

A LITTLE LIGHT GOES A LONG WAY – THREE DECORATED ROMAN LAMPS FROM LABRAUNDA (MILAS, TURKEY)

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Abstract: *During recent excavation at Labraunda (Milas, Turkey) three fragmentary decorated lamps were discovered in two of the excavated sectors, East Bath and Water Pool. Although fragmentary, the lamps are among the few such finds on the site and thus far the only ones preserving decorations. Two of the pieces depict two different types of gladiators, while the third bears the head of Athena Promachos. Neither the types of lamps, nor the decorations are unique or uncommon in the Roman world, but they are for the site and its surroundings, raising a series of questions about the trade and use of lighting devices at Labraunda and its neighboring cities.*

The paper discusses three lamps recently discovered during excavations at Labraunda (Milas, Muğla, Türkiye), in two different sectors, East Bath¹ (no. 1, from US 4031) and Water Pool² (nos. 2–3, from US 1002). Thus far, they are the best preserved Roman figurative lamps discovered at Labraunda in recent excavation. Several other fragmentary lamps were also discovered during excavation in these two areas, sometimes decorated with floral or schematic motifs, although most of the discs' decorations are poorly preserved or are completely lacking. All three lamps are type Loeschke VIII, one of the most common during the second-third centuries AD all over the Roman world. That being said, there is vast amount of evidence that several workshops must have

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¹ The excavation in this sector began in 2014, coordinated by Christophe Bost; BOST 2015; BOST 2016; BOST 2017; BOST 2018; BOST 2022.

² The first excavation in this sector revealed a rich material, especially fine wares, see ÇAKMAKLI 2017a; ÇAKMAKLI 2017b. New excavation in this sector began in 2021 coordinated by Ipek Dağlı, see DAĞLI 2022.

functioned in Asia Minor, but thus far very few have actually been identified (e.g. Pergamon, Ephesus or Sardis).³ Two lamps from the small lot featured here were likely made in Pergamon (nos. 1 and 3), whereas lamp no. 2 is from an unidentified micro-Asian center.



1. Fragmentary lamp, preserving a circular, concave discus, shoulder decorated with *ovae*, a fragmentary base, and a fragmentary, ribbed handle. US 4031. Fine fabric, 7.5YR6/6 reddish yellow, with mica; covered with red slip.

D. base. 3.4 cm, Hp. 4 cm⁴.

Decoration: *Secutor gladiator* in combat stance, double framed.

Typology: Loeschke VIII; Heimerl 2001, Group 9g/10; Bailey type C, group I, Q960/Q3089 at Ephesus; Bussiere D X 1 in Bussiere-Wohl, nos. 418–419, second c. AD, from Asia Minor, marked with *planta pedis*.

Dating: first half of the second century AD.

Posing little problems, perfect analogies for this lamp are found at Pergamum, likely even made in the same workshop probably even using the same mold, dated to the first half of the second century AD.⁵ The lamps from Pergamum preserve the entire discus where we can see that the depicted gladiator is also using a long, rectangular shield (*scutum*)⁶ and is facing a palm branch, the sign of his victory,⁷ both elements lost as the Labraunda lamp only preserves the left half. The gladiator is in an attack stance, sword in his right hand, flexed, slightly drawn back as if preparing to strike his opponent. The shield is held in the left hand, protecting him from the neck to the left knee. The right leg is left behind suggesting that he is in motion.

Even though the lamp is fragmentary, we can easily determine its type as of the gladiator represented by the specific equipment. Thus, the smooth helmet with a crest ending (*galea*) and a flared base is the first and most significant clue in

³ BAILEY 1988, p. 371 for the typical underbodies of Ephesian lamps and the Asia Minor fabrics; HEIMERL 2001, for the production at Pergamon; for an overview see BUSSIERE, LINDROS WOHL 2017, p. 195, 385.

⁴ D - diameter, Hp - Height preserved.

⁵ HEIMERL 2001, p. 131, nos. 403, 405, pl. 10 and 146, no. 585, pl. 14.

⁶ ROBERT 1940, p. 68; CARTER 1999, p. 89; WISDOM & MCBRIDE 2003, p. 32; TEYSSIER & LOPEZ 2005, p. 67; DUNKLE 2008, p. 112; MANN 2011, p. 35; NOSSOV 2009, p. 67.

