Transplanted Communities in Iudaea/Palaestina: The Epigraphic Evidence*

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The inscriptions from the Jewish catacombs of ancient Rome mention at least eleven different named synagogues in the city. These congregations were named variously for patrons, districts in Rome, the status of the members or their city of origin.[1] This last category contains the synagogues of the Tripolitans and of Elaea (and possibly others), and it is likely that these names represent not only the origin of the founder of the synagogue but the continued identification of the members. Apparently, then, communities of foreign Jews settled (or were settled) in the imperial capital and maintained their ethnic identity over generations. The question this article addresses is whether similarly good evidence for such a phenomenon can be found during the period of Roman domination in Iudaea/Palaestina, the region that had the largest concentration of Jewish synagogue communities in the ancient world, and held as well a certain ideological and sentimental value which the city of Rome never had for Jews. The *literary* evidence for the phenomenon has been gathered and analyzed, and shown to be of limited historical value.[2] The matter treated in this article is whether there is any epigraphical evidence, and what its value is.

It is well known that many Jews of foreign origin were buried in the big *necropoleis* in Iudaea/Palaestina, particularly in Jerusalem through the first century C.E. and in Beth She'arim and Jaffa in the third to sixth centuries C.E.[3] Regarding the cases of Jerusalem and Beth She'arim, it is widely assumed that the symbolic value of each place is what led so many individuals to desire to be buried there. The status of Eretz Israel in the belief

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1 H. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, Philadelphia 1960, 135-66. The latest editions of the inscriptions are in D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe* II, *The City of Rome*, Cambridge 1995, cf. index pp. 539-40.

2 S. Miller, 'On the Number of Synagogues in the Cities of Erez Israel', *JJS* 49, 1998, 51-66. See also L.I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, New Haven 2000, 191-3.

3 Jerusalem: J.J. Price, 'The Jewish Population of Jerusalem from the First Century B.C.E. to the Early Second Century C.E.: The Epigraphic Record', in M. Popovic, ed., *The Jewish Revolt against Rome: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, [Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 154] Leiden 2011, 399-417; A. Kloner and B. Zissu, *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period*, Leuven 2007. Jaffa and Beth She'arim: see now J.J. Price, 'The Necropolis at Jaffa and its Relation to Beth She'arim', in B. Isaac and Y. Shahar, eds., *Judaea-Palaestina, Babylon and Rome: Jews in Antiquity*, Tübingen 2012, 211-22, with earlier bibliography; and on the date of Beth She'arim, Z. Weiss, 'Burial Practices in Beth She'arim and the Date the Patriarchal Necropolis', *Zion* 75, 2010, 265-90 (Heb.), more briefly in English as 'Burial Practices in Beth She'arim and the Question of Dating the Patriarchal Necropolis', in Z. Weiss, O. Irshai, J. Magness, and S. Schwartz, eds., *"Follow the Wise" (B Sanhedrin 32b): Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine*, New York 2010, 205-29.

systems of the Jews in the Roman period is a contentious issue,[4] but whatever ideology or belief the foreign graves reflect, they are certainly not evidence for habitation in Iudaea/Palaestina, much less for communities of Jews of the same origin having immigrated there. In some cases it can be demonstrated, and in others assumed, that the bones of the deceased were brought up to the Holy Land after their death.[5] The case of Jaffa is somewhat different, and will be discussed below. We shall examine inscriptions from four places — Jerusalem, Sepphoris, Beth She'arim and Jaffa — which may relate more directly to transplanted communities.

Jerusalem

According to *Acts* 6:9, Stephen's demonstrations of Christian faith in Jerusalem drew a strong response:

> Ἀνέστησαν δέ τινες τῶν ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς λεγομένης Λιβερτίνων καὶ Κυρηναίων καὶ Ἀλεξανδρέων καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ Κιλικίας καὶ Ἀσίας συνζητοῦντες τῷ Στεφάνῳ.
>
> Some of those from the so-called Synagogue of the Freedmen, and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen.

The number of synagogues mentioned in this verse is disputed. Interpretations have taken into account all grammatical possibilities, ranging from one synagogue with multiple ethnic membership, to five different communities.[6] While a definitive solution to this problem is not critical to the present study, we shall state that both the syntax and sense of the sentence seem to indicate four different institutions, i.e., one of the Freedmen, a second of the Cyrenians, a third of the Alexandrians, and a fourth of the immigrants from Cilicia and (other parts of) Asia. A synagogue of Alexandrians in Jerusalem is mentioned in a rabbinic story related about a late first-century sage who purchased the synagogue (*Tos. Meg*. 2:17),[7] and this may indeed reflect the same

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4 B. Halpern Amaru, 'Land Theology in Josephus' "Jewish Antiquities"', *JQR* 71, 1981, 201-29; E. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans*, Cambridge, MA 2002, 232-52; D.R. Schwartz, ' "Wo wohnt Gott?" – Die Juden und ihr Gott zwischen Judenstaat, Diaspora und Himmel', *Gottesstaat oder Staat ohne Gott: Politische Theologie in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, [Linzer philosophisch-theologische Beiträge 8] Frankfurt am Main 2002, 58-73; id., 'Josephus on the Pharisees as Diaspora Jews', in C. Böttrich and J. Herzer, eds., *Josephus und das Neue Testament: Wechselseitige Wahrnehmungen*, Tübingen 2007, 137-46.

5 Y. Gafni, 'Reinternment in the Land of Israel: Notes on the Origin and Development of the Custom', *Cathedra* 4, 1977, 113-120 (Heb.); T. Rajak, 'The Rabbinic Dead and the Diaspora Dead at Beth She'arim', in T. Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome*, Leiden 2002, 479-99.

6 R. Riesner, 'Synagogues in Jerusalem', in R. Bauckham, ed., *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, Vol. 4, Grand Rapids, MI, 1995, 179-211.

