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CONTENTS

	PAGE
FILIP DE DECKER, Aspectual Distinctions in the Future Passive: Lysias 19.61.....	1
ROBERT MAYHEW, Eudemus' Objection to the Ash-Argument for the Existence of the Void.....	21
WERNER ECK AND ANDREAS PANGERL, Zwei neue Konstitutionen für das Heer von Iudaea in der Zeit Domitians.....	31
RIVKA ELIZUR-LEIMAN, A Roman Military Bread Stamp from Ḥorbat Naḥal Yatir.....	49
MATAN SCHAPIRO, Eternal Recurrence and the Identity of Indiscernibles.....	59
MARIE-LAURE REBORA, From the Four Corners of the Mediterranean Sea: Testimonies of Non-Roman Jews in Late Ancient Rome (2 nd –4 th cent. CE)	73
OFER POGORELSKY, The Date of Eusebius' Onomasticon Revisited.....	87
ZOHAR SLANEY, The Palmette Decoration on Galilean Oil Lamps: Transformation of a Classical Motif.....	105
GIACOMO LOI, There is no Analogy in History: On the Use of Myth in Early Hebrew Holocaust Fiction.....	127
BOOK REVIEWS	
Fotis Georgiadis and Anastasia Gadolou, <i>In the Cave: Stories from Darkness Brought to Light</i> (by Erica Angliker).....	153
Bernardo Ballesteros, <i>Divine Assemblies in Early Greek and Babylonian Epic</i> (by Nathan Wasserman).....	156
Sebastian Scharff, <i>Hellenistic Athletes: Agonistic Culture and Self-Presentation</i> (by Michael Poliakoff).....	159
Merav Haklai, <i>Money in Imperial Rome: Legal Diversity and Systemic Complexity</i> (by Amit Gvaryahu).....	163
James Q. Whitman, <i>From Masters of Slaves to Lords of Lands: The Transformation of Ownership in the Western World</i> (by Punsara Amarasinghe).....	166
Alexander Treiger, <i>The Church Fathers in Arabic Translations</i> (by Tanja Werthmann)	168
Vered Lev Kanaan and Patricia A. Rosenmeyer, <i>Classics Transformed in Jewish, Israeli, and Palestinian Receptions</i> (by Reviel Netz).....	172
OBITUARIES: NURIT YAARI (BY YAIR LIPSHITZ).....	
ROSA LAST (BY ORNA HARARI).....	175
DAME AVERIL CAMERON (BY GUY G. STROUMSA).....	179
DISSERTATIONS IN PROGRESS.....	
PROCEEDINGS: THE ISRAEL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES.....	
	185
	193

From the Four Corners of the Mediterranean Sea: Testimonies of Non-Roman Jews in Late Ancient Rome (2nd–4th cent. CE)*

Marie-Laure Rebora

Abstract: This paper deals with an often overlooked topic, namely the presence of non-Roman Jews in 2nd–4th century Rome, through a thorough study of the epigraphical material from the Jewish catacombs of Rome still available to us. After identifying the main places of origin of those foreign Jews, I aim to determine their integration into the broad Jewish Roman community as well as the diverse ways they sought to preserve their specific non-Roman identities, with a special focus on epigraphical practices peculiar to their local origin.

Keywords: Jewish epitaphs from Rome, non-Roman Jews, identities of Jewish diasporas, migrations, integration

INTRODUCTION

A fairly large number of studies¹ have investigated the varying degrees to which immigrants to Rome preserved their identities or had them changed by other groups present in Rome. Yet, so far, only a handful of researchers² have dealt with the same dynamics inside the same immigrant community, especially concerning the Jews whose members had not all been living in Rome for generations. This might be explained by the lower number of Jewish inscriptions compared to other groups such as Christians. As a matter of fact, out of some 594 Jewish Roman epitaphs identified by L. Rutgers³ and published in D. Noy's huge corpus of *Jewish inscriptions of Western Europe*,⁴ mainly from three Jewish catacombs of Rome (Monteverde, Vigna Randanini and Villa Torlonia), that enable us to understand better the life of Jewish Roman communities from the 2nd to the 4th centuries CE, twelve, possibly thirteen if one follows J.-B. Frey's reading of one inscription exposed in his *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* (1936), clearly keep track of the existence of Jews who lived and died in Late Ancient Rome whilst coming from non-

* I am grateful to Dr. Stéphanie Binder for her thought-provoking comments on the first version of my article, and to Jacob Hougie and Aleksandr Gaisin for helping me improve my academic English. I shall also thank Dr. David Sabato and Dorka Shimshoni for their help regarding some material. My gratitude extends to the two editors-in-chief whom I was in touch with, Prof. Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz and Prof. Orna Harari, as well as to the two anonymous reviewers.

