AN EXCERPT FROM THE JEWISH INSCRIPTIONS FROM PALESTINE AS PRESENTED IN SEG

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ABBREVIATIONS:
AASORJ: Annual of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem
AE: l’Année Épigraphique
AJA: American Journal of Archaeology
ANRW: Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt
AO: Archiv für Orientforschung
BA: Biblical Archaeologist
BE: Bulletin Epigraphique
BS: Beth She’arim
CIJ: Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum
CPJ: Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum
IEJ: Israel Exploration Journal
IES: Israel Exploration Society
IGRR: Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas pertinentes
JPOS: Journal of the Palestinian Oriental Society
JQR: Jewish Quarterly Review
JRS: Journal of Roman Studies
JSJ: Journal of Jewish Studies
MNDPV: Mitteilungen und Nachrichten des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
OGIS: Orientis Graecae Inscriptiones Selectae
PalEQ: Palestine Exploration Quarterly
PEFQS: Palestinian Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement
Ph. Woch.: Philologische Wochenschrift
QDAP: Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine
RB: Revue Biblique
RE: Paulys Realencyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft
REG: Revue des Etudes Grecques
REJ: Revue des Etudes Juives
THE INSCRIPTIONS:

**CAESAREA**

SEG 8.137; CAT. II

Caesarea; funerary inscription

BIBLIOGRAPHY:


Alt, A., *ZDPV* 47 (1924), 89-9, No. 10

Lifshitz, B., *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 6 (1970), 57-64, no. 6 (64)

Robert, L., *BE* 1971, 695

C.M. Lehmann & K.G. Holum, no. 247

ADDITIONAL 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 *mèmorion*. He thinks *hierissas* 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, *Tasella* 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-Holm think it might be a matronymic; however, matronyms are rare in inscriptions and another *Tasella* has not yet been found. At any rate, we cannot rule out this possibility completely.

The other name, *Hierissa*, is even more interesting and also not known from elsewhere. Lehmann-Holm hesitantly suggest that it is a commemoration of various Jewish priests, in which case *hierissas* should be read as *hieris (= eis) sas*-. 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 *hierissa*, 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, 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 *mèmorion* 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 & Holm, 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.”

**GOFNA**
SEG 14.847; CAT. II
Gofna; funerary stele; after 200 CE

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**
Schwabe, M., *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 1 (1954), 99-119, pl. 2
Peek, W., *Griechische Vers-Inschriften* 1, Berlijn, 1955, no. 1185

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:**
For a discussion of the appearance of Greek funerary epigrams in Israel/Palestine and more examples, see H. B. Rosén, *Sprachsituation*. 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 *Rusaleès graiès*. 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 *Moira* in another Jewish metrical inscription (*BS* II no. 127 line 6).

Schwabe reads the name of the deceased as *Nysoo*, Peek and Merkelbach & Stauber read *Nikoo*. Neither is hitherto attested (cf. the comments on our no. 2), but Schwabe offers parallels of other female names ending with -oo. The Roman name *Rouflos*, on the other hand, is found at least four times in Jewish contexts, as Ilan, 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 *parage* 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.

**JERUSALEM**
CIJ1405; SEG 8.206; CAT. II
Jerusalem, Ophel Hill; fragment of a marble plaque; third century CE

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**
Macalister, R.A.S. & Garrow Duncan, J., *PEF* Annual 4 (1923-5), 132, fig. 128
Schwabe, M., *ZDPV* 55 (1932), 238-41, pl. 23,4

**ADDITIONAL 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 *Enthade keitai*, 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 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 & Holm, 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; *Enthade keitai* is found only four times, and just twice at the beginning of the epitaph.\(^1\) 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 *en eirēnei hè koimisis 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 *Enthade keitai* and *en eirēnei hè koimisis autou* (or a variant, like *sou*, which is less common\(^2\)). 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

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\(^1\) Three times the variant with the first person singular *kei=mai* is found. Ten times the adverb *wides* is found (rare in Rome: only twelve times in 239 examples containing the formula); *einaq* twice (four instances in Rome only), and *oenaq/de* four times; in one instance the adverb has disappeared. Of all these sixteen instances only eight appear at the beginning of the epitaphs.

\(^2\) 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.
to be able to do so, he must ignore the gamma in -EIRGE - and complete the letters -MIS - to koimisis = koimèsis, 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 Nikoo, but Frey changed this into Iakoo, because ‘[l]e nom de Nikoo n’a pas encore été trouvé dans l’épigraphie juive’. -PE-, read by Schwabe as p’eftoon, 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 etoon, 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.

SKYTHOPOLIS
SEG 26.1683; CAT. I
Skythopolis (Beth Shean); dedicatory inscription from the synagogue; sixth century CE

BIBLIOGRAPHY:
Bahat, D., Qadmoniot 5 (1972), 55-8 (inc. photograph; in Hebrew)
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)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:
The interesting inscription is flanked by two pheasants; for another decorated mosaic inscription from a synagogue in our corpus, cf. SEG 20.453a-j, SEG 33.1298 from Tiberias with our comments. 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.3 The text is surprising because of the formula prosfora oon Kyrios 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 Kyrios, we add here that the combination of the two occurs in the Septuagint (cf. Sir. 14:11 and 50:13). Furthermore, Kyrios appears in BS II, nos. 130, 151 and 184. The word is also found in CIJ 725a;4 cf. also Horbury & Noy, no. 134. The verb ginooskoő is used with a similar meaning in many passages in the Septuagint, e.g. Ps. 90:14: hoti egnoo [i.e. God] to onoma mou. All in all this is a formula that could be either Jewish or Christian, but is now attested in a Jewish inscription.

3 According to Lifshitz P and F are in ligature, forming (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/rioo is rare; Lifshitz offers one parallel.
4 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.
WADI HAGGAG
SEG 26.1697; CAT. II
Wadi Haggag (Sinai); graffiti on a rock; after 300 CE

BIBLIOGRAPHY:
-, 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., SCI 13 (1994), 94-115, no. 35b (with SEG 44.1340 and 1367)

ADDITIONAL 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 Y and TH and reads this as an abbreviation of THeos HYpsistos. 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 THeos HYpsistos. We add here CIJ 725a; SEG 26.1683, LXXGen. 14:18ff.; 1 Es. 6:13; 8:19-21; Jdt 13:18. 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 (Y-Q-TH), making up the number 499, which is the numerical value of Heis Theos. 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 Heis Theos formula (which we would now have twice), as Di Segni explains: it may be Jewish, but in most cases it was not (one should 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 Antigonos (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.

Oualerios 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,
Sprachsitiuation, 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, Oualerios 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.