7 אמר ר' יהודה מעשה בר' לעזר בי ר' צדוק שלקח בית הכנסת של אכסנדריים שהיתה בירושלים והיה עושה בה כל חפצו, לא אסרו אלא שלא יהא שם הראשון קרוי עליו. The same story is told in *yMeg*. 3.1 73d without mention of Jerusalem, see S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah* V, 1962, 1162, who mentions a similar tradition in *bMeg* 26a about a synagogue of Tarsians in Jerusalem, which he notes is difficult to accept as historical. The attribution of the story to R. Elazar b. Zadok

historical memory recorded in *Acts*. The information as to the existence of all these communities, given as incidental detail in both sources, seems precise and unobjectionable. This is not the case with a later rabbinic tradition recording 480 synagogues in first-century Jerusalem:

> As R. Pinchas says in the name of R. Hoshaya, 'There were four-hundred and eighty synagogues in Jerusalem and each one had a bet sefer and a bet Talmud — a bet sefer for [the study of] Scripture and a bet Talmud [for the study of] Mishnah. And Vespasian went up [and burnt] all of them.[8]

In an understatement, Miller dismisses the story and the number 480 as 'rather imaginative', and he points out that the fantastic number is based on *gematria* derived from a verse in Isaiah.[9]

No trace of any of the communities mentioned in *Acts* or rabbinic sources has been found in archaeological excavations in the city, and nothing more is known about them: how long they had been in Jerusalem (obviously they all pre-date the destruction of the city in 70 C.E.), why they moved there, how coherent they remained as ethnic groups after their arrival and whether each had its own synagogue building. In fact, the only physical remains of a synagogue in Jerusalem is the well-known Theodotos inscription, documenting the existence of a synagogue community transplanted from somewhere unspecified to a structure built in Jerusalem some time before 70, when it was destroyed along with the rest of the city.[10] The limestone slab, which is all that remains of the synagogue, preserves the full text, as follows:

> Θεόδοτος Οὐεττήνου, ἱερεὺς καὶ | ἀρχισυνάγωγος, υἱὸς ἀρχισυν[αγώ]|γου, υἱωνὸς ἀρχισυν[α]γώγου, ᾠκο|δόμησε τὴν συναγωγὴν εἰς ἀνά[γ]νω|σ[ι]ν νόμου καὶ εἰς [δ]ιδαχ[ὴ]ν ἐντολῶν, καὶ | τ[ὸ]ν ξενῶνα, κα[ὶ τὰ] δώματα καὶ τὰ χρη|σ[τ]ήρια τῶν ὑδάτων, εἰς κατάλυμα τοῖ|ς [χ]ρήζουσιν ἀπὸ τῆς ξέ[ν]ης, ἣν ἐθεμε|λ[ί]ωσαν οἱ πατέρες αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ πρε|σ[β]ύτεροι καὶ Σιμωνίδης.
>
> Theodotos son of Vettenos, priest and *archisynagōgos*, son of an *archisynagōgos*, grandson of an *archisynagōgos*, built the synagogue for the reading of the Law and teaching of the commandments, and the guest-house and the (other) rooms and water installations(?) for the lodging of those who are in need of it from abroad, which (= the synagogue) his forefathers, the elders and Simonides founded.

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would push the chronology of the story later than the destruction of the Temple, thus the suggestion to emend the text to R. Zadok, who lived through the destruction, unless it is posited that R. Elazar b. Zadok was trying to purchase a ruin; but this chronological point is not crucial to the information regarding the existence of a synagogue of Alexandrians in Jerusalem. The Mishnah mentions a synagogue in the Temple precincts (*Yoma* 7.1; *Sotah* 7.7, 8), and see F. Hüttenmeister and G. Reeg, *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel*, Wiesbaden 1977, 192-210, on all rabbinic sources mentioning synagogues in Jerusalem

8 *yMeg*. 3.1 73d, translation S. Miller (above, n. 2), 52; see his discussion 51ff.

9 Miller, ibid., cites other rabbinic traditions deriving the number 460 (*yKet* 35c) and 394 (*bKet*. 105a).

10 See now the edition of the inscription in *CIIP* I, 9, on which the following discussion rests. Also Price (above, n. 3) for what follows.

It is noteworthy that the word συναγωγή is used to signify both the building and the community: Theodotos 'built the synagogue' (ᾠκοδόμησε τὴν συναγωγήν) 'which his forefathers had founded' (ἣν ἐθεμελίωσαν οἱ πατέρες αὐτοῦ), the relative pronoun referring back to συναγωγή. In the first instance, only a building can be meant, since the verb οἰκοδομεῖν normally refers to a physical structure and does not mean 'built again' or 'renewed', for which other words are used in epigraphy, such as the verb ἀνανεοῦσθαι or a circumlocution (e.g., τὸ ἔργον ἐγένετο), whereas the verb θεμελιοῦν can indeed refer metaphorically to founding a community, kingdom, and so forth.[11] The same double use of the word συναγωγή occurs in an inscription contemporary with this one (55-6 C.E.) from Berenice: ἐφάνη τῇ συναγωγῇ τῶν ἐν Βερνεικίδι | Ἰουδαίων τοὺς ἐπιδίδοντ{α}ς εἰς ἐπισκευ|ὴν τῆς συναγωγῆς ἀναγράψαι κτλ.[12] where the first use of the word refers to the community and the second to the building which was renovated. Thus it seems clearly implied that Theodotos moved his community to Jerusalem and built for them there the synagogue building which his inscription records and celebrates.

