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JEWISH TUNA AND CHRISTIAN FISH:  
IDENTIFYING RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION  
IN EPIGRAPHIC SOURCES

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In his collection of Jewish inscriptions, Jean-Baptiste Frey identifies as Jewish a stone fragment that contains no writing, but only depictions of an amphora, several birds, a branch of a plant, numerous circular objects with smaller circles within them, and one drawing of a fish.<sup>1</sup> Frey considers the amphora to be an oil jar; the birds to be doves and a goose; the plant branch to be the *lulav* associated with the Jewish festival of Sukkoth; the circles to be *mašot*; and the fish to be the tuna that Jews are said to have eaten on Friday nights and on various Jewish festivals. The stone bears no irrefutably Christian symbols, such as a chi rho, but neither does it bear such things as a seven-branched menorah, which virtually all scholars accept as an explicit Jewish symbol. Frey even speculates that were the stone complete, it would probably be found to include a seven-branched menorah.<sup>2</sup>

If at first glance Frey's identification seems reasonable, we have only to look at the catalogue of Christian symbols given by Orazio Marucchi to see the complexity of the problem.<sup>3</sup> Characteristic of Christian inscriptions are fish, doves, palm branches, vases (amphorae), as well as dolphins, ships, boats, sheep, peacocks, and depictions of biblical scenes. In other words, it appears that Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman world frequently employed many of the same symbols, making it difficult for scholars in the

<sup>1</sup>CII 653a.

<sup>2</sup>On Sabbath fish meals, see Persius *Saturae* 5.179-84. Interestingly, Erwin R. Goodenough agreed with Frey that the stone is likely to have had a menorah. See Goodenough's *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (13 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953-68) 2. 56.

<sup>3</sup>Orazio Marucchi, *Christian Epigraphy: An Elementary Treatise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912).

twentieth century to distinguish, in the absence of more explicit evidence, between Jewish tuna and Christian fish.

Relatively few epigraphers, including Frey, have made explicit the criteria by which they designate ancient inscriptions Jewish, Christian, or pagan. Those who have done so, such as Marucchi, have usually provided little more than a list of characteristic features of Jewish and Christian inscriptions. Yet the criteria for identifying inscriptions are usually derived from often unsubstantiated assumptions about Jews, Christians, and pagans in late antiquity, rather than by working deductively and proceeding from the known to the unknown. Two assumptions in particular strike me as both central and yet quite unsubstantiated: first, that Jews are always somehow recognizable as such and second, that Jews, Christians, and pagans are mutually exclusive categories, with the known and problematic exception of some Jewish Christians (or Christian Jews) and some odd individuals whose syncretistic tendencies make it hard for modern scholars to locate them in the social matrix of late antiquity.

In this article I explore the criteria normally employed to distinguish Jewish and Christian inscriptions from pagan ones in some detail in order to elucidate the methodological difficulties and suggest some procedures for caution.

The classification of an inscription as Jewish is typically done on the basis of what we may call “positive” indications of Jewishness on the one hand, and the absence of “negative” indications on the other. In his recent survey article on Greek and Latin Jewish inscriptions,<sup>4</sup> Larry H. Kant offered the following criteria:

1. Symbols (menorah; *lulav*; *etrog*—the citrus fruit associated with Sukkoth; ark; shofar).
2. Self-identification (usually expressed by the use of the term “Jew”).
3. Typical Jewish names.
4. Reference to Jewish religious customs.
5. Presence in a Jewish catacomb or cemetery.
6. Mention of a synagogue or synagogue office.

To his credit, Kant acknowledges that “this way of determining Jewishness, however, by no means points to a perfectly clear boundary between Jews and non-Jews in the ancient Mediterranean.”<sup>5</sup> At the begin-

<sup>4</sup>Larry H. Kant, “Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin,” *ANRW* II, 20, 2 (1987) 671–713.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 683.

ning of the century, Johannes Oehler, whose collection of Jewish inscriptions served as one basis for Frey's work, employed five criteria:<sup>6</sup>

1. The terms *Iudeus/a* and Ἰουδαῖος/α (and plurals).
2. The seven-branched candelabra.
3. The word שָׁלוֹם (shalom).
4. The phrase εἷς θεός ("One [is] God").
5. The phrase θάρσι, οὐδείς ἀθάνατος ("courage; no one is immortal").

Other scholars have also considered additional phrases as likely indicators of Judaism, such as ἐνθάδε κείται ("here lies"); ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ κοιμησὶς αὐτοῦ/αὐτῆς/αὐτῶν ("in peace be his/her/their/your sleep"); and a few others (τῷ λαῷ "to the people" and εἰς τὸν θεόν "let it be to that person according to God").

Positive indications of either Christianity or paganism have also been utilized to negate the possibility that an inscription is Jewish. In addition to the catalogue of Christian symbols provided by Marucchi, positive indicators of Christianity have included:<sup>7</sup>

1. The adjective Χριστιανός/οί ("Christian").
2. Terms of church office, such as διάκονος, διακόνισσα, πρεσβύτερος, and ἐπίσκοπος ("deacon," "presbyter," and "bishop").
3. The term κοιμητήριον ("cemetery") and the use of the verb κοιμάω ("sleep").
4. The phrase *depositus/a est* ("buried"), especially with date of burial.
5. The phrase *plus minus* ("more or less") with age at death.
6. The phrases *in pace*; ἐν εἰρήνῃ, *in Deo* ("in peace," "in God").
7. Christian names, such as Peter, Paul.

Positive indicators of paganism, which in turn qualify as negative indicators of Judaism and Christianity typically include:

1. The invocation of pagan deities.
2. The formula *di(i)s manibus* or the Greek equivalent θεοῖς δαίμοσι or θεοῖς καταχθονίοις ("to the gods of the lower world").
3. Location in a pagan temple.

<sup>6</sup>Johannes Oehler, "Epigraphische Beiträge zur Geschichte des Judentums," *MGWJ* 53 (1909) 292–302, 443–52, 525–38.

<sup>7</sup>See also Carl Maria Kaufmann, *Handbuch der Altchristlichen Epigraphik* (Freiburg: Herdersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1917) 14–51.

## 4. "Demonstrably" pagan names.

At the risk of being tediously thorough, I shall go through these criteria in detail.

## POSITIVE INDICATORS OF JEWS AND JUDAISM

*Self-identification*

The occurrence of Ἰουδαία/ῖος or *Iudea/us* has usually been viewed as a definitive indication of religious identity. Several years ago, A. Thomas Kraabel suggested that in some instances Ἰουδαία/ῖος might signify geographic origin rather than religious affiliation.<sup>8</sup> In an article published several years ago, I noted that of those few inscriptions that do contain these terms, particularly in reference to specific individuals, several contain characteristics that many scholars consider antithetical to Judaism, such as location in a pagan temple, or invocations to pagan deities.<sup>9</sup> I argued that a significant percentage may provide evidence of pagan attraction to Judaism. While I am aware that these may simply give evidence of what Jews really did, rather than what scholars think they should have done, I suggest that we must look carefully at each of these inscriptions and at any such inscriptions discovered in the future to determine what other evidence supports their identification as Jewish.

