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*The Menorah, the Ancient Seven-armed
Candelabrum: Origin, Form & Significance*

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This massive volume compiles and analyzes the evidence relating to the menorah both from texts and in the material culture. The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 (7–280) discusses the origins of the menorah primarily from biblical texts, describes the forms of the finds from the Land of Israel and the Diaspora, and analyzes the significance of the menorah from the tabernacle through the Second Temple period into late antiquity. Part 2 (281–477) is a corpus of most of the published menorah in three categories: finds from the Land of Israel, finds from the Diaspora, and designs on lamps regardless of their origins.

Chapter 1, “History and Origin of the Menorah,” lays out a careful analysis of the key biblical texts (Exod 25:31–40; 37:17–24) and wades through Josephus and the Talmud to reconstruct the origins of the menorah, not initially as a symbol but as a cultic object. Hachlili shows that the menorah of the tabernacle and Solomonic temple was not a seven-branched candelabrum but rather a single-stemmed stand topped with a bowl, a common accoutrement in cultic settings throughout the ancient Near East and Mediterranean (e.g., like a *thymiaterion* for incense). It was not until the postexilic period, inspired perhaps by Zechariah’s vision (4:2–3) of a lamp with seven spouts or wicks (but not seven arms) and combined with the earlier mention in Exod 25 of “six reeds” from the shaft (but not with seven

flames), that the conventional seven-branched menorah emerged, most likely during the Hasmonean period.

After dealing primarily with texts and non-Israelite archaeological parallels in chapter 1, Hachlili turns to the vast number of Jewish menoroth from late antiquity in chapters 2 and 3, which respectively characterize the finds and analyze their forms. The book's longest chapter, "Description of the Finds: The Menorah in the Land of Israel and the Diaspora" (41–120), begins with menoroth from the Second Temple Period and a nice discussion of that on the Arch of Titus in Rome. This transitions well from the previous chapter's discussion on origins, since it shows how the earliest depictions of the seven-branched menorah in the late Second Temple period depicted the temple's ritual object itself yet were barely beginning to assume the symbolism of priesthood (so the coins of Mattathias Antigonus) and then Judaism generally (so the Arch of Titus). Implicit in the evidence is the importance of Jewish interaction with Roman imperial policy in transforming the menorah from cultic object to a religious or ethnic symbol. For the rest of the chapter, Hachlili arranges the objects by context and material: free-standing synagogue objects, in art and architecture of synagogues, in burial contexts, in objects from daily life (such as seals, amulets, jewelry, bread stamps, weights, ceramic vessels, and lamps).

With a vast array of figures, charts, and even statistics, chapter 3 ("The Form of the Menorah" [121–69]) generalizes the menorah's typological tendencies and chronological development. What Hachlili calls Type I has semicircular branches and a canonical base (first century B.C.E. to first century C.E.); after a gap of little evidence in the second century C.E., Type II emerges, characterized by a stylized tripod base with round, right-angled, or straight branches ending in a straight line (third–fourth century C.E.); Type III has a tripod base with stylized round ornamented branches and with lamps or glass containers as light fittings (like type II, third to fourth century C.E.); finally, Type IV, the most common group in mosaic architecture, has a tripod base with branches ending in a straight line and a crossbar holding glass containers for light fittings (fourth–seventh century C.E.). The author herself does not wish to push too rigid a typology, however, noting that "artists and sometimes ordinary people elaborated on, adding details and ornamentation to the original shape" (168). In general the same patterns can be found in the Land of Israel as in the Diaspora, though in the former the menorah is usually accompanied by other ritual objects, while in the Diaspora the menorah tends to stand alone.

At the heart of the book is chapter 4, "Meaning, Interpretation, and Significance of the Menorah" (171–210), which to this reviewer is also the most disappointing. Hachlili limits her discussion of the menorah's meaning to "its function and location in the Tabernacle, the First Temple, the Second Temple, the ancient synagogue, and the burial context, as well as in Jewish daily life" (171). Although at each point the menorah's possible religious, magical, or spiritual symbolism is discussed, the key sociohistorical question that the amassed evidence raises is inadequately addressed, namely, Why and how do representations of this cultic object in the late Second Temple period become the dominant symbol of Judaism by the third century? With Avigad she asserts that it might have arisen in the Diaspora, and following Applebaum she suggests "during the second century CE in places such as Rome, Babylon, and North Africa the menorah no doubt came to symbolize the Jewish revolt against the Romans and the Jewish need for self-identity" (208). At this point, however, no evidence is offered, no argument is pursued, and religious interpretations of the symbol are suddenly abandoned in favor of political interpretations of what is off and on in the book referred to as a "national" symbol. The complexities of Diaspora Judaism, Jews living amidst Greeks and Romans, and the impact of Roman imperialism on Jewish society, are not tackled. Indeed, the index of ancient sources lists not a single Greco-Roman author, so how pagans might have reacted to such a national (does she assume also cryptic?) symbol is not addressed. The influence of Christianity's spread on synagogue iconography at a later period is raised, but a discussion of the developments under Roman rule during the century following the Bar Kokhba revolt, especially as the menorah allegedly relates to a desire to rebuild the temple, is lacking. At this point it is clear that the book's strength is its art-historical and formal analysis rather than its pursuit of social-historical concerns.

Three additional chapters round out part 1. Chapter 5, titled "The Accompanying Ritual Objects" (211–49), describes the relative preponderance of items such as the shofar, lulav, ethrog, incense shovel, the shewbread table, the Torah shrine, and the ark of the scroll. Chapter 6 (250–62) offers valuable insights into the world of ancient artists and craftsmen and how workshops might have acquired, preserved, and modified pattern books or copies. Chapter 7 takes a brief look at how the menorah was occasionally used in Samaritan and Christian contexts (263–74). A concise and clearly written summery concludes the first part of the book (275–80).

The latter half of this volume is dedicated to the corpus of most of the menoroth published or known to the author and is divided into three sections: "Menoroth Found in Israel" (285–354); "Menoroth Found in the Diaspora" (355–439); and

“Lamps from the Land of Israel and the Diaspora” (441–77). This catalogue provides the essential information for each menorah: an entry number (prefixed with IS = Israel, D = Diaspora, L = Lamp) is cross-referenced with the appropriate plate or figure, underneath which the type, provenance, and probable date are listed. In addition, the catalogue provides information on the menorah’s material, measurements, form, current location, accompanying objects, and bibliographic data. Occasionally line drawings are set off to the side. This corpus represents a Herculean effort by Hachlili, and archaeologists, art historians, Judaic scholars, indeed anyone working in the classical periods or late antiquity owes her a debt of gratitude. The catalogue is a mine of information in which scholars can dig around pursuing their own particular interests.

The book concludes with a valuable and thorough bibliography (481–99), a slim glossary of only two pages, and indices by subject (503–11), ancient sources (512–14), and location of finds (515–39). The latter index is particularly helpful for anyone interested in pursuing a particular site or geographical region and compensates for splitting off of lamps into a separate category from discoveries in Israel or the Diaspora. Thankfully, the volume is richly illustrated, with over one hundred figures of clearly executed line drawings interspersed within the text, making the author’s descriptions easy to follow. Maps noting the key find spots or presenting the distribution of menoroth would have been a welcome addition, particularly for those not immersed in the field. The mostly black and white photographs in the ninety-two plates are, no fault of the author, unfortunately of uneven quality and do not always include a scale.

In spite of the book’s prohibitive cost (\$190.00), this work belongs on the shelves of research libraries and serious scholars of the history of Judaism in the Second Temple period and in late antiquity.