

# A New Tetrarchic Relief from Nicomedia: Embracing Emperors

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Ancient Nicomedia, the most important capital of the eastern Roman empire during the Tetrarchy, now lies below the modern industrial city of İzmit. The first systematic archaeological research on Diocletian's capital, supported with a grant from The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK), examines a series of monumental reliefs and statues from a terraced imperial cult complex, found in the Çukurbağ district at the heart of modern İzmit. Excavations have brought to light more than 30 relief panels (average ht. 1.0 m x width. 1.5 m), the only surviving examples of Late Roman state reliefs that have extensive paint preserved on them. The panels illuminate multiple aspects of the art of the period, including the brightly colored costumes and the new and distinctive self-representation of the tetrarchic emperors and their administration. In this article, one of these relief panels, with a representation of two emperors embracing, is discussed as the precursor to the well-known porphyry Tetrarchs from Venice and the Vatican. It is argued that the relief panel is part of a larger *adventus* scene that shows the meeting of the two diarchs, Diocletian and Maximian, and thus dates from slightly before the onset of Tetrarchy in 293 C.E.<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Scenes of nearly identical coemperors and their Caesars embracing—perhaps the most emblematic motif in tetrarchic art—are well known from the porphyry examples in Venice and the Vatican (figs. 1, 2).<sup>2</sup> This motif is often seen as an early example of the rejection of the classical tradition in favor of the increasingly abstracted, symbolic, and rigid representations that would

<sup>1</sup> This article stems from the Çukurbağ Archaeological Project, a large ongoing project conducted with the permission of the Kocaeli Museum and the Turkish Ministry of Culture and supported by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) (Project 115K242). I would like to express my gratitude to the Kocaeli Museum and TÜBİTAK for providing me and my team with the opportunity to conduct this project. Among the many people involved in the project, I would like to thank museum director Rıdvan Gölcük and all his staff; the residents of the Çukurbağ district who endured our research—basically on their doorstep; and Anka Restoration, Muka Architecture, and Orhan Cem Çetin Photography. Special thanks go to Mark Abbe for his work on the polychromy, and to graduate students Tolga Özak and Fırat Gökdemir. I would also like to express my gratitude to R.R.R. Smith and Clemente Marconi for their inspiration, and to Christopher Hallett, Brian Rose, and the anonymous reviewers for the *AJA*, whose criticisms improved this article. The location of the archaeological site within a dense urban environment prevents further excavation for now, but our research on the finds continues. A detailed monograph is currently being prepared for publication. Fig. 1 is my own.

<sup>2</sup> L'Orange 1972; Weitzmann 1979; Kolb 1987; Rees 1993, 2002; Kitzinger 1995; Smith 1997; Elsner 2000.



FIG. 1. Porphyry relief statues of the four Tetrarchs. Venice, St. Mark's Basilica.

become the main characteristics of Byzantine art.<sup>3</sup> The consensus view of this revolutionary imagery, which is distinct from earlier imperial portraiture both in style and in iconography, correlates it with the new tetrarchic

<sup>3</sup>The stylistic break with the classical tradition has been interpreted by scholars in different ways. The Berensonian tradition sees this change as a decline in artistic competence and skill (Berenson 1954; see Elsner 2000 for a critique of this view). Kitzinger (1995) considers this change to be a natural development within the social context of the time. L'Orange (1972) closely links the changes in art and architecture of the late third century to the structure of the tetrarchic rule of Diocletian: on this analysis symmetry, mechanical coordination, and collective formations became the most important elements of the new government and thus of state art as well. For an overview of the scholarly literature on the third-century stylistic changes in Roman art, see Bergmann 1977; Wood 1986, 11–25; Rees 1993, 181–82; Elsner 2000, 149–52.



FIG. 2. Porphyry column with relief of two of the Tetrarchs. Vatican City, Vatican Library (© Scala/Art Resource, NY).

political ideology and its most important themes, such as the *concordia* (harmony), *similitudo* (similarity), and *fraternitas* (brotherhood) between the coemperors.<sup>4</sup> A newly discovered series of monumental reliefs with well-preserved polychromy, recovered from an imperial cult building in Nicomedia, Diocletian's administrative capital, substantially advances our understanding of the origins of tetrarchic art (figs. 3, 4). A central scene (see fig. 3), part of a larger depiction of an *adventus* (the ceremonial entrance of the emperor into a city), shows the two emperors, Diocletian and Maximian, who have descended from their ceremonial cars, in the act of embracing: a fully contextualized narrative image that anticipates the reduction of the embrace to a symbolic formula in later tetrarchic art. A detailed account of the discovery of this approximately 50 m long frieze of painted monumental reliefs, as well as the terraced cult building it once adorned, is currently being

<sup>4</sup>L'Orange 1972; Rees 1993, 2002; Smith 1997.





FIG. 3. Monumental relief of the embracing emperors from the Nicomedia frieze (courtesy Çukurbağ Archaeological Project [TÜBİTAK 115K242], Kocaeli Museum).



FIG. 4. Relief block with Roma and togate Roman citizens, possibly from the *adventus* procession on the Nicomedia frieze (courtesy Çukurbağ Archaeological Project [TÜBİTAK 115K242], Kocaeli Museum).

prepared for publication. In this shorter study, I focus on a single section of the frieze that marks the culmination of the larger *adventus* procession. The meeting and the embrace of the two coemperors represented on this monument (perhaps dedicated after 290 C.E.) is the only surviving example celebrating the rule and cult of the Diocletianic diarchy in the new imperial capital of Nicomedia.

Recent rescue excavations in the Çukurbağ district of the modern Turkish city of İzmit revealed a monumental terraced cult building containing figured reliefs and colossal statues. The Çukurbağ finds are important not only because they provide the most extensive body of archaeological evidence ever found in the ancient capital but also because they include the only surviving examples of Roman state reliefs whose ancient paint has been extensively preserved. The core of this article offers an iconographical, stylistic, and technical analyses of a single relief block (lgth. ca. 3 m x ht. ca. 1 m) that illustrates the climax of an imperial *adventus*. This is followed by a comparative discussion that situates the relief in the context of other imperial depictions of the Tetrarchic period. Unlike the parallel examples, which show the coemperors embracing with frontal faces, the two emperors on the Nicomedia relief face each other, their heads shown in profile, a composition that sheds important light on the origins of the new state art of the Tetrarchy. This remarkable relief may even be said to mark the beginnings of tetrarchic art, for it demonstrates that the shift in stylistic and iconographical trends can be closely correlated with changes in political ideology and court ritual. To provide the proper context for this newly discovered monument, however, I must begin my discussion with a brief historical overview of ancient Nicomedia and a summary of the recent excavations.

