THE JEWS OF ANCIENT PHRYGIA

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When one takes a look at map B VI 18 of the *Tübingen Atlas des Vorderen Orients* (TAVO)—the map with the title “Die jüdische Diaspora bis zum 7. Jahrhundert n. Chr.”—one sees a dense concentration of Jewish communities in Asia Minor. As was to be expected, a high number of these communities are found in the Western part of Asia Minor (not in the East), especially in great coastal cities such as Ephesus, Miletus, Smyrna etc. But also in the interior parts of Anatolia one finds a relatively high number, especially in the provinces of Lydia, Caria, and Phrygia. It is in precisely these three regions that the most spectacular discoveries concerning the Jewish diaspora in Asia Minor have been made in the last few decades. What I am referring to is the excavation of the monumental synagogue in Lydian Sardis in the 1960s (with more than 80 inscriptions),

2 the discovery of the by now famous inscription with a list of Jewish and pagan donors in Carian Aphrodisias in the 1980s,

3 and the publication of quite a number of inscriptions from the Phrygian city of Hierapolis.

4 Since I have published elsewhere about the finds in Sardis and Aphrodisias, in this short contribution I will focus on the last-mentioned (and other) inscriptions from Phrygia in order to see what this epigraphic material teaches us.


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about the Jewish diaspora in this central Anatolian region in the centuries around the turn of the era.\textsuperscript{5} But first something has to be said about the pertinent literary sources.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus quotes a letter written by the Seleucid king Antiochus III in the year 205 BCE in which he states that he has transferred two thousand Jewish families from Mesopotamia to the most important cities of Lydia and Phrygia (\textit{Antiquitates Judaicae} 12.148–152). This implies that there was a Jewish presence in Phrygia from the end of the third century BCE. That is confirmed in the first century BCE by the famous Latin orator Cicero. In his speech in defence of the Roman procurator Valerius Flaccus, Cicero says that the Jews of the Phrygian cities of Apameia and Laodicea had collected a huge amount of money in 62 BCE, to be sent as temple tax to Jerusalem and that Flaccus had confiscated the money (\textit{Pro Flacco} 28.66–69).\textsuperscript{6} This implies a sizeable Jewish presence in these towns. It comes, therefore, as no surprise to see Phrygia also mentioned in the long list of countries and regions from where Jews went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, mentioned by Luke in Acts 2:10.\textsuperscript{7} The fact that Phrygia is lacking in the other well-known list of countries where Jews live, sc. Philo’s \textit{Legatio ad Gaium} 281, is not telling because, first, Italy is absent as well in that list whereas Philo elsewhere clearly indicates that he did know about a large Jewish community in that country (\textit{Legat.} 155) and, secondly, because in his formulation “most of Asia up to Bithynia and the corners of Pontus” (281) Phrygia is undoubtedly included. Of later literary witnesses of Jewish presence in Phrygia, mention should be made of the \textit{Canones} of the synod of Laodicea (in Phrygia), most probably from around 365 CE, in which Christians are seriously warned not to get mixed up with a variety of Jewish religious practices.\textsuperscript{8} That it was more than just a theoretical possibility that such things could


\textsuperscript{8} For the text, see Egbert J. Jonkers, \textit{Acta et symbola conciliorum quae saeculo quarto habita sunt} (Leiden: Brill, 1954), 86–96.