Theodotos does not state, however, where he or his forefathers came from, although it has been plausibly conjectured that the Latin name of Theodotos' father, Vettenus, points to Italy or a western province; we have seen that the catacombs in Rome yield evidence for ethnic communities which seemed to have maintained themselves among the Jewish population. Moreover, it is not at all possible to construe, based solely on the evidence of the inscription, that the community which Theodotos brought to Jerusalem from abroad stayed together as an ethnic community, or referred to themselves by any ethnic label. On the contrary, Theodotos states that the guest facilities, and by implication Torah study as well, were for 'the lodging of those who are in need of it from abroad', i.e. for the many ethnically varied pilgrims who flooded Jerusalem especially during the three major Jewish festivals. The inscription was thought by its original editor, Weill, and others of that and later generations (Vincent, Dalman et al.), to represent the 'Synagogue of the Freedmen' mentioned in *Acts*; similarly, Jeremias identified the inscription with the synagogue of the Tarsians, but these suggestions derive more from the scholarly compulsion to give coherence to scrappy unconnected facts than anything inherent in either text.[13] Yet it can be said that Theodotos' synagogue is not likely to have been the only one of its kind in the Jerusalem even while the Temple stood; that would be odder than assuming that this substantial inscription, preserved against all odds in a city which suffered repeated destruction and rebuilding,[14] represented a more

11 The examples of each verb in inscriptions across the Mediterranean are extremely numerous. To cite just the examples in the published volumes of *CIIP*: ἀνανεοῦσθαι: *CIIP* I, 796; II 1259, III 2468, 2475. θεμελιοῦν: *CIIP* II, 1348.

12 G. Lüderitz, *Corpus jüdischer Zeugnisse aus der Cyrenaika*, mit einem Anhang von Joyce M. Reynolds, Wiesbaden 1983, no. 72. Josephus uses the word to mean building but not community in general: *BJ* 2.285, 289, 7.44; *AJ* 1.10, 15.346, 19.300-5; cf. R. Riesner (above, n. 6); for a summary of evidence, debates, bibliography, see L.I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue* (above, n. 2), chs. 2-4.

13 See commentary to *CIIP* I, 9, and bibliography listed there.

14 The inscription was found in a cistern, where it might have been deliberately put to preserve it from destruction. H. Kee's attempt to show that the Theodotos inscription and *New Testament* references to synagogues in Jerusalem and elsewhere in Paul's time were anachronistic, has failed utterly, see commentary to *CIIP* I, 9.

widespread phenomenon, especially since the synagogue as an institution had already been established in Judaea before the destruction of the Temple.

There is very little information about synagogues or Jewish communities in Jerusalem from 70 C.E. until the end of the Roman period, nor should we expect to find any. Hadrian and then Constantine banned Jews from the city, and despite brief periods in which the ban seems to have been relaxed, as well as real evidence for Jewish presence in the city during the prolonged Roman and Byzantine period, there would have been scant opportunity for the establishment of a community with its own building.[15] Scattered Christian references to synagogues in the city after the Temple's destruction are not reliable, and reflect confusion or ignorance, or religious triumphalism, rather than precise observation.[16] Aside from these references, there is no archaeological or epigraphical trace of a synagogue in Jerusalem from the time of Theodotos' dedication to the Muslim conquest. Given what is known about the Jewish population in Jerusalem during those centuries, it is not to be expected that future excavations will yield any monumental synagogue structures or inscriptions, much less evidence for transplanted communities.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jewish population shifted north, settling in the major cities — Sepphoris, Tiberias, Scythopolis, Caesarea — as well as in rural areas.[17] Indeed, synagogue buildings with inscriptions proliferate from about the third century C.E., the main concentration being in the Galilee and the Beth She'an valley.[18] Among the epigraphical bonanza from this period, there are really only three sites from which the inscriptions are even potentially relevant to the subject under investigation here: Sepphoris, Jaffa and Beth She'arim.[19]

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15 See B. Isaac, in his introduction to the Jerusalem inscriptions in *CIIP* I, pp. 15-17, 23-5, 28-9; J.J. Price, above n. 3; and for more detailed treatment of all the sources, S. Safrai, 'The Jews of Jerusalem during the Roman Period' and 'Jerusalem and the Jews from Constantine to the Muslim Conquest', in Y. Tasfrir and S. Safrai, eds., *The History of Jerusalem: The Roman and Byzantine Periods (70-638 CE)*, Jerusalem 1999, 15-34, 239-59 (Heb.).

16 Isaac discusses the mentions by Epiphanius and the Bordeaux pilgrim of remains of synagogues in Hadrian's time and as late as the fourth century, on which see also Miller (above, n. 2), 54-5 and Riesner (above, n. 6), 190

17 See, e.g. (among massive literature), the articles in S. Safrai, Z. Baras and Y. Tsafrir, eds., *Eretz Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest*, Vol. 1, Jerusalem 1982 (Heb.), esp. A. Oppenheimer, 'The Revival of the Jewish Population in the Galilee', 75-92 and S. Safrai, 'The Jewish Population in the Galilee and the Golan in the Third and Fourth Centuries', 144-179.

18 See map in Levine, p. 164.

19 Although outdated, the still-standard sources for the synagogue inscriptions from Iudaea/Palaestina are J. Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic: The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues*, Jerusalem 1978, (Heb.) and L. Roth-Gerson, *The Greek Inscriptions from the Synagogues in Eretz-Israel*, Jerusalem 1987, (Heb.); and see the synagogue texts from the coastal areas, re-edited and published in *CIIP* II and III. In addition to Sepphoris and Jaffa, discussed in what follows, Tiberias is said to have had 13 synagogues, one of which was the 'Synagogue of the Babylonians of Tiberias', see Miller (above n. 2) 55-8 for sources and discussion. Yet while the remains of synagogues at Tiberias and Ḥammat Tiberias may have been included in the 13 — unless that number is fabulous, as Miller strongly suggests — there is nothing in the epigraphy from Tiberias, including the lavishly

