

## Inscriptions from Israel: Jewish or non-Jewish Revisited

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Currently, two projects aim at digging up the inscriptions from the Land of Israel and making them available to specialists and non-specialists alike.<sup>1</sup> One is a long standing and well-funded project of a highly esteemed international team, the other a far more limited but nevertheless creditable project that focuses on getting what is available now in epigraphical editions and scholarly publications on the internet.<sup>2</sup> Obviously, the much expected outcome of both projects will, among other things, be consulted by scholars and students who have an interest in the history of ancient Judaism, eager to fill in the gaps in their knowledge, which is based on literary sources, and to read those sources in their socio-cultural context by linking them to non-literary documents; and vice versa. Yet, during such a process a danger may loom up of circular argumentation or bias in the attempt to reconstruct or contextualize. How can we be certain that an inscription has a Jewish origin? Sometimes we cannot, and then things get complicated. As far as we know, at the moment neither project involved deals explicitly with this problem. In this brief contribution we shall call attention to the questions implied by the famous debate about the criteria for determining the Jewishness of inscriptions. We argue that this debate is relevant for the inscriptions from ancient Israel as well. Inscriptions are considered Jewish on the basis of particular personal names, references to Jews/Judaeans, Hebrews, Jewish offices, institutions, practices etcetera, specific terminology, Jewish conventions of decoration or the archaeological context.<sup>3</sup> Most of these criteria do not yield decisive evidence for of an inscription's Jewish origin, which led Pieter van der Horst to the proposal that inscriptions should only be considered Jewish if two or more

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<sup>1</sup> We warmly thank Jonathan Price, Tel Aviv University, for sharing his references for some of the inscriptions discussed below.

<sup>2</sup> The first project concerns the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palestinae (CIIP)*, co-ordinated by Hannah Cotton (Hebrew University of Jerusalem); the project was announced in *ZPE* 127 (1999), 307-8. Michael Satlow (Brown University) designed and co-ordinates The Inscriptions from the Land of Israel project.

<sup>3</sup> See, among others, the discussions by R. S. Kraemer, 'Jewish Tuna and Christian Fish: Identifying Religious Affiliation in Epigraphic Sources' *HTR* 85 (1991), 141-62; P. W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs: An Introductory Survey of a Millennium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy*, Kampen, 1991, 16-18; W. Horbury & D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*, Cambridge, 1992, x-xi; J. W. van Henten & A. Bij de Vaate, 'Jewish or Non-Jewish? Some Remarks on the Identification of Jewish Inscriptions from Asia Minor', *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 53 (1996) 16-28.

criteria are met.<sup>4</sup> The outcome of this debate is that in many cases one cannot be sure of a Jewish origin, because one criterion is often not decisive; unfortunately, two or more criteria are not always met, simply because inscriptions lack the information for checking more than one criterion. What should be done about such inscriptions? How should the balance be tipped in favour of putting the inscriptions in either the Jewish or else in the non-Jewish category? Or should we acknowledge that we do not know sometimes, or that in some instances we can argue either way? Evidently, the latter position may lead to a third category of *possible* Jewish inscriptions.

We would like to illustrate the issue of the inscriptions' Jewish origin by briefly discussing several inscriptions from Israel. One inscription (no. 1) contains a formula which is usually taken to be Christian, but is attested in a few Jewish contexts as well. This inscription shows how cautious we should be in assigning a category to an inscription. Two other inscriptions considered Jewish by scholars, but may not be Jewish at all (nos. 2 and 5). In one other case, we argue the other way around (no. 3), while there are reasons, in our opinion, to consider one other inscription as possibly Jewish (no. 4). We also think that our additional category of possibly Jewish inscriptions matches the realities of (late) Antique society in Israel/Palestine better. The population of cities like Caesarea Maritima consisted of a wide variety of ethnic and religio-cultural groups. Certainly there were occasional tensions between these groups, but there must have been many interactions and overlaps as well. We know that a Jew, for example, was proud to see his name included in an inscription commemorating the restoration of the Hadrianaeum, just as Gentiles could readily designate themselves **PROSHLU&TOJ**.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> For the population of Caesarea Maritima, see C. M. Lehmann & K. G. Holum, *The Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima: Excavation Reports. No. V, The Greek and Latin Inscriptions of Caesarea Maritima*, Boston, 2000, pp. 20-24; for ethnic and religious tensions, pp. 16-20. For an overall picture of the Jewish community of Caesarea and its complex relationships to other groups, cf. L. L. Levine, *Caesarea under Roman Rule*, Leiden, 1975, pp. 80-6. For the Jew Elias in the Hadrianaeum inscription, see Lehmann & Holum, no. 58; for a proselyte their no. 165; also the comments by van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, pp. 135-7.

