

*A Naclerus de oeco poreuticorum in a New Inscription from Ashkelon/Ascalon**

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The inscription published here for the first time belongs to the city of Ashkelon and is kept at the local 'Khan Museum'. It was brought there by Baruch Brimer and Yesha'yahu Lender of the Israel Antiquities Authority from the area of Tel Ashkelon. Its original location is unknown; however it seems very likely that it was found not far from Ashkelon before 1995.



The tablet of white-yellow marble is broken at the bottom. The well-polished surface is splintered at the top and bottom edges. The back is only roughly dressed. The guidelines were prepared in advance. Height: 30.3

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cm; width: 52 cm; thickness: 6.8 cm. Letter height: lines 1-2: 4.0 cm; 3: 3.4 cm; 4: 2.8 cm; 5: 3.0 cm. Autopsy: July 10, 1998.

Memoriae

*C. Comisi Memor-
is naucleri de*

oeco poreuticor(um)

Μνήμη Γαίου Κομισίου

[Μέμορις ναυκλήρου ἑξ]

[οἴκου πορευτικῶν]

This is a funerary inscription. Since two lines of the Greek text are now lost, the slab on which it is written must have been some 20 cm higher than it is now, and reached almost 50 cm in height, i.e. almost a square. There are no clamp holes to be seen around the edges; the slab is likely to have been fitted into the wall of a tomb. However, the layout of the inscription does not tell us anything about the likely shape of that monument.

The deceased whose memory the inscription was meant to commemorate bears the name of C. Comisius Memor. He was therefore a Roman citizen.¹ The *nomen gentile* is extremely rare, attested in only two inscriptions from the entire western part of the empire (excluding Rome),² one from northern Italy, *CIL* V 3441 from Verona,³ and the other from Monaco, *CIL* V 7823.⁴ Even in Rome only two examples have been found: a grave inscription of the four-year-old C. Comisius Helpistus, put up by a Comisia G(ai) f(ilia) for her *delicius* (*CIL* VI 16055), and another grave inscription, found outside the *porta Salaria*, in which a C. Comisius Successus referred to as *negotians porto* (sic!) *vinario lagonari* is mentioned.⁵ Our Comisius seems to be the first attestation of the name from the entire eastern part of the Empire.

The *cognomen* Memor is also not very frequent. There are altogether 22 examples in Lörincz' *Onomasticon* (which excludes Rome),⁶ and 17 examples from the city of Rome, where the name is five times donned by slaves.⁷

¹ Perhaps he had only Latin citizenship; but this cannot be proved or disproved.

² See B. Lörincz, *Onomasticon provinciarum Europae Latinarum* II, Vienna 1999, 70.

³ Found on a seat in the theatre.

⁴ A grave inscription for M(anius) Avelius Paternus, where the mother, Comisia Tranquillina, is mentioned.

⁵ H.L. Wilson, *AJPh.* 31, 1910, 35f. = *AE* 1910, 74 = *ILS* 9429.

⁶ B. Lörincz, *Onomasticon provinciarum Europae Latinarum* III, Vienna 2000, 75.

⁷ *CIL* VI Indices p. 293; H. Solin, *Die stadtrömischen Sklavennamen. Ein Namenbuch*, Stuttgart 1996, 64f.

The deceased could conceivably be of servile origin, but there is nothing beyond a slight likelihood based on the name to confirm such an assumption; it is rather more likely than not that we are dealing here with a freeborn person despite the absence of filiation and *tribus*.

The deceased is thus likely to have come from the western part of the empire, if not from Italy itself.⁸ His native tongue at any rate is likely to have been Latin. This is implied by the position of the Latin text before the Greek in this bilingual inscription, but even more so by the paradoxical fact that the description of the man's profession and social affiliation in Latin as *naucle-
rus de oeco poreuticor(um)* is little more than a transliteration of the Greek ναύκληρος ἐξ οἴκου πορευτικῶν. Only a native speaker of Latin (or those executing his last wishes), living in a socio-economic context which was predominantly Greek, would have been likely to feel the need to duplicate the description of his vocation in Latin letters as well.