Sepphoris

Rabbinic sources seem to speak of eighteen synagogues in Sepphoris at the time of R. Judah the Patriarch's death, and three are mentioned by name: the 'Synagogue of the Babylonians in Sepphoris', the 'Synagogue of Gofna in Sepphoris' and the 'Great Synagogue of Sepphoris'.[20] These sources have been thoroughly discussed by Miller, who reinterprets the relevant texts to indicate that the eighteen were not even in Sepphoris but along the route from Sepphoris to Beth She'arim, whereas he takes seriously the more specific mention of the three named communities.[21] The Jerusalem Talmud also mentions a community of Cappadocians in Sepphoris, which may indicate a community organized around a synagogue.[22]

There is no direct epigraphic evidence for any of these ethnic communities in Sepphoris, neither from the two synagogue sites excavated there nor from the inscriptions emerging from them. In the recently published synagogue by Zeev Weiss et al., with the mostly intact mosaic floor containing dedications in Aramaic and Greek, the donors recorded — typically — only their names, blessings for themselves and their families, and the nature of their benefactions.[23] No general or individual inscription identifies the synagogue itself by name, which indeed would have been highly unusual.

Yet in the synagogue partly excavated on the site of the Church of Ste. Anne, there was found, along with an Aramaic dedication using the typical *dkyr ltb* dedicatory formula, a curious inscription in Greek which was thought by its original editors, followed by most subsequent editors and commentators, to offer physical testimony to communities of Tyrians and Sidonians in Sepphoris.[24] The inscription seems to be complete on the stone, which is whole. The letters can be read (from drawing and photo) as follows:

ΤΟΥΕΛΑΣΙΟΥΣΧΟΚΩΧΛΑΜΠΧΥΕΙΟΥΑΕΤΙΟΥΤΟ
ΥΚΟΧΕΙΟΥΔΑΡΧΙΣΥΝΑΓΩΓΟΥΣΙΔΟΝΙΟΥΑΡΧΙΣΥΝΑΓ
ΩΓΟΥΠΕΡΙΕΡΘΟΝΤΑΔΣΥΒΕΡΙΑΝΟΑΦΡΟΑΡΧΙΣΥΝΑΓ
ΩΓΟΤΥΡΟΥΛΑΜΠΡΧ

The incised letters are for the most part clear, but the decipherment of words and syntax is not simple or straightforward, and any interpretation will require corrections and

mosaicked synagogue floor from Hammat Tiberias, which even hints at any ethnic affiliation.

20 Eighteen: *yKil*. 9.4 32b, *yKet*. 12.3 35a, *Eccl.R* 7.11. Babylonians: *Gen.R* 33.3, 52.3; *yBer*. 5, 9a, *yShabb*. 6, 8a, *ySan*. 10, 28a. Gofna: *yBer*. 3, 6a. Great Synagogue: *Pesiqta' De-Rav Kahana* 18. On all of these: Miller (above, n. 2), 59-63; Z. Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue: Deciphering an Ancient Message through its Archaeological and Socio-Historical Contents*, Jerusalem 2005, 2.

21 Miller (above, n. 2), 59-63.

22 As suggested by Levine, 191, citing *yShev*. 9.5 39a. See discussion of Cappadocians in Jaffa, below.

23 Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue* (above, n. 20), 199-223 (with L. Di Segni).

24 The inscription was first published by W. Ewing in *PEFQS* 1895, 354. See early bibliography in *CIJ* II, p. 175 and *SEG* 8 16, and drawing in *IJO* III, Syr5.

amplifications to the inscribed text. The following edited version requires relatively few alterations:

> τοῦ Ἑλασίου σχο(λαστικοῦ)[25] κώ(μητος) λαμπροτάτου υείοῦ Ἀετίου το-
> ῦ κό(μητος), Εἰούδα[26] <ἀ>ρχισυναγώγου, Σιδονίου ἀρχισυναγ-
> ώγου ΠΕΡΙΕΡΘΟΝΤΑΔ, Συβεριάνο(υ) Ἄφρο(υ) ἀρχισυναγ-
> ώγο(υ) Τύρου λαμπρ(οτάτης).[27]
>
> (Tomb or donation) of Helasios the most illustrious scholasticus and *cōmēs*, son of Aetios the *cōmēs*, (and) of Eiouda (Judah) the *archisynagōgos*, (and) of Sidonios the *archisynagōgos* of Peri- (?), (and) of Suberianos (= Severianos) (son of?) Afros (= Afer), *archisynagōgos* of the most illustrious (city of) Tyre.

In this interpretation, editorial intervention is necessary 1) to fill out the abbreviations, which are marked by X on the stone, of σχο(λαστικοῦ), κώ(μητος) and κό(μητος), and λαμπρ(οτάτης); 2) to correct the haplography in Εἰούδα <ἀ>ρχισυναγώγου; and 3) to supply the final upsilons for the string of genitives Συβεριάνο(υ) Ἄφρο(υ) ἀρχισυναγώγο(υ) in ll. 3-4. All of these matters are epigraphically routine, especially for an inscription produced by an obviously unprofessional hand (the letters vary in size, the same letters have varying shapes, the lines are crooked and poorly planned). Thus what we have is a series of distinguished individuals, including three archisynagogoi and one — Helasios — who is identified at the head of the inscription by his civic offices and may not even have been Jewish, but probably was.

There is really no way of deciding the function of the stone merely from its contents, although it should be noted that as a public dedication, especially in light of the distinction of the individuals mentioned, the execution is unusually sloppy and inept, and does not compare favorably with other Greek dedications in synagogues in Iudaea/Palaestina and the Diaspora, starting with the well-executed mosaic pavement of the other synagogue at Sepphoris. As an epitaph, even on the lintel of the entrance to a monumental and well-appointed tomb, the quality of the inscription is less problematic.

