanç turizmi bağlamında da önemli bir potansiyel taşıdığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Issos Epiphaneia, Catabolos, Haçlı Krallığı, Ermeni Krallığı, Jerusalem, Sedef Haç Kolye Ucu, Ticaret, Haç Rotası.

1. Issos Epiphaneia Brief History

Epiphaneia (Gr. Ἐπιφανεία – Lat. *Epiphanea*), located today in southern Türkiye within the district of Erzin in Hatay Province, was situated in antiquity within the region of Cilicia Campestris (Gr. Κιλικία Πεδιάς – Lat. *Cilicia Campestris*), to the north of the Issos Plain (Gr. Ἴσσοί) (Fig. 1a, Fig. 1b). It is suggested that the site known as *Izziya* (Hit. URUIz-zi-ia), which is thought to have been located in the Kizzuwatna region during the Hittite Period, may have become identified with the plain later referred to as Issos beginning in the Hellenistic Period.

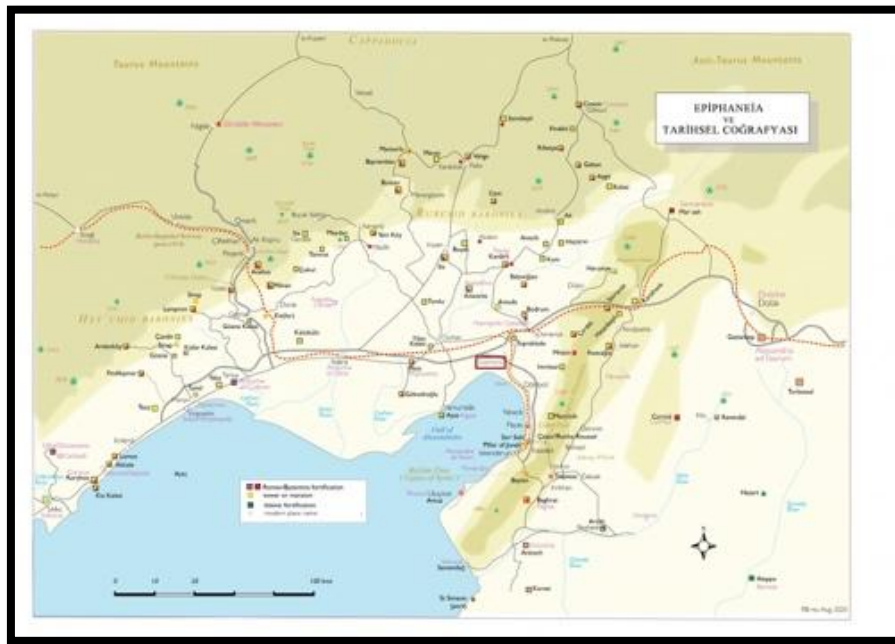


Fig. 1a: Epiphaneia and its Historical Geography.

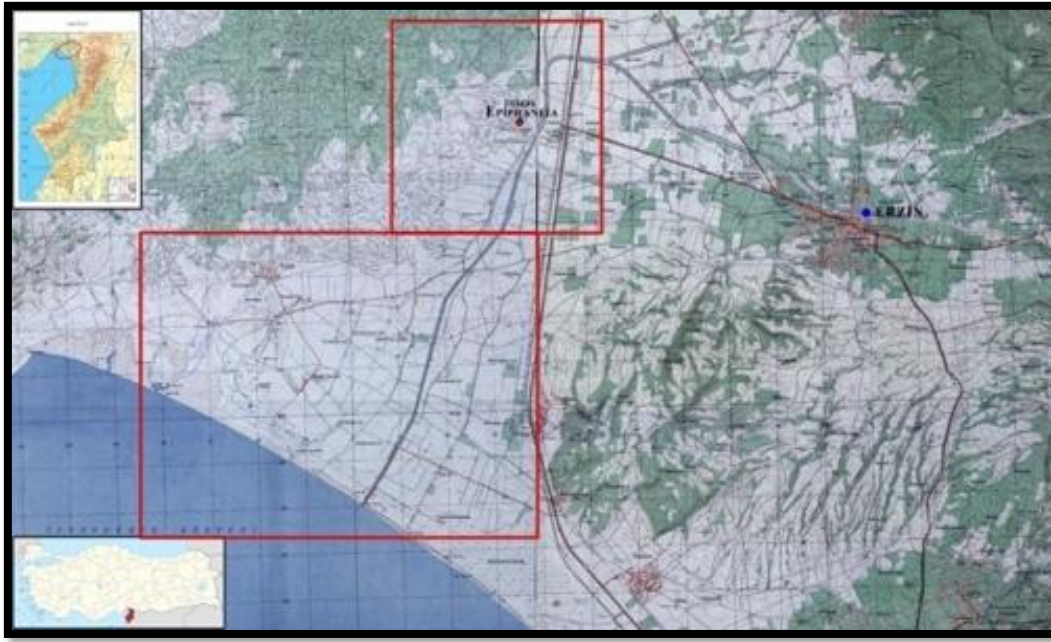


Fig. 1b: Issos Epiphaneia Map.

The earliest known name of the settlement, recorded in Latin sources from the 1st century CE, is *Oeniandos* (Gr. *Oiniandos*).¹ This toponym, which predates the Hellenistic Period, is thought to be related to the Hittite word *wiyanawanta*, associated with wine or viticulture.² Indeed, Xenophon, in his description of the Issos Plain, refers to the abundance of vines in the region.³ Some ceramic finds from the 2022 excavations at Issos Epiphaneia⁴ although found out of context suggest that the settlement's history may date back to earlier periods such as the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Ages (Fig. 2a, Fig. 2b).⁵



Fig. 2a: Bronze Age Juglet with snake applique. **Fig. 2b:** Bronze Age Ceramic Juglet.

These findings are likely associated with the mound upon which the Roman Period theater of Epiphaneia was constructed. In 333 BCE, during the eastward campaign of the Macedonian army, the battle that took place between the forces of Alexander the Great and the

¹ Pliny, Natural History 5.93.5.