⁷ PIETSCH 2002, p. 12; CARTER 2006a, p. 653; CARTER 2020, p. 499.

the gladiator's category.⁸ Another clear element that supports our identification is the weapon, which in the present case is completely preserved - a short sword called *gladius*.⁹ In the pelvic area, the folds of a *subligaculum* can be distinguished, while the right arm appears to be protected by a *manica*. By correlating the two elements - helmet and sword, we can assign the gladiator to the *secutor* category. This is a category of gladiators that appears in the first century AD and is first mentioned in a literary source by Suetonius.¹⁰

The iconographic theme of gladiatorial combats is often used in Pergamum, where there are several other lamps depicting pairs of fighters engaged during combat¹¹, some in a very similar fashion to the lamp from Labraunda.¹²



2. Fragmentary lamp preserving a part of a circular, concave disc, shoulder decorated with *ovae*, partial circular base, and trace of a handle. US 1002. Fine fabric, 7.5YR6/4 light brown and Gley 1 5/N gray, with dense mica; covered with red slip. D. base. 3.5 cm, Hp. 2.9 cm.

Decoration: *Murmillio* gladiator in combat stance, double framed.

Typology: Loeschke VIII; Heimerl 2001, Group 9; Bailey type Q, group III, Q 1399; Bailey III, Q3083, Q 3089 at Ephesus; Bussiere D X 1 in Bussiere-Wohl, nos. 418–419, second c. AD, from Asia Minor, with *planta pedis*.

Dating: second century AD.

The second lamp is less fragmentary than the previous one, but it raises more issues. It preserves about three-quarters of the circular, concave disc, shoulder decorated with *ovae*, circular base, and the lower remains of the handle. The fabric is fine, very rich in mica, with a grey core indicating oxidized firing in the kiln. The fabric, especially the large amount of mica, makes it similar to vessels from

⁸ CARTER 1999, p. 89; JUNKELMANN 2002, p. 29; WISDOM & MCBRIDE 2003, p. 41; DUNKLE 2008, p. 112–113; NOSSOV 2009, p. 67; CARTER 2020, p. 507.

⁹ CARTER 1999, p. 89; WISDOM & MCBRIDE 2003, p. 41; NOSSOV 2009, p. 67; CARTER 2020, p. 507.

¹⁰ Suetonius, *Caligula*, 30; CARTER 1999, p. 88–89; NOSSOV 2009, p. 67.

¹¹ HEIMERL 2001, nos. 150–153, 581–582, of which some of the gladiators are of *secutor* type.

¹² HEIMERL 2001, pl. 10, no. 403.

the ESB category - serving vessels of fine ceramics, made and spread all over the coast of Asia Minor during the second-third centuries AD.¹³ Vessels from this category (with the same fabric) were discovered during excavations at Labraunda, in the same contexts from which the featured lamps were also recovered from, revealing a pattern of trade with the production centers.

Even fragmentary, the lamp preserves most of the discus with the relief decoration and we can easily determine the type of gladiator represented with his specific equipment. The helmet is particularly significant with its wide brims and its high, rectangular, and massive crest. Other clear elements that support our attempt to identify the fighter's category are the weapon and the shield. Although worn and difficult to be clearly distinguished, the weapon is a short sword or rather a dagger, *pugio*,¹⁴ with a slightly longer blade, while the shield is rectangular in shape and large in size. The right arm, which holds the weapon, is protected by a *manica* depicted as a jagged relief that recreates the strips of leather or fabric of which the arm guard was made. Following these clues we can determine that the equipment is specific to the *murmillio* gladiator.¹⁵ The fighter's right lower limb is hardly visible, while the left one is not preserved due to the fragmentary state of the lamp. The lower left limb is the one that the *ocrea* was meant to protect, being also the most exposed during the fight. Facing right, with the right arm arched, the weapon placed next to the shield which is positioned between the head and the shin, the left limb is positioned in front, both limbs flexed, it shows us the *en garde* position of the fighter. This gladiator category appears in the late Republic and was supposed to replace the *gallus* category, the latter marked by the characteristics of the Gallic warrior.¹⁶

Although a frequent motif in gladiatorial iconography, we were unable to identify any analogies for this specific representation on lamps such as this one. However, the particular manner of representing the *murmillio* can be found on the funerary stela of the gladiator Kallimorphos, located in the collection of the Museum of Milas, not far from the site where the lamp was discovered, dating from the second-third centuries AD.¹⁷ Thus, we can presume that this type of depiction was somewhat familiar in the region, either for the category of fighter or a particular gladiator known to the public.

