

A Jewish Tombstone from Binyamina*

Gabriel Herman

A marble tombstone unearthed in the course of construction in Binyamina. Now at the Department of Antiquities, Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem. Length: 28.5 cm.; width: 22 cm.; thickness: 6 cm. The stone shows a well-wrought seven-branched Menorah with a Shofar to left and Lulav to right.

EIC ΘEOC | BO<H>ΘI IOY|ΔA | ΠPECE<Υ>T{Λ}OY
Εἰς Θεός | βο<ή>θι⊙ Ἰούδα | Πρεσ<β>ε<υ>τ{λ}οῦ

Unique God, help! [This is the tomb] of Judah [the] Presbyter

Although obviously echoing the *Shema* (*Deut.* 6.5), the expression Εἰς Θεός appears mainly in Christian epigraphy and is rare in Jewish inscriptions. It occurs in *CIJ* 675, 864, 1167, 1174 and 1186, and in *CPJ* III, 1539 (a mistake for 1540), but only *CIJ* 675 is both Jewish and funerary. Our inscription confirms the restoration by Schwabe and Lifschitz of another Jewish, possibly funerary inscription, namely, *Beth Shearim* II, 109 — Εἰς Θεὸς β[οήθει] — a formula which at the time of publication of *Beth Shearim* III was thought to be unique.

* I am grateful to Professor Israel Shatzman for making the inscription available to me together with some notes taken by the late Mrs. A. Hamburger and a letter addressed to her by the late Professor Morton Smith concerning the inscription.

The Biblical name Judah is here transliterated Ἰούδας¹ rather than Εἰούδας,² and its genitive form is Ἰούδα.³

The reading Πρεσ<β>ε<υ>τ{λ}οῦ at the bottom of the inscription is guided by the following considerations. First, the alternative πρεσ(βυτέρου), ἐτ(ῶν), which seems at first sight attractive, is made unlikely by the impossible ΛΟΥ as Judah's age at death. Second, although πρεσβευτής in the sense of "the elder" is rare on tombstones and normally πρεσβύτερος is used to convey the idea,⁴ it cannot be ruled out that πρεσβευτής appears here in the sense of "representative" or "ambassador".⁵ The ignorant stone-cutter has evidently scrambled the letters of this word, which is not at all surprising in light of his omission of Η from βο<ή>θι.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem



¹ Cf. *Beth Shearim* II, 29, 33, 48, 63, 64 and 82.

² Cf. *Beth Shearim* II, 181.

³ Cf. *Beth Shearim* II, 202, 208, 209 and 211.

⁴ Cf. *CIJ* 400, 597, 595.

⁵ Cf. the text of an inscription from Alexandria, 3rd century B.C., published by T. Röwe and P.M. Fraser in *JEA* 39 (1953), 84-94: Νικοστράτου τοῦ Δημητρίου Χίου πρεσβευτοῦ. For πρεσβευτής as a title in a Jewish context, see J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias. Cambridge Philological Society Supplement* 12 (Cambridge 1987), 5, ll. 26-7 and p. 30.