¹ A few examples are La Piana (1927), MacMullen (1993), Dresken-Weiland (2003), Whittaker (2004), Ricci (2005), Tacoma (2014), and Tacoma (2016).

² Noy (2000) includes Jews in his study on foreigners in Rome and insists on their specificities in contrast with other immigrant groups and Rocca (2019) mentions foreign Jews in his article about the Jewish settlement in Rome. Solin (1983) has offered a study on Semitic onomastics among Jewish and Syrian communities in Rome.

³ Rutgers (1995), 100.

⁴ Noy (1995). From now on I shall refer to it as *JIWE II*.

Roman communities. Therefore, my corpus appears to be limited (even though one may include more inscriptions based on less strict criteria than explicit place indication and epigraphical uses linked with a determined area outside Rome), for only a scarce number of inscriptions from non-Roman Jews are nowadays at our disposal, which restricts the available ground for interpretation. Nevertheless, these epitaphs, combined with earlier literary testimonies, reveal both the dynamic forms of Jewish mobility and immigration towards the capital of the Roman Empire and the broad diversity of Jewish Roman communities. The Jewish Roman communities were indeed mostly formed by descendants of former slaves deported to Rome after the Pompeian conquest of Judea in 63 BCE and after the destruction of the Second Temple by Titus in 70 CE. However, they were soon to be joined by newcomers who, throughout the centuries, deeply contributed to the community's diversity.

In this preliminary work on those long overlooked sources, whose potential is worth considering, I have decided to focus on three main topics that my paper will explore thoroughly: the places of origin of those immigrants, their integration into long established communities through their contacts and interactions with Roman Jews, and finally their relationships to their communities of origin and the specific practices of the latter. These aspects will work as a reference point or anchor for my short study.

PLACES OF ORIGIN ON NON-ROMAN JEWS: DIFFERENT WAYS OF EXPRESSING PLACES OF ORIGINS

In the ancient world, far more than in current Western societies, people used to be identified according to their origins. Since otherwise, because of the limited system of names, many people would share the same name, adding further geographical indications about the place of origin of a person helped to identify them by distinguishing them from others. As for my work, finding epitaphs with such indications of non-Roman places, has important implications, since it allows us to discover newcomers and their families, for another way of identifying individuals that we find in epitaphs is through their belonging to a precise family. Interestingly enough, one reads different kinds of geographical indications. Most of epitaphs (seven out of twelve epitaphs: JIWE II 60, 112, 113, 459, 508, 515 and 561) do not convey geographical information through the name of the places but rather by the noun of their inhabitants (for instance Κεσαρεύς, Caesarean, in JIWE II 112 and 459, Τριπολίτης, Tripolitan, in JIWE II 113 and ὁ Κατανέος, the Catanian, in JIWE II 515), which clearly presents the deceased as the Caesarean, the Tripolitan or the Catanian of the place. But the classical Greek way of expressing provenance through the use of the preposition ἀπό (from) followed by the city of origin in the genitive form, attested in non-Jewish epitaphs of immigrants from Rome from the same period (a few examples are: ἀπὸ Κρήτης, from Crete, in IGUR 3, 1262; [Ἀσίη]ς ἀπὸ γαί[ης], from Asia, in IGUR 3, 1288; Συρίας ἀπὸ, from Syria, in IGUR 3, 1317) also appears three times: ἀπὸ Λαδικίας (from Laodicea, JIWE II 183), ἀπὸ Ἀκουιλείας (from Aquileia, JIWE II 238) and ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως (?) Ἀρκίης Λιβάνου (from the city (?) of Arca Libani, JIWE II 568). Last but not least, twice, the foreign origin of the deceased can be identified by their function within a specific Jewish non-Roman community which no Roman Jew would have belonged to: ἄρχων συναγωγῆς Τριπολιτῶν (archon of the synagogue of the Tripolitans, JIWE II 166) and γραμματεὺς Σεκηνῶν (*grammateus* of the Seceni, JIWE II 436).

Places of Origin of Non-Roman Jews

In most cases, the place of origin of a deceased non-Roman Jew or relative of a non-Roman Jew can be identified with the highest level of certainty. However, in four cases, including the epitaph considered as being of a non-Roman Jew by J.-B. Frey, we are left with various plausible hypotheses without being able to prove which one is right.