The two biggest problems with the interpretation offered here are, first, that the inscription begins with τοῦ, which is highly unusual. It should be noted that the upper left-hand corner of the stone is abraded and only the upsilon can be clearly seen. Yet assuming that the inscription is complete (i.e. there is no line missing above the surviving text), it is difficult to imagine what other word or formula ending in upsilon could have fit in that small space (there is not enough room for any variation of ΕΤΟΥΣ + numeral). It is possible that the inscriber meant to begin the inscription by incising Ἑλασίου τοῦ σχο(λαστικοῦ), like Ἀετίου τοῦ κό(μητος) in ll. 1-2, but mistakenly reversed the name and definite article and, since it could not be easily corrected and the stone was expensive, decided that it made sense as it was.

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25 Assuming the letter after Σ in line 1 is chi, and not the abbreviation mark X used in the same line and elsewhere in the inscription, even though there is no difference in the form of each.

26 The very small upsilon between omicron and delta was apparently forgotten by the inscriber and added after the delta was inscribed.

27 λαμπροτάτη with a city or province is well-attested: the online index to *SEG* lists 40 (http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/supplementum-epigraphicum-graecum).

Second, the inscrutable ΠΕΡΙΕΡΘΟΝΤΑΔ in l. 3, for which various suggestions have been offered. The syntactical flow of the inscription such as is offered here, i.e. a string of names and titles in the genitive (and not a coherent sentence with a subject and verb + object), seems to require a place-name or entity of which Sidonios was the *archisynagōgos*. No exact or even close match of a city name beginning with Peri- is to be found in the Gazetteer of Barrington's Atlas. Alternatively, the word may refer to part of a building, such as περιελθόντα (= περίβολος), serving as a metonymy for the synagogue building in which the inscription was set up — if indeed it was set up in a building to record a dedication, which is far from certain.

However these two problems may be solved, the inscription thus rendered would *not* seem to indicate a community of Tyrians in Sepphoris, especially if Τύρου λαμπρ(οτάτης) is correct — and given its placement in the text, that is the easiest rendering.[28] Rather, the *archisynagōgos* of Tyre somehow found his way to Sepphoris so that he was included in a group of distinguished *archisynagōgoi*, either in a joint dedication or a joint tomb. Finally, while Sidonios can mean 'from Sidon', its place in the sequence Εἰούδα ἀρχισυναγώγου Σιδονίου ἀρχισυναγώγου ΠΕΡΙ- makes it almost certainly a personal name.[29] Therefore, this inscription does not seem to contain evidence for transplanted communities from Tyre or Sidon in Sepphoris.

This negative conclusion must be stated since the most-cited decipherments and interpretations of the text do read it as evidence for Jewish communities from Sidon and/or Tyre in Sepphoris. While the first editions and commentaries did not succeed in deciphering enough of the text to make sense of it, Sukenik revisited the stone in 1935 and produced a good reading on which Schwabe developed an interpretation which has been followed, with only slight variations and few exceptions, since then.[30] Schwabe

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28 The editors of *SEG* 8 16 already suggested Τύρου λαμπ(ροτάτης πόλεως), but this suggestion was hardly noticed.

29 Which is indeed attested, see Σιδώνιος in *LPGN* and Y. Le Bohec, 'Inscriptions juives et judaïsantes de l'Afrique romaine', *Antiquités africaines*, 17, 1981, 165-207 at 188 no. 57 and id., 'Juifs et Judaïsants dans l'Afrique romaine. Remarques onomastiques', ibid. 209-229 at 225.

30 M. Schwabe, 'The inscription from the synagogue in Sepphoris', in *Mincha le-David* (jubilee volume for David Yellin), Jerusalem 1935, 99-112 (Heb.); E. Sukenik, *JPOS* 15, 1935, 133 and id., *The Ancient Synagogue of El-Hammeh*, Jerusalem 1935, 48. The slight emendations of Sukenik – Schwabe in the subsequent major editions are not important for the present article: *SEG* 8, 16 and *SEG* 37 1476; *CIJ* II, 991; Lifshitz, *Donateurs et fondateurs dans les synagogues juives*, Paris 1967, 59-60, no. 74; F. Hüttenmeister and G. Reeg, *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel*, Wiesbaden 1977, 404-7, with all variant readings up to that point; B. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue. Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues* [BJS 36], Atlanta 1982, 229 n. 93; G. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* 4, 1987, 216 nos. 31-3; L. Roth-Gerson, *The Greek Inscriptions* (above, n. 19), 105-10, no. 24; T. Rajak and D. Noy, 'Archisynagogoi: Office, Title and Social Status in the Greco-Jewish Synagogue', *JRS* 83 1993, 75-93 at 86, 91 no. 26; J.F. Strange, T.R.W. Longstaff, D.E. Groh, *Excavations in Sepphoris I: University of Florida Probes in the Citadel and Villa*, Leiden 2006, 24-29; *IJO* III, Syr5, with further bibliography.

dated the inscription to the first half of the fifth century and read the inscription as follows:

> ̣τοῦ <Γ>ελασίου σχ<ο>(λαστικοῦ) κώ(μητος) λαμπ(ροτάτου) υείοῦ Ἀετίου ̣τ̣ρ̣|ῦ κό(μητος), Εἰούδ<α> ἀρχισυναγώγου, Σιδονίου ἀρχισυναγ|ώγου, περιε<λ>θόντα <τά>δε ὑ<π>ὲρ Ἰάνο<υ> Ἄφρο<υ> ἀρχισυναγ|ώγο<υ> Τύρου λαμπ(ροτάτου).

Schwabe offered two possible translations, the first construing the text as a dedication of the synagogue walls by Gelasius, Sidonius and Judah 'on behalf of (ὑπὲρ) Janus Afrus the most illustrious *archisynagōgos* of Tyre [i.e., of the Tyrians]'.[31] Judah and Sidonius were thus both *archisynagōgoi* of the Sepphoris synagogue (!), and Tyrians who had settled in Sepphoris formed their own community. Schwabe's second reading, which he offers cautiously but nonetheless defends expansively, is as follows: 'these synagogue walls (were built) by Gelasius, the most illustrious scholasticus and *cōmēs*, son of Aetius the *cōmēs*, head of the synagogue of the Judaeans and head of the Sidonian synagogue, on behalf of Janus, most illustrious head of the synagogue of the Africans who are in Tyre'. By this rendering, there is not just a Tyrian synagogue in Sepphoris, but also one of Judaeans, another of Sidonians[32] and yet another of Tyrians of African origins who settled in the city. Schwabe found at least one and at most four transplanted communities named in this inscription.