¹³ See HAYES 1985, *Atlante II*, p. 49–70; KENYON 1957, p. 288; HELLSTRÖM 1965, p. 30 after the finds at Labraunda; p. 281–283; HAYES 1972, p. 9–10; LUND 2003.

¹⁴ CARTER 2006b, p. 165.

¹⁵ JUNKELMANN 2002, p. 37; TEYSSIER & LOPEZ 2005; NOSSOV 2009, p. 59–60.

¹⁶ CARTER 1999, p. 88; KAZEK 2012, p. 163; JANKOVIĆ 2014, p. 51.

¹⁷ ZÜLKADIROĞLU & İÇTEN 2002, p. 80.



3. Fragmentary lamp partially preserving the circular, concave disc, shoulder decorated with small *ovae* and one preserved ovule. Fine fabric, 5YR6/6 reddish yellow, with mica; covered with dull, reddish slip. Lp. 6.6 cm, D. discus 4.5 cm.

Decoration: The head of Athena/Minerva *Promachos* double framed, from left profile, wearing a Corinthian helmet, with long hair tied together at the back.

Typology: Loeschke VIII; Bailey III, Q 3259, 3261 from Corinth, first half of the third c. AD; Perlweig 1961, Group 2 (spear not shown), nos. 649, 668; Iconomu 1967, Figs.3 2–33 at Tomis; Deneuve Pl. LXVIII/697 to the right, no *ovae*.

Dating: likely second century AD.

This last piece is the most fragmentary, preserving two fragments of the disc and the shoulder decorated with small sized *ovae*. The decoration consists of the double-framed bust of Athena *Promachos* to the right, wearing a Corinthian helmet, her hair tied back.

The warrior-like representation of Athena has its roots in the Archaic period¹⁸ and the goddess was often associated with her father Zeus, frequently represented in the same manner, in the *Promachos* pose, usually with *aegis*.¹⁹ The depiction is often reduced to that of a bust, mostly during the second-third centuries AD and later rendered in a standing pose.²⁰ Wearing either an Attic, Chalcidian, Corinthian or Phrygian helmet, frequently draped, the depiction becomes the embodiment of a model citizen, political or military leader.²¹ The image on the lamp resembles that on a third century BC relief, decorating a mirror,²² as well as on other types of objects such as vessels or coins from the Classical period,²³ examples of the enduring iconography of the pose.

¹⁸ LIMC Suppl. 2009, p. 121.

¹⁹ NEILS 2001, p. 229.

²⁰ KATSIOTI 2017, p. 101, cat. A 1, offering extensive references for the other finds at Kermeikos, Corinth, Nemea, Argos, Eretria, Aegina, Sevastopol, Caesarea Maritima, Kerch and Asia Minor, Knossos, Crimea.

²¹ LIMC Suppl. 2009, p. 123; LIMC Suppl. 2009, p. 115, 14. add.45, gold relief.

²² LIMC Suppl. 2009, p. 116, add.52a.

²³ Similar representations as a helmed head: LIMC II, 769/Minerva 1b painted; 771/33a and b on coins; 786/Minerva 18 on a gem; 787/Minerva 36 on a lamp; 788/46-57 on coins.