As for the term Χριστιανοί, it too is rare in early Christian inscriptions and occurs primarily in inscriptions from Phrygia ending with the dedication "Christians for Christians," discussed by Elsa Gibson.<sup>10</sup> Given the possibility that the phrase was intended to identify Montanist Christians, we must keep in mind that the term may convey subtle and complex information, such as relief at the termination of official persecution.<sup>11</sup>

*Synagogue and προσευχή*

Both συναγωγή ("synagogue") and προσευχή ("place of prayer") occur in numerous ancient literary sources in connection with Jews and Judaism

<sup>8</sup>A. Thomas Kraabel, "The Roman Diaspora: Six Questionable Assumptions," *JJS* 33 (1982) 445-64.

<sup>9</sup>Ross S. Kraemer, "On the Meaning of the Term 'Jew' in Greco-Roman Inscriptions," *HTR* 82 (1989) 35-53.

<sup>10</sup>Elsa Gibson, *The Christians for Christians Inscriptions of Phrygia* (HTS 32; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978).

<sup>11</sup>See the discussion by Gibson (*Christians for Christians Inscriptions*, 141) on an inscription from Syria, dated 369 CE, that contains the term Christian and was erected shortly after the death of Julian the Apostate; and also her discussion of inscriptions (*ibid.*) which follow the Decian and Aurelian persecutions.

and in inscriptions the Jewishness of which has never been the subject of any dispute. The presence of either term has usually been sufficient to classify an inscription as Jewish. But an inscription from Kyzikos, dated either 119 BCE or 94 CE records that the male and female members (οἱ θιασίται καὶ θιασίτιδες) of a *thiasos* or religious company of Meter Cybele and Apollo crowned a priestess named Stratonike ἐν τῇ τοῦ Διὸς συναγωγῇ (“in the ‘synagogue/assembly’ of Zeus”).<sup>12</sup> A papyrus from the mid-first century BCE, possibly from the Faiyum, also mentions συναγωγῇ in the context of an association of Zeus. Arthur Darby Nock argued many years ago that this could not possibly be a Jewish association.<sup>13</sup>

A third inscription, from Thrace, refers to a “synagogue” of barbers, with an ἀρχισυνάγωγος (“leader of the synagogue”). An accompanying inscription to Zeus Lopheites by a priest named Eudion would seem to confirm that this is a pagan association.<sup>14</sup>

As for προσευχή, consider a marble fragment from Olbia no longer extant that records the restoration of a προσευχή by men who are probably called ἄρχοντες (“archons” or “rulers”).<sup>15</sup> Epigraphers have argued about its identity since the nineteenth century. While the details of the argument are themselves interesting, for my purposes it is the methodological dilemma that is most compelling. Those scholars who argued for its pagan identification (on other grounds) could then use this inscription as evidence of the non-Jewish occurrence of προσευχή, but those unconvinced of the other evidence for its pagan identity could retreat to the use of προσευχή to bolster their case. Baruch Lifshitz’s eventual reconstruction of the opening line to include the term συναγωγῇ hardly resolves the matter.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in G. H. R. Horsley, ed., *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1976–1989* (5 vols.; North Ryde, Australia: Macquarie University Press, 1981–89) 3. 43, from S. Sahin, E. Schwertheim, and J. Wagner, *Studien zur Religion und Kultur Kleinasiens. Festschrift für Friedrich Karl Dörner* (EPRO 66; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 2. 819 no. 13.

<sup>13</sup>The text reads, “All are to obey the president and his servant on matters pertaining to the corporation, and they shall be present at all command occasions prescribed for them and at meetings and assemblies (συναγωγάς) and outings.” The papyrus is published in F. Preisigke, ed., *Sammelbuch Griechischer Urkunden aus Agypten* 5.2 (1938) 7835.12; the text is reprinted in Horsley, *New Documents* 1. no. 5 and also in Arthur Darby Nock, “The Guild of Zeus Hypsistos,” *HTR* 29 (1936) 39–88, reprinted in idem, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Zeph Stewart, ed.; 2 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972) 1. 414–43.

<sup>14</sup>*JG Rom.* 1.782.

<sup>15</sup>*CII* 682.

<sup>16</sup>Ludolf Stephani thought it was Jewish, reading the last line as ἀπὸ τοῦ θε(μελί)ου μέχρι, but Basilius Latyshev disagreed, reading the line instead as ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μέχρι

An even better illustration can be seen in a manumission inscription from Gorgippia dating to 41 CE that begins with a dedication to θεὸς ὕψιστος παντοκράτωρ εὐλογητός (“the highest, almighty, and blessed god”), ends with an invocation of Zeus, Ge, and Helios, and describes the release of the θρεπτὴ (“slave”) Chrysa as ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ (“in the *proseuche*”).<sup>17</sup> Basilius Latyshev, who argued against the Jewish identification of the previous inscription, did not consider this to be Jewish either, because of the invocation to Zeus, Ge, and Helios.<sup>18</sup> But Frey, who often found the mention of pagan deities sufficient grounds to eliminate the Jewish identity of an inscription, here disagreed. On the basis of a papyrus from Elephantini in which a Jewish woman invokes the goddess Sati as her witness before a tribunal, he claimed that “Jews of the diaspora attached no major significance to these formalities.”<sup>19</sup> Lifshitz agreed, not only on the assessment that the invocation of pagan divinities was simply *de rigueur* in legal proceedings of this sort, but also on the claim that παντοκράτωρ could not be pagan, and εὐλογητός could only be Jewish.<sup>20</sup> Lifshitz cited a second manumission document that he deemed Jewish by virtue of the cluster of παντοκράτωρ, εὐλογητός and the phrase θεὸς ὕψιστος (“God most high”).<sup>21</sup> It also invokes Zeus, Ge, and Helios, but contains neither a reference to a προσευχή nor any other terminology that might clarify things. Regrettably, the stone was destroyed during World War II.

