

# A New Greek Inscription from Byzantine Apollonia-Arsuf / Sozousa: A Reassessment of the Εἰς Θεὸς Μόνος Inscriptions of Palestine\*

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## I

Apollonia-Arsuf, located on the Mediterranean coast of Israel some 17 kilometers north of Jaffa (ancient Joppa, south of Tel Aviv) and 34 kilometers south of Caesarea, has been excavated continuously during the last thirty years.<sup>1</sup> Once a modest coastal settlement, Apollonia-Arsuf became the urban center of the southern Sharon plain as early as the Persian period (late sixth century BCE) through the Crusader period (until the mid-thirteenth century CE).

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<sup>1</sup> The first systematic excavations at Apollonia-Arsuf were carried out in 1950, north of the medieval city wall, by the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, directed by Immanuel Ben-Dor and later by Penuel Kahane. The latter published only an abridged preliminary report. See P. Kahane, 'Rishpon (Apollonia); B', *Bulletin of the Department of Antiquities of the State of Israel*, 3, 1951, 42-43 (in Hebrew); an English summary is found in Ann Perkins, 'Archaeological News: The Near East', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 55, 1951, 86-87, fig. 11. More information on these excavations is obtained in the archival files of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums (currently the Israel Antiquities Authority) and published in Israel Roll and Etan Ayalon, *Apollonia and Southern Sharon: Model of a Coastal City and Its Hinterland*, Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad Publishing House and Israel Exploration Society, 1989, 58, 65-66 and 217-221 (in Hebrew), and an English summary by Israel Roll: 'Introduction: History of the Site, Its Research and Excavations', in Israel Roll and Oren Tal, *Apollonia-Arsuf: Final Report of the Excavations*, v. 1, *The Persian and Hellenistic Periods (with Appendices on the Chalcolithic and Iron Age II Remains)*, Tel Aviv University, Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology, 16, Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 1999, p. 26, figs. 1.12, 1.14, and 1.15. The first large-scale excavations at Apollonia-Arsuf were carried out in 1977 by I. Roll who directed seventeen seasons of excavations at the site until 2004. The 1977 season was a salvage excavation on behalf of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, whereas only in 1982 the project became an academic excavation, on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University. In 2006 an eighteenth season of excavations at Apollonia-Arsuf was carried out as a joint venture of the Artemis and Martha Sharp Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World at Brown University. Excavations were directed by Israel Roll and Oren Tal of Tel Aviv University, with the assistance of Katharina Galor of Brown University. This season of excavations was an overlapping season, during which the directorship and responsibility for the future excavations at Apollonia-Arsuf were transferred from I. Roll to O. Tal. For the history of the site, its research and excavations see Roll, 'Introduction' (above), 1-62.

Apollonia is mentioned in a series of classical sources. Josephus<sup>2</sup> refers to it as one of the *poleis* that belonged to the Jews under Alexander Jannaeus. The city is also mentioned in lists of Judaea's coastal towns compiled by Pliny<sup>3</sup> and by Ptolemy.<sup>4</sup>

Apollonia is also noted in some written sources from the Byzantine period. It is recorded twice in the anonymous work *The Ravenna Cosmography*: in a list of urban centers of *Iudaea-Palaestina*, where it is listed after Caesarea and before Joppa, and again between Joppa and Caesarea in a long list of the coastal cities of Sinai and Palestine.<sup>5</sup> Apollonia also appears in the detailed list of twenty-five cities of that name compiled by Stephanus Byzantius under number thirteen 'near Joppa'.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Apollonia does not appear in early ecclesiastical lists. Two nineteenth century scholars, Stark and Clermont-Ganneau, assumed that the reason for its absence derived from the fact that Apollonia's name had been changed to *Sozousa* — a common change for cities named after Apollo Soter in Byzantine times.<sup>7</sup> Later texts and critical editions of texts, which recount the Persian-Sassanian capture of Jerusalem, record the death of the patriarch Modestus in a city named *Sozos*: *Sozousa* in Georgian texts and Arsuf in Arabic texts.<sup>8</sup> Official documents of the synod of Ephesus held in 449 indicate that in the mid-fifth century CE *Sozousa* was a city in the Byzantine province of *Palaestina Prima* and that its Christian community was headed by a bishop. Bishops of *Sozousa* appear

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<sup>2</sup> *Ant.* 13.15.4 [395].