#### NICOMEDIA: HISTORY, ANCIENT SOURCES, AND EARLY SCHOLARSHIP

Ancient Nicomedia, once the administrative capital of the eastern Roman empire, now lies just below the industrial city of İzmit in Turkey (ca. 100 km east of Istanbul). Strategically located between West and East, Nicomedia, along with its protected harbor in the Propontis, maintained its significance as a major naval, industrial, and trade center throughout the ages despite numerous devastating earthquakes (fig. 5). According to Strabo (*Geographica* 12.4.2), the city was founded in 264 B.C.E. by Nikomedes I and shortly after became the capital of the Hellenistic kingdom of Bithynia. In

74 B.C.E., it was designated the capital of the Roman province of Bithynia, and, after the ascent of Diocletian to the imperial throne in 284 C.E., it became the capital of the eastern Roman empire. Following the transfer of the imperial capital to Constantinople in 330 C.E. and the catastrophic earthquakes of 358 and 386 C.E., the significance of the city diminished somewhat, but it was always rebuilt and thus maintained its role as a major urban center through the Byzantine, Seljukian, and Ottoman periods. The size of the city and its impressive structures are described by many sources from the Roman period. Pliny the Elder, for example, mentions Hannibal's monumental tomb in Nicomedia (*HN* 5.43.148). As governor of Bithynia between 109 and 111 C.E., Pliny the Younger referred to numerous architectural structures in his letters to Trajan (e.g., *Ep.* 10). Lactantius, who wrote when the city was the capital of the eastern Roman empire, refers to Diocletian's building activity as part of his attempt to transform Nicomedia into "a rival of Rome" (*De mort. pers.* 7.8, 10). Writing in the fourth century, Libanius offered a detailed account of its urban structures and also of the earthquakes that devastated the city (*Or.* 61.15–17).

From the 18th century onward, the region of Bithynia and the remnants of ancient Nicomedia were the subject of many books by travelers.<sup>5</sup> Because the ancient city lies directly underneath the modern town, Nicomedia has never been systematically excavated. Prior to the discovery of the Çukurbağ finds, the most concrete archaeological data about this celebrated ancient city came from rescue excavations conducted in the courtyard of a modern paper factory in the 1930s. Most of the sculptural finds of this excavation, including the famed portrait often said to represent Diocletian, are now in the Istanbul Archaeology Museums.<sup>6</sup> Modern scholarship on Nicomedia includes publications on surviving inscriptions and architecture, as well as some local publications on the history of the city based on ancient literature and well-known archaeological remains.<sup>7</sup> The place of the ancient city in the

<sup>5</sup> Peyssonel 1745; Lechevalier 1800; Hammer 1818; Fraser 1838; Fellows 1852; Texier 1862; Perrot et al. 1872.

<sup>6</sup> Dörner 1941a, 1972; Duyuran 1947; Koyunoğlu 1953; Bayburtluoğlu 1967; Ebcioğlu 1967; Zeyrek and Asal 2004. Head of Diocletian: Istanbul, Istanbul Archaeology Museums, inv. no. 4864.

<sup>7</sup> Surviving inscriptions: Dörner 1941b; Şahin 1974. Architecture: Foss 1996; Çalık Ross 2007a. History of the city: Firatlı 1971; Öztüre 1981; Ulugün 2004, 2007.



FIG. 5. Map of Propontis, showing the location of Nicomedia (courtesy Çukurbağ Archaeological Project [TÜBİTAK 115K242]).

Roman imperial economy has been reconstructed on the basis of literary evidence.<sup>8</sup> Recent scholarly surveys of the topography of Nicomedia by Zeyrek and Çalık-Ross have drawn attention to the archaeological potential underneath modern İzmit.<sup>9</sup>

#### THE ÇUKURBAĞ EXCAVATIONS (2001, 2009) AND THE TÜBİTAK ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT (2015–2018)

The first reliefs and architectural elements from the site were recovered during rescue excavations conducted by the Kocaeli Museum in 2001. During the 2001 salvage operation, which took place in the neighborhood of Çukurbağ, about 22 m above sea level, excavators retrieved parts of about 11 relief panels. They also took possession of two colossal statues of Herakles and Athena, parts of which had already been dug out from the basement of an abandoned building and were intended for illegal export.<sup>10</sup> After a lawsuit that

dragged on for several years, this building and another nearby building (already heavily damaged during the 1999 earthquake) were expropriated and demolished, leading to the rescue excavations of 2009. During two months of excavations in an area measuring approximately 400 m<sup>2</sup>, several more reliefs were discovered and transferred to the Kocaeli Museum, while architectural finds were stacked on top of one another and left on-site. Because of an ongoing legal investigation into the smuggling of some reliefs during the 2009 salvage expedition, the remaining reliefs were kept in boxes and were never properly inventoried or studied.<sup>11</sup>

The new archaeological project started in 2013 and was funded in 2015 by TÜBİTAK. The main purpose

<sup>8</sup>Ward-Perkins 1980; Güney 2012.

<sup>9</sup>Zeyrek 2005; Çalık-Ross 2007a, 2007b, 2007c.

<sup>10</sup>Zeyrek and Özbay 2006, 280–91. The Herakles statue belongs to the Farnese type and, being almost 3 m in height, is one of the largest ever discovered of this type. The Athena is of the Giustiniani type and is ca. 2 m in height.