Most recently Greg Horsley has questioned Lifshitz’s assessment, again on the basis of the pagan invocation.<sup>22</sup> For Horsley, the mention of θεὸς

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which, he claimed, could only refer to a pagan divinity. On this basis, he argued that προσευχή was sometimes used in a pagan context, and therefore (presumably) could not be the sole evidence for considering an inscription Jewish. Frey sided with Stephani on the Jewish identification, on the basis that there were no other non-Jewish attestations of προσευχή. For references, see Baruch Lifshitz, *CII prolegomenon*, 1. 89–90; and *CII* 1.495–96. More recently, Lifshitz offered a reconstruction that strengthens the evidence for a Jewish identification, but which is nevertheless not as unambiguous as he suggests. See Lifshitz, *Donateurs et Fondateurs dans les synagogues juives: répertoire des dédicaces grecques relatives à la construction et à la réfection des synagogues* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1967) 19, where he reconstructs [Ἡ σύνοδος ἡ] περὶ σ[υνάγωγον—]. Again some circularity is introduced: the reconstruction of συνάγωγον supposedly strengthens the argument that the inscription is Jewish. Yet we have just discussed several instances of non-Jewish usage of συναγωγή that make this less compelling than Lifshitz claimed. The term ἀρχων does not resolve the matter, for it, too, occurs in demonstrably non-Jewish contexts.

<sup>17</sup>*CII* 690 = V. V. Struve et al., *Corpus Inscriptionum regni Bosporani [=CIRB]* (Moscow/Leningrad: Nauka, 1965) 1123 (revised by A.I. Boltunova).

<sup>18</sup>See Lifshitz, *CII prolegomenon* 1. 67.

<sup>19</sup>Frey, *CII* 1. 500–501.

<sup>20</sup>Lifshitz, *CII prolegomenon* 1. 67.

<sup>21</sup>*CII* 690a = *CIRB* 1126.

<sup>22</sup>Horsley, *New Documents*, 1. 27.

ὑψιστος, παντοκράτωρ, and εὐλογητός is obviously not decisive. If Horsley is correct, precisely the opposite becomes the case: we now not only have evidence for a non-Jewish usage of προσευχή, but also for non-Jewish usage of the last two terms.

While the ultimate resolution of these issues requires further investigation, including a computer search,<sup>23</sup> of the entire epigraphic corpus to verify Lifshitz's claim that παντοκράτωρ only occurs in Jewish and Christian inscriptions, and εὐλογητός only in Jewish contexts, an additional inscription complicates matters further. Also from Gorgippia, but not cited by either Frey or Lifshitz, this inscription begins with an invocation to θεὸς ὑψιστος παντοκράτωρ εὐλογητός. In it, Timotheus, son of Nymphagoros Makarios, together with his sister manumit a female slave raised in their household (θρεπτή) in accordance with a vow made by their father. If Lifshitz is correct, this must be a Jewish inscription; if he is not correct, the terms παντοκράτωρ and εὐλογητός occur in a non-Jewish epigraph. Frey included this inscription in his appendix of "Judaizing Pagans," siding with Latyshev against the judgment of several others.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Terms of Jewish religious office*

The titles ἀρχισυνάγωγος, γερουσιάρχης ("ruler of the council of elders") and rabbi (this last not strictly speaking a title of synagogue office) have all been considered strong, if not definitive evidence of a Jewish inscription, while the terms ἄρχων ("archon" or "ruler") and πρεσβύτερος ("elder"), clearly attested as synagogue titles, have also led scholars to suspect Jewish provenance. Horsley, however, reprints a dedication to Zeus Hysistos by a guild of worshippers ca. 250 CE from Pydna in Macedonia, among whose officers are an archon, an ἀρχισυνάγωγος, a προστάτης ("presiding officer"), and a γραμματεὺς ("secretary"), all titles known to

<sup>23</sup>Just as this article went to press, I received the new Packard Humanities Institute CD-ROM 6, containing inscriptions and papyri. A global search of παντοκράτωρ turned up two pagan examples: *IG* 5.2.472 and M. Guarducci, *Inscriptiones Creticae* (4 vols.; Rome: Libreria dello stato, 1935–50) 2.28.2. A global search of εὐλογητός yielded numerous examples from Christian inscriptions. Of these a few might conceivably be Jewish, but many display numerous other indications of Christianity, including explicit references to Christ. Interestingly, the compilers categorized all three inscriptions from Gorgippia as Jewish, and add a fourth: SEG 32.790. However, even the new disk is not exhaustive.

<sup>24</sup>*CII* 78\* = *IG Rom.* 1.911. B. Latyshev, *Inscriptiones antiquae orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latini* (3 vols.; St. Petersburg: Archaeologicae Imperii Russici, 1885–1901) 2.401.

us in Jewish contexts as well.<sup>25</sup> Horsley has also assembled both certain and uncertain epigraphic occurrences of ἀρχισυνάγωγος, including six other usages he considers non-Jewish and a number of examples the religious identification of which cannot be determined with any certainty. He concludes that the Jews took over not only the form of Hellenistic private associations as the model for synagogue organization, but also the terminology of such associations, to such an extent that these terms eventually came to signify Jewish structures more or less exclusively.<sup>26</sup>

The term πρεσβύτερος, signifying public and/or religious office of some kind, is attested in demonstrably pagan and demonstrably Christian contexts, as well as in inscriptions the Jewishness of which has never been questioned,<sup>27</sup> making it abundantly clear that “elder” is virtually useless in itself as an indicator of religious affiliation.<sup>28</sup>

More problematic is the term γερουσιάρχης (“head of the council of elders”) which LSJ defines as “head of a Jewish council of elders.” While virtually all instances of γερουσιάρχης do display other indications of Jewishness, there is a first-century CE inscription from Thrace concerning a γερουσιάρχης named Apollonius that gives no evidence of being Jewish and considerable evidence of being pagan.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Text initially in James Maxwell Ross Cormack, *Mélanges helléniques offertes à Georges Daux* (Paris: Boccard, 1974) 51–55; also in Horsley, *New Documents*, 1. 26–27.

<sup>26</sup>Horsley, *New Documents*, 4 no. 113. Horsley suggests that προσευχή first acquires this specialized usage in the Hellenistic period (see, e.g., the various inscriptions from Egypt), which accounts for the lack of attestation of ἀρχισυνάγωγος in the Hellenistic period, but that by the first centuries BCE/CE the synagogue gained popularity to the extent that its usage in non-Jewish instances diminishes considerably. Horsley concludes, however, that the occasional late attestation of ἀρχισυνάγωγος in non-Jewish contexts (as in the inscription from Pydna just mentioned) may be attributed to “the survival of a term already in use in non-Jewish circles before the latter specially appropriated it” (p. 220). Here he differs with Bernadette Brooten (*Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogues: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues* [BJS 36; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982] 5, 23, 228 n.81), who suggests that pagan associations borrow the terminology from Jews. See also Horsley’s reference (p. 220) to Christian usage but by Jewish Christians, namely, the Ebionites, which complicates matters further.

<sup>27</sup>See Brooten, *Women Leaders*, 52–53.