² Laroche 1961, 61; Gander 2010, 68.

³ Anabasis 1.2.22.

⁴ Özdilek-Tıbikoğlu 2023, 24, 25.

⁵ Özdilek-Tıbikoğlu-Ersoy 2023, 29-33; 2024, 337, 370; Özdilek-Ersoy-Tıbikoğlu 2024, 197-222.

Persian King Darius III unfolded in the plain that included the city itself. This confrontation, involving both military maneuvers and armed conflict, is known as the “Battle of Issos” (Fig. 3a, Fig. 3b).⁶ This battle marked the end of over two centuries of Persian domination in Anatolia.



Fig. 3a, Fig. 3b: The Battle of Issos: Depiction of Alexander the Great in the Alexander Mosaic from the House of the Faun, Pompeii.

Following this, during the Hellenistic Period, the region saw a strong wave of Macedonian colonization. It is during the reign of Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Gr. Ἀντίοχος ὁ Ἐπιφανής) (175–164 BCE) that the settlement came to be known as *Epiphaneia*.⁷ In the Late Roman Republic period, it is reported that the city was settled by pirates captured during Pompeius Magnus’s campaign against piracy in Cilicia.⁸ Beginning in the 2nd century BCE, the Roman Republic began implementing measures to secure the region. In the 1st century BCE, in response to widespread piracy, Rome reorganized certain areas formerly part of the province of Asia but not within Cilicia’s historical geography into a newly formed province called Cilicia.⁹ Following the aforementioned campaign of Pompey in 67 BCE, administrative reforms were carried out, and traditional Cilician territories were integrated into the Roman province of Cilicia as Cilicia Tracheia and Cilicia Pedias (Lat. Cilicia Aspera and Cilicia Campestris) in an effort to establish Roman control over this part of the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁰ In 51 BCE, the famous Roman orator Cicero was appointed proconsul of Cilicia. In order to secure the province’s eastern frontier against the Parthian threat, he launched several campaigns in the region. Under his command, the Roman army clashed with a Parthian unit at Epiphaneia and conducted operations against local tribes inhabiting the Amanos Mountains east of the settlement.¹¹ Such military and administrative activities by Rome significantly shaped the increasing regional prominence of Epiphaneia, particularly during the principatus period. During the reign of Emperor Trajan, the city renamed Traianopolis underwent a noticeable urban development, especially in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, as attested by the architectural character of archaeological remains. With the Roman Imperial Period, the harbor of Epiphaneia at Burnaz, situated to the south, began to function effectively and maintained its significance through the Middle Ages.¹² In the second half of the 3rd century CE, the region of Cilicia witnessed devastating campaigns by Sasanian King Shapur I, resulting

⁶ Ozaner-Çalık 2003, 153 ff.

⁷ Ptolemaeus, *Geographia* 5.8.7.8; Hierokles, *Synekdemos* 705.5; Tscherikower 1927, 41; Sayar 1999, 128; SNG Levante no. 1805; Tempesta 2005, 66; Pamir-Yastı 2020, 378.

⁸ Appian, ref. XXXX.

⁹ Brennan 2000, 358.

¹⁰ Magie 1950, 298-301; Brennan 2000, 572.

¹¹ Tozan 2016, 114-115; Marmier 1884, 43-50.

¹² Tobin 2004, 92.

in increased instability and the destruction of numerous settlements. In the subsequent 4th and 5th centuries CE, the administrative and cultural influence of Christianity became strongly evident in urban centers across the region, marked by a significant public building program that included churches and basilicas. As a reflection of these developments, Epiphaneia gained episcopal (suffragan) status under the Patriarchate of Antioch in the 4th century CE.¹³ In parallel, remains of a richly decorated basilica¹⁴ adorned with mosaics dated between the 5th and 6th centuries CE have been discovered in the civic center of the city, and several bishops who served in Epiphaneia are known from written sources (Fig. 4).¹⁵



Fig. 4: The Temple-basilica.



Fig. 5: Byzantine Period coin. **Fig. 6:** Armenian Period coin.

¹³ Hild-Hellenkemper 1990, I, 250.

¹⁴ Erdoğan-Pamir 2023, 235-237.

¹⁵ Hild-Hellenkemper 1990, I, 250; Pamir-Yastı 2020, 378.

In the first half of the 7th century CE, following the Muslim Arab conquests, the Cilicia Campestris region including Epiphaneia came under Islamic rule. Consequently, the local bishoprics were subordinated to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.¹⁶ During this period, Epiphaneia referred to as Kenīsetu's-Sauda (the "Black Church") became a military base for Islamic forces during their frontier struggles against Byzantium.¹⁷ In the second half of the 7th century, the region fell under Umayyad control, and after 750 CE, it became part of the Abbasid Caliphate. Epiphaneia, especially during the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786–809 CE), was transformed into an Abbasid settlement.¹⁸ By the end of the 10th century, the Cilicia region and subsequently the city of Antioch were reconquered by the Byzantine general and emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (Fig. 5). In the wake of this reconquest and following subsequent Byzantine administrative decisions and Turkish incursions in the 11th century, Armenian populations gathered in Cilicia Pedias (Fig. 6), where Epiphaneia was located, and maintained their presence through various governing structures. Between the late 11th century and the third quarter of the 13th century, Epiphaneia found itself caught in the volatile political climate marked by conflicts among the Crusaders of the Principality of Antioch,¹⁹ the Armenian Kingdom,²⁰ the Mongols, and Muslim Emirates.²¹ In the 14th century, Cilicia then under Mamluk control was briefly ruled by the Turkmen Ramazanoğulları before becoming part of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century.