<sup>3</sup> *NH*, 5.69.

<sup>4</sup> *Geogr.* 5.15.2. Roman-period remains were discovered during excavations at the site; cf. Israel Roll and Oren Tal, 'A Villa of the Early Roman Period at Apollonia-Arsuf', *IEJ*, 58, 2008, 132-149.

<sup>5</sup> *The Ravenna Cosmography* 2.14.2 and 5.7.2. See Joseph Schnetz, ed., *Itineraria Romana*, v. 2, *Ravennatis anonymi cosmographia et Guidonis geographica*, Leipzig: Friderici Nicolai, 1940, 25, 90, and 133. *The Ravenna Cosmography* was compiled soon after 700 CE from earlier sources that go back to early Byzantine or even Roman times; see J. Schnetz, 'Untersuchungen über die Quellen der Cosmographie des anonymen Geographen von Ravenna', *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Abteilung* 6, 1942, 1-87; O.A.W. Dilke, *Greek and Roman Maps*, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, 174-176.

<sup>6</sup> *Stephani Byzantii Ethnorum quae supersunt*, ed. Augustus Meineke, Berlin: G. Reimer, 1849, 106. It is worth noting that in Stephanus Byzantius' text the name *Sozousa* (s.v. no. 1, p. 596) is also mentioned (for which see below) — most probably because Stephanus used sources from different periods: one from Roman times when listing *Apollonia*, and a source from Byzantine times when mentioning *Sozousa*. For Apollonia, see also *Stephani Byzantii Ethnica*, v. I, ed. M. Billerbeck, Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 2006, 228-229.

<sup>7</sup> Karl B. Stark, *Gaza und die philistäische Küste*, Jena: F. Mauke, 1852, 452, n. 5; Charles Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches in Palestine during the Years 1873-1874*, v. 2, London: Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1896, 337-339.

<sup>8</sup> Gerard Garitte, ed., *La prise de Jérusalem par les Perses en 614*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, v. 203, Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1960, 55; id., *ibid.*, v. 341, 1953, 38, 70; id., *ibid.*, v. 348, 1974, 131.

again in the records of two sixth-century ecclesiastical meetings.<sup>9</sup> They may have served in the church with the inscribed mosaic floor that was uncovered in Apollonia in 1962.<sup>10</sup>

The importance of *Sozousa* in Late Byzantine Palestine (sixth to seventh centuries CE in archaeological terms), seems to have been enhanced by the large and affluent Samaritan community that resided in the city until the Islamic conquest, as is evident from the archaeological finds.<sup>11</sup> Arsuf is also mentioned in connection with the Sassanian military campaign in the Holy Land.<sup>12</sup> As there is no evidence of destruction, we may assume that the city surrendered peacefully to its Persian-Sassanian conquerors.<sup>13</sup> The *Acta Anastasii Persae* relate that the escort conveying the relics of the Christian martyr Anastasius the Persian from Caesarea to Jerusalem in 631 — soon after the Persians evacuated Palestine — marched via *Sozousa*. This indicates that the name *Sozousa* continued to be used for Apollonia-Arsuf until the Islamic conquest.<sup>14</sup>

## II

This article examines a new Greek inscription dated to the Byzantine period that was discovered during the 2006 season of excavations at the site in Area O, in the northern part of the site, in proximity to the excavated areas of the site's first digs held in 1950 (fig. 1). The excavations at the newly opened Area O were minimal, and confined to the exposure of a medium-sized white *tesserae* (1.5-2 cm on average) mosaic floor, adorned with a partially preserved Greek inscription. The floor formed part of a room in a building whose dimensions and functions are unclear, and await future excavations. On its southern side, the mosaic floor room was partially covered by the remains of a raw

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<sup>9</sup> *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, Berlin: W. de Gruyter, v. 3, ed. Eduard Schwartz, 1940, 80 and 188, and v. 4, no. 1, ed. Johannes Straub, 1971, 221. For a more detailed discussion on the issue, see Roll, 'Introduction' (note 1 above), 9 with relevant bibliography in notes 14-15.