<sup>28</sup>*IG Rom.* 1. 1231 presents a puzzling example. In fact, the methodological pitfalls this creates may be demonstrated in the discussion over an inscription from Samos which A. M. Schneider originally considered Christian (on the basis of the term πρεσβύτεροι [“Samos im frühchristlicher und byzantinischer Zeit,” *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts* 54 (1929) 137 n.2]), and which Louis Robert judged pagan (reading “the πρεσβύτεροι of the γυμνάσιον” *Hellenica* 4 [1948] 71 n.3) but which Dunst subsequently demonstrated to be Jewish on the basis of a new fragment which actually reads [τῶ]ν Ἰουδαίων. See Günter Dunst, “Eine jüdische Inschrift aus Samos,” *Klio* 52 (1970) 73–78.

<sup>29</sup>SEG 1.327

The word “rabbi” is probably the only Jewish title for which pagan or Christian usages are not also attested, but it occurs so infrequently and relatively so late in Jewish inscriptions that it is not a major factor.<sup>30</sup>

### *Phrases and formulas*

Although certain phrases and formulas have been cited by numerous scholars as key indications of religious affiliation, contradictory or problematic instances can be adduced in virtually every case.

For instance, a significant proportion of the inscriptions from the Jewish catacombs in Rome begin with the phrase ἐνθάδε κείται (“here lies”), which occurs much less frequently in Jewish inscriptions from other geographic areas. It is attested as well in pagan and Christian inscriptions.<sup>31</sup>

Although many scholars consider the phrase ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ κοίμησις αὐτοῦ/αὐτῆς (“in peace be his/her sleep”) a strong indication of Jewishness, several inscriptions bearing this formula show signs of being Christian. One, found in 1769 and perhaps from the Christian cemetery of Saint Agnes in Rome,<sup>32</sup> commemorates a child named Peter. Although Frey thought the formula generally Jewish, the name Peter and the use of the verb ἐτελεύθη (“is completed”) to signify death led him to exclude it.<sup>33</sup> Another, from the Via Salaria in Rome, found above the Christian catacomb of Pamphilus, was considered Jewish by Oehler and others on the basis of the formula.<sup>34</sup> Frey included it in the Jewish section of the *Corpus*, and suggested that it might be that of a Jew converted to Christianity or perhaps the work of a stone cutter who just added the phrase out of habit. Anton Ferrua disagreed, citing its location and another Christian inscription with a variant of the formula.<sup>35</sup>

Another phrase often taken as a possible indication of Judaism is θάρσι, οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος (“courage, no one is immortal”). The claim that this phrase identifies Jews seems to rest on an assumption that admonishing the dead to have courage or to be of good cheer implies a belief in an afterlife characteristic of Judaism. The phrase occurs in inscriptions ranging from

<sup>30</sup>Shaye Cohen, “Epigraphical Rabbis,” *JQR* 72 (1981) 1–47.

<sup>31</sup>Maria Teresa Manni Piraino, *Iscrizioni greche lapidaree del Museo di Palermo* (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1973) no. 13 (= *L'Année Épigraphique* [1975] 454): Εἰνθάδε κίτε Καλή πρε(σ)β(υ)τις ζησ(ασ)α ετη ν' αμε(μ)πτως Τον βιον τελ(ευ)τα τη προ ιθ' κ(α)λα)ν(δων) Οκτωβριων.

<sup>32</sup>Frey himself (*CII* 1. 579) expressed doubts about the reliability of this information.

<sup>33</sup>*CII* 80°.

<sup>34</sup>*CII* 3.

<sup>35</sup>Anton Ferrua, *Epigraphica* 3 (1941) 30–46, esp. 32.

North Africa to Rome.<sup>36</sup> Frey obviously considered it a formula used by Jews and pagans alike.<sup>37</sup>

Particularly interesting in this regard is an inscription from Ptolemais in Cyrene, which LSJ cites as typical of the usage:<sup>38</sup>

—Eirana Kapitonos [?] aged two, lies here.  
Her father bid her farewell, saying thus:  
whoever opens the coffin and buries  
someone (else) shall contribute five hundred denarii  
to the most sacred treasury.  
Courage, heroic one, no one is immortal.

Is this a Jewish inscription? Regrettably, the opening of the inscription is missing, although whether that would help is not clear, since even an invocation to the spirits of the dead would not, as we shall see, rule out its Jewishness. Outside the formula under discussion, the provision of penalties for violating the tomb are well known from Jewish graves in Asia Minor, although there most prescribe either fines to the Jewish community or a split fine to the Jewish treasury and to a local or imperial treasury as well. Is the name Eirana a variant of Eirene, a well-known Jewish name? The inscription utilizes the phrase ἐνθάδε κεῖται, frequent in the Roman Jewish inscriptions. I do not recall an inscription otherwise considered Jewish that addresses the deceased as heroic; none is indexed in *CII* 1.

Other examples of problematic formulas include the so-called Eumenian formula discussed at length by Louis Robert, namely, warnings to would-be tomb violators that they would be accountable to God (ἔσται αὐτῷ πρὸς τὸν θεόν). Robert concluded these could be either Jewish or Christian. He also claimed that the invocation of the judgment of God (κρίσις) was not pagan, although it could be either Jewish or Christian.<sup>39</sup> Robert also considered the phrase εὐλογία πᾶσιν (“blessing to all”) to be purely Jewish; similar arguments have been made for the use of εὐλογία in any

<sup>36</sup>E.g., *CII* 314; 335; 380; 450; 539; 59\*; SEG 29.1039.

<sup>37</sup>Frey classifies *CIL* 5.7380 (= *CII* 59\*), actually a bilingual inscription from Tortona, Italy, as probably pagan—this is an inscription on a sarcophagus “qui porte une foule de sujets paiens, mais rien de juif” (*CII* 1. 564)—and comments that the text of the inscription conforms to the terminology of pagan inscriptions in general. Johannes Oehler considered it clearly Jewish, perhaps on the basis of this phrase itself, but Frey disagreed strongly. The text reads: P. Aelio qui vixit annos XXIII Antonia Tisipho mater filio pientissimo. Θάρσει, εὐγένει, οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος.

<sup>38</sup>*IG Rom.* 1. 1026.

<sup>39</sup>Louis Robert, *Hellenica* 11–12 (1960) 404.

form.<sup>40</sup> References to ὁ λαός (“the people”) have also been taken as indicators of Judaism.

### *Symbols*

When we turn to the use of symbols as indications of religious affiliation, we must keep in mind that the vast majority of visual symbols can be documented alike in inscriptions considered Jewish, Christian, and pagan on other grounds. A few, especially the seven-branched menorah, are traditionally put forth as irrefutable and sufficient indicators of Jews and Judaism. To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever argued for the pagan identification of an inscription with a seven-branched menorah, but there is some question of its use among Christians, and what exactly this might connote.