2. Urban Planning

Issos-Epiphaneia²² a lowland settlement, was established on flat terrain. The structures visible today mostly date to the Roman period, the Middle Ages, and later. Excavations have revealed extensive use of spolia (reused building materials) in many of the observed structures.²³ The urban layout follows a grid plan intersected by colonnaded streets.²⁴ The city contains several major public buildings, including a theater, *bouleuterion-odeon*,²⁵ *stoa* and *porticus*, temples, a basilica-church, a *prytaneion*, baths and *aqueductus*.²⁶ One of the most remarkable monuments is the Artemis bath, located at the eastern entrance of the city.²⁷ It features impressive mosaics depicting hunting scenes, geometric patterns, and a striking calendar mosaic, believed to originate from the Antioch-Daphne workshop. With its architectural richness, advanced water engineering systems, and refined mosaic art, Issos-Epiphaneia stands out as one of the most significant ancient cities of the Eastern Mediterranean (Fig. 7a, Fig. 7b).²⁸

¹⁶ Tobin 2004, 8; Koder 2017, 11-13; Sayar 2021, 436.

¹⁷ Bahadır 2009, 163-178; Balaban 2019, 602.

¹⁸ Hild-Hellenkemper 1990, I, 250; Tobin 2004, 13; Eger 2016, 111-112, 480.

¹⁹ Bahadır 2017, 76-327.

²⁰ Runciman 1989, 154-155.

²¹ Nicolle 2020, 10-49.

²² Özdilek 2024, 24-25; Özdilek-Tıbıkoğlu 2023, 24-25; 2024, 27; Özdilek-Tıbıkoğlu-Ersoy 2023, 30; 2024, 342; Özdilek-Ersoy-Tıbıkoğlu 2024a, 201.

²³ Özdilek-Tıbıkoğlu-Sönmez-Ersoy 2025, 267.

²⁴ Yegül-Favro 2019, 173-175.

²⁵ Özdilek 2024b, 24-25.

²⁶ Özdilek-Tıbıkoğlu 2025a, 1-23.

²⁷ Tıbıkoğlu-Özdilek 2024, 263-300.

²⁸ Tıbıkoğlu-Özdilek 2024, 263-300; Özdilek 2024a, 10-11.

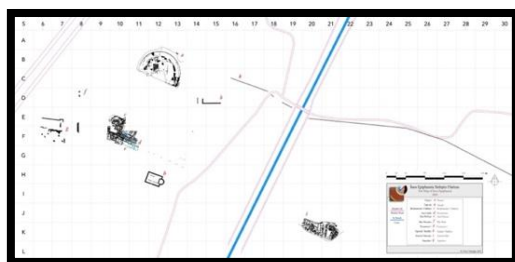


Fig. 7a: The plan of Epiphaneia.

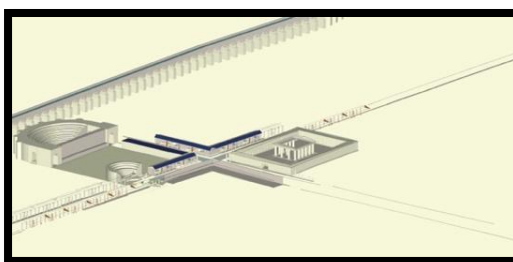


Fig. 7b: Epiphaneia.

3. Catabolos, the port of Epiphaneia

The foundation of the Catabolos harbor settlement is closely linked to the renaming of Epiphaneia in the 2nd century BCE, reflecting new political developments.²⁹ The harbor's structured development as an organized port city emerged during the Roman Early Republic period, particularly following Pompey the Great's campaign to suppress piracy in Cilicia in 67 BCE (Fig. 8a, Fig. 8b). Pompey resettled the subdued pirates in depopulated cities such as Adana, Mallos and Epiphaneia, encouraging them to engage in agriculture.³⁰ This resettlement led to a population increase in Epiphaneia and the subsequent development of the Catabolos harbor, enhancing its significance in international trade. The Cilicia region situated on the border of the Syrian region, historically served as a buffer and transitional zone between the Roman, Byzantine and Islamic worlds. It connected eastern routes such as those to Trabzon and Armenia with Mediterranean sea routes linking Cyprus and Crete to Greece, as well as southern Anatolia.³¹

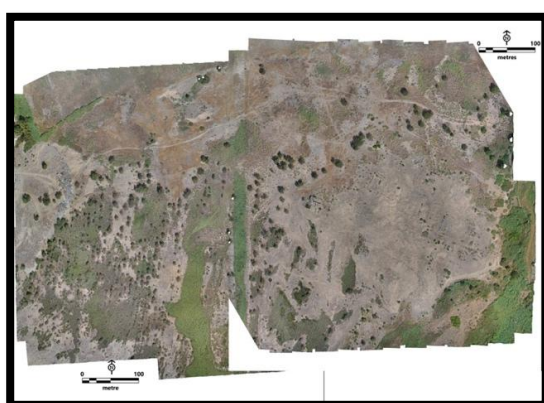


Fig. 8a: Burnaz Ortophoto

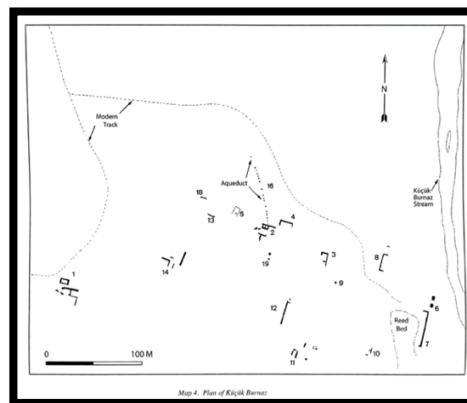


Fig. 8b: Catabolos Tobin's Map.

Furthermore, the "*Itinerarium Burdigalense*"³² a travel account from 333 CE documenting a pilgrimage from Bordeaux to Jerusalem, references Catabolos.³³ The itinerary details stops and distances between locations, including cities (*civitates*), lodging places (*mansiones*), and horse changing stations (*mutationes*).³⁴ After entering Cilicia, the pilgrim

²⁹ Tobin 1999, 221-226; Tülek 2012, 177-194; Özdilek-Tıbıkoğlu 2025b, 175-214; general overview see Tobin 2004.

³⁰ Plutarchus 1906, 26-28; Cassius 1914, 36-39.

³¹ Hild-Hellenkemper 1990, 17-19.