After becoming a civic deity and protector of Athens, the goddess is often represented in her dedicated town. The depiction of Athena *Promachos* to the left, armed in crested Corinthian helmet, *aegis* and spear, frequently appear on Athenian lamps of the third - fourth centuries AD and, more rarely, on Corinthian lamps of the first - second centuries.²⁴ Following the typology from the Athenian Agora, our lamp belongs in Group 2: spear not shown, *aegis* and two framing rings, dating from the third-fourth centuries AD. The disc from Labraunda resembles more a lamp from the Athenian Agora, considered liked to the first-second centuries production in Corinth and later massively produced in Athens as well. As for other analogies, one lamp was discovered at Corinth, now in the British Museum, which is considered an Athenian product, while the another is assigned as being from a Dionysios workshop in Corinth, although not with certainty.²⁵

Lamps with the helmed head of Athena are also rare at Pergamon, a well-known and prolific ceramic manufacturing center. One fragmentary discus shows a rather schematic rendering from the right profile, dated to the Augustan period²⁶ and on another later lamp dated to the second quarter of the first century AD.²⁷ Although the fabric of the fragmentary lamp from Labraunda indicates a workshop from Asia Minor, it cannot be clearly attributed to Pergamon where even the iconography is rarely attested.

In the Empire, at Cosa, similar Loeschcke VIII lamps, with ovules and the bust of Athena in left profile, with Corinthian helmet, were discovered in a context dating from AD 100 to 225.²⁸ Lamps with this iconography were also discovered in the two main cities of the western Black Sea coast, Tomis and Odessos. Two Loeschcke VIII lamps with the bust of Athena from left profile are known from the major Black Sea metropolis, Tomis, with a string of *ovae* on their shoulders. The fabric is described as red or yellowish, covered with orange and dark red paint. One of them bears the stamp of the workshop of one *Marcus*,²⁹ unattested anywhere else in the western Black Sea seashore. The emergence of a local production of lamps with this motif is also attested by the discovery of further lamps of a lesser quality, made in worn molds.³⁰ Two other similar lamps were discovered at Odessos, the other large western Black Sea metropolis, this time of Athenian production, with a more elaborate ovule decoration on their

²⁴ PERLWEIG 1961, p. 111–112, also referencing numerous finds in Egypt and Tarsus dating from the second-third centuries.

²⁵ PERLWEIG 1961, no. 649; BAILEY 1988, p. 403–405, Q 3259, 3261 (classified as type Brooner XXVIC).

²⁶ HEIMERL 2001, p. 100, no. 151, Annex 6, type Loeschcke III. Two lamps from the second-third centuries depicting a standing Athena are imports, nos. 1066-1067, Taf. 23.

²⁷ HEIMERL 2001, p. 53, 110, pl. 5, no. 151, Athena with helmet and spear.

²⁸ RICKMAN FITCH & WYNICK GOLDMAN 1994, p. 154–155, 160, nos. 754, 765, 810, the latter discovered in a context dated AD 350-416.

²⁹ ICONOMU 1967, p. 17–18, the lamps almost identical, with *ovae* on their shoulder, dated to the second century AD. Another lamp from Tomis is part on a funerary inventory from the second century AD, see BUCOVALĂ 1970, p. 202, fig. 11.

³⁰ Courtesy of Viorel Ștefan Georgescu (National Museum of National History and Archaeology Constanța), PhD. Thesis.

shoulder and dating from the first half of the third century AD.³¹ One is marked EY³². One can add to these the inscription ANEIKHTOC found on a Cypriot lamp with the bust of Athena.³³ The Attic lamps resemble the one found in Rhodes, marked with an A monogram, dating from the third-fourth centuries AD.³⁴ The same motif was used on another Cypriot type, a much simpler lamp with no other visible decoration from the early fourth century AD.³⁵

Even if the fabric of two fragments from Labraunda seems to indicate Pergamon as the origin, lamps with this iconography are rare there. A fragmentary disk shows a fairly schematic rendering from the right profile, dated to the Augustan period, and another lamp has been dated to the second quarter of the first century AD. Although the fabric of the fragmentary lamp from Labraunda indicates an Asia Minor workshop, possibly Pergamon, but may have also been made in an other workshop from the coast of Asia Minor, in the Pergamenian area. As we have seen, lamps with this representation are widespread in the Aegean, less in the Black Sea area, but rarely on the coast of Asia Minor, making this finds from Labraunda significant to the repertoire of lamps depicting Athena *Promachos*.

