

CORPUS INSCRIPTIONUM IUDAEAE / PALESTINAE: A MULTILINGUAL CORPUS OF INSCRIPTIONS

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PART I: A BILINGUAL INSCRIPTION FROM ZO'AR (by Hannah M. Cotton)

I intend to examine here the issue of multilinguality in the Roman Near East by focusing on one bilingual inscription from Zo'ar¹. It does not come from an area included in our corpus, but it does illustrate the kinds of issues of which a multilingual Corpus can take cognisance. It comes from a cemetery at Zo'ar, a site located south of the Dead Sea in present-day Jordan. The cemetery is dated by the inscriptions to the 4th - 6th centuries CE. Like the rest of the southern part of what used to be the Roman province of Arabia, Zo'ar became part of the province of Palaestina in the Tetrarchic period, to become in the middle of the fourth century part of Palaestina Tertia.

A Corpus of tombstone inscriptions from Zo'ar — their number reaches ca. 350 according to what Dr. Konstantinos Politis has kindly told me — is currently being prepared by Dr Yannis Meimaris and Dr Sebastian Brock. The majority are in Greek. I am acquainted with 25 written in Aramaic². The inscription I have here is — so far as I am aware — the only bilingual one. All the Aramaic tombstones and also the bilingual one

belong to Jews. Of the many Greek tombstones said to come from Zo'ar only two appear in Sartre's collection of inscriptions from Petra and its surroundings as nos. 105 and 106³; both have been known for a long time. Rumour has it that the unpublished Greek tombstones are all Christian. Sartre no. 105 is no doubt a Christian monument⁴. However, Sartre no. 106 had been included in J.-B. Frey's *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* as no. 1209, where lines 1-2 read: Μνημῖον Αἰνίου Ἰουδαίου. It would thus be an exception, unless one reads Μνημῖον Αἰνίου Γοδέου instead.⁵ Four more Greek tombstones said to come from Zo'ar known to the authors conform to the general pattern: they no doubt belong to Christians⁶.

The stone of the bilingual inscription contains two texts, one above the other, inside a red frame; its upper part is decorated with red *menorahs*. Five lines of Greek text are followed by the four lines of Aramaic text. The Greek text seems to have been created first. At a later stage the epitaph was made over into its Aramaic version: the red frame was

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1. COTTON, H.M.; PRICE, J.J., "A Bilingual Tombstone from Zo'ar (Arabia)", *ZPE* 134, 2001, 277-83; cf. NAVEH, J., "Two Tombstones from Zoar in the Hecht Museum Collection - The Aramaic Inscriptions", *Michmanim* 15, 2001, 5-7 (Hebrew).

2. See NAVEH, J., "Tombstones from Zo'ar", *Tarbiz* 64, 1995, 477-97; STERN, Y., "New Tombstones from Zo'ar", *Tarbiz* 68, 1999, 185-77 (Hebrew); NAVEH, J., "More Tombstones from Zo'ar", *Tarbiz* 68, 1999, 581-6 (Hebrew); NAVEH, J., "Two Tombstones from Zoar in the Hecht Museum Collection - The Aramaic Inscriptions" *Michmanim* 15, 2001, 7-9 (Hebrew); NAVEH, J., "Seven New Tombstones from Zoar", *Tarbiz* 69, 2000, 621-35; MISGAV, H., "A Jewish Tombstone from Zoar", *Israel Museum Studies in Archaeology* (forthcoming).

3. M. SARTRE, *JGLS XXI, Inscriptions de la Jordanie IV: Pétra et la Nabatène Méridionale du wadi al-Hasa au golfe de 'Aqaba*, 1993 Paris, 134-7.