The Latin form for *naucleerus* is *navicularius*. This refers either to the ship owner or to a captain in charge of someone else's boat.⁹ An association of such *naucleri* or *navicularii* is normally designated *collegium* or *corpus*, whereas here the term used is *oikos*. Although the latter term would be naturally associated with the premises of such a society, it is nonetheless used in some epigraphical sources which employ it to describe the 'guild' itself.¹⁰ This meaning of *oikos* is never attested in the western part of the empire

⁸ This also makes it rather unlikely that this *naucleerus* belonged to the Jewish population of Ashkelon, although there were naturally also Jewish *naucleri*, cf. D. Sperber, *Nautica Talmudica*, Ramat Gan - Leiden 1986, 143-44.

⁹ For a recent discussion of the terms, which at least in the period to which the inscription belongs, i.e. first to third centuries A.D., are not always distinguishable, see J. Rougé, *Recherches sur l'organisation du commerce maritime en Méditerranée sous l'empire romain*, Paris 1966, 239ff.; J. Vélissaropoulos, *Les nauclères grecs. Recherches sur les institutions maritimes en Grèce et dans L'Orient hellénisé*, Genève-Paris 1980, 91ff.; L. de Salvo, *Economia privata e pubblici servizi nell' impero Romano. I corpora naviculariorum*, Messina 1992, passim; cf. also *naucleerus* and *navicularius* in *Neuer Pauly* 8, 745, 762ff. (not always satisfactory).

In Midrash Tanhuma Genesis 1:1 we find the following statement: 'A shipowner is not called a *naukleros* unless he has a ship'; the Midrash is perhaps explaining an unfamiliar term.

¹⁰ See above all Vélissaropoulos (n. 9) 104f. and de Salvo (n. 9) 452ff. with the older literature. A compilation of all the epigraphic testimonies on *naucleri* and *navicularii* can be found in de Salvo 611ff.

(including Rome).¹¹ It is found once in Attica, already in the late Hellenistic period,¹² and several times in the northeastern part of the Roman Empire: once in Amastris in Pontus-Bithynia,¹³ and in Tomis at the Black Sea. An οἶκος τῶν ἐν Τόμει ναυκλήρων is attested dedicating a statue for Lucius Verus,¹⁴ and another text from Tomis mentions an οἶκος Ἀλεξανδρέων, apparently a *collegium* of merchants or ship owners from Alexandria.¹⁵ In several other inscriptions from Pontus-Bithynia it is not always completely certain whether a *collegium* or a *collegium's* house is meant.¹⁶

The place of origin of a society (*collegium*) of *nauleri* or *navicularii* is often mentioned — especially if it happens to be different from the place where the inscriptions were found. This is true of various *collegia* attested in the Piazzale delle Corporazioni in Ostia.¹⁷ But we have examples from other sites as well: *navicularii* from Lepcis Magna attested in Syracuse and *navicularii* from Arelate in the Narbonensis recorded in Syria.¹⁸ Therefore it can be assumed that the *collegium*, or the *oikos*, to which Comisius Memor belonged had its seat in Ashkelon; otherwise its provenance would have been mentioned in our inscription.

Comisius Memor's *collegium*, *oikos*, is more closely defined by the expression *poreuticor(um)*. This term seems not to be attested so far in connection with a *collegium*.¹⁹ It appears, however, in both inscriptions and papyri in connection with the grain fleet, or, more generally, with the grain transport from Alexandria to Rome. An inscription from Ostia attests that the Emperor Commodus was honoured with a statue there by the ναύκληροι τοῦ πορευτικοῦ Ἀλεξανδρείνου στόλου, who travelled regularly between Egypt and Italy.²⁰ They no doubt represented a *collegium* of ship owners from

¹¹ De Salvo (n. 9) 453, n. 360 wrongly believes herself to have found such evidence in a dedication from the city of Rome: *IGR* I 147 = *IGUR* I 26; however, the word οἶκος, which can safely be restored there, refers to the imperial house.