For example, two sarcophagi with menorahs were found in the early Christian necropolis east of Thessalonica.<sup>41</sup> One bears the inscription Κύριος μεθ’ ἡμῶν (“Lord, be with us”), which Lifshitz observes is frequent in Christian epigraphs<sup>42</sup> and (otherwise) unattested in Jewish inscriptions.<sup>43</sup> The obvious possibility that these are Christian Jews is not mentioned by Lifshitz. In his discussion of the use of menorahs in Jewish inscriptions, Kant notes that dedications from Syros in Greece have been found bearing both crosses and menorahs; he also calls attention to Goodenough’s report of a Christian bread stamp with a menorah.<sup>44</sup>

Another problematic example is *CII* 84\*, a Latin inscription, now in Urbino, that begins with a chi rho, and which is accompanied by a seven-branched object that looks somewhat different from the typical rendering of a seven-branched menorah. Frey simply denied that it was a menorah: “among the Jews, the seven-branched candelabra never appears in such a form.”<sup>45</sup> But Diehl thought it was, and he concluded that the inscription was Jewish Christian. Several other symbols occur here, including a dolphin, Lazarus in the tomb, and something Diehl took to be an ark. In any case the methodological difficulties are apparent.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid, 394; Lifshitz, *CII* prolegomenon 1. 70.

<sup>41</sup>*CII* 693b; reported by S. Pelekanides, “Χρονικά Μεσαιωνικά Μακεδονίας,” *Archaiologikon Deltion* 17 (1961–62) 257 plates 314a and b.

<sup>42</sup>E.g., Louis Jalabert and René Mouterde, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* (Paris: Geuthner, 1929–59) 1453, 1559, 1705.

<sup>43</sup>Lifshitz, *CII* prolegomenon 1. 75.

<sup>44</sup>Kant, “Jewish Inscriptions,” 685, esp. n. 82. See also Marcel Simon, “Le chandelier à sept branches—symbole chrétien?” *Revue archéologique* 6th ser., 31–32 (1948) 971–80.

<sup>45</sup>*CII* 1. 582.

*Names*

Virtually all epigraphers have relied on personal nomenclature as a major clue in the identification of inscriptions. Regrettably, however, the controls on distinguishing Jewish names from Christian names and pagan names are difficult to establish. The issue of nomenclature warrants a study in itself: here I want only to make a few, cautionary observations. In order to use names as reliable indications of Jewish and Christian identity, it is necessary to establish the use of such names from evidence that is indisputably Jewish or Christian on other grounds. While there may be names which were used only by Jews and never by Christians or pagans, whether in the same or other geographic areas, to the best of my knowledge no one has ever done the tedious work necessary to establish controls on this subject. Arguments from silence here are only dangerous—to say that an inscription cannot be Jewish because of the name is to rule out the possibility that this inscription itself provides the missing evidence in the same way that the invocation of pagan deities in *CII* 680 may itself be the evidence that Jews did this, if the inscription may be reliably classified as Jewish on other grounds. In any case we must be careful of arguments that rule out names simply on the basis of assumptions that Jews would not have used certain names, particularly pagan theophorous names, since there is ample evidence that they did.<sup>46</sup>

*Location*

Location may be one of the most difficult ways of identifying an inscription, as the differing positions of epigraphers demonstrates. Harry J. Leon, for example, took the position that once a catacomb was identified as Jewish, any inscription found in the catacomb was to be considered Jewish until proven otherwise, and he criticized Frey for assuming that an inscription was suspect until proven Jewish.<sup>47</sup> While my sympathies lie more with Leon than with Frey on this point, the mere identification of a catacomb as Jewish or Christian does not immediately alleviate the potential and real methodological dilemmas.

Take the case of the Vigna Randanini catacomb, sometimes known as the Via Appia catacomb. This catacomb contains a set of two connected vaulted rooms, skillfully painted with typical Greco-Roman funerary mo-

<sup>46</sup>Frey himself (*CII* 1. 64) provides some examples.

<sup>47</sup>Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1960) 97.

tifs, including peacocks and other birds. The central ceiling panel in the first room portrays Victory crowning a youth; the second depicts the goddess Fortuna.<sup>48</sup> The painted rooms do not connect smoothly to the catacomb corridor which is considerably higher than the floor of the rooms.

The combination of pervasive Greco-Roman motifs and physical disjuncture between the rooms and the corridor led early investigators to conclude that the rooms were not originally Jewish, despite their concession that an inscription found in the second room (still in situ) to a twenty-four-year old γραμματεὺς named Petronius, by his father Honoratus, also called γραμματεὺς, and his mother Petronia, was clearly Jewish.<sup>49</sup> Various theories were put forth to explain how pagan *hypogea* (underground graves) were ultimately utilized by Jews.<sup>50</sup> Although Leon and Goodenough refuted these arguments more than thirty years ago, one version of these interpretations is still offered as the most likely explanation for the presence of these rooms by local guides. According to this scenario, *fossores* (grave diggers) excavating the catacomb accidentally hit a pagan *hypogeum*, which they respectfully connected to the corridors. Sometime later, when its origins had been forgotten, Jews utilized the rooms for burials, as in the case of Petronius.<sup>51</sup> In his refutation of such explanations, Leon points not only to the frequent use of the symbols found in Randanini in other demonstrably Jewish synagogues and catacombs, but also to the fact that a similar disjuncture between a *cubiculum* and a catacomb corridor occurs in the Via Nomentana catacomb, except that there no one has argued for the non-Jewish identification of the room.<sup>52</sup>

Ultimately, the Randanini rooms pose two separate questions. It is quite conceivable that the rooms were not originally part of the catacomb, but this by no means points to their non-Jewish character. Prosperous Christian families sometimes built their own family tombs, which they later allowed to be connected to Christian catacombs, and there is no reason to think that prosperous Jews might not have done the same. Certainly, the size and decoration of the rooms point to more affluent persons than those who utilized the simple loculi and *kokhim* lining the corridors of Randanini, as

<sup>48</sup>For a more detailed description, with black and white plates, see Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 60–61, 203–20; 204 n.1 contains further references. Also Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 2. 15–33 (on the catacomb itself); 2. 17–20 (on the painted rooms); 3. 737–56, 762 (photographs).

<sup>49</sup>*CII* 149.

<sup>50</sup>For references, see Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 61 n. 2.

<sup>51</sup>For the refutation of these interpretations see Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 60–61, 203–204; and Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 2. 30–33.