<sup>11</sup>During the 2009 expedition, archaeologists did not have time to record the positions of the finds or draw them in situ. The excavation diaries were also lost, and only some excavation photographs were archived; we have relied on the latter to partially reconstruct the in situ position of the finds. Although the reliefs were kept in boxes, exposure to the elements contributed to significant color loss. The two illegally smuggled relief panels, one with an imperial scene, recently appeared in an auction of the art dealer Gorny & Mosch Giessener Münzhandlung GmbH in Germany (Gorny & Mosch 2013, no. 8). The Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism has initiated a lawsuit for the return of these reliefs.



of this project is to analyze all the sculptural and architectural finds and create a digital reconstruction of the complex to which they once belonged.<sup>12</sup> The Çukurbağ finds have now been catalogued. They include 75 fragments of architectural relief panels, all made of Proconnesian marble. At least 30 of these slabs are fully preserved, with an average height of 1.0 m and average width of 1.5 m; other finds include 129 smaller fragments of relief panels, 62 fragments of freestanding statues of various scales (from colossal to smaller than life-sized), and dozens of architectural elements, including an *opus sectile* floor, columns, capitals, and cornice and architrave blocks. The variety of marble used in the architectural elements is also worth noting: three sizes of Corinthian capitals of Proconnesian marble, two sizes of gray granite columns, cipollino columns that are close in size to the smaller granite columns, small pavonazetto columns that perhaps originally supported three small-scale pediments of Proconnesian marble, and large cornice and architrave blocks of Proconnesian marble. The variety of marbles is also reflected in the *opus sectile* floor and suggests a late third-century date.<sup>13</sup>

A new excavation of the southern part of the building initiated in 2016 revealed the monumental stairs of what was clearly a large cult complex (fig. 6) to which the sculpture and the architectural elements had belonged. An over-life-sized statue of Hygeia had fallen onto the stairs. Based on our reexamination of the site, we were able to construct an initial site plan. The continuous frieze comes from inside a large building with an *opus sectile* floor. The architecture itself and some of the subjects represented in the reliefs suggest that this was a monument dedicated to the imperial cult. The juxtaposition of mythological narratives with imperial representations in the same frieze recalls the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias,<sup>14</sup> while the handling of the reliefs as a continuous frieze recalls the Parthian Monument of Lucius Verus at Ephesos.<sup>15</sup> A reused inscribed block

in the foundation of the western wall of the building mentions an honorific decree celebrating the Emperor Caracalla that was issued during the 14th year of his rule.<sup>16</sup> An erasure in the inscription must have been carried out after Caracalla's death in 217 C.E., a date that also marks the *terminus post quem* for the building. The structure must have collapsed during the devastating earthquake in August 358 C.E., which had an estimated magnitude of 9.0 on the Richter scale.<sup>17</sup>

Prior to the 2009 discoveries, Zeyrek and Özbay had examined the reliefs and statues found during the rescue excavations of 2001. They suggested, mostly on stylistic grounds, that the reliefs belonged to a victory monument built in honor of Septimius Severus in the late second century C.E.<sup>18</sup> But the above-mentioned inscription from the foundation of the building that the reliefs once adorned, as well as the style and themes of most of the reliefs, signals instead a late third-century date, when Nicomedia became the administrative capital of the eastern Roman empire. Historical subjects illustrated on the reliefs include military expeditions, captive barbarians, triumphal processions, and imperial rulers in battle and participating in religious ceremonies. The reliefs also depict mythological narratives, possibly related to the foundation myth of Nicomedia, and several scenes from agonistic games held at the city, including chariot races, boxing competitions, theatrical performances, and the awarding of prizes. As is typical of tetrarchic art, both the traditional naturalistic style and the new abstracted and symbolic styles are used side by side on the frieze; complex and naturalistic combat scenes are juxtaposed with static and symbolic representations of the imperial court.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Special thanks to Mustafa Adak and Tolga Özhan for their help in the reading of this inscription.

<sup>17</sup> Libanius (*Or.* 61.17.10) laments the destruction of the city by this major earthquake. For a detailed account of ancient literary sources on the earthquake, see Foss 1996, 7–9.

<sup>18</sup> Zeyrek and Özbay 2006.

<sup>19</sup> The contemporaneous use of different styles for different themes and messages, especially on later Roman reliefs, is explained in Hölscher's (2004) groundbreaking work on semantic methodology. Other examples of the intentional combination of various styles in tetrarchic art include the frescoes of the imperial cult room at Luxor. McFadden (2015, 107–8) argues that the stylistic variety of the frescoes marks a shift in thematic content. Elsner (2000, 173–76) argues that at Luxor the emperor was represented in different styles corresponding to his human and divine roles: naturalistic for the former, and abstracted and symbolic for the latter.

<sup>12</sup> Şare Ağtürk 2015, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Similar *opus sectile* floors with geometric designs incorporating various marble types are typical of late third-century and early fourth-century tetrarchic art; see, e.g., the octagon hall in Galerius' complex in Thessaloniki (Mentzos 2011, 346), the basilica at Trier (Karababa 2008, 163), and the frescoes of the imperial cult room at Luxor, with their imitation of geometrically patterned *opus sectile* (McFadden 2015, 116–17).

<sup>14</sup> Smith 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Landskron 2006.