³² <https://www.iri.cci.org/2017/06/05/litinerarium-burdigalense/> (access date: 25.05.2024).

³³ Tobin 1999, 225, Geyer 1965, 1-26; Özdilek-Tıbıkoğlu 2025b, 186-187.

³⁴ French 2016, 37, 57.

rested in Adana (a *civitas*), then in Mopsuestia (another *civitas*) (Fig. 9). From there, the route continued to a *mutatio* at Tardequeia, located 24 kilometers east of Mopsuestia at Kurt Kulağı.³⁵ The pilgrim then proceeded 16 Roman miles to the *mansio* at Catavolo/Catabolos, followed by another 17 Roman miles to the *mansio* at Baeae.³⁶ This sequence corroborates the location of Catabolos at the northern end of the Gulf of Issus, near the Burnaz River.³⁷

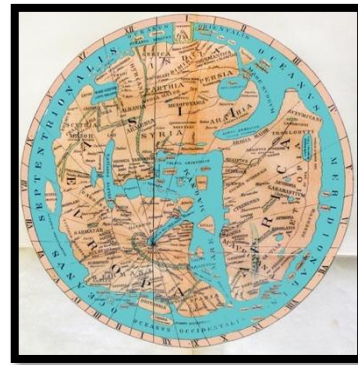
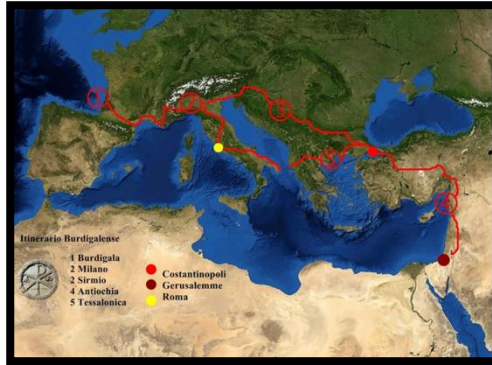


Fig. 9: Itinerarium Burdigalense.

Fig. 10: Ravenna Cosmography.

A later literary reference to Catabolos is found in the *Ravenna Cosmography*.³⁸ compiled in the 11th century but based on documents dating back to the 5th century CE.³⁹ This work lists place names in Cilicia, including Adanon (Adana), Momsuestia (Mopsuestia), Epiphania, Isson (Issus), Catavolon (Catabolos), Aedis (Aegeae), and Malion (Mallus). Although distances between locations are not provided, the inclusion of Catabolos reaffirms its general location as indicated in earlier sources. In addition to literary testimonia, the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a medieval copy of a Byzantine-era map discovered in the 15th century, graphically represents the location of Catabolos.⁴⁰ On this map, Catavolo is depicted along the main coastal road between Aegeae and Issus, as well as on a secondary route leading from Mopsuestia. This positioning places Catabolos east of Aegeae and west of Issus/Baeae/Alexandria ad Issum.⁴¹

4. The Bouleuterion/Odeon (Areas 4-5)⁴²

The existence of the *bouleuterion-odeon* is very important in terms of showing the high political and intellectual position of Issos Epiphaneia in the Roman Period in the Cilicia Region.⁴³ The building is located north of the colonnaded street, is connected to the central axis of the city with its façade opening to the *stoa-porticus*-Roman colonnade street (Fig. 11). Almost all of the *bouleuterion-odeon* is preserved. The interior masonry of the building is *opus caementicium*. The outer walls of the building were built with *opus quadratum* masonry. There

³⁵ Borgia 2003, 72.

³⁶ Maricq 1958, 295-360; Sayar 2018, 282, 285.

³⁷ Honigmann-Maricq 1953, 159.

³⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ravenna_Cosmography#/media/File:Weltkarte_des_Ravennaten_Müller_1898_01.jpg (access date: 25.05.2024).

³⁹ Schnetz 1940, 38; Talbert 2000, Map 67.

⁴⁰ Özdilek 2014, 32, 158; Miller 1916; Talbert 2000, Map 67.

⁴¹ Bent 1890, 235;

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a4/Heinrich_Kiepert._Asia_citerior.Cilicia.jpg (access date 25.05.2025).

⁴² Sezgin-Çelik 2015, 246; Pamir-Yastı 2020, 377-379.

⁴³ Özdilek 2024c, 24-25.

are 6 seating rows preserved in the semicircular *cavea* (Fig. 12). The seating rows are made of limestone. The *cavea* is divided into three *kerkides* with four *klimakes*. There are vaulted *parodos* entrances and arched doors on both sides of the *cavea*. The façade of the stage building is enlivened with niches, and there is a *pulpitum* in front of it (Fig. 13).



Fig. 11: Issos Epiphaneia *bouleuterion*. **Fig. 12:** Issos Epiphaneia *bouleuterion*.



Fig. 13: Issos Epiphaneia *bouleuterion*.

Bouleuterion architecture is dated to the end of the first and 2nd century AD in the light of inscriptions and finds.⁴⁴ In the light of the excavations, it was determined that the last phase of use of the building belongs to the 13-14th century AD. It was determined that the inner and outer parts of the building were used as a cemetery. During the excavations in 2022, the outer wall of the *bouleuterion*, the vaulted ambulacral outer wall, the western and eastern *parodos* were excavated. The excavations revealed that this area was used as a glass workshop in Late Antiquity. After the 2023 earthquake, there was no damage to the structure. The planning for 2024 includes the preparation of the restitution project of the *bouleuterion* and street-porticus in the city centre.

⁴⁴ Sezgin-Çelik 2015, 247.