<sup>52</sup>Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 61 n. 2.

does the text of Petronius's epitaph. Furthermore, according to Frey,<sup>53</sup> individual Jewish *hypogea* were discovered in the region of the Monteverdi catacomb, when a new church, Regina Pacis, was being constructed, and also at the end of the Saint Sebastian catacomb, near the Via delle Sette Chiese. None yielded inscriptions.

Interestingly enough, no one has commented on the possibility that the Randanini inscription for Petronius is not Jewish. The term γραμματεύς was obviously considered definitive proof of a Jewish tomb, despite the fact that the stone contains no other demonstrably Jewish symbols or terms. Yet as we have seen, the title γραμματεύς does occur in demonstrably non-Jewish contexts.

Regardless of the identification of the Randanini rooms, the problems of method should be apparent. How one interprets the rooms depends on one's a priori assumptions about what Jews did and did not do; yet once the rooms are identified as Jewish, our evidence for the behavior of Jews may be significantly revised.

Catacombs also pose other problems. While Leon and others, such as Goodenough, generally consider inscriptions found in Jewish catacombs to be Jewish without further substantiation, Leon allows for exceptions. Commenting on fragments of sarcophagi with pagan elements found in the Jewish catacombs, Leon suggests that some of these fragments may not have been part of coffins used for Jewish dead, but rather were simply used to close up loculi, on the theory that the use of such broken fragments was economical. While broken stones were undoubtedly reused under a variety of circumstances in antiquity, it remains a highly problematic yet convenient explanation of the presence of seemingly non-Jewish fragments in Jewish catacombs. It is not impossible, as Frey contended, that non-Jewish fragments from a pagan cemetery above and near Monteverde found their way into the Jewish catacomb, but it does tend to provide a simplistic way out of a complex dilemma.<sup>54</sup>

Synagogues present both similar and different problems. While the identification of synagogues is sometimes quite straightforward, as at Sardis or

<sup>53</sup>*CII* 1. lxi.

<sup>54</sup>Frey accounted in this way for the lid of a child's sarcophagus depicting a boy reclining on a couch, holding a bunch of grapes, and caressing a small dog, found in the Monteverde catacomb (*CII* 1. cxxxv-vi); see also Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 210-11; and Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 2. 11-12. Leon himself (*The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 214) took a different stance regarding certain sarcophagus fragments now in the catacomb, but which could not be shown definitively to have originated in the catacomb. Some of these he considered Christian, and others pagan on the grounds that they were un-Jewish, and he shifted the burden of proof to those who thought they were Jewish.

Ostia, our assumptions also govern our assessments of the identity of buildings. A fascinating case in point concerns the identification of the mosaics at Mopsuestia. Michael Avi-Yonah presents strong arguments that the mosaics are Jewish, not Christian, and therefore that the building was a synagogue, not a church. Since this article is primarily concerned with inscriptions, I will not repeat his thesis in detail, but it makes compelling reading for anyone interested in these questions.<sup>55</sup>

Even in cases where the identification of a building as a Jewish synagogue appears incontrovertible, it does not necessarily follow that all inscriptions within are themselves by or about Jews. Yet most scholars have tended to assume that in the absence of evidence to the contrary, all dedicators and benefactors are Jewish, an assumption that in turn rests on the notion that non-Jews were not likely to frequent synagogues or to be active contributors to their maintenance.

Whether we are dealing with Jewish burial sites or Jewish synagogues, assumptions about what constitutes evidence of non-Jewishness still play a critical role. Some brief discussion of the features often cited as positive evidence of Christianity or paganism, and therefore as negating a Jewish identity, is warranted.

#### NEGATIVE INDICATORS OF JUDAISM

##### *Dis Manibus*

The presence of several otherwise seemingly Jewish inscriptions that begin with invocations to the spirits of the dead has confounded numerous epigraphers, who took it for granted that Jewish monotheism precluded any use of pagan religious language or symbols. For example, Frey gives twenty-seven *di(i)s manibus* inscriptions in the first volume of *CII*, twenty-four of which he considered probably non-Jewish.

In the case of *CII* 464, which ends with the formula “in peace be his sleep,” Frey included the inscription as genuinely Jewish, reluctantly restoring the initial M for *manibus* for the missing right hand portion of the inscription. Leon found this sufficiently unpalatable that he left the inscription unrestored, commenting that “The D is usually taken as part of the abbreviation of *Dis Manibus* (to the Divine Shades), the M having been in

<sup>55</sup>Michael Avi-Yonah, “The Mosaics of Mopsuestia—Church or Synagogue” in Lee I. Levine, ed., *Ancient Synagogues Revealed* (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 1981) 186–90.

the lost portion of the stone. If correct, this is the only instance of the pagan formula in the Jewish inscriptions of Rome.”<sup>56</sup>

What should we do with *CII* 6\*, which ends with the Greek abbreviation of the equivalent formula, θεοῖς δαίμοσι, and which was still in the Jewish catacomb of the Vigna Randanini when Frey published his *Corpus*? Frey considered it not Jewish by virtue of the final formula, the orthography of the inscription and the formula μνήμης χάριν (“in memory”). But what is a pagan epitaph doing in a Jewish catacomb? In the case of numerous other stones he considered not Jewish, Frey offered an explanation: they were reused by Jews, often to close up a loculus, and sometimes to engrave a Jewish inscription, as in the case of *CII* 9\* (which contains *CII* 148 on the other side), to a woman named Iunia Rufina, which begins *Dis Manibus et memoriae*.<sup>57</sup>

Frey also suggested that inscriptions that were not manifestly pagan, but used as filler, are therefore pagan by virtue of that usage, as in the case of *CII* 31\*. This one is particularly instructive, however, for it is simply a fragment that reads Iul(i)a Rufina, names that Frey acknowledges to have been used equally by both pagans and Jews. If we cannot tell the religious identity of the individual merely by these names, could the Jews using the catacomb distinguish between pagan stones, which Frey thinks were fair material for closing up a loculus, and Jewish stones, which apparently were not? If the motives for purchasing such stones were at least in part economic, what evidence do we have that Jews cared whose reused stone they bought? If we argue that Jews did not care whose stones they used for filler, then we must grant the possibility that some of the stones used for filler could be Jewish.

Frey’s assumption that Jews did not use *dis manibus* on their inscriptions was challenged most by an inscription from Siklos in modern Hungary that begins *dis manibus* and memorializes an eighteen-year-old named Septimia Maria, called *Iudea*.<sup>58</sup> For Frey, the occurrence of the term *Iudea* was

<sup>56</sup>Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 332.