4. No. 105 is now at the Armenian Museum in Jerusalem where it has been seen by the author.

5. Cf. SARTRE, *o.c.*, 135-7 with the bibliography.

6. COTTON H.M.; PRICE, J.J., *ZPE* (forthcoming). They very much resemble the inscriptions published in R. CANOVA, *Iscrizioni e monumenti protocristiani del paese di Moab*, Rome 1954. Dr Leah Di Segni drew my attention to an unpublished Greek tombstone, now in the École Biblique in Jerusalem, produced in MEIMARIS Y.E., *Chronological Systems in Roman-Byzantine Palestine and Arabia*, Athens 1992, no. 166 on p. 206, which is likely to come from Zo'ar; cf. DI SEGNI, L., "Dated Greek Inscriptions from Palestine from the Roman and Byzantine Periods" (unpublished PhD dissertation submitted to the Hebrew University), Jerusalem 1997, 629, no. 215.

painted together with the *menorahs* — which are painted on top of the Greek text. Probably at the same time the Aramaic text with its incised guidelines was carved below the area of the Greek text. Most of the Greek is still legible: it is clear that there was no attempt to obliterate the Greek text. It was simply incorporated into the decoration of the Aramaic text, with consequent damage to the letters.

1. Μυμίον Μουσίου
2. Μάρκου [πλ]η[σθ]έντος
3. ἔτους ... ἀποθανόντος
4. τος ἔτους σγ'
5. εὐμοιρίτω

The grave of Mousios / Son of Marsas, who, having completed / the year x of his life, died / in the year 253 / Let him fare well!

1. הורה נפשה רמוסיס בד מרסה רמית בשחה
2. תליתה שבוצה בירח כסלו הצסדין ושכצה
3. יומין ביה היא שנת רצ שנין
4. לחרבן בית מקרשה

This is the grave of Mousios son of Marsa who died in year / three of the Sabbatical cycle, in the month of Kislev, on the twenty seventh / day of it, which is the year 290 / after the destruction of the Temple.

Although this is a tombstone of one person, the Aramaic and Greek texts are not identical, and they are not translations of each other. Each uses formulae taken from a different epigraphic tradition. This is especially noticeable in the dating formulae. Quite a large part of the text is occupied by the dates. And in fact my reason for choosing this particular inscription is the intriguing presence of three systems of dating in one and the same monument. The Greek text uses the era of the province of Arabia (which continued in this area even after its annexation to the province of Palaestina and eventually to Palaestina Tertia); the Aramaic inscription, by contrast, uses the era from the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and that of the year in the Sabbatical cycle.

This bilingual inscription thus reflects the dating habits in use in the entire corpus from Zo'ar. In the Greek tombstones one and sometimes two systems of dating are used: that of the era of the

province (which started on 22 March 106 CE) and that of the year of the indiction.⁷ The latter cannot be used independently of another system of dating since the indiction cycles themselves are not numbered. Consequently, whereas the era of Arabia always occurs, the indiction year can be omitted. As it happens, and this may not be a coincidence, the Semitic tombstones also use two systems of reckoning in which, as in the Greek tombstones, one is absolute and the other is cyclic and related to another dating system: the era from the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and the year in the seven-year Sabbatical cycle. The Sabbatical cycle resembles the indiction cycle.

December of the year 253 of the era of the province of Arabia fell in the Julian year 358.⁸ This agrees with the year 290 from the Destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the Aramaic inscription if, and only if — and this is crucial — we reckon the first year of the destruction as running from 1 Tishri (September/October) 69, i.e. the beginning of the Jewish year in which the destruction occurred, to the last day of Elul (August/September) 70, i.e. the end of the Jewish year. Thus our bilingual inscription offers support for assuming that the era of the destruction of the Temple started on 1 Tishri 69, and not on the actual day of the destruction, 9 Ab 70, as some scholars maintain.

The multiplicity of dating systems reminds us of the second-century CE multilingual papyri from the Judaean Desert⁹. Those too, like the present inscription, were written by Jews living in the province of Arabia in the area of Zo'ar. But in contrast to the dating habits in the inscriptions from the cemetery in Zo'ar, where the language of the inscription is tied up with a particular system or systems of dating, the use of dating systems in the papyri is completely independent of the language of the text: whether written in Nabataean Aramaic, Jewish Aramaic or Greek, the papyri from Nahal Hever are dated by one, two or even three systems of dating, none of which belongs to the Jewish calendar: by the emperor's regnal year, the Roman consular year and the era of the province of Arabia¹⁰.