¹² Vélissaropoulos (n. 9) 105.

¹³ G. Mendel, *BCH* 25, 1901, 36 no. 184 — understood wrongly to refer to the shipowners' house by Chr. Marek in *Stadt, Ära und Territorium in Pontus-Bithynia und Nordgalatia*, Tübingen 1993, 94: an *oikos* honouring its *prostates* can only be a society, not a building.

¹⁴ *IGR* I 610.

¹⁵ *IGR* I 604; cf. also *ISM* II 153.

¹⁶ Vélissaropoulos (n. 9) 104f.; de Salvo (n. 9) 453 n. 359.

¹⁷ De Salvo (n. 9) 612f.

¹⁸ De Salvo (n. 9) 627.

¹⁹ But see n. 26.

²⁰ *IG* XIV 918 = *IGR* I 392.

Alexandria, who pursued their trade in Ostia as well as in Alexandria; they, too, are attested in the Piazzale delle Corporazioni in Ostia.²¹ A dedication from Alexandria has as an object the emperor Septimius Severus as well as the εὐπλοία τοῦ στόλου ... πλοίων πορευτικῶν.²² In addition, the term πορευτικός occurs in two papyri connected with the public grain supply and its transport from Egypt to Rome. In the first papyrus the *procurator Neaspoleos* is explicitly named;²³ however, the official of the *Mausoleum* associated with the πλοία πορευτικά attested in the second papyrus²⁴ is likely to be none other than the very same imperial procurator mentioned in the first one since the full title of that official was *procurator Neaspoleos et Mausolei Alexandriae*.²⁵

Πορευτικός transliterated as *poreuticus* is to be associated therefore with the regular transport of goods, and in the case of Alexandria undoubtedly of food, or rather of grain, from Egypt to Rome. If the term — so far attested only in the Egyptian context — as well as the specific connotations of the activity can be transferred to the *oikos poreuticorum* attested in the funerary inscription from Ashkelon, then this *collegium* must also have been involved in the transport of food products from the province of Iudaea/Syria Palaestina especially to Rome.²⁶

What food product produced in Ashkelon, or rather in its territory, is likely to have been in such great demand at Rome as to explain the development of a regular and steady sea transport between the two cities?

At least from the fourth century AD onwards Ashkelon's wine acquired a reputation for its special qualities throughout the Roman world. From the fourth to the seventh centuries the city flourished as a major wine exporting centre. The earliest source is the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* (mid-fourth century AD): it eulogizes Ashkelon and Gaza as famous cities,

²¹ *CIL* XIV 4549, 40.

²² *IGR* I 1062 = *Arch. Pap.* 2, 1902, 447 no. 77 = F. Kayser, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques et latines (non funéraires) d'Alexandrie impériale*, Cairo 1994, no. 84.; cf. de Salvo (n. 9) 480 with the older literature; the various restorations suggested are irrelevant for our context.

²³ *Sammelbuch* 16, 13049: only [---]ικων remained, where Sijpesteijn plausibly restored [πλοίων πορευτ]ικῶν.

²⁴ *Sammelbuch* 16, 12667. For the meaning of πορευτικός see also B. Sirks, *Food for Rome*, Amsterdam 1991, 104f.

²⁵ See, e.g., *ILS* 1454.