These possibilities were treated by subsequent editors in different ways, but all accepted that Sepphoris had at least a synagogue of Tyrians; the differences concerned how many more ethnic communities there were, if any, attested in the inscription. Most influential has been Lifshitz, who strengthened the interpretation of the text as a dedication by emending the beginning to a dating formula (Ἐπὶ) 'Υελασίου …, eliminated the ἀρχισυναγώγου after Σιδονίου and came up with two *archisynagōgoi*, representing communities of Sidon and Tyre in Sepphoris.[33]

The latest treatment of this inscription is in *IJO* III Syr5, whose editors do in fact doubt that communities of Sidonians and Tyrians are indicated, but retain the conjectured ἐπί and ὑ<π>έρ which make this stone a dedication: 'It seems more likely that the first three names are there for dating purposes and ὑπέρ should have been ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας or ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς, indicating that Ianus did the building on his own behalf';[34] this interpretation must also posit that the synagogue had two *archisynagōgoi*.

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31 Schwabe, p. 103.

32 Note Ioses the *archisynagōgos* of Sidon, epitaph at Beth She'arim, M. Schwabe and B. Lifshitz, *Beth She'arim* II: *The Greek Inscriptions*, Jerusalem 1974, no. 221.

33 Lifshitz was followed by Brooten, Horsley, Roth-Gerson, Rajak and Noy, and others, see note 30 above.

34 The text offered there is as follows:

> <ἐπὶ?> ̣τοῦ <Γ?>ελασίου σχο(λαστικοῦ) κώ(μητος) | λαμπ(ροτάτου) υείοῦ Ἀετίου ̣τ̣ρ̣|ῦ κό(μητος), Εἰούδ<α> ἀρχ<ισ>υναγώγου, Σιδονίου | ἀρχισυναγ|ώγου, περιερθόντα <τά>δ<ε> ὑ<π>ὲρ Ἰάνο<υ> Ἄφρο<υ> ἀρχ<ισ>υναγ|ώγο<υ> Τύρου λαμπ(ροτάτου). ΧΡ.
>
> The editors mistakenly view the final rho + X (abbreviation mark) as chi-rho. Cf. also H. Lapin, 'Palestinian Inscriptions and Jewish Ethnicity in Late Antiquity', in E.M. Meyers, ed., *Galilee Through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures*, Winona Lake 1999, 239-68 at 256-7, who also breaks from the trend and casts doubt on the existence of a Tyrian synagogue at Sepphoris, calling it 'unsubstantiated'.

But the less editorial intervention, the better. The cumulatively emended text creates new problems. The addition of ἐπί at the beginning of the text, presuming a dating formula, requires awkward construction of the subsequent sequence of words. The assumption that the stone is in fact a dedication requires the assumption of a missing verb and the over-emendation of ΤΑΔΣΥΒΕΡΙΑΝΟ to –τα <τά>δ<ε> ὑ<π>ὲρ Ἰάνο<υ>: even for a careless inscriber, that is a lot of missing letters in such a short space. Further, there is no reason not to understand the final λαμρ- as associated with the word immediately preceding it, Τὺρου, and there is thus no firm indication that the community of the *archisynagōgos* Janus was in Sepphoris and not Tyre. Rendering the other personal names in the inscription — Εἰούδα, Σιδονίου, Ἄφρου — as ethnics, requires excision of an entire word (ἀρχισυναγώγου after Sidonius' name, per Lifshitz's suggestion) and further violation of whatever rudimentary syntax there is in the text.

The stone was found in the Church of Ste. Anne in Sepphoris. That church seems to have been built on the site of a synagogue, since the original excavators also found there a room with a mosaic bearing a Hebrew inscription, as mentioned. The Greek-inscribed lintel was found reused in the pavement outside this room. But the history of the stone is a mystery: it could have been used either in the original Byzantine church or in the Crusader church of the 12th century, and it could have come from either the presumed synagogue or the cemetery of the city. Moreover, as already noted, the amateur execution and the lack of clarity in the text are much more common in funerary inscriptions than in public inscriptions. For a building identified with such a distinguished list of officials (however the list of names and their relation to one another are construed), one would have expected a finer inscription which greeted visitors to the building. Thus the inscription could be funerary instead of dedicatory, a private not a public text. Instead of a string of *archisynagōgoi* as benefactors, they are the deceased. Three names in the genitive are followed by a word for the tomb enclosure which is followed by the name of the owner in the genitive. If so, they are like the *archisynagōgoi* at Beth She'arim who were interred in the Holy Land but did not serve in their roles as community leaders there; these will be discussed presently.

To conclude, the Greek-inscribed lintel from Sepphoris is too cryptic and leaves open too many possibilities to be used as evidence of transplanted communities there. The ethnic synagogal communities in Sepphoris mentioned in rabbinic literature receive no confirmation in epigraphy. Sepphoris, with its large and perhaps varied Jewish community in the fourth-fifth centuries, may indeed have had different synagogues organized around ethnic identities. But there is no reliable evidence for them.

Archisynagōgoi at Beth She'arim

The burial ground at Beth She'arim is known for the wide geographical distribution of the people interred there.[35] The presence of foreign Jews at Beth She'arim attests to a sentimental or ideological wish to be buried in Eretz Israel (perhaps in some cases people were fleeing political or social troubles). The bones of the deceased in each case may have been brought up to the grave posthumously. Their epitaphs certainly cannot

35 T. Rajak, 'The Rabbinic Dead', above n. 5.

serve as testimony for the presence of living Jewish *communities* from any of the places of origin documented in the necropolis.