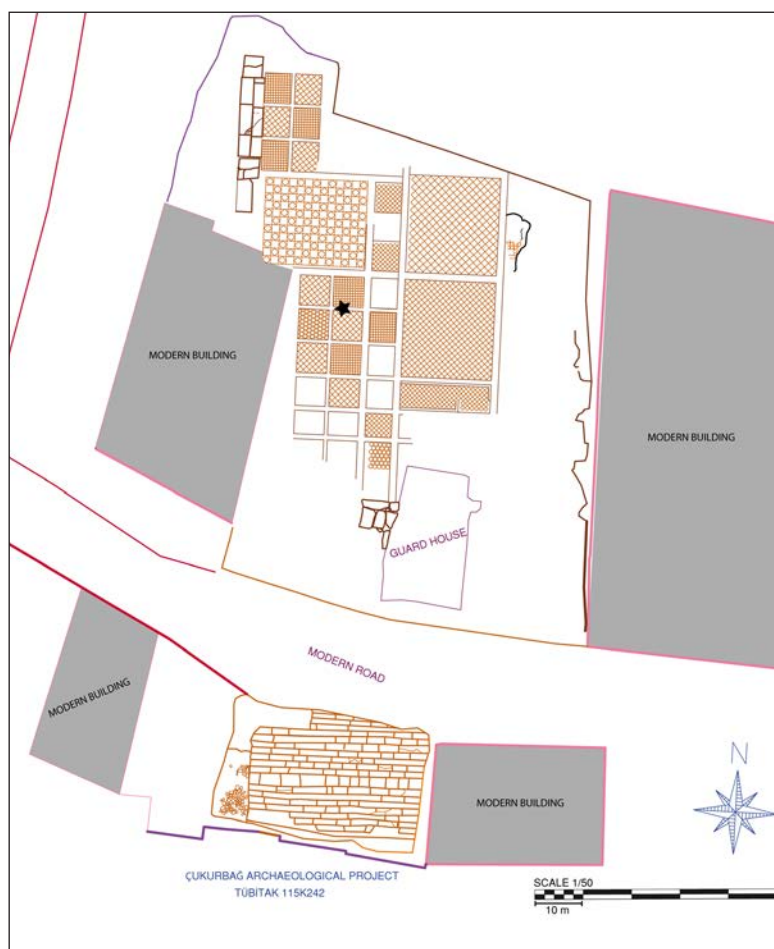


FIG. 6. Map of the Çukurbağ archaeological site. The star indicates the findspot of the relief block with the embracing emperors. The monumental stairs are south of the modern road, between two modern buildings (courtesy Çukurbağ Archaeological Project [TÜBİTAK 115K242]).

At least 10 of the large relief blocks depict a triumphal procession, specifically an *adventus* featuring standard bearers, Roman soldiers leading Germanic captives with bound hands, and spectators including deities, personifications, and togate Roman citizens. The procession approaches from both the right and the left, culminating at the center with the meeting and the embrace of the two emperors.

#### THE CENTRAL RELIEF PANEL AND ITS SURVIVING COLOR: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

The central relief block showing the emperors embracing has been restored from seven fragments (see fig. 3). The right edge of the relief block (directly behind

the chariot) is finished with a claw chisel. The background of the relief, and the upper surface of the narrow plinth on which the figures stand, are both cleanly finished with a flat chisel and rasps. The front surface of the plinth, however, shows claw chisel marks consistently applied diagonally from right to left, leaving a textured but finished look. A drill, a flat chisel, and several smaller chisels were used for various details such as folds of drapery and facial features.

On the far right is a four-wheeled ceremonial chariot with gold-colored, six-spoked wheels, the beginnings of the chariot pole, and a box with elaborately carved floral designs supporting a throne-like seat (a *cathedra*). Although the color of the chariot appears red to the naked eye, visible-induced luminescence (VIL) analysis has

detected a large amount of Egyptian blue, indicating that it was originally painted in purple.<sup>20</sup> The portion of the relief depicting the full extent of the pole of the ceremonial chariot is missing, but the adjoining fragment shows the forequarters of a horse, traces of eight additional legs and hooves of horses, and the leg of a man wearing trousers. The presence of at least three horses should indicate that the chariot is a quadriga. A headless, diminutive, frontal figure wearing a long cloak, tight trousers, and red shoes leads the car. Perhaps he held the reins of the horses with the missing hand of his raised left arm. Immediately to the left of this figure are the central figures of the two emperors embracing. Both are clad in similar imperial clothes: long-sleeved tunics with gold bands at the shoulder and at the hem (visible on the figure on the left) and also at the wrist (visible on both), red trousers with horizontal gold bands (visible on the figure on the right), closed soft leather shoes in red (visible on both), red belts (visible on the left figure), and elaborate fringed *paludamenta* with V-shaped folds,<sup>21</sup> fastened with a brooch over the right shoulder. Ultraviolet (UV) and VIL analyses on the *paludamenta* have shown that they too were brightly

colored in purple.<sup>22</sup> The emperor on the left is slightly taller than the one on the right. Now-lost flying Victories with blue-colored wings hovered beside their heads; the preserved part of the wing of the Victory on the left is much higher than the one on the right. Although the lower part of the face of the emperor on the left is missing, both figures have the short, military hair and beard styles typical of the later third century; stippling across the surface of the marble creates a buzz-cut effect. Both figures have rounded heads and thick necks, but the retroussé nose of the figure on the right and wider eye sockets for the figure on the left seem distinctive. The most conspicuous difference, however, is the hair color of the two figures: the hair of the taller emperor now has a light gray-brown hue while the hair of his counterpart is reddish. VIL imaging of the heads shows differences in the application of paint layers, particularly in the use of Egyptian blue, while X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectroscopy displays different proportions of elements in the composition of pigments used for the heads (fig. 7).<sup>23</sup>

During our research at the Kocaeli Museum, we found boxes containing other relief fragments from Çukurbağ in a separate storage building. Technical and iconographic analyses of three of those fragments has confirmed that they belong to the left side of the block depicting the embracing emperors (fig. 8). The smallest of these fragments preserves the corner of the taller emperor's fringed *paludamentum* and another headless, diminutive figure probably holding the reins of horses. The largest of the three additional fragments has a plinth with the same tooth chisel marks seen on the other fragments, applied diagonally from right to left on the front surface. This fragment joins the third of the additional fragments, and together they display the four horses of a ceremonial quadriga, part of the right wing of the Victory hovering above the head of the emperor on the left and a military guard who wears a lorica with *pteryges* and a cloak thrown over his left shoulder and carries a shield and fasces or a torch. The guard's head is broken off. He stands behind the horses, but his legs

<sup>20</sup> Techniques such as VIL or similar IR (infrared reflectography) are used especially to detect traces of Egyptian blue, the first synthetic pigment used in ancient polychromy. Egyptian blue has the peculiar property of glowing white when exposed to infrared light. But this white glow cannot be observed with the naked eye. In both VIL and IR imaging, special cameras with infrared filters record this luminescence reflecting from surfaces once painted with Egyptian blue. Abbe (2015) has conducted extensive scientific research on the polychromy of the Nicomedia reliefs. Besides VIL and IR analyses, he has used ultraviolet and microscopic analysis to detect traces of pigments. Chemical compositions of the pigments have been examined through X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectroscopy, and samples have been taken for future Raman spectroscopy. Abbe's upcoming publications will shed light on many aspects of polychromy in Roman relief sculpture. For a recent overview of the polychromy of Roman free-standing sculpture, see Abbe 2015. The color previously observed on Roman state reliefs has been largely vestigial.