As stated from the beginning, the three types of lamps featured in this paper are not uncommon, but their iconography is, at least for this site and its surroundings. In this area, the only place where lamps depicting gladiators have been discovered is at Iasos, an ancient city located approx. 25 km in a straight line from Labraunda. Several ceramic deposits were discovered here, including a significant number of lamps with gladiator representations. Two of these deposits were discovered in 1972 in the center of the Roman agora and interpreted as ritual depositions.³⁶ The first deposit consists of 161 various objects - cups, bowls, plates, etc., of which 122 are small and all of them show traces of use.³⁷ None of the lamps are marked, being considered products of Asia Minor workshops,³⁸ unidentified. The second deposit consists of fragmentary ceramic sherds and further 778 various pieces - cups, bowls, plates, etc. of which 580 lamps.³⁹ Of these, those with depictions of gladiators are most likely Italian imports and even made from the

³¹ KUZMANOV & MINCHEV 2018, p. 242, nos. 333–334, pl. XXXIV.

³² KUZMANOV & MINCHEV 2018, p. 87, no. 333.

³³ BAILEY 1988, 315, Q 2572, fig. 9, 138, pl. 70, fourth century AD.

³⁴ KATSIOTI 2017, p. 102, no. A 3. The author also states that the motif was not used by Rhodian lamp makers following the Attic imports as it had little relevance for the local market, p. 98-99.

³⁵ KATSIOTI 2017, p. 50, no. Cy 17. The author also features an Attic lamp with this motif, discovered in Rhodes, from the third century AD, p. 101, no. A 2 as well as references for similar finds at Kerameikos; Corinth; Nemea; Argos, Eretria; Aegina; Sevastopol; Sofia; Kerch - Panticapaeum; Knossos; Thessaloniki; Perissa on Thera; from the Crimea; Asia Minor.

³⁶ MICHELUCCI 1985.

³⁷ MICHELUCCI 1985, p. 94.

³⁸ MICHELUCCI 1985, p. 96.

³⁹ MICHELUCCI 1985, p. 98.

same mold. The distance between the two deposits is of 1 m and they are both associated with the same cult, still unknown, and share the same chronology.⁴⁰ The two deposits were likely sealed during the Augustan era, at the end of the first century BC.⁴¹ Although earlier than the lamps discovered at Labraunda, these finds are significant for the popularity of gladiatorial iconography in close proximity of Labraunda. In Caria, gladiator fights were extremely popular as the numerous epigraphic and iconographic finds reveal at Aphrodisias,⁴² Stratonikeia,⁴³ Alabanda,⁴⁴ Halicarnassus,⁴⁵ Mylasa,⁴⁶ and Iasos.⁴⁷ It is likely that the popularity of these spectacles also reached Labraunda, as evidenced by these two lamps, but what is also striking is the scarcity of finds, by comparison the neighboring city. From the iconographic point of view, even if we are dealing with a small lot, the fact that two of the three pieces bear gladiatorial motif can attest for the popularity of such games, corroborated with the other gladiatorial finds from the wider region.

In order to provide some kind of explanation we must take into account the fact that Labraunda is not a city, meaning that it did not perform the function of one, nor did it provide accommodations for inhabitants who would bring their possessions. This would ensue that the trading would have been very specific and not take into consideration normal market dynamics of supply and demand based on personal preferences. If we discard for a moment the lamps from the Water Pool turned into a waste pit, we are only left with the lamp from the East Bath (no. 1) as originating from a public place where it would have served a functionality. Several other sherds of lamps were also discovered here (nozzles, discs), extremely fragmentary, but which must have served a functional role in the *thermae*. The other two pieces (2–3) were discovered in the outdoor pool transformed in the second century AD into a waste pit, so we cannot say for sure whether these lamps were originally brought to Labraunda for their functional role or as votive deposits. The scarcity of lighting devices makes unlikely the existence of a dedicated trade with such items, which probably arrived together with other vessels made at Pergamon and from other Asia Minor centers (e.g. the ESB tableware). Or, taking into account the particular character of the site, a sanctuary, votive deposits seem possible.

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⁴⁰ MICHELUCCI 1985, p. 101.

⁴¹ MICHELUCCI 1985, p. 102.

⁴² HRYCHUK KONTOKOSTA 2008.

⁴³ AYDAŞ 2006.

⁴⁴ CARTER 1999, nos. 387, 388, p. 372.

⁴⁵ CARLSEN 2014.

⁴⁶ AUBRIET 2011.

⁴⁷ CARTER 1999, nos. 389, 390, 391, p. 372–373.

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