1. **SEG** 26.1683

Scythopolis (Beth Shean); dedicatory inscription from the Beth Shean B synagogue; sixth century CE

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Bahat, D., 'The synagogue at Beth-Shean – Preliminary Reports', *Qadmoniot* 5 (1972), 55-8 (inc. photograph; in Hebrew)

Lifshitz, B., 'Varia Epigraphica', *Euphrosyne* 6 (1974), 23-48, no. II (27-9)

Ovadia, R., & Ovadia, A., *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements in Israel*, Rome, 1987, 36, no. 31 B (inc. photograph) (with *SEG* 37.1467 and 1532)

TEXT (with Lifshitz) AND TRANSLATION :

**P(ROS)F(ORA) W{N K(U/RIO)J G|INO/SKI TA\ | O!NOMAT|A: AUOTOJ | FULA/CI EON | XRO/(NW|).**

*Offering of those, whose names God knows; may He guard them at length.*<sup>6</sup>

COMMENTS:

This intriguing inscription is flanked by two birds. The formulas in the inscription are, according to Lifshitz, '*tout à fait unique dans l'épigraphie grecque-juive*'. He thinks the same holds true for the abbreviations.<sup>7</sup> The text is surprising because of the formula **PROSFORA\ W{N KU/RIOJ KTL.**, which looks rather Christian, as Lifshitz notes. For some Christian usages of the formula we point to *SEG* 16.826 and 37.1274. Nevertheless, the context of the inscription here is undoubtedly Jewish and it may be instructive to look for Jewish antecedents of this formula. Apart from the parallels listed by Lifshitz for the words **PROSFORA/** and **KU/RIOJ**, we add here that the combination of the two occurs in the Septuagint (cf. Sir. 14:11 and 50:13). Furthermore, **KU/RIOJ** appears in M. Schwabe & B. Lifshitz, *Beth She`arim. Volume II: The Greek Inscriptions*, Jerusalem, 1974

<sup>6</sup> Translation of **EON XRO/NW|** based on *LSJ* **XRO/NOJ** 4.e.

<sup>7</sup> According to Lifshitz **P** and **F** are in ligature, forming **P(ROS)F(ORA/)**. Ovadia & Ovadia think the letters **P** and **R** are in ligature, which is a more common abbreviation method and therefore more probable. **KS** for **KU/RIOJ** is rare ; Lifshitz offers one parallel.

(henceforth *BS II*) nos. 130, 151 and 184. The word is also found in *CIJ* 725a;<sup>8</sup> cf. also Horbury & Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions from Graeco-Roman Egypt*, no. 134. The verb **GINW&SKW** is used with a similar meaning in many passages in the Septuagint, e.g. Ps. 90:14: **Ο#ΤΙ ΕΙΓΝΩ** [i.e. God] **ΤΟ\_ Ο!ΝΟΜΑ ΜΟΥ**. All in all this is a formula that could be either Jewish or else Christian, but is now attested in a Jewish inscription. This instance shows us that we have to be careful in claiming an exclusively pagan, Christian or Jewish usage for a formula. In our short notes on the next inscriptions we will discuss some additional formulas.