The Land of Israel/Palestine

Starting with the unequivocally certain cases, we can define five major areas of provenance of non-Roman newcomers. Unsurprisingly, the first one appears to be the Land of Israel, called Palestine since Hadrian, the focal point of the Jewish world. The persistence of the Land of Israel's centrality for the diasporic community of Rome in the studied period is evidenced by the reorientation works of the synagogue of Ostia, the oldest preserved synagogue in Western Europe, probably in the 4th century CE. Notably, it was moved so that the congregants would be able to face Jerusalem while praying.⁵ Furthermore, contacts between both communities are explicitly mentioned in the Talmud and other rabbinic sources, for instance in the famous aggadic passage staging Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah and a young Jewish boy used as a sexual slave in Rome who, after his liberation, is known as Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, a great Torah scholar in his own right.⁶ Four epitaphs mention a Palestinian origin of the deceased Jews commemorated on them or their relatives: one from Sepphoris, Galilee (JIWE II 60), one from Tiberias, also in Galilee (JIWE II 561) and two from Caesarea (JIWE II 112 and 459), one of which even specifies 'from Caesarea in Palestine' in order to differentiate from Caesarea in Mauretania (JIWE II 112). If we slightly broaden the geographical zone, we find one inscription (JIWE I 15) from Ostia, in the suburbs of Rome, from the 3rd century CE, in the same period as the catacombs' inscriptions, that commemorates the pantomime performer Marcus Aurelius Pylades from Beth She'an (Scythopolis). If we take into account literary sources that predate epigraphic ones by around two centuries, Flavius Josephus, who himself immigrated to Rome as a slave, mentions another comic actor, Aliturus, much beloved by Nero and Sabina Poppaea, who also arrived from Judea (*Vita* 16). It is worth noting that, from what our inscriptions tell us, a few centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and the massive arrival of Jewish slaves from Judea, most of the Jews who moved to Rome were not from Judea anymore, but from Galilee. This may be linked with the relocation of the central Jewish religious authority, the Great Sanhedrin, from Jerusalem to Galilee, first to Beth She'arim and Sepphoris and then to Tiberias in the first half of the 3rd century.⁷ Hence, as rabbinic centres, at that time, Tiberias was mostly entirely Jewish and Sepphoris predominantly Jewish.⁸ Coastal Caesarea, on the other hand, was a 'mixed' city, commonly characterised

⁵ Noy (2000), 267.

⁶ bb. Git. 58a = y. Hor. 3,4 (דף מ"ח, ע"ב) = t. Hor. 2,5. Additional evidence can be found in Safrai (1994), 367–369 who mentions, amongst others, t. Betsah (Lieberman) 2,12; Midrash Shemot Rabbah 30,9; Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 20,4; y. Sanh. 7,13 (דף כ"ה, ע"ד).

⁷ Oppenheimer (2021), 269.

⁸ Lieberman (1946), 368 and Sivan (2008), 318.

as highly Hellenised, and the 2nd–5th centuries CE have been called a ‘golden age’ by Irving Levey⁹ for Jews there.

Syria, Asia Minor, North Africa and Italy

The second place of origin, close to Palestine and part of the same Roman province, is Syria with one inscription pointing out an origin from Arca Libani (JIWE II 568), the hometown of emperor Severus Alexander. Asia Minor appears to be a third area of emigration for Jews, even though Hermias’ epitaph does not mention any specific region of emigration but, as we shall see, the phrasing indicates his Asian origin beyond a shadow of a doubt. The fourth area is North Africa, which counted numerous Jewish communities on its coast long before the Arab conquest,¹⁰ which one of the deceased surely came from: Maximus of Thrabaca, a town located on the Numidian shores (JIWE II 508). The last area of provenance, often overlooked despite being very important in order to understand truly the dynamics of Jewish communities in Italy, is Italy itself. Indeed, at least two inscriptions in my corpus bear witness to internal migrations of Jewish Italian communities, be it from the North (Aquileia, JIWE II 238) or from the South (Catania, JIWE II 515). The mention of both places is unsurprising since the presence of Jews in both cities is well attested. The first epigraphic mention of a Jew in Aquileia dates back to 1st century BCE with the epitaph of a freedman by the name of Lucius Aiadius Dama (JIWE I 7), even though, as H. Solin¹¹ rightly points out, one cannot deduce from this isolated inscription the existence of an established Jewish community at that time. However, such a community has indeed been proved by many sources, both archaeological and literary, in the 4th century, at the time of our Roman inscription: excavations there found three African-type lamps decorated with a menorah¹² while, in a letter to his sister Marcellina in 388 CE (XLI, 26), Ambrose, bishop of Milan, praises the Christians setting fire to the synagogue of Aquileia. As for Catania, six inscriptions (JIWE I 145–150) come from the Sicilian city, one in Latin and Hebrew dating back to 383 CE, that is in the same period of the Roman inscription, and five Greek epitaphs from the 4th–5th centuries. Furthermore, just like for Aquileia, there is knowledge of (at least) an individual Jew a few centuries before, since the Suda mentions the Jewish Sicilian rhetor Caecilius of Calacte, probably descending from Jewish slaves arrived after the Pompeian conquest of Judea, who lived during the reign of Augustus.¹³ Such internal migrations of Italian Jews are not uncommon later on, as epigraphical practices attest that some Jews buried in the catacombs of Venosa (late 4th–5th century), at Portus (3rd–4th century) and at Taranto (3rd–6th century) actually came from Rome¹⁴ and this phenomenon goes further into Italian Jewish history in the medieval period as well.