<sup>57</sup>Other stones used for filler, or inscribed on both sides: *CII* 17\*, 19\*, 20–21\*, 26\*, 27\*, 28\*, 37\*, 38\*—all of these read DM or KΘ (17\*): the “*manibus*” from 28\* is not abbreviated, and could conceivably be reconstructed differently. There are others that do not contain the invocation. In any case, I find the social dynamics of such a reuse of stones rather puzzling. Conceivably, such stones came from the stone cutters, since it seems hard to imagine that Jews found the stones and then took them to be reused. Presumably, such stones were cheaper, but how they came to be reused is interesting in itself. I would appreciate any additional information that others may have on the evidence for such a practice and its social implications.

<sup>58</sup>*CII* 678: D(is) M(anibus) Septim(i)ae Mariae Iudeae quae vixit Annis xviii Actia Sabinilla mater. This inscription is also published in Alexander (Sándor) Scheiber, *Jewish*

sufficient to override even his discomfort at the use of *dis manibus*, and he simply observed that this was one of the rare examples where the abbreviation *DM* occurred in a demonstrably Jewish inscription. Ironically, I think this inscription is more problematic than Frey realized. With Alexander Scheiber, I think it may indicate a Jewish daughter of a pagan mother.<sup>59</sup> Had Frey lived to edit the Jewish inscriptions from North Africa, which he had intended to include in a third volume of the *Corpus*, he would have had to contend with another such inscription: *Dis M(anibus) Juliae Victoriae Judeae*.<sup>60</sup>

One other inscription closes my illustrations of potentially Jewish inscriptions. Of uncertain origin, it reads simply:

D(is) M(anibus) Ἐνθάδε κεῖται Δίκαιος.<sup>61</sup>

To the gods/spirits of the underworld. Here lies Dikaios.

Frey interpreted the combination of the Latin invocation with a Greek epitaph as evidence that the stone was purchased with the *DM* already engraved. Despite the similarity of the opening formula and the manifestly Jewish name, Dikaios, Frey thought it likely that the inscription was pagan. It is of course the case that *dis manibus* is characteristic of many pagan inscriptions, and relatively rare among those inscriptions that display other indications of being Jewish. In general, however, on this issue I still support the judgment of Goodenough, who observed that Frey would have found a lot more Jewish *dis manibus* inscriptions had he not begun with the assumption that there was no such thing.<sup>62</sup>

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*Inscriptions in Hungary* (Leiden: Brill, 1983) no. 7. See also Kraemer, "On the Meaning of the Term 'Jew,'" 41–42.

<sup>59</sup>Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions in Hungary*, 45; Kraemer, "On the Meaning of the Term 'Jew,'" 41.

<sup>60</sup>Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 332.

<sup>61</sup>*CII* 60\*.

<sup>62</sup>For Goodenough (*Jewish Symbols*, 2. 137–40), the presence of these inscriptions, which otherwise closely resemble Jewish inscriptions from the same catacombs, could equally, if not more so, be taken as evidence that some Jews did use the phrase *dis manibus* on their inscriptions. The explanations suggested by Goodenough and others are not implausible, ranging from the possibility that some Jews actually liked these phrases and were not offended by them, to the possibility that the initials were routinely inscribed on stones before they were purchased, and that some Jews saw no problem in buying these stones and using them.

Interestingly, the difficulty posed by the phrase *dis manibus* is not limited to its occurrence on inscriptions that otherwise might be catalogued as Jewish. The phrase occasionally occurs also on Christian inscriptions.<sup>63</sup>

### *Invocation of pagan divinities*

The invocation of pagan divinities (other than the spirits of the dead) in an inscription has often been seen as sufficient evidence of non-Jewish behavior to classify an inscription as pagan, even when there are strong reasons to consider a Jewish identification on other grounds. We have already discussed this with regard to the manumission inscriptions with invocations of Zeus, Ge, and Helios, but the problem arises in the case of several other inscriptions as well. Frey had particular difficulties with an inscription by a woman named Annia who called herself *Iuda* in a dedication to the *Iunones*.<sup>64</sup> He speculated that she was born Jewish but had renounced the religion of her ancestors.

Two inscriptions from a Temple of Pan in Egypt compound the problem, both because of their location and because of their obvious dedication to a pagan divinity. Both dedicators identify themselves as Ἰουδαῖος, and their dedications do not name the divinity specifically. One begins Θεοῦ Εὐλογία,<sup>65</sup> the other Εὐλογεῖ τὸν θεόν.<sup>66</sup> Frey speculated that these inscriptions might signify a belief on the part of the donors, if an unorthodox one, that one could thank the god of the Jews even in a pagan temple. Alternatively, he proposed that the worship of Pan had become understood as worship of τὸ πᾶν ("the All"), to which presumably even Jews could relate. The possibility that these are just dedications to the pagan divinity Pan by men calling themselves *Ioudaios* was not considered by Frey, perhaps understandably.

### TYPICAL FEATURES OF CHRISTIAN INSCRIPTIONS

We next consider typical features of Christian inscriptions, which are then used to rule out Jewish identity in inscriptions which contain other features reminiscent of Judaism.

<sup>63</sup>See Edmond Frédéric Le Blant, *Inscriptions Chrétiennes de la Gaule antérieures au VIIIe siècle* (2 vols.; Paris: L'Imprimerie impériale, 1856–65) 1. 264; 2. 406; Philippe Le Bas and William Henry Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines* (1870; reprinted Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1972) nos. 2145, 2419.

<sup>64</sup>CII 77\*.

<sup>65</sup>CII/CPI 1537: θεοῦ εὐλογία Θευόδοτος Δωρίωνος Ἰουδαῖος σωθεὶς ἐκ πελ(ά)γους ("Blessing to God. Theudotos, son of Dorion, Ioudaios, saved from the sea.")

<sup>66</sup>CII/CPI 1538: Εὐλογεῖ τὸν θεόν | Πτολεμαῖος Διονυσίου Ἰουδαῖος ("Ptolemaios,

*Depositus Est, and dating of burial.*

Marucchi and others believed that the custom of writing *depositus* followed by the date of burial stems from the practice of celebrating the anniversaries of the dead, beginning in the third century CE, and reflects a Christian understanding of death as a commencement, rather than an end.<sup>67</sup> Given the fact that some Jews clearly believed in the resurrection of the body (this, after all, is one explanation for the Jewish practice of secondary burial of bones in ossuaries) they equally might have stressed the notion of *depositus*. More telling, however, is *CII* 558, an inscription found in a Jewish cemetery in Naples in 1908, with a seven-branched menorah at bottom right:

Hic requiescit in pace  
 Barbarus filius Cumanus  
 de Benafri qui vixit an-  
 n(o)s pl(us) m(inus) XVIII Deposi-  
 tus Idus Iulias Ind VI  
 שלום על מנוחתך

Here lies in peace, Barbarus, son of Cumanus of Venafri, who lived eighteen years, more or less. He was buried on the Ides of July, in the sixth Indiction. Peace to his resting place.