8. Although the Greek text of the bilingual inscription does not give us a day and a month but only a year, we can use the day and month in the Aramaic part to determine the time of year.

9. See COTTON, H.M., "Documentary Texts from the Judaean Desert: A Matter of Nomenclature", *Scripta Classica Israelica* 20, 2001, 113-19.

10. See COTTON, H.M., "The Calendar", COTTON, H.M.; YARDENI, A., *Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek Texts from Nahal Hever*

Of course an explanation for the difference is not far to seek: legal documents are a very different matter from tombstone inscriptions, unless the latter too are legal documents, like the Nabataean texts on the rock-cut tombs from Mada'in Salih in the Hejaz¹¹. And in fact among the Nabataean tombstones in Mada'in Salih there is one which belongs to a Jew: there is no distinction between his and those of the others.

It is time to sum up and take stock. When Jonathan Price and I published the bilingual inscription we were mainly occupied with synchronisation of the three dating systems in the text, since among all the Jewish tombstones from Zo'ar which we know this one alone includes an external dating system, that of the era of the province of Arabia, and this seemed to us to offer a singular opportunity to settle once and for all the old controversy over when should one reckon the start of 'year 1' of the Destruction of the Temple¹². Nonetheless, I am not so naive as to think that a single item of evidence can settle this dispute definitively.

Today, moreover, I have come to realise that the importance of this bilingual inscription goes far beyond calendaric questions, and that our real gain lies elsewhere. It lies in the fact of the tombstone's bilingualism, in the fact that although recording the single death of a single individual, it bears two texts, independent of each other, which represent two distinct epigraphic traditions and two different cultures. The different dating systems in the Aramaic and Greek parts are outward symptoms of this cultural phenomenon. This bilingual inscription is a cultural statement in its own right. Of course its full meaning will emerge only once its context is known, once the entire cemetery is published and its character fully understood. But it already tells us a great deal about the Jews in this area: the use of two languages, their preference for one language over the other, the feeling that the use of language imposes a dating system; the fossilization of formulae, and so forth.

So far only the Aramaic tombstones have been studied, but already their testimony has

and Other Sites, with an Appendix containing alleged Qumran Texts. *The Seiyāl Collection II, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XXVII*, Oxford 1997, 146-8.

11. See HEALEY, J.F., *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih*, Oxford 1993.

12. 1 Tishrei 69, 9 Ab 69 or 1 Tishrei 70. And indeed the synchronisation of this year, 253, which equals 358 CE, with 290 from the Destruction implies that year 1 from the Destruction began in 69 CE.

been used to question old notions. A new book on the Jewish calendar maintains that the dating system used on the tombstones from Zo'ar "challenges the common assumption that by the later Roman period the rabbis and rabbinic Judaism had become a dominant force in Jewish Palestinian society"¹³. I, for one, after working on the legal papyri from Nahal Hever, do not find this either disconcerting or surprising. For far too long we have been at the mercy of rabbinic sources¹⁴.

However, the full meaning of the bilingual inscription will become clearer with the publication of all the Greek tombstones from Zo'ar, both Jewish and non-Jewish, which may present us with a mixed society whose mutual influences are apparent already in the dating systems. Here I must stop and return briefly to the *CIIP*.

What a crime it would have been to publish the bilingual inscription in two different volumes! What a shame it would be *not* to publish the entire cemetery in one and the same volume! This is, however, the unfortunate practice in far too many publications, for example in the cases of Beth She'arim and Masada, to name but two from the region covered by the *CIIP*. I may recall Fergus Millar's observation in his essay on epigraphy from 1983, now republished in the first volume of his collected essays¹⁵:

The effort and expense of producing a volume of Latin and/or Greek inscriptions is great enough without the extra problems presented by other ancient languages and scripts. Yet it does deserve emphasis that this restriction, serious enough for our understanding of the local culture of Tripolitania, is a much more fundamental handicap when we come to the even richer mixture of cultures in the Near East, where we find a number of major documents inscribed from the beginning in parallel texts in two or more languages — and where the texts in different languages have tended to be published and discussed separately.