⁹ Levey (1975), 44.

¹⁰ Le Bohec (2021).

¹¹ Solin (1983), 612 n.37,613,649 and 727.

¹² Avneri (1962).

¹³ Leon (1960), 15.

¹⁴ Noy (2000), 197.

Four Inscription with Unclear Origins

When we come to the four inscriptions with no clear origin of the deceased evidenced, we can see that all suggest links to four of our five areas of origin, that is North Africa, Palestine, Asia Minor and Syria. Two epitaphs (JIWE II 113 and 166) commemorate the ἄρχων συναγωγῆς Τριπολιτῶν (archon of the synagogue of the Tripolitans) and εἰεροσάρχης Τριπολίτης (the Tripolitan gerusiarch) which points out to a synagogue reserved for Jews from Tripoli who moved to Rome and their descendants, although we cannot determine clearly whether this community came from Tripoli in Libya or Tripoli in Lebanon. According to S. Rocca,¹⁵ the North African Tripoli seems to be the most reasonable hypothesis and the many exchanges between Rome and Tripolitania support him but the sources are not clear enough for us to be more assertive. Another epitaph (JIWE II 183) is the epitaph of Ammias from Laodicea, which could refer to at least three different cities: Laodicea in Phrygia or Laodicea Combusta in Central Anatolia or even Laodicea in Syria. But, again, nothing allows us to identify the place more precisely. The last inscription of this series (JIWE II 436) indicates the existence of the community of the Σεκίνοι whose *grammateus* used to be Aiutor at some point. Not every reading of this inscription identifies this community as being composed by non-Roman Jews. B. Manna¹⁶ suggests that Σεκίνοι may refer to Sicininum, the name of an area located near the current S. Maria Maggiore in the 4th century, in the same way we find a community of the Campesians (after the Campus Martius area) and that of the Siburensians (after the quarter of Subura). However, the difference between the spelling of Σεκίνοι and Sicininum is quite considerable. H. Lietzmann proposed that Σεκίνοι be some transliteration of the Hebrew word עֲקֵיז, the Elders; no proof supports this claim and he himself rejected it in the end. Two readings consider the Σεκίνοι as being foreign Jews who settled in Rome but they do not agree on their origin. G. La Piana thinks that they come from Sacnia, a Galilean site located near Jotapata but this place was a small village, according to D. Noy¹⁷ probably destroyed in the 2nd century, which weakens the hypothesis that Jews would migrate from it in the 3rd–4th centuries. In my opinion, the most likely assumption has been formulated by J.-B. Frey, that is a North African origin from Scina or Iscina, on the shore of eastern Tripolitania, mentioned as *locus Iudaeorum Augusti* on the Tabula Peutingeriana, that corresponds to the current Madinat-al-Sultan, since the Tabula Peutingeriana is a copy of a Roman map from the 4th century, which is the period of the inscription.

Conclusion of the First Part: Foreign Jews Mainly Came from Coastal Cities

In this part, I have singled out the various places of origin of non-Roman Jews, showing the many migrations that took place in the 2nd–4th centuries from all the corners of the Mediterranean Sea, Asia and Africa alike, but also internally from other Jewish Italian communities that constituted the oldest Western Jewish diaspora. It is worth noting that most places foreign Jews come from, such as Aquileia, Catania, Caesarea or Tripoli, are coastal cities. This is not surprising, for maritime trade was one of the most attested Jewish activities by that time; one of the deceased commemorated in the inscriptions, Publius

¹⁵ Rocca (2019), 452.