On the basis of location, the Hebrew phrase and the menorah, no one has yet suggested that Frey erred in cataloguing this as a Jewish inscription. If he is correct, then we must conclude that the term *depositus*, together with date of burial, was not exclusively Christian, and exercise extreme caution in identifying an inscription based on the use of that phrase.

*Date of death*

In addition to date of burial, it has been suggested that date of death also suggests a Christian identity. This occurs in a number of Egyptian Jewish inscriptions,<sup>68</sup> as well as in *CII* 482, from Italy, 330 CE.

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son of Dionysios, Ioudaios, praises (the) God").

<sup>67</sup>Kaufmann, *Handbuch der Altchristlichen Epigraphik*, 53; Marucchi, *Christian Epigraphy*, 56–57.

<sup>68</sup>Many Egyptian Jewish inscriptions include a date: e.g., *CII/CPI* 1459, 1460, 1464, 1466, 1471, 1480 and many others.

Victorina qu(a)e  
 vixit ann(os) p(lus) m(inus)  
 XXXV defunct-  
 a die pridie id-  
 us Maias Galli-  
 cano et Symma-  
 co cons(ulibu)s dicea  
 osia filentolia

Victorina, who lived thirty five years, more or less, died on the eve of the Ides of May [May 14] Gallicanus and Symmachus being consuls. [Greek in Latin letters] Righteous, holy; a lover of the law.

The inscription is followed by a seven-branched menorah, a shofar, and two drawings of an *etrog*. Because of these symbols and the adjectives that describe the dead woman, especially *filentolia* ("lover of the law"), the Jewishness of the inscription has been uncontested.

Both these inscriptions, *CII* 482 and 558, incidentally provide contrary evidence for the assumption that *plus minus* identifies a Christian epigraph, to which may be added approximately another nine from *CII*, many from the city of Venosa.<sup>69</sup>

### *The chi rho*

Virtually all scholars regard the chi rho as indisputable evidence that an inscription is Christian, even when the text and symbols are otherwise ambiguous. We have already discussed *CII* 84\*, a Latin inscription with a chi rho and a disputed object that closely resembles a menorah.<sup>70</sup> Kaufmann noted the presence of a chi rho in an inscription with Hebrew letters,<sup>71</sup> and there is also an odd inscription from North Africa, listed in the Christian section of *CIL* 60, that contains a chi rho and the words *Mosattes de Iudeus*.<sup>72</sup> Most intriguing is a trilingual inscription, in which the Hebrew portion begins with the phrase על ישראל שלום while the Greek and Latin

<sup>69</sup>E.g. *CII* 559, 606, 608, 614, 616, 619, 631, 644, and 646. *CII* 606–46 are all from the Italian city of Venosa, from a catacomb identified as Jewish; many of these bear the symbol of the menorah, the Hebrew word "Shalom," references to synagogue officials, etc. Several of the Venosa inscriptions have a Hebrew text more substantial than the common "Shalom" found in the Roman inscriptions.

<sup>70</sup>See above, p. 151.

<sup>71</sup>Kaufmann, *Handbuch der Altchristlichen Epigraphik*, 55 n.1.

<sup>72</sup>*CIL* 8.20354

read 'Ev (ὁ)ν(ὁ)ματ(ι) Κ(υρίο)υ / *In nomine domini* ("in the name of the Lord").<sup>73</sup> Goodenough suggests that the subtle differences here reflect Jews who "lived in a Christian community where they found it safer to use the Christian phrase in languages intelligible to their neighbors, while they announced their Jewish loyalty in Hebrew,"<sup>74</sup> and supposes a date of late fourth or fifth century CE. Apparently, the back of the stone contains a chi rho between an alpha and an omega. Schwab thought this was a much later addition to the stone, but Goodenough thought it just as possible that it was part of a pattern of pragmatic Jewish accommodation to increasing Christian pressure on Jews.<sup>75</sup> Thus, even the interpretation of a chi rho may be complex.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Such ambiguous usages suggest that to distinguish between Jewish, Christian, and pagan inscriptions in the Greco-Roman period is not nearly as simple as we may wish. A significant number of inscriptions contain features that appear contradictory to us: they point simultaneously to differing cultural and religious contexts. I am convinced that, in numerous cases, these seemingly contradictory features are more real in our eyes than in the eyes of those we study and that they reflect the cultural realities of late antiquity.

I suspect we shall continue to have difficulty determining the religious identification of many inscriptions, whether already known or yet to be discovered. I think it will help if scholars keep in mind several things as we proceed in our work.

It should go without saying that our ideal is to proceed from the known to the uncertain in determining the distinctive and characteristic features of ancient inscriptions. To do this, we need first to reconsider the evidence for the Jewishness of many, if not most inscriptions previously classified as Jewish. This is not to suggest that most are not Jewish, but rather that we need to ask what criteria were employed in that classification and how well grounded those criteria are. Second, we need to make clear our own assumptions about what constituted Jewish behavior and social identity in late antiquity and to reexamine the evidence for those assumptions, for often it turns out that the classification of an inscription hinges on just such assumptions. Frey's treatment of Annia Iuda (*CII 77\**) is one such case in

<sup>73</sup>*CII 661*, discussed in Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 2. 58.

<sup>74</sup>Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 2. 58.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*

point: he could just as easily have used this inscription as evidence that Jewish women made dedications to female divine spirits, had that not been outside his own conceptual framework.

I also suggest that we take seriously the possibility, if not the probability, that many inscriptions made by Jews will not contain any specifically Jewish items. For those in search of certainty this will no doubt be frustrating, but particularly in places where Jews were well integrated into the life of the larger community, such as many of the cities, towns and villages of Asia Minor, this may in fact be the case. Whether we can accept the suggestion of Ellen Saltman that any inscription not demonstrably non-Jewish may well be Jewish I am not sure, for this assumes our definitions of non-Jewish, rather than the definition of persons in late antique Asia Minor.<sup>76</sup> Similar observations may no doubt be made for Christian inscriptions as well, since identifiably Christian inscriptions cannot be documented before the third century, and it is hard to believe that no Christians left epigraphical records prior to that time.

We must also keep in mind the fluidity of ancient social relations when considering inscriptions that seem incongruous to us. In some cases, the incongruity may be a figment of our own imaginations, but in other cases it may reflect the results of intermarriage, new religious affiliation, or ancient self-understandings that do not make much sense in the modern world, such as Christian Judaism. I do not suggest this recognition of fluidity will enable us to resolve all our difficulties in the identification of inscriptions, but it will help.

<sup>76</sup>Ellen Saltman, "The Jews of Asia Minor in the Greco-Roman Period: A Religious and Social Study" (M.A. diss., Smith College, 1971) 81ff.