This is equally true regarding individuals with titles connected to the administration of synagogues and Jewish communities outside of Iudaea/Palaestina; it should be assumed that the bearers of the titles served and discharged their functions in their home communities and arranged burial in the famous necropolis of Beth She'arim.

For example, all that can be said about Εὐσέβις ὁ λαμ|πρότατος ἀρ|χισυνάγωγο|ς <τ>ῶν Βηριτῶ[ν] and Ἰωσῆς ἀρχισυνάγωγος | Σίδονος[36] is that they served as *archisynagōgoi* in their respective cities and had their bones interred in the caves at Beth She'arim, and the same goes for Aideios, the Gerousiarch of Antiochia.[37] Perhaps it was their high rank and status, and perhaps also personal means, which enabled them an honored burial in the Holy Land, far from their home communities.[38]

A third *archisynagōgos*, probably with the name Ἀυῖτος, is recorded on a broken marble slab found in the area of the synagogue at Beth She'arim, but in its fragmentary state contains no further information.[39] But a fourth inscription with a complete text, also on a marble slab from the synagogue area, offers a puzzle: Ἰακὼς Καισαρεὺς | ἀρχισυνάγω|γος Πανφυλί|ας שלום, 'Iakos citizen of Caesarea, *archisynagōgo*s of Pamphylia. Peace'.[40] Neither the function of this stone nor its exact location and placement at Beth She'arim are known. If it is an epitaph, then it was set up above Iakos' grave at Beth She'arim.[41] Yet the inscription could also have been dedicatory, in which case it could have been set up in the Beth She'arim synagogue or in some other synagogue. As Ameling points out, the interpretation of this simple text depends on how it is punctuated. If one understands Καισαρεὺς, ἀρχισυνάγωγος, Πανφυλίας, then Iakos was from Pamphylia, moved to Caesarea and somehow became an *archisynagōgos* there (or had served in that capacity in Pamphylia and retained his title in his new city). But if by removing a single comma one reads Καισαρεὺς, ἀρχισυνάγωγος Πανφυλίας, then he

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36 Schwabe, *Beth She'arim*, nos. 164 and 221 = *IJO* III, Syr26 and Syr18. The cave in which Eusebi(o)s was buried contained also a priest from Beirut and a resident of Sidon (nos. 148, 172). The actual text of no. 221 has three genitives: Ἰωνῆ ἀρχισυναγώγου | Σίδονος. It is possible to read the third word as an ethnic or a patronymic, but the best interpretation is the name of the city Sidon, see commentary ad loc. in *IJO*. Similar reasoning applies to a certain Nonnos from Cyzicus mentioned in the Beth She'an/Scythopolis synagogue, Roth-Gerson (above, n. 19), no. 8 and Ameling, *IJO* II, 147 (308): προ(σφορὰ) Νόννου [--] | Κυζηκίνου [--] | ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας [αὐτοῦ?] |καὶ τοῦ οἴκου [αὐτοῦ?]. Nonnos, whether or not he was visiting or had settled in Scythopolis, does not represent an entire community. Cf. T. Rajak and D. Noy, above n. 30.

37 Ἀψὶς | Αἰδείου | γερου(σ)ιάρχου | Ἀντιοχέως, Schwabe no. 141. Schwabe posits that the gerousiarch was the head of council of elders from all synagogues in one city.

38 'It would be natural for leading Jews of Beirut to seek burial at Beth She'arim', *IJO* III p. 42. It is clear from Schwabe 142 that Adesios bought an entire burial chamber for his family within the cave: Εἰσὶν ἐν τῇ ἀ|ψίδι κρηπῖ|δες ἓξ ς΄ | διαφέρου|σαι Αἰδεσίῳ.

39 Schwabe, *Beth She'arim*, no. 212.

40 Schwabe, no. 203 = *IJO* II, 217.

41 Alternatively — but highly unlikely — it could have been brought for some reason from Caesarea. The suggestion by S. Schwartz of a Caesarea in Pamphylia is not likely: *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.*, Princeton 2001, 155 n. 93.

becomes the *archisynagōgos* of Pamphylia who lived (or died) in Caesarea. It is true, as Ameling notes, that it is difficult to construe an *archisynagōgos* of an entire region instead of a city or a community within a city. But *if* Iakos was the *archisynagōgos* of Pamphylian immigrants in Caesarea, then he could very well have been designated ἀρχισυνάγωγος Πανφυλίας, as in this inscription, understanding (τῆς συναγωγῆς τῶν τῆς) Πανφυλίας. An easier and more regular expression would have been ἀρχισυνάγωγος τῶν Πανφύλων, but regularity cannot be expected in this kind of epigraphy. As in the case of the Sepphoris inscription, the facts and details were well known to the people who put up the inscription and the first generation to read it, but are lost to us.

This admittedly remote possibility is as close as we can come to finding a transplanted community in the Beth She'arim inscriptions.

Jaffa

The last bit of tantalizing evidence comes from the Jaffa necropolis, which was used more or less at the same time as Beth She'arim, when synagogue construction and epigraphy were proliferating in Iudaea/Palaestina. From the size of the Jewish necropolis at Jaffa,[42] it is safe to assume that the city had one or more synagogues, even if no trace of any building has been found, much less any with an ethnic affiliation. The only clear epigraphic trace of a synagogue at Jaffa is the probable mention of a *ḥazzan* in one epitaph (*CIIP* III, 2235).

The epitaphs from Jaffa do contain evidence for a community of Egyptians who settled there. This has been dealt with before, with the publication in this journal of two or possibly three new epitaphs of Egyptian Jews in the necropolis, bringing to as many as 12 the number of epitaphs revealing some Egyptian connection.[43] These stones document individuals who lived or at least died and were buried in Jaffa from the third to fifth centuries CE, but they may well represent the descendants of people who had previously migrated (or fled?) to Jaffa, under various circumstances, the later generations retaining their Egyptian identity. In the absence, however, of any inscription or literary reference to 'the synagogue of the Alexandrians at Jaffa', vel sim., the actual coherence of the Egyptian immigrants as a community in Jaffa, and the retention of their identity as Egyptians over generations, remain matters of speculation.