¹⁶ Manna (1922), 214.

¹⁷ JIWE II 436, p. 361.

Catilius Hermias (JIWE II 360), a Roman citizen from Asia Minor, is said to have been an ἔμπορος (a trader).¹⁸ Such professions may have been performed by many among the non-Roman Jews, especially those coming from coasts, which may explain why they moved from their hometown, since these migrations were mostly due to economic reasons unlike those of the first Jews of Rome who had been forcibly brought as slaves.

NEWCOMERS AND LOCAL JEWS: INTERACTIONS ACCORDING TO EPIGRAPHY

Despite being short and not numerous, these thirteen inscriptions give us some valuable information about the way non-Roman Jews interacted with local Jews and were integrated into the whole Jewish Roman community.

Foreign Jews from Generation to Generation and by Marriage

First of all, since people were then identified by their belonging to a specific family through their patrilineal lineage, it is very obvious from the inscriptions that non-Roman identity was transmitted from generation to generation, at least, according to the epitaphs, from the generation of the newcomers to that of their children. While the epitaphs themselves do not record that their children were born in Rome, it is possible that they were born in Rome, yet retained the non-Roman identity through their fathers. Four inscriptions bear witness to that phenomenon: the epitaphs of Ursacia, daughter of Ursacius of Aquileia (JIWE II 238), Justus, son of Amachius of Catania (JIWE II 515), Justus and Alypius, sons of Alypius of Tiberias (JIWE II 561), and Alexandria, daughter of Alexander from Arca Libani (JIWE II 568). In one particular case (JIWE II 459), it is a woman, called Eusebis, who is identified through her Caesarean spouse Gelasius; her epitaph does not tell us whether she was herself non-Roman, she might also have been Roman but, in any case, after getting married, a Jewish woman, but also a Roman woman, would always be referred to as her husband's wife. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the reference to non-Roman origins is not only a matter of identification but it also works as a distinctive identity label used by those foreign Jews themselves in order to emphasise their pride in belonging to their non-Roman communities, a pride that they passed onto their children.

Non-Roman Jews in Rome: A Seeming 'Success Story'

At the same time, a few available elements tend to convey the idea of a rather good integration of those non-Roman Jews in the Jewish Roman community. In Rome, there is no specific catacomb, not even a specific area of a catacombs, reserved for Italian, Tripolitan or Palestinian Jews. This is unlike what one finds much later in the modern era in Jewish cemeteries like that of Tunis in which a wall literally separated the local Tunisian community and the 'elite' community of the Jews from Livorno or, even later on, like the cemeteries of Buenos Aires, La Tablada (among others) for Ashkenazim, Bancalari for Ladino-speaking Sephardim, Lomas de Zamora for Syrian Jews and Avellaneda for Moroccan Jews. The selected inscriptions come variably from Monteverde (JIWE II 60, 112, 113, 166 et 183), Vigna Randanini (JIWE II 238 et 360) and Villa Torlonia (JIWE II 436, 459, 508 et 515) (JIWE II 561 and 568 are of unknown

¹⁸ 'He is particularly likely to have been an immigrant in view of his profession.' Noy (2000), 196.

provenance). Roman and non-Roman Jews were all buried together in mixed areas, they were united in death the way they probably were while being alive. The main reason for this situation may have been the size of the Jewish Roman community, which, unlike the Jews of Tunis or those of Buenos Aires, represented a very tiny part of the whole Roman population, less than 2% according to L. Rutgers,¹⁹ so that it seemed logical to share spaces, especially funerary sites, for such a small amount of people.

Nonetheless, this was not the only reason. Beyond geographical differences and some quite dissimilar traditions and rites according to their communities, the Jews viewed themselves as a united people with a shared story and identity, an exclusive religion, common ancestors and a common homeland: they were foremost Jews before being Romans, Tripolitans or Catanians. As D. Noy phrases it, 'Jews from Asia perhaps had more in common with Jews from elsewhere than with other people from Asia'.²⁰ There is epigraphic evidence that supports this claim: the phrasing of Ammias' epitaph (JIWE II 183) identifies the deceased woman primarily as a *Ἰουδέα* (for *Ἰουδαία*, Jewess) and only after as *ἀπὸ Λαδικίας* (coming from Laodicea), which emphasises the national, ethnic and collective identity over the particular, individual and geographical identity. Interestingly enough, because of the existence of numerous Laodiceas, we are not able to identify which one was her hometown but we are sure about one thing: she was Jewish. This simple fact epitomises how much more significant her Jewish identity was than her identification with her hometown. Despite Jews having a particularly strong national feeling, among other groups, similar identities were prioritised over hometown: it also appears in the Greek world, very impregnated by panhellenic sentiments, as such expressed by the epitaph of a Greek woman from Apamea, buried in Rome in the 2nd–3rd centuries (IGUR 1287): *Ἑλλήν μὲν τὸ γένος, πατρίς δέ μοι ἦτον Ἀπάμεια* ('My race was Greek and my homeland was Apamea.'), with those meaningful words ordered in a way that is no less meaningful, the deceased Olympia introduces herself to the passing-by. Both inscriptions are of course the expression of particular individuals, both women, who saw themselves as belonging to a specific people but they also reflect collective representations of people with a strong identity. In the very peculiar case of Jews, the existence of specific Roman catacombs for Jews, from many different places, corroborates itself this view.