## 2. *CIJ* 1405; *SEG* 8.206

Jerusalem, Ophel Hill; fragment of a marble plaque; third century CE

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Macalister, R.A.S. & Garrow Duncan, J., 'Excavations on the Hill of Ophel, Jerusalem', *PEF Annual* 4 (1923-5), 132, fig. 128

Schwabe, M., 'Eine jüdische Grabschrift vom Ophelhügel in Jerusalem, *ZDPV* 55 (1932), 238-41, pl. 23,4

### TEXT (with Schwabe) AND TRANSLATION:

**ΟΕΝQA/[DE KEI=TAI NI]KW\_ P' EO[TW~N: EON]|| EIOR{G}H/[NH| H9 KOI/]|MIS[i/J  
SOU.**

*Here lies Niko, aged 80; in peace may be your sleep.*

### COMMENTS:

This inscription is a *caveat* for students of Jewish epigraphy, since, apart from the first line, it is so badly damaged that it defies any restoration. Yet, by the end of his article Schwabe manages to give a complete reading of the inscription. He restores the first line with Macalister and Garrow Duncan to **ΟΕΝQA/DE KEI=TAI**, which indeed seems to be the most plausible restoration (and the only one Macalister and Garrow Duncan are prepared to propose). Then Schwabe suggests: '*Bei Annahme dieser Ergänzung würde*

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<sup>8</sup> This inscription from Delos consists of two funerary steles, in which the murderers of two young Jewish girls are cursed; in this indignant outburst God is invoked in various ways; cf. our commentary on No. 6.

*die Inschrift auch jüdisch sein können*’, which he explains in a footnote: ‘*Es ist die häufigste Eingangsformel jüdischer Epitaphien*’. This is correct, but especially in the case of Roman Jewish epitaphs: cf. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 41, and H. J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, Philadelphia, 1960, pp. 122ff, who looked at 328 epitaphs from Rome, 239 of which contained this formula or a variant thereof. On the other hand, in the Caesarean corpus of Lehmann & Holum, for example, the first formula is found only once, in a Christian (!) epitaph (no. 197). In *BS II* only 20 out of 221 inscriptions containing a variant of this formula can be found; **OENQA/DE KEI=TAI** is found only four times, and just twice at the beginning of the epitaph.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Schwabe cites non-Jewish examples from Israel as well. Thus, so far there is no reason to be sure of a Jewish provenance.

However, Schwabe restores the last two lines, without even knowing the length of the lines, as **EON] EIOR{G}H/[NH|| H9 KOI/]MIS[1/J SOU**, stating: ‘*So erhält man die übliche jüdische Schlussformel.*’ This formula appears to be Jewish, but, once again, it is mainly found in Rome -- Leon counted 167 examples -- but not at all in Caesarea and only once in Beth She`arim (*BS II*, no. 173). Leon lists 112 epitaphs that contain both **OENQA/DE KEI=TAI** and **EON EIORH/NH| H9 KOI/MISI/J AU)TOU~** (or a variant, like **SOU**, which is less common<sup>10</sup>). Van der Horst, *l.c.*, in fact states that such epitaphs ‘must be regarded as typically Roman Jewish’. The numbers show great regional differences and it can hardly be expected for both formulas to occur on an epitaph from Israel. Yet, Schwabe wants to read it that way; but to be able to do so, he must ignore the *gamma* in **EIRGH-** and complete the letters **-MIS-** to **KOI/MISIJ = KOI/MHSIJ**, while the letters **-MIS-** are hardly readable.

Schwabe considers the inscription possibly Jewish, but according to Frey it suddenly *is* Jewish. Frey even ‘improves’ on Schwabe’s restorations, apparently in order to make the case for a Jewish inscription stronger. Schwabe reads the name **NIKW&**, but

<sup>9</sup> Three times the variant with the first person singular **KEI=MAI** is found. Ten times the adverb **W{DE** is found (rare in Rome: only twelve times in 239 examples containing the formula); **E1NQA** twice (four instances in Rome only), and **OENQA/DE** four times; in one instance the adverb has disappeared. Of all these sixteen instances only eight appear at the beginning of the epitaphs.