5. Bouleuterion/Odeon East Parodos Trench (Area No.4-5)

The form of the Bouleuterion/Odeon has a rectangular prism plan on the outside and was built in opus quadratum technique. During the excavations, it was observed that there was a vaulted double ambulacral vault connected to each other between the outer wall and the inner cavea, but this section was demolished. During the excavation of this area, near the upper levels, it was used as a cemetery area in the Middle Ages. Generally, 2 burials were found without a specific grave arrangement but with objects thought to be grave gifts. The other burial was found on a terracotta pithos on the edge of the wall built between the cavea and the outer wall. During the 2022 excavation season, studies on the skeletons in the field were carried out by Dr. Ali Rıza Can.⁴⁵ In the area where the male skull was found, two large nails, a Latin cross pendant and a terracotta tile with a cross engraved in a wreath were found, belonging to the second-use basilica built in the city in the 6th century AD (Fig. 14a, Fig. 14b). However, this area was probably used as a cemetery by the settlers belonging to the Christian kingdoms of the Middle Ages and these tiles belonging to the earlier period must have been placed as grave gifts of the Christian faithful. The fact that coins belonging to the Crusader Kingdom were also recovered from this area supports this hypothesis. In the same cemetery area, coins belonging to the Armenian King Hetoum were recovered both in the previous excavations and in the 2022 excavations.



Fig. 14a: Latin cross terracotta plaque. **Fig. 14b:** Latin cross plaque.

Another group of finds recovered from the excavation consists of terracotta plaques and *sgraffito* style glazed tiles (Fig. 15). Decorated ceramics in *sgraffito* technique from the Middle Ages were also found. Ceramics belonging to the Crusader Kingdom have revealed through our excavations that Epiphaneia functioned as a glazed pottery production center during the Middle Ages. A small number of Roman *terra sigillata* sherds were also recovered from the site. The find which is considered to be a grave gift is a mother-of-pearl cross pendant/*engolpion* (Fig. 16). Another find is a fragment of a thin bronze earring. A spindle whorl made of green serpentine stone used in weaving was recovered. Some knife finds were found near the skeletal remains (Fig. 19c). A bronze belt buckle was recovered (Fig. 17). Scale hooks and a bronze wick holder used in glass goblet shaped oil lamps were recovered. The coins recovered are dated to the Middle Ages; 13th century AD and the Crusader Period.

⁴⁵ Özdilek-Tıbıkoğlu-Ersoy 2024, 368.

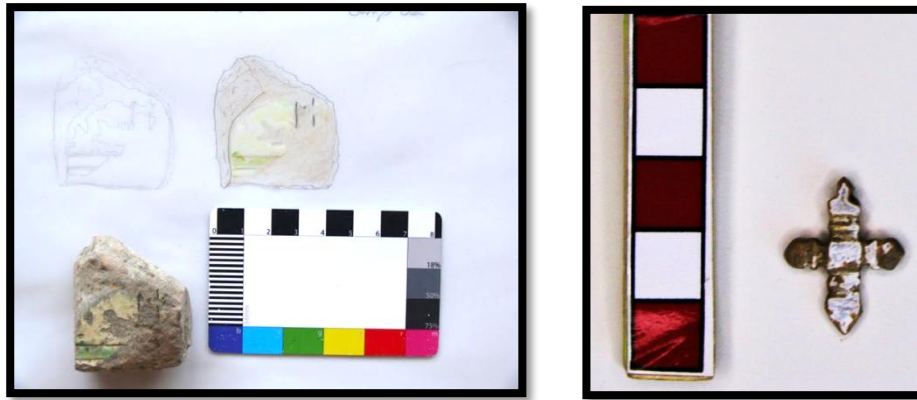


Fig. 15: Glazed tiles. **Fig. 16:** Mother-of-pearl Latin cross *pendant* from the *bouleuterion* of Epiphaneia.

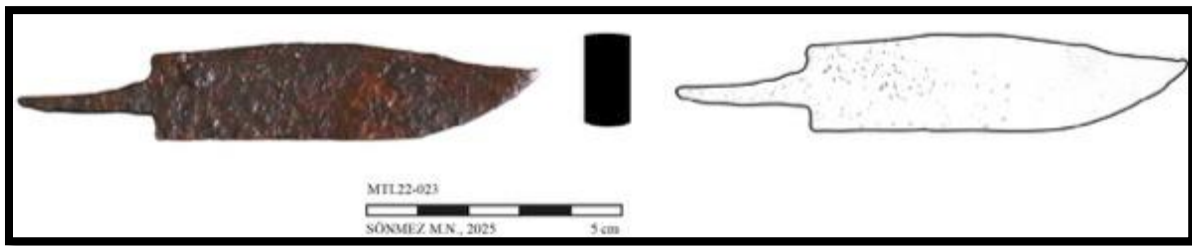


Fig. 17a: Crusader Kingdom cemetery findings, knife.



Fig. 17b: Crusader Kingdom cemetery findings, belt buckle.

6. A Mother-of-Pearl Latin Cross Pendant /*Engolpion* from Epiphaneia

A find measuring 22 mm in length and 17 mm in width (thickness unspecified) was documented at a depth of -136 cm (locus E10/1) in the East *Parodos* of the Epiphaneia *Bouleuterion*-*Odeon* (Fig. 18a, Fig. 18b, Fig. 18c), a level that excavations have shown was repurposed as a Christian necropolis during the Middle Ages (Fig. 19a, Fig. 19b).



Fig. 18a: *Bouleuterion* Christian cemetery. **Fig. 18b-Fig. 18c:** Christian cemetery.



Fig. 19a: *Bouleuterion* excavations. **Fig. 19 b-Fig. 19c:** Christian cemetery excavations.

The mother-of-pearl cross *pendant* recovered from Epiphaneia exhibits a modest appearance with decoration limited to incised lines and simple geometric motifs.⁴⁶ Despite this relative simplicity, the small size of the object required a degree of skill and precision in its production. This is particularly significant given the nature of the material: although mother-of-pearl is relatively hard, its lustrous surface is prone to flaking, making careful workmanship essential (Fig. 20a, Fig. 20b). At the intersection of the arms, the central square field of the cross has been left plain and undecorated. The suspension system was created by means of a narrow lateral perforation (c. 2 mm in diameter) drilled through a projection at the top of the upper arm. This feature indicates that the pendant could have been worn around the neck as part of a necklace (Fig. 20b), or alternatively sewn onto a piece of cloth or garment as an appliqué.