'DIASPORAS INSIDE THE DIASPORA': WHAT EPITAPHS REVEAL ABOUT SPECIFIC USES AND IMPLICIT USES AND IMPLICIT DISTINCTIVE MARKS

Even though Jewish inscriptions of Rome attest such a feeling of belonging to a unified people and of holding a shared identity and destiny, that is not to say that non-Roman Jews did not take any pride in displaying their community's origins by other means than simply referring to the place of origin. Thus, our epitaphs bear witness to the existence of

¹⁹ Rutgers (2006), 356.

²⁰ Noy (2000), 157. Incidentally, in her study on North African Jews, Stern draws the exact opposite conclusion: 'While scholars have largely treated Jews as exceptions to North African cultural processes, this book demonstrates how Jews were embedded in them to the same degree as their neighbors. The term "North African" possessed different meanings in distinct places and times, and so too did the term "Jewish" mean something different among distinct populations and in different places and times.' Stern (2008), 97.

‘diasporas inside the diaspora’ in the ancient city of Rome, with not only explicit but also implicit distinctive marks.

Non-Roman Synagogues in Rome: A Way to Preserve the Identity of Foreign Jewish Communities

The first way to perpetuate a strong bond to their home community, despite both the geographical and temporal distance to the land of their ancestors, was through the holding of administrative functions in synagogues that would carry on the specific traditions of their home community. As a matter of fact, after the destruction of the Second Temple, synagogues became hubs of community life and the heart of Jewish life. Therefore, it seems obvious that Jews not native to Rome would have had their own synagogues to rebuild their own communities, much as one synagogue, the synagogue of the Vernaculi, might have been the prayer house for local Roman Jews.²¹ One inscription mentions unequivocally a non-Roman synagogue, that of the Tripolitans (JIWE II 166), in which at some point Proclus served as an *archon* (an executive function in the community). The epitaph of Symmachus, gerusiarch (member of the assembly of the elders) of Tripolis (JIWE II 113), also seems to refer to that synagogue, even though the word ‘synagogue’ is not used. The epitaph of Aiutor, *grammateus* (scribe) of the Seceni (JIWE II 436), may also point out to another synagogue constituted by people coming probably from Scina or Iscina, as said before. The traces of these individual lives left on the inscriptions allow us to have a sense of the collective dimension of the transfer of rituals from home communities such as the Tripolitans’ to the rebuilt communities in Rome. Unfortunately, we cannot fully understand the nature of those transfers or the impact of the new Jewish Roman environment on those newly rebuilt communities and on their rituals. Indeed, just as the Jewish Italian ritual in Jerusalem is not exactly the same as in Rome, it seems probable to me that Jewish Tripolitan practices in Rome may not have been the same as in Tripoli. Sadly, this cannot be proven by our sources.

The Case of the Synagogue of the Hebrews and its Link with the Hebrew Language

One interesting case of a synagogue should be singled out: the synagogue of the Hebrews (τῶν Ἑβραίων for τῶν Ἑβραίων), clearly attested in four inscriptions (JIWE II 2, 33, 578 and 579). This synagogue was very probably the synagogue of Palestinian Jews who had moved to Rome and was, according to H. J. Leon,²² the first one to be established in the capital of the Roman Empire, which seems to be logical, since Jews as a collective group primarily came to Rome as slaves from Judea. The Jewish Palestinian character of the Ἑβραῖοι or, at least their close connection with Palestine,²³ is confirmed by two of our inscriptions (JIWE II 112 and 561) which, without mentioning explicitly the community of the Hebrews, identify the deceased as Hebrews and mention, at the same time, Caesarea and Tiberias as the Palestinian place of origin of them (JIWE II 112) or their father (JIWE II 561). The insistence on the ancestral origin and the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people through this repetition emphasises the feeling of pride and the affection of the deceased’s families towards their homeland. Three other inscriptions (JIWE II 4, 108 and

²¹ Noy (2000), 265.