<sup>10</sup> Park, J.S., *Conceptions of Afterlife in Jewish Inscriptions*, Tübingen, 2000, 101, states that the variant with **SOU** is slightly more common; he looked at a bigger, not regionally defined corpus. Park devotes pp. 98-112 entirely to this formula, which he considers to be largely, but not exclusively Jewish.

Frey changed this into  $\text{IAKW\&}$ , because '[l]e nom de  $\text{NIKW\&}$  n'a pas encore été trouvé dans l'épigraphie juive'. -PE-, read by Schwabe as  $\text{P' EO[TW~N}$ , indicating the age of the deceased, is read by Frey as the first two letters of a proper name, because 'dans les inscriptions juives, le chiffre indiquant l'âge est placé après le mot  $\text{EOTW~N}$ , non avant.' A glance at the indexes of Vol. 1 of *CIJ* and Horbury & Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*, seems to confirm this theory. However, because of the lacunae all the suggested readings remain rather speculative, and the inscription, therefore, may better be considered possibly Jewish. By implication, it can be Christian or pagan as well.

### 3. *SEG* 14.847; CAT. II

Gophna; funerary stele; after 200 CE

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Schwabe, M., 'A Greek Epigram from Gofna', *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 1 (1954), 99-119, pl. 2

Peek, W., *Griechische Vers-Inschriften [= GV] I*, Berlin, 1955, no. 1185

Merkelbach, J. & Stauber, J., *Steinepigramme aus dem Griechischen Osten. Band 4: Die Südküste Kleinasiens, Syrien und Palaestina*, Leipzig, 2002, 332, no. 21/11/01 Gophna

#### TEXT (with Peek) AND TRANSLATION:

**9R**USALE/HJ GRAI/HJ KAMA&TWN A)NA&|PAUMA& ME LEU/SEIJ, |  
**0I**]KON, **03N** I9DRU/SAJ TH=SD' AONE/QHKE TE/KOJ, ||  
**U**#STATON A)NQRW&POIJ, H(DU\_N PO|NON, EIOKO&NA DO&CHJ, |  
**F**AINO/MENON ZW&OI=J TERPNO&|TATON LIME/NA. |  
**03**STIJ GA\_R NAI/EI ME, PO/NWN MO&||XQWN TE PE/PAUTAI, |  
**SH**~J D' EOSORA|~J BIOTH~J POULU/ ME | TERPNO/TERON. |  
**E4N** DE\ TE/LOJ PA&NTWN: SEIGH\ MI/A: | KOINOJ O( PLOU~TOJ ||  
**KAI**\ PENI/A PAR' EOMOI: PA~SI PE/FU|KA D' I1SOJ. |  
**TAU**~TA MAQW&N, W} CEI=NE, TA\_ GRA&M|MATA TH~SD' A)PO\_ DE/LTOU ||  
**I1SQ'** O#TI MOIRA&WN O( SKOPO&J EOST||IN O#DE. ||  
**SH**~MA DE\ SOI, NIKW&: KTI/STOU D' O!NOM' EUOQU\ MAQH&SH| |

[EΘC A)KROSTIXI/]DOJ LAI+NE/AJ. |[PA&RAGE.]

The acrostichon reads: ΘΡΟΥ=ΦΟJ ΕΞΚΤΙΣΕ.

*The resting-place from tiresome cares of a wrinkled old woman is what you behold in me, a house, which her child erected and dedicated, a last resort for humans, a sweet labour, an image of her good name, seeming a most refreshing port to the living. For whoever dwells in me, he has brought his toils and troubles to an end, and you see that I am much more enjoyable than your life. One is the end of all; one silence; with me wealth and poverty are one and the same thing. To everyone I am equal. Having understood these words from this tablet, stranger, you must know that this is the aim of the Moirai. The grave is yours, Niko; the name of the builder you will learn straightaway from the first stone letters . Off you go. The acrostichon means: Rufus built it. (Transl. L. Huitink)*