<sup>21</sup> There are various ancient terms for this kind of military cloak, such as *chlamys* and *sagum*. Since *paludamentum* exclusively refers to the more elaborate, usually purple, cloak of imperial figures, it was decided to use this term (see Cleland et al. 2007, 125–37). The elaborate fringes of the *paludamenta* worn by the two emperors on the Nicomedia relief are unparalleled on other tetrarchic representations. Unlike the Venice and Vatican Tetrarchs, the emperors here do not wear the typical Pannonian hats. Yet, an unidentified figure with a Pannonian hat appears in a broken relief fragment elsewhere on the Nicomedia frieze.

<sup>22</sup> VIL imaging also showed a large amount of Egyptian blue.

<sup>23</sup> Pigment on the hair of both heads includes iron, lead, and traces of copper, the last being a special ingredient used in the making of synthetic Egyptian blue. But quantities are different: more iron on the hair of the emperor on the left, and more lead on that of the emperor on the right, suggesting a different color was used for each.





FIG. 7. Detail of emperor portraits on the Nicomedia frieze: *left*, under ambient light; *right*, under infrared light (M. Abbe) (courtesy Çukurbağ Archaeological Project [TÜBİTAK 115K242], Kocaeli Museum).



FIG. 8. Embracing emperors relief from Nicomedia with all surviving fragments (courtesy Çukurbağ Archaeological Project [TÜBİTAK 115K242], Kocaeli Museum).

are not depicted. Only the horse in the foreground is shown in full profile, walking toward the right; the other three horses are depicted as overlapping heads and hooves. The harness strapped against the right flank of the leftmost horse is a ceremonial one, consisting of a wide red band with floral designs and tassels that hang down; one tassel has an image of Medusa attached. Two poles (broken) emerge behind the horses and extend toward the left, where they would have connected with a second imperial chariot, now lost.

The original relief block, including the ceremonial chariot from which the emperor on the left has

descended, must have measured about 3 m in length and 1 m in height (fig. 9). As is typical of tetrarchic representations, the overall composition seems to have been arranged symmetrically.<sup>24</sup> It shows the emperors, each clad in ceremonial gold, purple, and red, rushing toward each other and embracing after descending from their ceremonial quadrigas. Despite the *similitudo* of their costumes, their cropped hair and beards, and

<sup>24</sup> On symmetrical compositions as vital elements of tetrarchic art, see L'Orange 1972, 89–90; Rees 1993, 187–88.

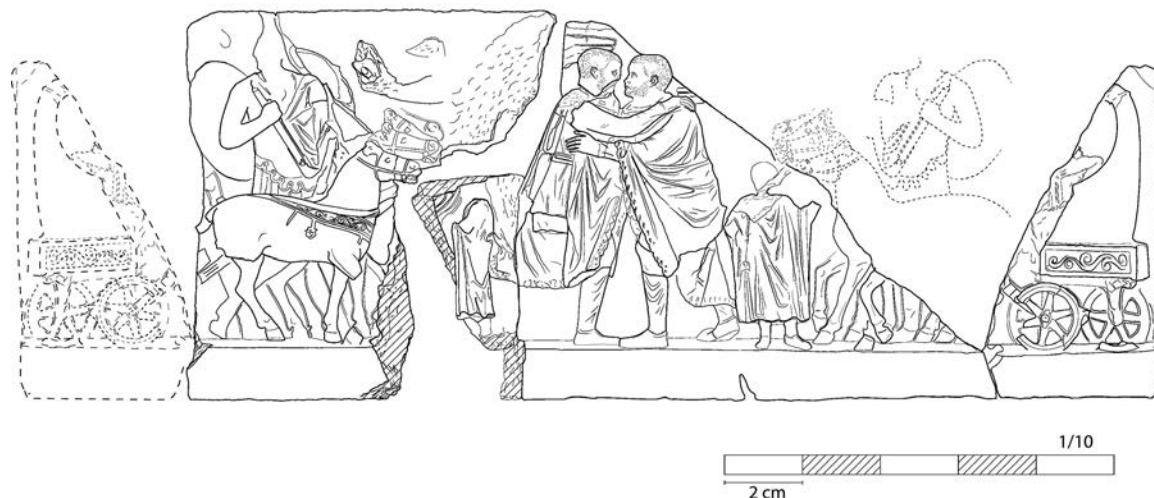


FIG. 9. Drawing of the embracing emperors' relief from Nicomedia (courtesy Çukurbağ Archaeological Project [TÜBİTAK 115K242]).

the accompanying imperial entourage, one can clearly identify each emperor: Diocletian has grayish-brown hair and wider and deeper eye sockets, while Maximian, with a retroussé nose and thicker eyelids,<sup>25</sup> has reddish-brown hair, being at least five years younger than Diocletian.<sup>26</sup>

#### THE REPRESENTATION OF THE TWO EMPERORS

Despite the common perception that tetrarchic portraiture is formulaic and characterized by indistinguishable figures whose similarity reflects the new political ideology of concord between the divine rulers, this courtly representation of the coemperors in Nicomedia preserves physiognomic distinctions while visually establishing a hierarchy between the two men. Diocletian, the senior figure, is slightly taller than Maximian, and his Victory (to judge from the position of her wing) is also set at a higher level than that of his counterpart. Similar representations of tetrarchic hierarchy can be seen on other contemporary examples.<sup>27</sup> Among the enthroned Tetrarchs on the

north face of the south pier of the Arch of Galerius in Greece, Diocletian's status as the leader of the four is communicated by the gesture he makes with his left hand and by his pronounced frontality.<sup>28</sup> In the same manner, in the over-life-sized frescoes of the similarly dressed and nimbate Tetrarchs on the south wall niche of the cult room at Luxor, Diocletian holds a scepter and a globe as signs of his universal authority granted by Jupiter.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, as Smith rightly points out, the claim that *similitudo* is reflected in the style of imperial portraiture as part of the new tetrarchic ideology is an exaggeration; it disregards regional and chronological variations as well as manufactural difficulties associated with coinage and stone carving that might have prevented more individualistic representations.<sup>30</sup> Thus, imperial *similitudo* and the decision to begin using the difficult-to-carve purple porphyry for imperial depictions both contributed to the rigid and near-identical figures. As a result, the identification of portraits of individual Tetrarchs without a firm archaeological context often remains speculative (e.g., "Portrait of Diocletian[?]").<sup>31</sup> When multiple Tetrarchs are represented, it is sometimes impossible to distinguish one from another, as in the case of the Vatican porphyry group of embracing Tetrarchs (see fig. 2). But

<sup>25</sup> Smith (1997, 181) notes that the retroussé nose was an individual physiological feature of Maximian, as it appears on early tetrarchic coinage. The retroussé nose of Maximian is also very distinctive on another Nicomedia relief, on which he appears being crowned by Herakles.