<sup>10</sup> Rachel Birnbaum and Asher Ovadiah, 'A Greek Inscription from the Early Byzantine Church at Apollonia', *Israel Exploration Journal*, 40, 1990, 182-191; see also Roll, 'Introduction' (note 1 above), 31 and 45.

<sup>11</sup> Roll and Ayalon (note 1 above), 51-67; Roll, 'Introduction' (note 1 above), 26-53 *passim*. It should be emphasized however that Abū L-Faḥ reports Samaritan synagogues in villages between Zaytā (north of Ṭūl Karem) and Arsūf, but only a Dosithean (not Samaritan) 'meeting place' in Arsuf in the early 9th century long after the Islamic conquest. Cf. Milka Levy-Rubin, *The Continuatio of the Samaritan Chronicle of Abū L-Faḥ Al-Sāmīrī Al-Danafī*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, 10, Princeton: Darwin Press, 2002, 69-70.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Peeters, 'La prise de Jérusalem par les Perses', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph de Beyrouth*, 9, 1923-1924, 13. Gerard Garitte, ed., *Expugnatio Hierosolymae A.D. 614*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, v. 341, Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1953, 4 and 42. Id., *ibid.*, v. 348, 1974, 75, and 104. For discussion, see Robert Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study*, Princeton, New Jersey: Darwin Press, 1995, 20-25.

<sup>13</sup> Schick (note 12 above), 20-25, and esp. 250.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Flusin, ed., *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris: Editions du C.N.R.S., 1992, v. 1, 105, and v. 2, 339.



Fig. 1. Apollonia-Arsuf: Site-plan

glass furnace. Two similar raw glass furnaces were found nearby during the 1950 excavations, and another one in Area N in the southern part of the site. Based on stratigraphical considerations and on the chemical composition of the raw glass products, all furnaces can be dated to the sixth and seventh centuries CE.<sup>15</sup> All the finds retrieved from Area O are no later than the seventh century CE, and a *terminus ante quem* set to the Late Byzantine period is plausible for both the mosaic floor and the raw glass furnace, which covers it partially. However, given the fact that the raw glass furnace is later than the mosaic floor and was put to work only after the building with the mosaic floor had been dismantled or abandoned, the inscription must be dated to a date earlier than the seventh century CE.

The inscription is set in the center of a tripartite panel that was placed close to the center of the preserved floor. Small parts of the inscription were extracted from the floor in later periods and over time it was covered by whitewash that accumulated on the floor. Nonetheless it was found almost complete (fig. 2).<sup>16</sup>

The decipherment of the inscription was made possible only after preservation works were conducted by a team from the Israel Nature and National Parks Protection Authority and we were able to transcribe the letters of the inscription in the following manner:

1. ΕΙCΘΕ[O]CΜΟΝΟCΒO[HΘΕI]
2. ΚΑCС[IA]NΩΑΜΑCΥΜΒIΩ
3. ΚΑΙΤΕ[K]ΝΟΙCΚΑΙΠΑCΕI

Hence, the transliterated and restored version of the inscription may be read as follows:

1. Εἰς θεὸς μόνος βοήθει
2. Κασσ(ι)ανῶ ἅμα συμβίω
3. καὶ τέκνοις καὶ πάσει

The translation is: 'One God only, help / Cassianos together with (his) wife / and children and everyone.'

The formula Εἰς θεός, which was used in many Greek inscriptions of Late Antiquity, was studied in detail some eight decades ago by Peterson.<sup>17</sup> Peterson realized that most of the inscriptions found in Egypt that bear this formula also include clearly identifiable Christian symbols and signs. As this was also the case with not a few inscriptions found

<sup>15</sup> Roll, 'Introduction' (note 1 above), 26-29; Oren Tal, Ruth E. Jackson-Tal and Ian C. Freestone, 'New Evidence of the Production of Raw Glass at Late Byzantine Apollonia-Arsuf, Israel', *Journal of Glass Studies*, 46, 2004, 51-66; Ian C. Freestone, Ruth E. Jackson-Tal and Oren Tal, 'Raw Glass and the Production of Glass Vessels at Late Byzantine Apollonia-Arsuf, Israel', *Journal of Glass Studies*, 50, 2008, 67-80.