#### COMMENTS:

For a discussion of the appearance of Greek funerary epigrams in Israel/Palestine and more examples, see H. B. Rosén, ‘Die Sprachsituation im römischen Palästina’ in G. Neumann & J. Untermann (eds), *Die Sprachen im römischen Reich der Kaiserzeit*, Köln, 1980, 229-30. Rosén thinks that these inscriptions do not necessarily say much about the education of the dedicator; rather their stock-literary motifs and phrases indicate that they were produced in great quantities and the scribes simply put in the name of the deceased, often unmetrically. This observation is not entirely satisfactory in our opinion. Although it may be true that the dedicators did not actually write the texts, there still had to be a ‘market’ for such epigrams, that is people they appealed to. Furthermore, this particular inscription is an acrostichon and it is therefore unlikely that it consists of a totally pre-written text. It contains some exceptional phrases, such as ΘΡΥΣΑΛΕ/ΗJ ΓΡΑΙ/ΗJ. Merkelbach & Stauber only offer parallels for line four and the first half of line seven.

Peek, who is interested in the literary merits of inscriptions, includes this inscription in his collection as an example of funerary epigrams in which the grave itself speaks. This particular literary motif seems to be unparalleled in Jewish epigraphy. However, it is fruitful to consult P.W. van der Horst, ‘Jewish Poetical Tomb Inscriptions’ in J.W. van Henten & P.W. van der Horst, *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy*, Leiden etc., 1994, 129-47, about the Jewish metrical ‘speaking tombstone’ inscription (*CPJ*

1530; *GV* 1861; Horbury-Noy No. 38). Van der Horst (p. 136; cf. Horbury & Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions from Graeco-Roman Egypt*, p. 72) also discusses the use of **MOI=RA** in another Jewish metrical inscription (*BS* II no. 127 line 6).

Schwabe reads the name of the deceased as **NUSW&**, Peek and Merkelbach & Stauber read **NIKW&**. Neither is hitherto attested (cf. the comments on our no. 2), but Schwabe offers parallels of other female names ending with **-w**. The Roman name **9ROU=FOJ**, on the other hand, is found at least four times in Jewish contexts, as T. Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity. Part 1. Palestine 330 BCE – 200 CE*. Tübingen, 2002, p. 38 shows. Schwabe concludes that the inscription ‘contains nothing which a Jew might not have said in an epitaph’. Furthermore, Merkelbach & Stauber draw attention to the fact that the text fills the entire stone and that no image is present; they connect this to the Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4-6). However, many non-Jewish tombstones bear no images either, and we think that the presence of an image should in the first place be connected with economic factors rather than with religious beliefs. The completion to **PA&RAGE** in the last line is plausible. There are many Jewish epitaphs in which the passer-by is addressed, cf. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, pp. 49ff. All in all it is not unlikely that part of the people to whom this kind of highly literary funerary epigrams appealed consisted of well educated Jews.

#### **4. SEG 8.137**

Caesarea; funerary inscription

##### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Coburn, C.M., *Recent Exploration in the Holy Land*, Meadville, 1916 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), useless photograph on p. 110, translation on p. 111

Alt, A., ‘Studien aus dem Deutschen evang. Institut für Altertumswissenschaft in Jerusalem. 35. Epigraphische Nachlese’, *ZDPV* 47 (1924), 89-9, No. 10

Lifshitz, B., ‘Notes d’Epigraphie Grecque’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 6 (1970), 57-64, no. 6 (64)

Robert, L., *BE* 1971, 695

C.M. Lehmann & K.G. Holum, *Caesarea Maritima*, no. 247

TEXT AND TRANSLATION:

The text is that of Lifshitz:

**MHMO&RION | 9IERI/SSAJ | TH~J TASE/LLAJ | [----]**

*The memorial of Hierissa of Tasella...*

COMMENTS:

Much about this inscription remains uncertain. The confusing translation by E. J. Goodspeed in Cobern's publication runs (no Greek text is given apart from the photograph): "In the month of Lous the priestess passed away ... on the eighth day of the year ... of Christ." Alt criticizes this translation and after reconsidering the photograph deciphers the word **MHMO&RION**. He thinks **9IERI/SSAJ** must be a name in the genitive, and does not reconstruct the rest of the inscription. Lehmann & Holum have not seen it and follow Lifshitz's text, which has an extra line in comparison to Cobern's reading. The name in that line, **TASE/LLA**, is interpreted by Lifshitz as a geographical name, for which he refers to *CIJ* 901; cf. also Robert for various versions of the name. Lehmann-Holum think it might be a matronymic; however, matronymics are rare in inscriptions and another **TASE/LLA** has not yet been found. At any rate, we cannot rule out this possibility completely.

The other name, **9IERI/SSA**, is even more interesting and also not known from elsewhere. Lehmann-Holum hesitantly suggest that it is a commemoration of various Jewish priests, in which case **9IERI/SSAJ** should be read as **9IERI=J (= -EI=J) SAJ-**. Since such a reading would blur the syntax and leaves us with the unclear syllable **SAS**. This cannot be correct. Although a clear photograph is not yet available, we allow ourselves to make another, rather bold, suggestion. Perhaps we do have here a **9IERI/SSA**, not one of the kind Cobern wants – a Christian 'priestess' is rather unlikely –, but in the Jewish sense of 'priestess', 'woman of priestly descent', living in Israel/Palestine (cf. *CIJ* 315 from Rome and the comments of P. W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, who notes about Jewish priests: 'Most probably these were *kohanim* in the sense of "descendants from Aaron", or "persons of Levitical descent" ...')

(p. 96)). There were priests living in Caesarea; cf. Lehmann & Holum, *Caesarea Maritima*, no. 167, which is dated to the fourth - mid seventh century CE (editors don't provide a date for our inscription). Our reading would certainly gain plausibility, if the last (missing) line contained the name of this priestess: "The memorial of a priestess from Tasella, X."

The word **ΜΗΜΟ&RION** is used by Jews to denote a grave; cf. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, pp. 41f., who lists all Greek words denoting 'grave' that occur in Jewish epitaphs and Lehmann & Holum, *Caesarea Maritima*, p.25, who warn us that "[n]one of these terms for the tomb is exclusive to Jewish or Christian usage, nor does any designate a particular type of tomb."

## **5. SEG 26.1697; CAT. II**

Wadi Haggag (Sinai); graffiti on a rock; after 300 CE

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Negev, A., 'Inscriptions on Rock No. 5 in Wadi Haggag, Sinai', *Eretz-Israel* 12 (1975), 132-41 (in Hebrew, English summary on p. 123\*)

-, *The Inscriptions of Wadi Haggag, Sinai*, Qedem Monographs of the Institute of Archaeology No. 6. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1977, No. 242, fig. 183 (with SEG 39.1635)

Di Segni, L., 'Heis theos in Palestinian Inscriptions', *SCI* 13 (1994), 94-115, no. 35b (with SEG 44.1340 and 1367)

### **TEXT AND TRANSLATION:**

Negev's text:

**EI[J QEO\_J U 7 Q | O( BOHQW~N | OU)ALE/RIOJ OANTI|GOU&NOU STRA|THGO&J.  
G O IONDIKTI(W~NOJ)**

*One God. God Highest. One. The helper of Valerius son of Antigonus, strategos. Third indiction year.*

Di Segni's text:

ΕΙ[Υ ΡΕΘ\_Υ ΥΥΚ | Ο( ΒΟΗΚΩ~Ν | ΟΥ)ΑΛΕ/ΡΙΟΥ ΟΑΝΤΙ|ΓΟΥ&ΝΟΥ ΣΤΡΑ|ΤΗΓΟ&Υ.  
Γ Ο ΙΟΝΔΙΚΤΙ(Ω~ΝΟΥ)

*One God. One God the helper of Valerius son of Antigonus, strategos. Third indiction year.*

