

A relief of a water-powered stone saw mill on a sarcophagus at Hierapolis and its implications

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stridentesque trahens per levia marmora serras (Auson., *Mosella* 364)¹

The sarcophagus of M(arcus) Aur(elius) Ammianus

Travellers leaving Hierapolis (Phrygia) by the gate built by Sextus Iulius Frontinus, proconsul of Asia, follow a road winding for c.2 km through the north necropolis. On both sides, the road is lined by both monumental tombs and plain sarcophagi. Set on a podium or at ground level, most of the sarcophagi carry a funerary inscription.² In the 1980s, the necropolis was the subject of extensive investigations by T. Ritti and M. Waelkens. Some 800 m from the gate, on the left side of the road (fig. 1), was found half of the cover of a limestone sarcophagus (the other half of the cover and the sarcophagus itself have not yet been located³). On its intact pediment is an inscription and, intermingled with the text, a mechanical contraption outlined in relief. The inscription gives the owner's name: M. Aur. Ammianus of Hierapolis. The contraption shows one large and two smaller wheels (fig. 2) and has recently been recognized as a water-powered twin stone saw. As the owner of a limestone (rather than a marble) sarcophagus, M. Aur. Ammianus probably did not enjoy a very high social and financial status, yet he was able to purchase a funerary plot at the preferred location next to the road. Presumably the inscription and relief were confined to the pediment facing the road since the sarcophagus' long side would not have been much visible to passers-by. According to M. Waelkens and H. Vanhaverbeke's chronology of Hierapolis' limestone sarcophagi, the dimensions of this cover are typical of sarcophagi dating after A.D. 212.⁴ They point out that sarcophagi later than the mid-3rd c. generally lack decoration, but, since this one was not made for purely aesthetic reason, a later date is not ruled out.

The inscription

The inscription fills the upper section of the pediment and the boss below (fig. 2). The characters are quite regular though not elegant, in the usual mid-Imperial style. The text intermingles with the relief: written between wheels of the mechanism, the lowest line is short and off centre; the last two lines appear on the boss. Letter height varies between 2.5 (ll.1-5) and 3.0 cm (ll.6-7). The space between lines is 0.5-0.7 cm.

Text on the pediment:

M. Αὐρ.
 Ἀμ[μ]ια[ν]ὸς Ἱεραπο-
 λείτης τροχοδέ-
 [δ]αλος (?) ἐποίησεν Δαδαλ(ου/ἔη) ὀ
 τέχνη

on the boss:

καὶ νῦν ὦ-
 δε μενῶ.

Translation: M. Aur. Ammianus, citizen of Hierapolis, skillful as Daedalus in wheel-working (?), made (the represented mechanism) with Daedalean craft (or: 'with the skill of Daedalus'); and now I'll stay here.

The name is commonplace in the landscape of Hierapolitan funerary epigraphy: the *cognomen* Ammianus is widespread, as is the female Ammia from which it derives. *Praenomen* and *nomen* show that the inscription is probably later than the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212, although it could go back to the reign of Marcus Aure-

1 Lines 361-64: *ille / praecipiti torquens cerealia saxu rotatu / stridentesque trahens per levia marmora serras / audit perpetuos ripa ex utraque tumultus* ('Turning the stones for grain in headlong rotation and drawing the creaking saws through shining marble, [the river Erubris] hears an incessant din on both its banks').

2 On the Hierapolis necropolis, see Schneider Equini 1972; Ronchetta 1999; Vanhaverbeke and Waelkens 2002. For an illustrated itinerary, see D'Andria 2003, 48-62.

3 The relief is now stored in the depot of the Hierapolis museum.

4 Vanhaverbeke and Waelkens 2002.