⁴⁶ Özdilek-Tıbıkoğlu-Ersoy 2024, 368-369.



Fig. 20a: A mother-of-pearl cross pendant from Epiphaneia *bouleuterion* Christian cemetery.

Fig. 20b A mother-of-pearl cross pendant from Epiphaneia *bouleuterion* Christian cemetery.

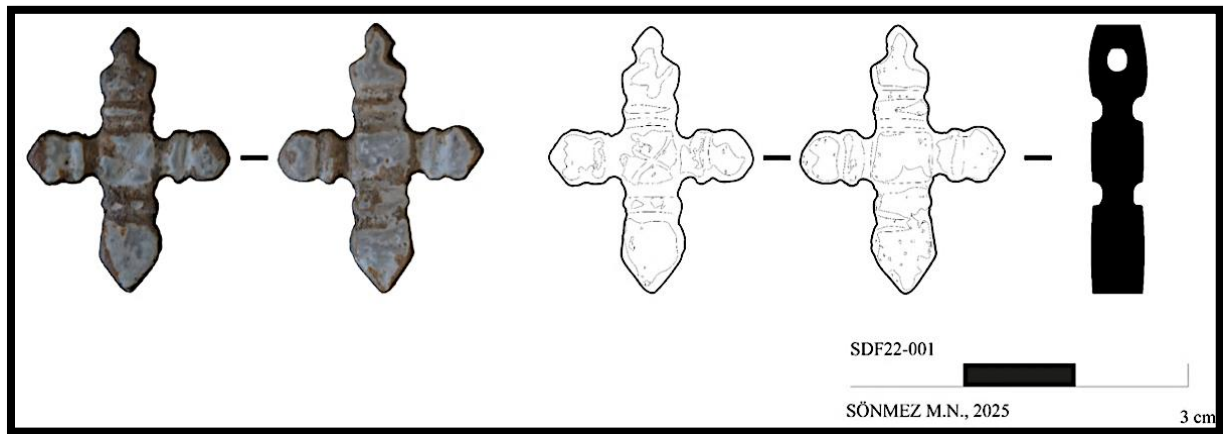


Fig. 20 c A mother-of-pearl cross pendant from Epiphaneia *bouleuterion* Christian cemetery.

The cross pendant recovered from Epiphaneia belongs to the same typology as certain examples from Atlit, in particular those classified as “Type 3” (Fig. 21).⁴⁷ This group is characterized by simple, undecorated crosses with slightly flaring arms. Dorso-Gleize-Mercier suggest that the pendant from Acre also belongs to this type,⁴⁸ although it is somewhat more elaborate, one face is incised with cross-shaped cuts and its arms terminate in small knobs resembling the projections to which most Atlit pendants were attached. Despite being thicker, the Atlit specimen now housed in the Rockefeller Museum was likewise suspended from such a projection which appears to have broken at some stage possibly prior to being decorated.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Dorso-Gleize-Mercier 2023, 235-254.

⁴⁸ Dorso-Gleize-Mercier 2023, 551, 554.

⁴⁹ General overview Pringle 2024; Dorso-Gleize-Mercier 2023, 245.

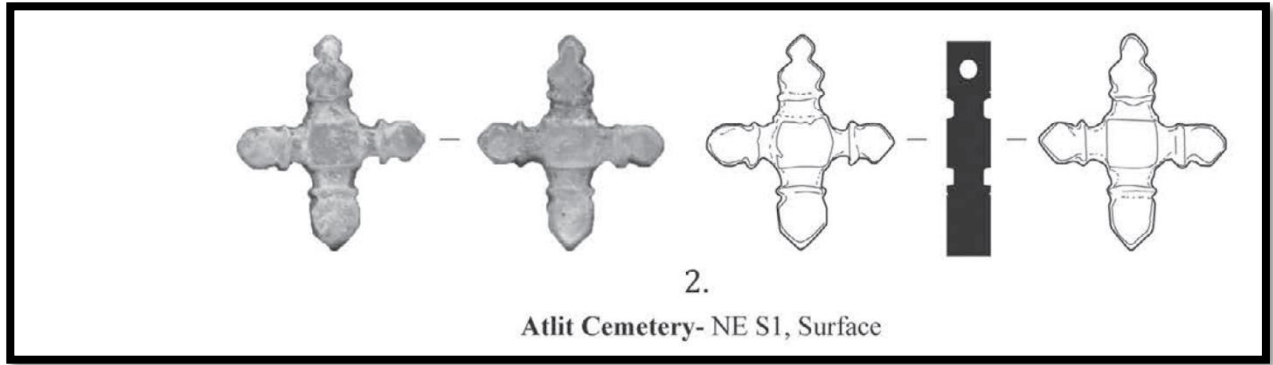


Fig. 21: Atlit Cemetery mother-of-pearl cross pendant examples.

In both types, some pendants display a form at the suspension end that resembles the *biretta* (lat. *beritum*). In the typological study of Crusader Period mother-of-pearl pendants, the term *biretta* designates a specific suspension form resembling a domed cap. Such iconographic associations would have reinforced the pendant's devotional and commemorative function among Latin Christians in the Levant. It has been suggested that this form may have been intended to recall either the dome of the Holy Sepulchre or the aedicule within it. When compared to the wide range of contemporary mother-of-pearl crosses, the typological homogeneity of the Atlit corpus is striking.⁵⁰ Such formal and decorative similarities are unlikely to be coincidental. The pendants also exhibit recurring irregularities that point to distinctive handcrafting. For example, the perforated ends through which the pendants were suspended consistently show the same treatment. Not only do the overall shapes resemble one another, but also the slightly thinner junction between the loop and the arm is always cut deeper on one side an idiosyncratic feature suggesting the hand of the same workshop.⁵¹

7. Pearly Cross *Pendants* of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and Workshop of Atlit

Mother-of-pearl cross pendants associated with the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem were likely produced in the city of Jerusalem itself and appear to have been used among both Eastern and Latin Christians.⁵² Depending on whether the wearer chose to display it publicly, the *pendant* could serve as a visible marker of faith and religious affiliation, functioning as a public emblem of the crusader's status (*cruce signati*) or alternatively, as a more intimate piece of jewelry. It may have been valued as a decorative ornament, as a personal memento for instance, of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land or even as a protective object, either because of the material from which it was carved or because it enclosed a relic.