Among the Jaffa epitaphs is one with a puzzle which pertains to the subject under investigation:

ἐν<θ>άδε κ<ῖ>τε | Ἰσάκις πρεσ|βύτερος τῆς | Καπαδοκῶ|ν Ταρσοῦ λι|νοπώλου.

This is translated in *CIIP* as follows: 'Here lies Isakis, presbyteros of the (community of the) Cappadocians, from Tarsus, linen merchant.'[44] The last four or five words have

42 It was probably originally 100 acres, see *CIIP* III, p. 36. The 80 surviving epitaphs published in *CIIP* III represent only a small proportion of the hundreds, maybe thousands which had been there.

43 J.J. Price, 'Five Inscriptions from Jaffa', *SCI* 22, 2003, 215-31. *CIIP* III, 2180, 2182, 2191, 2196, 2197, 2202, 2213, 2237, 2240, 2243, 2246, 2248, and cf. p. 38. Note two other Egyptian Jews whose epitaphs found in Palestine, *JIGRE* 151 and 152.

44 *CIIP* III, 2203, see there for full bibliography; the translation follows Klein and Williams.

proven difficult to parse, especially the definite article τῆς which has no corresponding noun, thus implying συναγωγῆς. Clermont-Ganneau, in the *editio princeps*, translated 'from Tarsus of the Cappadocians', taking the article τῆς to refer to Tarsus, but there is no known Tarsus in Cappadocia, and Ταρσοῦ is better read as the genitive of the ethnic designation (Ταρσεύς), as in another epitaph from Jaffa mentioning Ἰούδας υἱὸς Ἰοσῆ Ταρσεύς.[45] Subsequent editors have understood τῆς to refer to a synagogue or community, but have not agreed on how to understand the words after that. Reinach, for instance, interpreted 'ancien de la Synagogue des Cappadociens à Tarse',[46] while Feissel translates 'Ancien de la communauté des Cappadociens de Tarse, marchand de lin'; other renderings, such as Krauss' 'Presbyter (der Synagoge) der Kappadoker, (Ort) des tarsischen Leinenhändlers', and the Bishop of Salisbury's 'of the synagogue (or guild) of Cappadocian linen merchants of Tarsus', take us even further from the plain text, which requires no emendation.[47]

It is interesting that the community of the Cappadocians at Jaffa was known not by the name of a city but of a region in Asia Minor. Yet such a general designation seems to have been common. In rabbinic sources, Cappadocians are identified as a community of Jews living in Sepphoris alongside the Jewish Babylonians,[48] and Jerusalem had communities who self-identified as Cilicians and residents of *Asia*, as we have seen. The epitaph (unprovenanced, unfortunately) of a certain Rabbi Samuel attests that he was *archisynagōgos* in Phyrgia,[49] and we have already mentioned the *archisynagōgos* from Pamphylia in Caesarea.

Thus in Jaffa there was a community of Jews who had, it seems, their own separate synagogue and called themselves 'Cappadocians'. As noted above, another epitaph from Jaffa attests to a person identifying himself as Cappadocian: τόπος | Εἰακω | Καπάδοκος | κὲ Ἀχολί|ας συνβίου αὐ|τοῦ κὲ Ἀστε|ρίου.[50] We can only speculate whether he attended the same synagogue as the one in which Isaac was *presbyteros*.[51] The most interesting questions about the Cappadocians in Jaffa cannot be answered, viz.: whether the synagogue community was totally transplanted to Jaffa or whether a core of the community remained behind, somewhere in Cappadocia. Or what generation the Cappadocians mentioned in their epitaphs actually were: *presbyteros* does not mean founder, and the fact that a leader of the community was from Tarsos and not Cappadocia suggests that he was not first generation to disembark in Iudaea/Palaestina.

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45 C. Clermont-Ganneau, *PEQ* 32, 1900, 110-120, 118, no. 18; *CIIP* III, 2206; Ameling, *IJO* II, 250.

46 *BE* 1902, p. 93.

47 For these references, see, in addition to *CIIP* III, 2203, Ameling's commentary in *IJO* II, 249. Note also the rabbinic tradition about 'synagogue of Tarsians' without specifying the city, Miller (above, n. 2), 63, n. 60. A synagogue of Tarsians is said to have existed at Lod: *LevR* 26.3; *bNAz* 53a.

48 Cappadocia is cited in rabbinic literature as a place unto itself, e.g., *M.Ket* 13:11.

49 *IJO* II, 184.

50 *Ed.princ.*: C. Schick, *PEF QS* 25 (1893), p. 290 fig. 7; A.S. Murray, ibid., p. 300 fig. 7.

51 Of course, the other two people mentioned on Εἰακω's epitaph may have been from Cappadocia as well.

Conclusion

There is some hard evidence, if meager, of Jewish communities transplanting themselves to Iudaea/Palaestina during the Roman period. Rabbinic sources and early Christian literature mention synagogue communities in cities, but more reliable information is to be sought in inscriptions. The only relatively certain instance is of the Cappadocians in Jaffa. Naturally, the hard evidence of structures and inscriptions suffers from two faults, first, the destruction wrought by successive waves of invaders and earthquakes, and second, the invisibility of probable synagogue communities, including groups with a common topographical or ethnic origin, who met in private houses without public advertisement in monumental structures or expensive inscriptions. Thus the nature of religious communities as well as the low survival rate of inscriptions suggest that the phenomenon was rather more widespread than the scattered evidence suggests. But on this matter, as often in ancient history, we are forced to admit that we may never know.

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