²⁶ Cf. P.J. Sijpesteijn in *ZPE* 40, 1980, 106f. (= *Sammelbuch* 16, 12667), reading [---]κλήρω as [ναυ]κλήρω; if this is accepted then we have another testimony for the association of *nauleri* with the term *poreuticus*.

bustling with commercial activity and exporting wine of excellent quality (*vinum optimum*) to Syria and Egypt.²⁷ Two sixth-century sources convey a similar message. Palestinian wines take pride of place on the ‘wine list’ presented to the imperial couple on the occasion of Justin II’s coronation: ‘the sweet gifts of Bacchus, which wild Sarepta and Gaza have created, and which lovely Ascalon had given to her happy colonists ... the ancient gifts of the Palestinian Lyaeus were mingled in, white with the colour of snow and light with bland taste’ — thus Flavius Cresconius Corippus (ca. 566/7 AD) in his *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris* 3, 87ff. (ed. A. Cameron, London 1976, p. 63).²⁸ Gregory of Tours in his *Historia Francorum*, written c. 575, tells us that the hills surrounding the city of Dijon ‘are covered with fruitful vines which yield a fine Falernian wine so that the inhabitants scorn Ashkelon wine’ (3.19).²⁹ Medical writings recommending Ashkelon wine in prescriptions bear witness to widespread belief in its medicinal virtues — perhaps because of its light taste.³⁰

The excellent local wine was exported in locally-made amphorae, known from the ancient sources as Γαζίτιον and Ἀσκαλώνιον jars.³¹ Enormous quantities of these transport jars were mass-produced in large workshops, and dozens of them have been discovered in the city surroundings.³² In

²⁷ *Expositio* 29: *Deinde aliae iam civitates omnes. Ascalon et Gaza, civitates eminentes et in negotio bullientes et abundantes omnibus, mittunt omni <negotio> Syriae et Aegypto vinum optimum.*

²⁸ *Dulcia Bacchi / munera, quae Sarepta ferax, quae Gaza crearat, / Ascalon et laetis dederat quae grata colonis ... prisca Palaestini miscentur dona Lyaei, / alba colore nivis blandoque levissima gusto.*

²⁹ *A parte autem occidentes montes sunt uberrimi viniisque repleti, qui tam nobile incolis Falernum porregunt, ut respuant Scalonum.*

³⁰ Cf. P. Mayerson, ‘The Use of Ascalon Wine in the Medical Writers of the Fourth to the Seventh Centuries’, *IEJ* 43, 1993, 169-73. The wine is mentioned for the first time in the prescriptions of Oribasius (c. 320-400); he is followed by Cassius Felix (fl. 447), Aetius of Amida (sixth century), Alexander of Tralles (525-603) and Paulus of Aegina (seventh century).

³¹ E.g. Ἀσκαλωναία κεράμια in Stephen of Byzantium, *Ethnika* (sixth century), p. 132, 1.10; p. 194, 1.9, ed. A. Meineke, Graz 1958 (Berlin 1849). See recently P. Mayerson, ‘The Gaza “Wine” Jar (Gazition) and the “Lost” Ashkelon Jar (Askalonion)’, *IEJ* 42, 1992, 76-80. Mayerson maintains that these jars had a secondary use as containers for fish, fish sauce, cheese, sweetmeats etc., attested in ancient papyri and ostraka, *ibid.* 79.

³² See Y. Israel, ‘Survey of Pottery Workshops, Nahal Lakhish — Nahal Besor’, *ESI* 13, 1993, 106-107; for preliminary information on additional kilns, see

addition, excavations conducted by Yigal Israel at the 'Third Mile Estate' located 4.5 km NE of Tel Ashkelon have disclosed an agricultural estate consisting of pottery workshops, large wine presses and wine-storage halls — all dating to the fourth to seventh centuries.³³

Jars of the types produced at this industrial centre, namely Γαζίτιον and Ἀσκαλώνιον jars (Mayerson types A and B)³⁴ have been discovered in major coastal sites around the Mediterranean and all over Europe: in England, Spain, Italy (Naples, Rome), Hungary, Germany, Romania and Crimea. The arrival of these jars in these sites coincides with the praise showered on the wines from Ashkelon and Gaza in the literary sources mentioned above.³⁵