²² Leon (1960), 147–149.

²³ Smith (1980), 19.

569) use the term Ἑδραῖος with no specification of a Palestinian origin. This reflects the word's association with the idea of piety; just like in Philo's and Josephus' works, Ἑδραῖος was used to designate particularly pious Jews of Palestine, who kept using the traditional languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, in their synagogue community.²⁴ Indeed, among the twelve inscriptions from the Jewish catacombs of Rome and other Jewish Roman sites that include Hebrew words or letters and the two inscriptions with Aramaic words or letters, one is directly connected with the Ἑδραῖος: the epitaph of Isidora, daughter of an *archon* of the Hebrews, that is bilingual Greek-Aramaic, Aramaic being precisely the vernacular language of the Jews from Palestine at that time. Two other inscriptions (JIWE II 539 and 551) presumably commemorate Jews of Palestinian origins and could have been included in my corpus under less strict criteria: the Greek epitaph of Tobias Barzaarona (JIWE II 539) that mentions four times the word שלום and that of little girl Hermione Barsheoda (JIWE II 551), in Greek as well but whose name appears written in Latin characters except for the sound 'sh' transcribed by a *shin*. But it does not seem to me that the use of the Hebrew language should be considered as an unequivocal criterion for Palestinian Jews, even though it was surely mainly spoken among those communities, since no evidence of a Palestinian origin appears on the other inscriptions including Hebrew/Aramaic. We even find שלום in the epitaph of Ammias, the Jewess from Laodicea. In my opinion, the very limited use of Hebrew in Jewish Roman inscriptions of that time, which announces its later development in the epitaphs of the catacombs of Venosa (6th–7th century) and of the Apulian city of Taranto (7th–8th century), shows at least some basic knowledge of Hebrew even for non-Palestinian Jews. It also exemplifies the way even a few words in Hebrew, mostly linked with the language of the Psalms, had sentimental, national and religious value related to the Jewish identity of the deceased and their belonging to the Jewish people, whether or not they had recently come to Rome from Palestine.

Cognomina: Another Criterion to Determine Foreign Origins?

In the two cases referred to earlier, I would not say that the presence of a Hebrew word or a Hebrew letter is a sufficient criterion to let us think that the deceased's families may have come from Palestine but their *cognomina* are a more determinant key, even though I have not included them in my corpus because of the less clear evidence. Indeed, Barzaarona and Barsheoda, that are not attested elsewhere, really sound Semitic and, strengthened with the use of Hebrew, this would suggest a Palestinian origin, even though it remains highly implicit due to the lack of parallels. Another case of the criterion of onomastics would be the use of the *cognomina* Hermias and Hermione in JIWE II 360, two *cognomina* that were very common in Asia Minor, the region the deceased seem to have come from. However, this criterion is not exclusive either: Hermione is also the first *cognomen* of Barsheoda (the latter being used as a *signum*) but this would not lead us to think that the girl's family came from Asia Minor. A stronger implicit criterion has to be used.

²⁴ Rebora (2023), 122–124. On the liturgical use of Hebrew, see Colorni (1964), 63.