<sup>26</sup> Barnes (1982, 31–2) notes that Maximian, who was born in 250 C.E. (the date is certain), was only five to eight years younger than Diocletian.

<sup>27</sup> Rees 1993, 186.

<sup>28</sup> Rothman 1977, 444; Rees 1993, 186–87.

<sup>29</sup> McFadden 2015, 129–32.

<sup>30</sup> Smith 1997, 180.

<sup>31</sup> Kleiner 1992, 405–7; Rees 1993, 194–95.

the Çukurbağ relief shows that, at the early stages of the Tetrarchy in Nicomedia, the imperial *concordia* was presented not as a total physiognomic *similitudo* but as the *similitudo* of imperial presence. Citing *Panegyrici Latini* 11, a speech delivered to Maximian on his birthday in 291 C.E. in which the unknown orator clearly states that Diocletian and Maximian were similar in character rather than appearance, Smith further argues that establishing physical similarity between the rulers was not the main intention of the tetrarchic imagery at the beginning of Diocletian's rule. As seen in the relief from Nicomedia, the hierarchic composition of the embracing diarchs and the preservation of individual physiognomic features such as hair color and Maximian's retrousé nose seem to back up Smith's argument that "Diocletian's new imperial style was conceived both with some residual personal identity and with a highly normative collective aspect expressive of a unified political-moral character."<sup>32</sup>

The iconographical details of the painted relief block exhibit many parallels with contemporary *adventus* depictions on state reliefs and frescoes.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the emphasis in the Nicomedia relief seems to be on the meeting of the emperors rather than on their entry into a city. The *adventus* scene on the east side of the Arch of Constantine in Rome shows Constantine approaching Rome after his victory over Maxentius (fig. 10). The throne-like chariot driven by Victory is very similar to that of the painted relief from Nicomedia: both are decorated with floral motifs, have throne-like seats, and are drawn by horses equipped with ceremonial harnesses.<sup>34</sup> The same details—an imperial throne-like chariot, a bodyguard, and a small figure in front of the chariot—also appear on the *adventus* of Galerius into an undetermined city on the north face of the south pier on the top register of the Arch of Galerius.<sup>35</sup> The heavily damaged west wall frescoes of the imperial cult chamber at Luxor may also have included a ceremonial imperial chariot as part of a large *adventus* scene.<sup>36</sup>

Although there is no single formula for *adventus* depictions in Roman state art,<sup>37</sup> common motifs include

architectural references to the city the emperor is entering; citizens, troops (esp. typical are standard bearers), and divine figures accompanying the emperor to indicate their support; and captives or defeated enemies that mark his military victory. As mentioned above, all these motifs appear on other *adventus* blocks of the painted frieze of Nicomedia. Only one of the broken frieze blocks displays an architectural element, and it seems to be a generic reference to a city rather than to a special landmark (see fig. 4). The partially preserved figure holding a cornucopia on the left side of this relief is perhaps a representation of the Genius Populi Romani. Next to him is the armed goddess Roma, sitting on shields and holding a small Victory on a globe in her right hand and a spear in her left hand.<sup>38</sup> In front of the goddess, Romans wearing the *toga contabulata* (both bearded adults and children) advance toward an arched structure at the upper right of the relief.<sup>39</sup> The stylized, rather stiff figures with disproportionately large heads seem more formulaic than the depiction of the embracing coemperors. This scene may have been situated in the continuous frieze somewhere to the left of the block with the coemperors, behind Diocletian's entourage.<sup>40</sup> If this is the case, the goddess Roma probably did not symbolize Rome and so identify the city in which this meeting is taking place; rather, she probably represents Roman imperium itself. On the reliefs of the Arch of Galerius, Galerius also appears accompanied by Roma when meeting with the Persian delegation on his eastern expedition.<sup>41</sup>

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strated that it is problematic to posit that a single visual formula was used for the arrival of the emperor and to label this formula using the ADVENTVS legend appearing on the reverse of Roman coinage because state reliefs display a variety of *adventus* scenes that are mostly different from numismatic imagery and from one another as well. Thus, Klose rightly argued that each image should be examined in its own right.

<sup>38</sup> These two figures can alternatively be interpreted as Honos and Virtus. Bieber (1945) discusses how these two gods are usually mistaken for Genius Populi Romani and Roma with their similar iconography, but Virtus is usually shown as standing, not seated, on shields as on the Nicomedia relief.

<sup>39</sup> Zeyrek and Özbay 2006, 293–95.

<sup>40</sup> Stylistic differences within the same imperial *adventus* might indicate that this relief, which displays the formulaic features characteristic of the fourth century, either was part of a Constantinian renovation to the cult building in Nicomedia or was simply the product of a different sculptor who favored abstracted forms over naturalism.

<sup>41</sup> Rothman 1977, 453.

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<sup>32</sup> Smith 1997, 181.

<sup>33</sup> For *adventus* scenes, see Koeppel 1969.

<sup>34</sup> Elsner 2000; Carlson 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Laubscher 1975, table 48; Rothman 1977.

<sup>36</sup> McFadden 2015, 118–19.

<sup>37</sup> Klose (2015) reexamined the *adventus* scenes in Roman state art in two different media (coinage and reliefs) and demon-





FIG. 10. Detail of the *adventus* scene from the Arch of Constantine in Rome, east side (H. Ağıtürk).

