

Tarcondimotus, Hierapolis-Castabala, and the Cult of Perasia

After the final collapse of the Seleucid kingdom in the mid-first century BCE, a dynast named Tarcondimotus asserted his authority over parts of Smooth Cilicia and the Greek *polis* of Hierapolis-Castabala. Although little perhaps distinguished him from other Cilicians whom Roman authorities identified as bandits, pirates, or barbarians, Tarcondimotus' authority within the region earned him Roman imperial support and the praise of a local Greek city. The civic inscriptions of Hierapolis-Castabala, its municipal coin issues, and the proconsular letters of Cicero illuminate how this process occurred.

As this paper will argue, Tarcondimotus' ability to negotiate his position amid the differing socio-political and cultural expectations of Roman magistrates, local Greeks, and Cilicians was intimately connected to his patronage of Hierapolis-Castabala. Through such patronage, he collaborated with municipal elites to interweave Greek and local traditions into the city's civic culture and primary cults in ways that produced innovative expressions of civic Hellenism. Such collaboration stimulated the *Hierapolitai* to erect honorific inscriptions casting Tarcondimotus as the protector of their "sacred and inviolable city" (*hiera kai asulos polis*) despite his apparent barbarian origins and potentially autocratic intervention in civic affairs, and their descriptions of his relatives and administrators as benefactors or good men (*andres agathoi*) who defended their city from the depredations of highland Cilicians located them within the traditions of the Greek *polis*. Roman authorities likewise distinguished Tarcondimotus from other dynasts of Cilicia because of his *andragathiai* (Strabo, 15.5.18), and when Cicero was proconsul of Cilicia (51-50 BCE), he attacked with his legions various strongholds that could have been disruptive to Tarcondimotus' authority over the region adjoining the Amanus Mountains (Cicero, *ad Fam.* 15.1.4 and 15.4; *ad Att.* 5.20).

Equally as significant, while their "sacred and inviolable city" was under Tarcondimotus' protection and patronage, the *Hierapolitai* articulated an innovative form of civic Greekness through their cult to the goddess Perasia, a local manifestation of the ancient Hittite deity Kubaba. During the Hellenistic and Roman periods Perasia's iconographic features, as they appeared on municipal coin issues, resembled those of numerous female divinities worshipped throughout the Greek world. Yet, the goddess retained her traditional name, and her cult was characterized by distinctively local rites in which her priestesses walked upon fiery coals. Such unique qualities, as the inscribed verses of at least one dedication show, prevented Greeks and Romans during the centuries following Tarcondimotus' rule from explicitly associating her with any single goddess worshipped in Greece or Italy. Through such a cult and its local features, the *Hierapolitai* were able to classify themselves as citizens of a Greek *politeia* while nonetheless distinguishing their expressions of civic Hellenism from those produced in regions further west. The methods through which the *Hierapolitai* cast Tarcondimotus as the defender of their unique form of Greek civic life and cult thereby enabled them to weather the collapse of Seleucid royal authority and to negotiate the subsequent pressures of Roman imperialism.