How Epigraphical Uses Help us Identify Non-Roman Jews

This brings us to the last implicit proof of foreign origin, namely epigraphical and linguistic uses. This criterion is both strong and very interesting since it allows us to measure somehow better the extent of cultural transfers from home communities to Rome through individuals whose epigraphical and linguistic uses were not specific to their Jewish identity but to their place of origin. Such a practice is attested in one inscription of my corpus, the epitaph of Hermias' family (JIWE II 360), whose origin can be deduced at a quite precise stage from the curse addressed by Hermias, the father of the family, to anyone who would possibly plunder the family's grave. The used formulae have no parallel among Jewish inscriptions from Rome nor among non-Jewish inscriptions from Rome but we find them among Jewish and non-Jewish inscriptions from Asia Minor, especially from Phrygia,²⁵ and non-Jewish inscriptions from Rome that commemorate immigrants from Asia Minor (for instance in IGUR 837). Two peculiar elements strongly advocate for a family origin from Asia Minor. First of all, the evocation of a financial penalty of 5 000 *denarii* to be deposited in the treasure,²⁶ a sizeable fine to whomever would open the grave, is typical of Asia Minor's epigraphical culture: it is also found in Rome, but in the epitaph of a family coming from Smyrna (IG XIV, 1815), in Eumeneia (inscription n. 217 of W. M. Ramsay's corpus),²⁷ in Klaudiu Polis (IK XXXI, 39) and in Nicomedia, Bithynia (TAM IV, 231, 239, 243, 260, 285 and 332). The second proof is even stronger since it gives us a more accurate insight into the area and maybe even the city Hermias' family originated in. This evidence is the idiom ἡ Θεοῦ ὀργή ('God's wrath'), used in the Psalms (see Ps 78, 31), which appears in numerous Jewish epitaphs from Asia Minor, especially in Acmonia, Phrygia (see n. 5, 6 and foremost 12,²⁸ inscriptions from that city that are quoted by J. Strubbe). Therefore, a Phrygian origin of Hermias' family is highly probable and it is not unlikely at all to suppose that they even came from Acmonia, a conclusion that D. Noy dares to draw.²⁹ As L. Robert has displayed in his study,³⁰ this Phrygian city included a Jewish community that was well-developed, prosperous and involved in the city life; many Jews were even Roman citizens, as Publius Catilius Hermias was. Hermias' family was therefore composed of Jews from Asia Minor, most likely from the city of Acmonia, Phrygia, who came to Rome seemingly because of Hermias' work but remained faithful to the epigraphical practices of their place of origin. The example of this family reminds us that circulation of individuals and communities from one place to Rome also meant circulation of non-Roman uses, including epigraphical ones, as well as cultural contribution of these foreign Jews.

²⁵ Robert (1978). L. Robert shows how predominant they are in Asia Minor as well as how polytheist and Jewish inhabitants there influenced each other. For a complete catalogue of Jewish curses from Asia Minor, mostly from Phrygia, see Trebilco (1991), 60–79.

²⁶ The reference to the treasure has not been clearly identified but may be related to the acquisition procedures for the graves.

²⁷ Ramsay (1897).

²⁸ Inscription n. 12 corresponds to MAMA vi 325 and dates back to 255/256 CE. Its conclusion is almost identical to our inscription.

²⁹ Noy (2000), 258.

³⁰ Robert (1975).

General Conclusion of the Study

As a general conclusion, epigraphical material certifying the existence of foreign Jews among Roman Jews, coming from other parts of Italy, Palestine, North Africa or Asia Minor, contributes a lot to a better understanding of the way Jewish Roman communities worked, showing how diverse they were already in Late Antiquity. It is all the more important that Jews, whether Roman or not and across the centuries, were a very distinct immigrant group inside the city of Rome and were clearly identified as such: to quote L. Rutgers, ‘in ancient Rome Syrian immigrants never had nor could have the sense of belonging that many Jews in this city must have felt. The Jews of Rome were a *people* in the sense that their Syrian neighbors were not’.³¹ As a matter of fact, many generations after most of them arrived, they would keep using their languages, especially Greek, whereas other Oriental groups, such as Syrians, switched to Latin around the 2nd–3rd century, with the result that other groups became less cohesive from generation to generation, which was not the case of the Jews as a people. Hence, it is worthwhile analysing the same phenomenon inside the group and uncovering the way those ‘diasporas inside the diaspora’ managed to integrate into the larger Jewish community of Rome, precisely because of their shared identity, story and religion as a people (see Ammias’ epitaph), while preserving their local specificities as evidenced by the existence of distinctive communities and synagogues, such as that of the Tripolitans, or by the peculiar epigraphical practices of Hermias’ family that cannot be understood out of their specific Asian Minor context.

At the same time, as D. Noy points out in his monograph, a researcher has to acknowledge the existing bias of their sources. For Jewish sources, one should not forget that not every Jew would have explicitly expressed their Jewish identity on their grave and not every Jew, especially in the elite, would have been buried among their fellow Jews. Likewise, not every foreign Jew would have made it clear that they did not come from the place. In D. Noy’s words, ‘those who preferred to blend into the Roman background are now largely invisible in the sources’.³² Consequently, I cannot truly speak for them in my analyses but I am aware of the existence of such individuals. Nevertheless, this study offers us a better understanding of what interactions of most of non-Roman Jews with their Jewish Roman environment may have looked like and how these foreign Jews expressed their peculiar Jewish non-Roman identity, be it in their life or in their death, as far as can be deduced from the few sources still available to us.

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³¹ Rutgers (1995), 48–49.

³² Noy (2000), 157.

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