#### COMMENTS:

This inscription is part of a large group found on the rocks of Wadi Haggag in the Sinai desert. In *SEG* only what is now called ‘Rock No. 5’ is treated (in his monograph Negev treats all the rocks and counts 267 inscriptions). We mention Rock No. 5 here, *exempli gratia*, because it contains the most interesting graffiti when it comes to the question of a Jewish origin. On the rock ten Greek and eighteen Nabataean inscriptions were found. “One remarkable feature is that no clear signs of Christianity were found with either of the inscriptions”, Negev comments (p. 62). The present graffito is intriguing because of the three characters in the right top angle of the inscription. Negev suggests it contains a **Υ** and **Κ** and reads this as an abbreviation of **ΡΕΘ\_Υ ΒΥΥΙΣΤΟΥ**. The character in between these two he considers to be a Hebrew *dalet* meaning, as an abbreviation, ‘One’. Negev provides Jewish parallels for the formula **ΡΕΘ\_Υ ΒΥΥΙΣΤΟΥ** (cf. also *CIJ* 725a; *SEG* 26.1683, *LXX* Gen. 14:18ff.; 1 Es. 6:13; 8:19-21; Jdt 13:18 among other passages). The question of the formula’s Jewish character has, apparently, lost its importance almost completely with the article by Di Segni, who wants to read the three characters as the Greek *ypsilon-koph-theta* (**ΥΚΘ**), making up the number 499, which is the numerical value of **ΕΙ[Υ ΡΕΘ&Υ**. This is more plausible than Negev’s proposed reading, with its unparalleled usage of the *dalet*. Isopsephism, on the other hand, was very popular among all sorts of people in Egypt. What, then, points to a Jewish origin in this inscription? Certainly not the **ΕΙ[Υ ΡΕΘ&Υ** formula (which we would now have twice), as Di Segni explains: it may be Jewish, but in most cases it was not (one should, however, ignore the remark in *SEG* 39.1635 that the formula ‘is a clear sign of Christianity’). The two engraved palm branches are, as Negev states, not exclusively Christian or pagan; the symbol was used by Jews as well. One of the palm branches has seven leafs, which leads Negev to interpret it as a *menorah*. In *SEG* 39.1635 it is thought that this amounts to

special pleading. Both personal names may be Jewish. Ilan refers to many occurrences of **ANTI/GONOJ** (*Lexicon of Jewish Names* pp. 263f.) and although the *terminus ante quem* for her corpus is 200 CE, there is no reason to assume that after this date the name disappeared.

**OU)ALE/RIOJ** is, of course, a Roman name (*Valerius*), but may constitute a worthy illustration of the theory explained by B.H. McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods from Alexander the Great down to the Reign of Constantine (232 B.C. – A.D. 337)*, Ann Arbor, 2002, 91f., namely that after Caracalla's citizenship edict in 212 CE, 'Jewish personal names were often absorbed into the Roman citizen's formula – becoming *cognomina* – and used for formal purposes.' McLean adds that 'the situation is complicated for the middle to late third century A.D. by the opposite tendency of persons of modest (and sometimes higher) status (including Jews) to drop the full citizen nomenclature in inscriptions in preference of a single personal name.' Rosén, 'Die Sprachsituation im römischen Palästina', p. 234, gives a different analysis of the matter by stating that Roman names could occur in Palestine via the Greek language in which they were common already. The Roman names, then, would be just as unsurprising as the Greek ones; this seems to us not to be entirely in keeping with the epigraphical evidence. In Ilan's onomasticon only 3% of all people bear a Latin name; Ilan suggests that these names were at first borne by Roman officials and 'did catch on occasionally' (p. 13). Either way, **OU)ALE/RIOJ** could be the name of a Jew, but not necessarily so.

Di Segni concludes about the Jewish nature of this inscription: '[t]he absence of Christian symbols suggests that the writer was a Jew.' (p. 106) We, however, would like to suggest that it is safer to consider the inscription as equally possibly Jewish, Christian, or pagan. The date offered by Negev is criticized in *SEG* 39.1635 and Di Segni; we follow *SEG*.