13. STERN, S., *Calendar and Community: A History of the Jewish Calendar. Second Century BCE - Tenth Century CE*, Oxford 2001, 97.

14. See COTTON, H.M., "The Rabbis and the Documents", GOODMAN, M., (ed.), *The Jews in a Graeco-Roman World*, ed., Oxford 1998, 167-79; COTTON, H.M., "Die Papyrusdokumente aus der jüdischen Wüste und ihr Beitrag zur Erforschung der jüdischen Geschichte des 1. und 2. Jh. n. Chr." *ZDPV* 115, 1999, 228-47.

15. MILLAR, F., *Rome, the Greek World, and the East I: The Roman Republic and the Augustan Revolution*, COTTON, H.M.; ROGERS, G.M. (edd.), Chapel Hill, NC 2002, 44.

The Graeco-Roman bias in epigraphic publications of the 19th and 20th centuries, reflecting their editors' unstated conviction of the supremacy of Graeco-Roman culture over the local cultures, excluded more than half the world from its rightful place in history. Whereas collections of Semitic inscriptions are mainly the work of philologists, and this fact may serve as their excuse for excluding other languages, Latin and Greek collections are mostly the work of historians who should know better.

PART II: THE LANGUAGES OF THE JERUSALEM OSSUARIES (by Jonathan Price)

The first volume of *CIIP* (*Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*) will include the inscriptions from Jerusalem and the surrounding area. Unsurprisingly, since the city was surrounded by a huge necropolis, by far the largest group of inscriptions from Jerusalem consists of epitaphs. Since Jerusalem's relatively substantial population was predominantly Jewish before the Jewish revolt of 66-70 CE, a cataclysmic event which started a process of sharp decline in the Jewish component of the ancient city and completely changed its demographic complexion, it will also cause no surprise that Jewish epitaphs dating before 70 CE comprise the largest group of Jewish epitaphs from Jerusalem — about 400-450 texts. These include some famous names familiar from other sources, such as the high priests Caiaphas¹⁶ (known from the New Testament) and Theophilus¹⁷, as well as the family of Queen Helena of Adiabene¹⁸ (all these inscriptions are in Jewish script). Finally, of these Jewish epitaphs, about three quarters (ca. 300 texts) are found on ossuaries, or stone caskets used for the secondary burial of bones after the body has decomposed (*ossilegium*). It is on this particular group of texts that I wish to focus my remarks here.

In fact, the bulk of all ossuaries of known provenance come from Jerusalem and surrounding areas — within a 25-km. radius of the city (a few are also known from the Galilee) — and they

16. REICH, R., "Ossuary inscriptions from the 'Caiaphas' tomb", *Atiqot* 21, 1992, 72-87.

17. BARAG, D.; FLUISSE, D., "The ossuary of Yehohanah granddaughter of the high priest Theophilus", *IEJ* 36, 1986, 39-44; RAHMANI, L.Y., *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries*, Jerusalem 1994, no. 871.

18. *CII* 1388; MISCAV, H., *The Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions on ossuaries from the end of the Second Temple period*, MA thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1991, 139 (Hebr.), although the identification is disputed.

date from the relatively brief period between the reign of King Herod (end of the first century BCE) and the end of the Bar Kochba revolt (136 CE). While the starting date is quite certain, for it corresponds to a change in Jewish burial practices and is well-documented archaeologically¹⁹, the date for the termination of the practice is fuzzier: although most ossuaries pre-date the Bar Kochba revolt, there are isolated specimens through the third century. Thus ossuaries represent something which epigraphists and ancient historians wish for, i.e. a large group of texts with fairly well-defined topographical and chronological parameters — and not only well defined, but relatively narrow: a 25-km. radius and a period of 150 years (again, some texts lie outside these parameters, but they are very few). Ossuary inscriptions of unknown provenance will by default be included in the Jerusalem volume of *CIIP* since that is where they are presently located, and in most cases it is reasonable to assume that they were found in the environs of the city.

