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 Θ EOC | BO<H> Θ I IOY| Δ A | Π PECE<Y>T{ Λ }OY EÎS Θ EÒS | β O< η > Θ L Θ 'IO η | δ A | Π PECE<Y>T{ λ }O θ

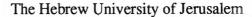
Unique God, help! [This is the tomb] of Judah [the] Presbyter

Although obviously echoing the *Shema* (*Deut*. 6.5), the expression \mathbb{El}_S $\Theta \in \acute{o}_S$ 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, $109 - \mathbb{El}_S \Theta \in \acute{o}_S \beta[\circ \acute{\eta}\theta \in I] - 100$ 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 'loú $\delta \alpha S^1$ rather than $Eloú\delta \alpha S^2$ and its genitive form is 'loú $\delta \alpha S^3$

The reading $\Pi\rho\varepsilon\sigma\langle\beta\rangle\varepsilon\langle\upsilon\rangle\tau\{\lambda\}\circ\hat{\upsilon}$ at the bottom of the inscription is guided by the following considerations. First, the alternative $\pi\rho\varepsilon\sigma(\beta\upsilon\tau\dot{\varepsilon}\rho\circ\upsilon)$, $\dot{\varepsilon}\tau(\hat{\omega}\nu)$, which seems at first sight attractive, is made unlikely by the impossible AOY as Judah's age at death. Second, although $\pi\rho\varepsilon\sigma\beta\varepsilon\upsilon\tau\dot{\eta}\varsigma$ in the sense of "the elder" is rare on tombstones and normally $\pi\rho\varepsilon\sigma\beta\dot{\upsilon}\tau\dot{\varepsilon}\rho\circ\varsigma$ is used to convey the idea, 4 it cannot be ruled out that $\pi\rho\varepsilon\sigma\beta\varepsilon\upsilon\tau\dot{\eta}\varsigma$ 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 H from $\beta\circ<\dot{\eta}>\theta\iota$.





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, Il. 26-7 and p. 30.