Because of constant campaigning in remote corners of the empire in the east and west, Diocletian and Maximian rarely saw each other.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, there is no mention in the extant literature of Maximian ever arriving in Nicomedia.<sup>43</sup> Only two meetings between the two Augusti are attested: one in 288 C.E. at an unknown location following Diocletian's campaign against Raetia,<sup>44</sup> and another in late December 290 C.E. in Milan after Maximian's successful campaigns at Bagaudae, across the Rhine, and against German tribes in Gaul in previous years.<sup>45</sup> Along with their Caesars, the coemperors might also have been present together in Rome in November 303 C.E. for the *decennalia* celebrations commemorating the 10th year of the Tetrarchy.<sup>46</sup> The *adventus* scene on the Nicomedia

frieze could not have referred to a meeting of the two emperors during the early stages of their diarchy, as other blocks of the frieze contain references to several later victories over different Germanic tribes in the west. Further, on certain blocks the emperors appear with the attributes of their new appellations, Diocletian Jovius and Maximian Herculus, which were probably not well established before the later years of their corule.<sup>47</sup> Three possible dates for the meeting of the emperors commemorated on the relief are 290 C.E., when the fifth-year *quinquennalia* of their corule might have been celebrated (this date also marks their actual meeting in Milan);<sup>48</sup> 298 C.E., the *quinquennalia*

<sup>42</sup> Rees 2002, 31–4.

<sup>43</sup> Maximian might have been present in Nicomedia when Diocletian was proclaimed emperor in November 285 C.E. (see Barnes 1982, 31–2).

<sup>44</sup> *Pan. Lat.* 10.9.1.

<sup>45</sup> *Pan. Lat.* 11.8.1. For a list of the attested movements of the emperor Diocletian, see Barnes 1982, 50–6.

<sup>46</sup> To commemorate the 10th year of the Tetrarchy, Diocletian ordered the construction of the so-called Decennalia, or Five Column Monument, in the Roman Forum. Only one column base with relief sculpture on its four sides, depicting a procession, a sacrifice, the crowning of one of the Tetrarchs by a Victory, and Victories holding a shield, survives today. However, the monument is represented in the background of Constantine's

*oratio* scene on one of the reliefs of the Arch of Constantine. On the relief, the Decennalia Monument appears as consisting of five statue-topped columns, the statues representing Jupiter and the four Tetrarchs (Kleiner 1992, 413–17).

<sup>47</sup> On one block, Maximian (*supra* n. 25), with his distinctively retroussé nose, is depicted being crowned by Herakles, while on other, rather fragmentary, pieces, Jupiter's scepter is discernible. For these appellations, see Rees 2005.

<sup>48</sup> In 290 C.E., by the fifth year of their coregency, the diarchs had achieved greater success than many third-century emperors by establishing stability through the new governmental system and suppressing attacks in both the East and the West. However, there is no reference in literary sources to *quinquennalia* celebrations that might have taken place in 290 or 291 C.E. to mark the fifth year of the diarchy. Diocletian appointed Maximian as Caesar on 21 July 285 C.E., and as Augustus on 1 April 286 C.E. It

celebrations of the tetrarchic rule;<sup>49</sup> and 303 C.E., the tetrarchic *decennalia* celebrations, which possibly gathered the two Augusti in Rome. The stylistic features, the emphasis on the Jovius/Herculius iconography, and the lack of any reference to Caesars on the parts of the Nicomedia frieze discovered so far suggest a date slightly after 290 C.E. In the context of the overall sculptural program, however, rather than referring to an actual meeting, the relief panel with the embracing emperors is more likely to be understood as a symbolic and timeless representation of a continuous state of like-minded concord between the two emperors, who in reality rarely saw each other.

The motif of the embracing Tetrarchs in the porphyry groups is often linked to the *dextrarum iunctio* (right hands clasped) motif that was a common feature of the iconography of marriage in Roman art and literature.<sup>50</sup> Apart from being a particular sign of harmony and loyalty in marriage, the handclasp also functioned as a sign of political concord.<sup>51</sup> One of the well-known uses of the motif to illustrate such concord is the *dextrarum iunctio* of Caracalla and Septimius Severus on the reliefs of the Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna.<sup>52</sup> To promote their harmonious rule as one family, Diocletian and Maximian's *dextrarum iunctio* is also emphasized in literature.<sup>53</sup> The Leptis Magna relief shows that the use of the motif in imperial art was not a Diocletianic invention. On the reverse of a rare aureus minted at Cyzicus in 284 C.E., the coemperors Carinus and Numerianus, precursors of Diocletian, clasp their right hands as they stand facing each other. Just above their clasped hands, Victory stands on a globe as she crowns them both.<sup>54</sup> As the legend on the coin indicates, this is a representation of the *adventus* of the emperors and certainly sets a precedent for the

Victories hovering above (and probably crowning) the embracing diarchs on the Nicomedia relief. Yet, on the painted relief, Maximian and Diocletian do not just clasp hands but embrace each other with both arms. The only earlier imperial example of such an embrace is partially preserved on the so-called dynastic relief of the Antonine altar from Ephesos. Here, Marcus Aurelius' embrace of the young Lucius Verus is interpreted as a dynastic scene depicting adoption.<sup>55</sup> Unlike the earlier Antonine example or the slightly later porphyry examples from Venice and from the Vatican, the coemperors in the Nicomedia relief do not face forward; rather, having just descended from their ceremonial chariots they surge toward each other almost as if they were two relatives reuniting (fig. 11). Similarly, in the joint portrait of the two diarchs—shown with different physiognomies: larger eyes and prominent cheekbones for Diocletian and retroussé nose for Maximian—they appear as facing each other on the obverse of specially issued antoniniani and gold medallions of early Diocletianic coinage.<sup>56</sup> On the obverse of a rare gold medallion issued in 287 C.E. in Rome, two laureate emperors clad in ceremonial costumes face each other (fig. 12). On the reverse, the corulers, in a ceremonial car pulled by elephants, carry the symbols of their appellations, Diocletian (Jovius) a thunderbolt and Maximian (Herculius) a club, while a Victory hovers above their heads.<sup>57</sup>

The intimate relationship between the diarchs is also emphasized in contemporary panegyric language. *Panegyrici Latini* 11 (12.3–5), delivered in 291 C.E. to Maximian at Trier after the conference in Milan and after the *quinquennalia* of his coregency with Diocletian, includes this passage about the meeting of the diarchs:<sup>58</sup>

is hard to determine which of the two dates the rulers considered as marking the beginning of their coregency. In 290 C.E., Maximian visited Rome and Lugdunum, toured Gaul, and met Diocletian in Milan; before meeting Maximian, Diocletian had visited Adrianople, Byzantium, Antioch, Emesa, Laodicea, Pannonia, and Sirmium (see Barnes 1982, 52).