The artistic individuality of ossuaries has been well demonstrated by L.Y. Rahmani in his catalogue of Jewish ossuaries²⁰, which is however only a partial compilation, including only those texts owned by the state of Israel. I hope to demonstrate elsewhere that, although many ossuary texts consist of little more than a name, they have a distinctive epigraphic style as well, arising from the particular requirements of the medium and its function: ossuaries were often arranged in family groups, the inscriptions merely serving as an indication of who was buried where — two outstanding examples of this are the "Goliath" family in Jericho, published in 1979 by Rachel Hachlili, and the two family caves recently discovered at Akeldama²¹. Thus the uniqueness and coherence of Jerusalem ossuaries as a group lends stronger historical relevance to onomastic and epigraphic trends within the group — although here caution is advisable, since the number of surviving texts, while at first sight large, may still not be a statistically relevant sample: 300 specimens from a city with a population of tens of thousands over a period of 150 years in fact comprise a tiny number, and they represent a very particular, well-off socio-economic class. Moreover, the rate of

19. RAHMANI, *o.c.* (n. 17), 21ff.

20. See above, n. 2.

21. HACHLILI, R., "The Goliath family in Jericho", *BASOR* 235, 1979, 31-66. ILAN, T., "The ossuary and sarcophagus inscriptions", AVNI, G.; GREENHUT, Z. (edd.), *The Akeldama Tombs*, IAA Reports 1, Jerusalem 1996, 57-72, and note the ossuary recording "the brother, father and mother of Natira", 67, no. 21.

destruction of material in Jerusalem, given its violent history, was extremely high.

Despite this caution, it will nonetheless be relevant to observe here that, unlike Jewish inscriptions from any other place in the Roman world, including other areas in Palestine, the texts in Hebrew and Aramaic on Jerusalem ossuaries far outnumber those in Greek (and there are only two in Latin). This phenomenon — which in fact is true for all Jewish inscriptions from Jerusalem and not just the ossuaries — reflects in part the spoken language of the deceased (or inscriber), since, without entering into the controversies of the language map of ancient Palestine, it is clear that Aramaic and probably, to a limited extent in Judaea, Hebrew as well, were the primary languages spoken by Jews in and around Jerusalem during the Second Temple and Mishnaic periods; and it is important to remember that Jerusalem was the center of the priestly establishment and Jewish political leadership. I don't mean to exclude Greek, since the Jews in ancient Palestine were of course a trilingual society, but Hebrew and Aramaic predominated around Jerusalem. We recall for instance that the first-century historian Josephus, a native of Jerusalem who had as fine an education as anyone of his generation, admits that he had to study and improve his Greek when he attempted to write history in that language (Jos. AJ 20.263). In any case, I would not draw too fine a distinction between Hebrew and Aramaic on ossuary inscriptions, since given the terse and abbreviated language restricted mostly to names, Hebrew and Aramaic are often indistinguishable.

At any rate the prevalence of Hebrew and Aramaic cannot account for all Semitic ossuary inscriptions found in and around Jerusalem, since many texts of "foreign" Jews — i.e., people coming from places not only in ancient Palestine, but also from places outside it, e.g. Cyrenaica, Babylonia, Italy, Delos, Egypt, Bithynia, Phrygia and Syria, to name only those places mentioned on ossuaries — are bi-lingual, either Greek-Hebrew/Aramaic or, more rarely, Aramaic-Hebrew. In some cases it is possible that the deceased could not read or understand the Semitic portion of his own epitaph. To take a well-known example from an ossuary found on the Mount of Olives²²:

ὄσάτων του Νεικά-
νορος Ἀλεξανδρέως
ποιήσαντος τὰς θύρας
נקרל ארבל

22. CII 1256; SEG VIII, 200.

("Nikanor Aleksa", the second word is probably an abbreviation for "the Alexandrian")

Disregarding the problems in reading this inscription (especially the question of whether the first seven Greek letters are one word or two), we may accept for present purposes the widely held assumption that this is the ossuary of Nicanor, the celebrated Alexandrian who, according to rabbinic sources, had bronze gates made for the Jerusalem temple and brought them there from his home-city. The Mishna (Yoma 3:10) locates the so-called Nicanor Gate on the east side of the Temple court.

Whether Nicanor the Alexandrian could actually read the Semitic part of his own epitaph is questionable, but this is of secondary importance to the fact that, as we see from William Horbury and David Noy's corpus²³, all or nearly all Jewish inscriptions from Egypt are purely Greek in Nicanor's time, and following Alexandrian practice he would not have had his name written in Jewish script if he had been buried in Egypt; thus the last line is a reflection of the place where he was buried, Jerusalem. This impression is further strengthened by the fascinating phenomenon of Hebrew words appearing in Greek transliteration — such as σαλώμ (for שלום, peace) or ουρουν (for עוררין, blindness, in a curse)²⁴; such texts were composed by people who knew important Hebrew words and, for authenticity's sake, felt compelled to use the Hebrew word, albeit in Greek transliteration, rather than its Greek translation.

The unusually high proportion of Semitic texts from Jerusalem seems to reflect not only the languages presumably spoken there, but also the special significance of Jerusalem, the Temple city and destination of thrice-yearly pilgrimages until the year 70 CE, when the Temple was destroyed. Jews not only made religious pilgrimages to Jerusalem, but also went there deliberately to die and be buried, or arranged to have their bones transported there for burial (even though some foreign Jews buried in Jerusalem probably travelled to the city on some other business and just happened to die there); the city's significance and character induced

23. *Jewish inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*, Cambridge 1992.

24. For σαλώμ and variants at Beth She'arim (probably not a name), see SCHWABE, M.; LIFSCHITZ, B., *Beth She'arim II: The Greek Inscriptions*, Jerusalem 1974, nos. 21, 25, 28, 72, 91. For ουρουν, KLONER, A., *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period*, Ph.D. thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1980, 193-195 (Hebr.), and RAHIMANI, o.c. (n. 17), no. 559; in general, RAHIMANI, o.c. (n. 17), 13, n. 16.

these Jews to commission their epitaphs in Hebrew and/or Aramaic, even though these were not their native languages. Even at Beth She'arim, the extensive Jewish necropolis in the lower Galilee where the codifier of the Mishna, Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi ("the Prince"), is said to be buried (use of the necropolis seems to post-date the time when burials in Jerusalem virtually ceased) — and where, incidentally, because of Rabbi Judah's status, Jews from abroad also arranged to be buried — Greek inscriptions by both native and foreign Jews far outnumber those in Jewish script.

In brief, the Jerusalem material is rich enough to suggest at least the outlines of a sociological phenomenon, the preference for Hebrew and Aramaic in formal commemoration, which is not so evident in literary sources and emerges only when inscriptions in different languages from diverse locations are studied side by side. Yet I would also stress, that this study should not be conducted in isolation, but that trends in ancient Jewish society should be compared to similar trends in other parts, and among other peoples, of the Roman empire.

ADDENDUM

1. The publication of The Greek inscriptions from Ghor – es safi (Byzantine Zo'ar) by I.E. Meimaris and K.T. Kritikakou - Nikolaropaoulou, *Inscriptions from Palaestina Tertia Ia*, Athens 2005, reached us too late to take account of.

2. H. Misgav, «Two Jewish Tombstones from Zo'ar», *Israel Museum Studies in Archaeology* 5, 2006, should be added to our list in n. 2.