Other agricultural products for which Ashkelon was famous in antiquity, like the Ashkelon onion (κρόμυα Ἀσκαλώνια),³⁶ or *henna*, used in cosmetics,³⁷ are less likely to have been produced on a scale which justified organised transportation of these goods between Ashkelon and the West. Thus there is considerable likelihood that the *naucleri* of the *oikos poreuticorum* — assuming that they exported local products from the territory of Ashkelon

L.E. Stager, *Ashkelon Discovered, from Canaanites and Philistines to Romans and Moslems*, Washington 1991, 52.

³³ See Y. Israel, 'Ashkelon', *ESI* 13, 1993, 100-105; idem, 'The Economy of the Gaza-Ashkelon Region in the Byzantine Period in the Light of the Archaeological Survey and Excavations of the "3rd Mile Estate" near Ashkelon', *Michmanim* 8, 1995, 119-32 (Hebrew, English summary). Israel's finds include a sophisticated oil-press and a *piscina*, used for breeding fish. Both in his report and in a personal communication (3.2.2000) Israel points out that the Γαζίτιον and the Ἀσκαλώνιον jars (Mayerson types A and B) were manufactured in the same workshops, scattered throughout the Gaza and Ashkelon area, and should therefore be labelled the 'Gaza and Ashkelon Jars'. We are grateful to Y. Israel for his advice. For remains of another ceramic workshop, dated to the third-fifth centuries A.D., see: A. Berman, 'Archaeological Survey of Israel, The Judaeon Shephelah', *Hadashot Arkheologiyot* 44, 1973, 39 (Hebrew).

³⁴ See previous note.

³⁵ See J.A. Riley, 'The Pottery from the First Session of Excavation in the Caesarea Hippodrome', *BASOR* 218, 1975, 30; D.P.S. Peacock and D.F. Williams, *Amphorae and the Roman Economy: An Introductory Guide*, London and New York 1986, 196-99; P. Reynolds, *Trade in the Western Mediterranean, AD 400-700: The Ceramic Evidence*, BAR International Series 604, 1995, 70-82.

³⁶ See Strabo 16, 759; Columella 12.10; Pliny, *NH* 19.101-105, 107; Athenaeus 2.68.

³⁷ E.g. Pliny, *NH* 12.109.

— transported the famous wines of Ashkelon. Wine was needed (and consumed) in great quantities in Rome. The regular flow of wine to the Roman markets could only be secured by means of contracts concluded with a *collegium*. That amphorae of Ashkelon wine have also been found in Rome serves to strengthen this assumption.

It is true of course that both the literary testimonies attesting the fame of Ashkelon wine and the amphorae finds in the western parts of the Empire date from the beginning of Late Antiquity, whereas the inscription published here is to be dated much earlier: to the second century, or at latest to the first half of the third century.³⁸ However, climatic and soil conditions in the territory of Ashkelon could hardly have changed very much in the course of the centuries separating our inscription from the literary and archaeological testimonies attesting the popularity of Ashkelon wine in world markets later on. We must assume that viticulture flourished here long before it reached its peak in Late Antiquity. It is thus not improbable that the *collegium* to which Comisius Memor belonged was occupied with the regular transport of wine from Ashkelon to Rome and to the western provinces.³⁹

Köln and Jerusalem

³⁸ It is hardly credible that Latin would be used after this date by anyone other than members of the imperial administration. The scarcity of inscriptions from Ashkelon does not permit a more precise dating based on palaeographical grounds.

³⁹ Among the very few people known to have the *nomen gentile* Comisius, we find C. Comisius Successus, the *negotians porto vinario lagonari* mentioned above (n. 5); therefore, he handled wine stored in bottle-like containers. The fact that two men called Comisius were involved with the wine trade must be a coincidence; no further connection can be established between them.