These pendants were usually produced in small sizes and appear to have transcended distinctions of gender and social class. They could range from highly valuable to relatively inexpensive, being crafted from both rare and common materials. Finds from the Kingdom of Jerusalem are typically of bronze,⁵³ sometimes adorned with semi-precious stones⁵⁴ or glass

⁵⁰ Dorso-Gleize-Mercier 2023, 235-254.

⁵¹ Dorso-Gleize-Mercier 2023, 237.

⁵² Buckingham 2016, 39, Fig. 5, 36, Fig. 3.

⁵³ For bronze samples see: Buckingham 2016, 39, Fig. 5.

⁵⁴ Buckingham 2016, 33, Fig. 22.

and less frequently of mother-of-pearl. Other examples suggest the use of stone, bone or wood though their preservation is more fragmentary.⁵⁵

Mother-of-pearl cross pendants were known both in the West and the East even before the Crusades and display a wide variety in terms of form and size. It has been suggested that, since shell material was relatively abundant along the coasts and less expensive than metal many of these mother-of-pearl pendants imitated the shapes⁵⁶ and decorative patterns of bronze⁵⁷ or more precious metal counterparts.

Seashells and particularly objects made from mother-of-pearl were popular among Christian pilgrims due to the symbolic values attributed to them. Scallop shells were often depicted on *eulogia ampullae* and are known as pilgrim badges; many of these have been found in “Crusader” contexts in the former Kingdom of Jerusalem. Johns discovered one of these “in front of the city church” and the two holes on it demonstrate its use as a badge. In the Middle Ages, seashells and coral were also used in necklace making. Like mother-of-pearl, they were valued for their protective virtues.⁵⁸ In a Christian context seashells and mother-of-pearl following the Gospels and Early Christianity, became strongly associated with pearls, metaphorically linked to virginity, the Immaculate Conception and thus the Virgin Mary.⁵⁹

Medieval theologians kept in mind the famous commentaries by Origen and Jerome on the Hidden Treasure and pearl analogy.⁶⁰ In this parable, Christ was associated with a “very precious pearl”. The metaphorical connection with conception and resurrection made mother-of-pearl cross necklaces suitable grave goods.

Many graves contained scallop shells or pilgrim staffs, one was discovered in Atlit cemetery, Area 2 suggesting that necklaces and related objects may have served to identify the deceased as pilgrims.⁶¹ The site’s Crusader name, *Chastel-Pèlerin/Castellum Peregrinorum*, already reflects its strong association with pilgrimage. Located between Acre⁶² and Caesarea two major pilgrimage ports of the 13th century CE Atlit formed part of a network of secondary pilgrimage centers along the coastal route to Jerusalem.

Atlit’s inclusion within established pilgrimage routes also integrated the settlement into the medieval pilgrimage economy. Although it remained a secondary port, the presence of a Templar castle made it an important stopping point for pilgrims traveling by land and sea. In this context, the circulation of devotional objects such as cross necklaces was closely tied to pilgrimage-related trade. Similar objects reached major coastal cities such as Acre, Jaffa, and Caesarea,⁶³ where pilgrimage consumption was actively encouraged despite the relative scarcity of major holy sites.⁶⁴

The recovery of numerous closely related mother-of-pearl cross pendants at Atlit indicates that these finds cannot be explained as accidental losses or isolated deposits. In contrast to other sites, where such objects usually occur as single finds, their high concentration at Atlit strongly suggests the presence of a local production workshop or a commercial outlet.

⁵⁵ Boas 1999, 122-124.

⁵⁶ Buckingham 2016, 37, Fig. 4.

⁵⁷ Buckingham 2016, 39, Fig. 5.

⁵⁸ Dorso-Gleize-Mercier 2023, 243.

⁵⁹ For additional liturgical censors, buckles in mother-of-pearl, see Laflı-Buora-Çetingöz 2024, Fig. 15-16.

⁶⁰ Matthew 13, 44-46.

⁶¹ Dorso-Gleize-Mercier 2023, 247.

⁶² Buckingham 2016, 36, Fig. 4.

⁶³ Buckingham 2016, 33, Fig. 22.

⁶⁴ Dorso-Gleize-Mercier 2023, 248.

This interpretation is further supported by the discovery of a thirteenth-century pottery kiln, a large number of bronze dress accessories, and unfinished or semi-finished bone objects from the same area. Taken together, this evidence demonstrates that Atlit functioned as an important craft and production center connected to pilgrimage and trade networks during the Middle Ages, where mother-of-pearl cross pendants were likely manufactured and distributed.⁶⁵

The discussion of mother-of-pearl cross *pendants* associated with the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem is included here in order to contextualize the significance of the Epiphaneia finds within the broader Crusader and pilgrimage networks of the Eastern Mediterranean. These *pendants* carry a strong iconographic and symbolic meaning related to faith, pilgrimage, protection, and religious identity, and their distribution reflects both devotional practices and patterns of movement along established pilgrimage and trade routes. The discovery of a specimen at Epiphaneia that closely parallels examples recovered from the Atlit cemetery is particularly noteworthy. Atlit is well known as a secondary pilgrimage center along the coastal route to Jerusalem, and its material culture has been closely associated with Crusader period religious production and circulation.

The presence of an identical or closely comparable example at Epiphaneia suggests that the city may likewise have functioned as part of this secondary network of pilgrimage centers extending along the Levantine coast. This observation strengthens the hypothesis that Epiphaneia was not only an important Crusader Period settlement within the region of Cilicia, but also a node integrated into medieval pilgrimage routes, maritime connectivity, and the circulation of devotional objects. The city's harbor would have played a crucial role in facilitating both commercial exchange and what may be defined as "religious trade," encompassing pilgrimage-related goods, souvenirs, and symbolic artifacts.