<sup>16</sup> We are grateful to Hagi Yohanan, Director of the Apollonia National Park, for putting his experienced team and the necessary logistical resources at our disposal.

<sup>17</sup> Erik Peterson, *Εἰς θεός: Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1926.

in the Levant (defined by him as Syria), he concluded that  $\text{Εἰς θεός}$  was essentially a typical Christian formula. Even though only two of the four inscriptions that bear the

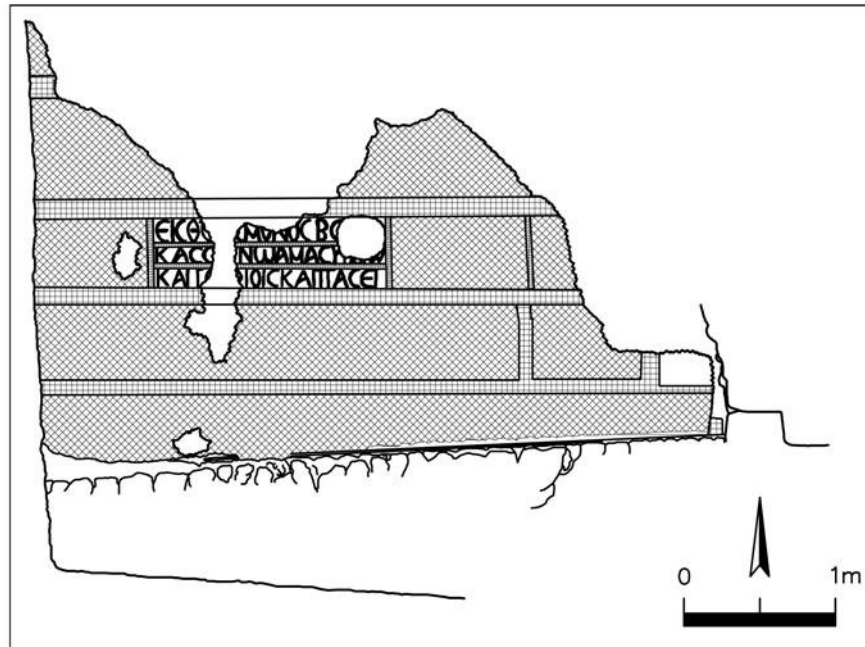


Fig. 2. Apollonia-Arsuf, Area O: Mosaic floor inscription

specific formula  $\text{Εἰς θεός μόνος}$  include Christian symbols, Peterson attributed a Christian character to all four of them.<sup>18</sup> Negev, who examined several  $\text{Εἰς θεός}$  inscriptions found in Israel, summed up his views on the issue in his discussion of a relevant text found in southern Sinai.<sup>19</sup> Negev believed that ‘the  $\text{Εἰς θεός}$  formula was created in the later part of the third century, possibly by Jews. It was soon picked up by the adherents of Julian Apostata, and very soon also by Christians and again by Jews in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. However, the Egyptian Christians used it most.’<sup>20</sup> The  $\text{Εἰς θεός}$  formula in inscriptions found distinctively in Palestine has been discussed in detail in a more recent and well-documented article by Leah Di Segni.<sup>21</sup> According to Di Segni this acclamation, though ‘usually considered a certain clue of the Christian or at least

<sup>18</sup> Peterson (note 17 above), inscriptions no. 10, 47, 49 and 65, at pages 8, 15, 17, and 23.

<sup>19</sup> Avraham Negev, *The Inscriptions of Wadi Haggag, Sinai*, Qedem 6, Jerusalem, 1977, 62-64.

<sup>20</sup> Negev (note 19 above), 64. Negev admittedly follows the suggestions advanced previously by Michael Avi-Yonah, ‘Greek Inscriptions from Ascalon, Jerusalem, Beisān and Hebron’, *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine*, 10, 1944, 160.