<sup>49</sup> There is no reference to *quinquennalia* celebrations for the first Tetrarchy in literary sources.

<sup>50</sup> Rees 2002, 78–9.

<sup>51</sup> Müller 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Kleiner 1992, 341, fig. 310.

<sup>53</sup> *Pan. Lat.* 10.11.1.

<sup>54</sup> *RIC* 5(2):177, no. 317, pls. 7, 15; Hölscher 1967, pls. 2, 12. Legend on obverse reads "IMP M AVR CARINVS P F AVG"; legend on reverse reads "ADVENTVS AVGG NN."

<sup>55</sup> Kleiner 1992, 309–10, fig. 279.

<sup>56</sup> On the obverse of these rare antoniniani, possibly issued in Siscia in 287 C.E., radiate, draped, and cuirassed busts of the coemperors face each other, while the legend reads "IMPP DIOCLETIANO ET MAXIMIANO AVGG." On the reverse, Jupiter and Herakles, appellations of the corulers, clasp hands as a small Victory hovers between them, while the legend reads "VIRTVS AVGVSTORVM" (Margetić 2015, figs. 1–3).

<sup>57</sup> Berlin, Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, inv. no. 18200802. Legend on obverse reads "IMPP DIOCLETIANO ET MAXIMIANO AVGG"; legend on reverse reads "I-MPP DIOCLETIANO III ET MAXIMIANO CCSS." Elephants in a processional scene also appear on one of the surviving blocks of the Nicomedia frieze.

<sup>58</sup> Translation from Rees 2002, 78; see also Nixon 1994.

Meanwhile, however, while I bring before my eyes your daily conversations, your right hands joined at every conversation, the trivial and serious matters you shared, parties spent in contemplation of each other, the thought comes to me of the magnanimity with which you separated to revisit your armies and overcame your sense of duty for the benefit of the state. What were your feelings at that time, what were your expressions! How incapable were your eyes of disguising the evidence of emotion! Of course, you looked back frequently, and this is not an empty fiction made up about you—you exchanged such assurances since you intended soon to return to see each other.

Interpreting this passage, Rees draws attention to the fact that the language used to describe the meeting of the emperors—such as the emotionally charged gaze shared between them or their need for physical contact implied by the constant handclasp—is predominantly reserved for the discourse of lovers in Latin literature.<sup>59</sup> This new language can serve as a powerful metaphor for the collegiate harmony of their rule. Indeed, the intimate gaze and enthusiastic embrace of the emperors on the Nicomedia relief can be regarded as a visual counterpart to contemporary panegyric language—a panegyric in stone.

## CONCLUSIONS

The embrace of Diocletian and Maximian on the painted Nicomedia relief differs slightly from the scenes depicted in the later porphyry tetrarchic groups. This difference is not just due to the use of different materials (Proconnesian marble vs. difficult-to-carve porphyry) but also to the particular circumstances of the years of the diarchy. After the crisis of the mid third century, when emperors repeatedly killed one another in their struggle to become the sole ruler of the Roman empire, there seems to have been a lot of doubt among Romans about the validity and sustainability of the diarchic rule of Diocletian and Maximian. By adopting new motifs and styles, the Diocletianic court seems to have developed a new language, both visual and literary, to overcome these doubts and to present the leaders of the new regime as two brothers. But these brothers were not twins: Diocletian was slightly older, taller, and had achieved greater victories than his younger colleague Maximian. Once adorning an imperial cult building in Diocletian's new imperial capital of Nicomedia, the painted relief depicting the meeting of the ruler of the West and the ruler of the East

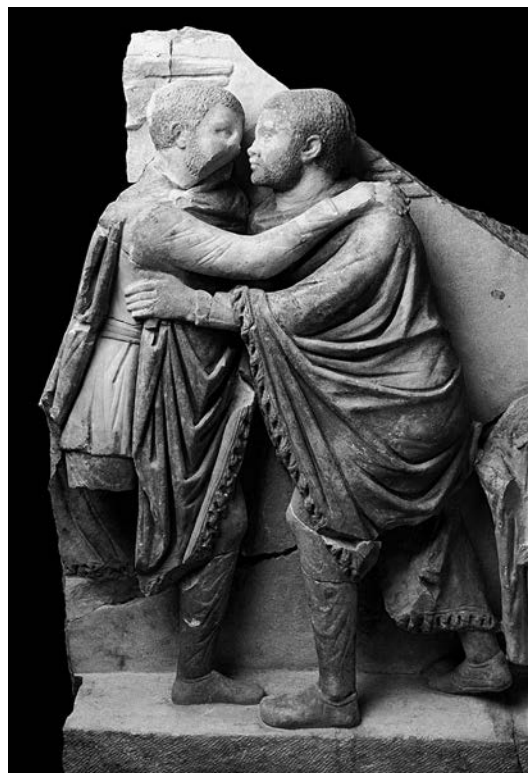


FIG. 11. Detail of the embracing emperors on the Nicomedia frieze (courtesy Çukurbağ Archaeological Project [TÜBİTAK 115K242], Kocaeli Museum).



FIG. 12. Gold medallion (worth 5 aurei) with busts of Diocletian and Maximian on the obverse. Berlin, Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, inv. no. 18200802 (courtesy Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin).

stands out as one of the earliest examples of diarchic propaganda in the late third century. The motif of the intimate imperial embrace first seen on the Nicomedia relief went on to become the hallmark of tetrarchic art.

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<sup>59</sup> Rees 2002, 77–81.



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Editor's note: An incorrect version of figure 6 that originally appeared in this article was replaced by the correct figure 6 in the digital publication on June 29, 2018. An erratum notice with the correct figure 6 will appear in the printed version of the *American Journal of Archaeology* for October 2018 (volume 122.4).