Moreover, the identification of a production-related context or workshop associated material at Epiphaneia gives these finds added historical importance. Rather than representing isolated imports, the evidence points to local or regional production and active participation in Crusader Period craft and devotional economies. Consequently, the Epiphaneia material provides direct archaeological testimony to the city's role in the Crusader Kingdom landscape of Cilicia, underscoring its strategic, economic, and religious significance during the Middle Ages.

8. Comparative Examples of Mother-of-Pearl Cross Pendants

During the excavations at Alanya Castle, an Atlit-type mother-of-pearl cross pendant was discovered suspended around the neck of a single male skeleton.⁶⁶ Another pendants was also recovered from the excavations at Alahan Monastery and Smyrna.⁶⁷

A relevant comparative group comes from the Niğde Museum, whose collection reflects the region's substantial Christian population during the Ottoman period.⁶⁸ Among the objects acquired through purchase, transfer or donation is a group of nineteen mother-of-pearl artifacts, including various appliqués, pendants, belt buckles, and a cross, most of which were likely used in religious ceremonies. Although none corresponds exactly to the Epiphaneia example, the assemblage includes a Latin mother-of-pearl cross pendant probably originating from the Jerusalem region featuring a figural depiction of Christ. This piece provides an important parallel

⁶⁵ Buckingham 2016, 36-39, Fig. 3, Fig. 5.

⁶⁶ Arik 2006, 217, Fig. 10.

⁶⁷ Dorso-Gleize-Mercier 2023, 252-253.

⁶⁸ Ünlüer 2018, 310-331.

for understanding both the stylistic range and devotional functions of mother-of-pearl crosses circulating in the Eastern Mediterranean during this period.

Bronze, silver, and iron 11 samples of crosses housed in the Alanya, Kahramanmaraş, and Mersin Museums, all located within the region of Cilicia, have been examined in Laflı - Buora-Çetingöz's study.⁶⁹ Given the detailed nature of the corpus, the significance of these objects is evident in terms of their contribution to an understanding of religious life in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Cilicia. The material culture represented by these crosses is closely tied to Cilicia's historical position as a crossroads of diverse Christian traditions, including Byzantine, Armenian, and Arab influences.⁷⁰

9. Conclusion Epiphaneia Bouleuterion Crusader Period Christian Cemetery A mother-of-Pearl Cross *pendant*: Tracing Its Journey from Jerusalem to the Port Catabolos

The discovery of a mother-of-pearl Latin cross *pendant* within the Crusader Period Christian cemetery of the Epiphaneia Bouleuterion provides significant insight into the city's cultural, religious and economic networks during the 11th–14th centuries. The contextual evidence suggests that this object was most likely imported via the nearby port of Catabolos, which functioned not only as an important commercial center but also as a key maritime station along the pilgrimage route connecting Jerusalem to the eastern Mediterranean coast. Comparable finds from Atlit and other Crusader period contexts in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem indicate that mother-of-pearl crosses were common devotional items among both Latin and Eastern Christian communities. These pendants, often produced in or near Jerusalem, held symbolic and protective significance, reflecting personal piety, pilgrimage identity and the broader cultural syncretism of the Crusader states. The Epiphaneia example thus serves as tangible evidence of the spiritual and material connections extending from the Holy Land to the northern Levantine coast.

Anthropological analyses from the Bouleuterion Cemetery revealing burials of men, women and children⁷¹ further emphasize the communal and inclusive nature of this Christian necropolis, likely serving a mixed local population under Crusader and Armenian influence. The coexistence of imported devotional objects locally produced ceramics and the reuse of a Roman civic structure as a burial ground underscores Epiphaneia's transformation into a dynamic multicultural center. In this context, the mother-of-pearl cross pendant from Epiphaneia not only represents a personal object of faith but also a symbol of transregional connectivity, linking Jerusalem's pilgrimage and craft traditions with the coastal trade networks and religious landscape of Cilicia.

Its presence highlights the city's integration into the sacred geography of the Crusader world and its continued importance as a node of exchange between East and West during the Middle Ages. Through the Latin colonies established in Antiocheia⁷² and Epiphaneia under the rule of the Principality of Antioch, goods originating from the East were transferred to the West; together with Mediterranean maritime trade and Crusader routes, this process fostered an intensive network of both religious and commercial interaction.

Based on the burial context, associated coin finds, as well as accompanying grave goods such as bronze belt buckles, small earrings and knives and through comparative analysis with

⁶⁹ Laflı-Buora-Çetingöz 2024, 499-578.

⁷⁰ Laflı-Buora-Çetingöz 2024, 499-578, Fig. 1-10.

⁷¹ Özdilek-Tıbbıkoğlu-Ersoy 2024, 368.

⁷² Bahadır 2017, 352-353.

examples from Atlit, both the mother-of-pearl cross pendant and the necropolis in which it was recovered are dated to the 13th century CE. As comparative evidence for the burial assemblage uncovered in this Crusader period cemetery, the grave goods recovered from Epiphaneia correspond closely in both form and function to items commonly found in contemporaneous *necropoleis*. This alignment suggests that the objects buried alongside the individuals are closely linked to their identities, social positions, and the spiritual meanings attributed to such items.

The belt buckles and knives reflect equipment characteristic of soldiers serving in the Crusader Kingdom, while the mother-of-pearl cross *pendant* embodies the religious symbolism central to medieval Christian belief. Jewelry and spindle whorls, on the other hand, represent personal adornments and gender associated artefacts with spindle whorls in particular pointing to women's traditional involvement in textile production. Thus, the burial gifts likely served as indicators of the deceased individuals occupations, social roles and faith.

Overall, the presence of such grave goods reflects a long standing tradition rooted in pre-Christian, pagan funerary practices and carried into medieval Christian contexts of interring the dead with meaningful objects that affirmed their identity and beliefs in life.

Çıkar Çatışması/Conflicts of Interest: Yazar, herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan eder. / The author declare no conflict of interest.

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