<sup>21</sup> Leah Di Segni, ‘ $\text{Εἰς θεός}$  in Palestinian Inscriptions’, *SCI*, 13, 1994, 94-115.

Jewish-Christian character of the monuments on which it appears, is neither Jewish nor Christian in the large majority of its occurrences in Palestine. ... it often appears in a pagan context, not only in the well-known instance of the acclamation of Emperor Julian, but also in earlier acclamations of Sarapis and Kore in Samaria. Moreover, it is most characteristic of Samaritan holy places, including the holiest of all, the *temenos* on Mount Gerizim.<sup>22</sup> This may be the case, but it is reasonable to assume that the Εἷς θεὸς μόνος formula inscriptions of Palestine have an exclusive Samaritan provenance. Indeed these inscriptions are far fewer and rarer, but they are found in Roman and Byzantine sites in the region of Samaria and in cities where Samaritan communities are attested according to both the archaeological finds and the written sources.<sup>23</sup> Thus Di Segni recorded two references of Εἷς θεὸς μόνος inscriptions (her 'Formula C'):<sup>24</sup> One is from Belah (in northern Samaria), on a door of a burial chamber, and it reads Εἷς θεὸς μόνος ΙΧΜΓ that may have been added at a later stage.<sup>25</sup> The other comes from the *temenos* of Mount Gerizim, on a stone slab probably built in a wall dated to the fourth to early fifth

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<sup>22</sup> Leah Di Segni, 'The Samaritans in Roman-Byzantine Palestine: Some Misapprehensions', in: *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine*, ed. Hayim Lapin, Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture, 5, Bethesda: University of Maryland, 1998, 55. Given the fact that only about one third of the 62 documented inscriptions are strictly Samaritan, her conclusion that it is most characteristic of Samaritan holy places should be attenuated, cf. Di Segni (note 21 above), 111-113. However, this idea may even be strengthened by the presence of inscribed Εἷς θεός on Samaritan type lamps, see Varda Sussman, 'Εἷς θεός, "One God"', *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society*, 12, 1992-1993, 32-37; although Sussman refrained from attributing a Samaritan origin to the lamp she published, for it 'does not fall into any of the well-known categories ... since it combines elements from many different types', its pear-shaped body, shallow decorated wheel-like pattern ring base, and two bands of decoration of radials (outer) and dots (inner) are characteristic of Samaritan lamps; cf. e.g. Varda Sussman, 'The Samaritan Oil Lamps from Apollonia-Arsuf', *Tel Aviv*, 10, 1983, 71-96. It should be emphasized that none of the inscribed Byzantine lamps of Christian origin bear either an Εἷς θεός inscription or abbreviated formulas that may be interpreted in such a manner; cf. Stanislao Loffreda, *Lucerne byzantine in Terra Santa con iscrizioni in greco*, SBM Collectio Maior, 35, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1989.

<sup>23</sup> For general works, cf. e.g. Ishaq Ben-Zvi, *The Book of the Samaritans*, Tel Aviv: Stiebel, 1976 (in Hebrew); Ephraim Stern and Hanan Eshel, eds., *The Samaritans*, Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press and Israel Antiquities Authority, 2002 (in Hebrew).

<sup>24</sup> Di Segni (note 21 above), 100-101, nos. 16, 20a; for the formulae see p. 111.

<sup>25</sup> See also Claude R. Conder and Horatio H. Kitchener, *The Survey of Western Palestine*, v. 2, London, 1882, 172; Claude R. Conder, 'Greek Inscriptions in Western Palestine', *Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement*, 1894, 201, no. 10; see also Bellarmino Bagatti, *Ancient Christian Villages of Samaria*, SBM Collectio Minor, 39, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2002, 166. Another possibility is that the ΙΧΜΓ formula was not as patently Christian as one may believe. In fact it can also be interpreted as an isopsephy, having an apotropaic function, cf. Leah Di Segni, 'The Greek Inscription from Tel Ashdod: A Revised Reading', *'Atiqot* 58, 2008, 32\*(in Hebrew).

centuries CE, and it reads Εἰς θεὸς μόνος ὁ βοηθῶν.<sup>26</sup> An additional inscription on a “church pillar” of a Byzantine date comes from Amwâs (Emmaus) and reads: Εἰς θεὸς μόνος together with a Samaritan text ‘Blessed be His name for ever’.<sup>27</sup>

As to the name mentioned in the Apollonia-Arsuf inscription, it can either be reconstructed as Kassianos (apparently the Latin cognomen Cassianus), which remained in use during the Roman and Byzantine periods in Greek-speaking regions, but is quite rare in other Greek inscriptions found in Palestine, or less likely Kassanos, which may represent the Greek adaptation of a Semitic personal name.<sup>28</sup>

Most of the Εἰς θεός formula inscriptions in Palestine come from public buildings as they are commemorative in character (excluding those that appear on amulets of course). The building, as well as the room that hosted the inscription from Apollonia-Arsuf, may well have formed part of a Samaritan synagogue. Given the fact that Samaritan synagogues are normally oriented toward Mount Gerizim, such a building at Apollonia-Arsuf should have been aligned in an east-west axis, for the site is of the same latitude line as Mount Gerizim. The south-north alignment of the inscription, the mosaic floor, and the room, may hint that the room functioned as an appended room of a Samaritan synagogue, or even part of its northern nave (or a northern portico). Therefore we cannot exclude the possibility that the building was destroyed as a result of Justinian’s law (*ca.* 527-531 CE) prohibiting Samaritan gatherings of any kind, thus encouraging the destruction of Samaritan synagogues (*Samaritarum synagogae destruuntur*).<sup>29</sup> Alternatively, the abandonment or destruction of such a building may have been related to the edicts against the property rights of the Samaritans included in the *Novellae* enacted during the period of the Samaritan Rebellion (529 CE).<sup>30</sup> The fact that the raw glass furnace covering the mosaic floor is dated either to the sixth or to the seventh

<sup>26</sup> In fact Di Segni (note 21 above), 101, no. 20a, mentions several such inscriptions. See also *SEG* 8, no. 134; A.M. Schreiber, ‘Römische und byzantinische Bauten auf dem Garizim’, *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, 68, 1949-1951, 228-231.

<sup>27</sup> Conder (note 25 above), 202, no. 17; see also Bagatti (note 25 above) 180.

<sup>28</sup> For the personal name Κασσιανός in contemporaneous inscriptions in the Greek cultural zone, cf. e.g. P.M. Fraser and E. Matthews, eds., *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987-2005, v. I: Cyrene (2nd-3rd centuries CE); v. II: Athens (2nd-3rd centuries CE); v. IIIa: Epiros (imperial); v. IV: Thessalonike (5th-6th centuries CE) and Nicopolis ad Istrum (in Thrace, 2nd century CE); see also *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* 3/2, s.v. Cassianus, esp. col. 1667 (Κασσιανός), and also, *ibid.*, col. 2563, s.v. Cintasius. Κασσάνος may originate from the Safaitic (Arabic) name, Q’sn, cf. G.L. Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions*, Toronto-Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1971, 485 (13×), but a Latin origin seems preferable. We are indebted to Ran Zadok for these observations. Interestingly, Cassianus and Kassanos are popular in the Roman and Byzantine Hauran and Transjordan, where Arabic influence was likely significant. It may be that both names are adaptations of an Arab name.

<sup>29</sup> *Cod. Iust.* (ed. Krueger) 1.15.17.

<sup>30</sup> See in this respect Leah Di Segni, ‘Samaritan Revolts in Byzantine Palestine’, in Stern and Eshel, eds. (note 23 above), 467-480 (in Hebrew); Alfredo M. Rabello, ‘The Samaritans in Roman Law’, *Ibid.*, 488-495 (in Hebrew).



centuries, based on inter-site *comparanda*, may support such a notion. Hopefully, future excavations and finds will shed light on the genuine function of the room and its building, as well as provide evidence for the date of its abandonment or destruction.

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