

The Status of Jaffa in the First Century of the Current Era

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A group of three Greek inscriptions recently published by Dr. Ya'akov Kaplan¹ raises a number of questions relating to the status and history of Jaffa in the earlier period of the Roman Empire. The three inscriptions are nominally uniform, but were written in very careless lettering, two of them certainly by a semiliterate, being mere test sketches on moulds in which inscribed weights were to be cast. No. 2, however, was sufficiently clear to enable the text to be read, and to show that all three reflected one formula.²

The main point is that each ends with the name and function of a Jewish official — Judah the *agoranomos*, son of Zozomus (?). Not less important are the two signs opening the common formula; each of these represents the well-known sign 'L', which stands for 'Year' in numerous Greek inscriptions,³ and is invariably followed by a figure. On inscription No. 2 this is Θ, i.e. year 9; No. 7 is a botched version of the same date; Θ is here represented by '0'. The figure on No. 3, on the other hand, is Δ, i.e. year 4. As the inscriptions begin with the name of the emperor Trajan, the years concerned are the fourth and ninth of his reign, i.e. 101/2 and 106/7.

Dr. Kaplan has drawn my attention to the horizontal line or bar above the 'L' sign, and, in his opinion, connected with it, as it commences the first line of the second inscription, numbered by him as '2' (Plate 68, No. 3 in Dr. Kaplan's photograph). The bar appears only in this one of the three inscrip-

1 *Eretz Yisrael* 15 (1981/2) 413 ff: 'Evidence of the Trajanic period at Jaffa.'

2 Αὐτοκράτορος Νέρουα Τραιανοῦ Καίσαρος ἀγορανομοῦντος Ἰουδου τῷ Ζοζόμ[ου]

3 W. Larfeld, *Griechische Epigraphik*, (München 1914) 449. This sign is especially frequent in Egypt, also in Cyrenaica, but is also found in Syria; see Landau, *Atiqot* 2 (1959) 265.

tions; in the photograph it does not appear to be part of the 'L', but Dr. Kaplan tells me that it does reach the vertical of that sign. I believe, however, that it is meant to cover the 'theta', a frequent practice in contemporary epigraphy in relation to numerals.

The presence in Jaffa of a Jewish *agoranomos* in those years, invites the question — What was the status of Jaffa and of the Jewish community resident in the port? It is first necessary to recapitulate briefly the little we know of the previous history of Jaffa under Roman rule. Pompey 'liberated' the town, which indicates that he regarded it as a constitutional *polis*.⁴ We do not know what was the fate of the Jewish population when this took place. The port was restored to Hyrcanus II by Julius Caesar,⁵ was acquired by Cleopatra while Antony was master of the Orient,⁶ and was restored to Herod by Octavian after Actium.⁷ In Pliny's list of toparchies,⁸ which seems to have reflected the position at the deposition of Archelaus (6 CE),⁹ Jaffa is merely the centre of one such, to wit, of Joppica. A.H.M. Jones interpreted this change as showing that Jaffa had been demoted from city status by Herod,¹⁰ Jaffa's inferior status would then have lasted till the deposition of Archelaus in 6 CE. If Jones' interpretation is right, it may be deduced that Jaffa already held a sizable Jewish population, otherwise it is difficult to account for Herod's decision to reduce the town to a mere administrative centre. *The Acts of the Apostles*,¹¹ indeed, furnishes proof that a Jewish community existed there in the forties of the century.

A renewed urban status may be confirmed by an inscription alleged to have come from Jaffa.¹² It reads: ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος Λούκιον Ποπίλιον Βάλβον πρεσβευτὴν Τιβερίου Κλαυδίου Καίσαρος Σεβαστοῦ Γερμανικοῦ τὸν πάτρωνα τῆς πόλεως.

Nothing else appears to be known of this Balbus, and he is listed without comment in Pauly-Wissowa.¹³ The earliest source in which the inscription is reproduced is that of Hamilton, who saw it at Damietta (1809). Napoleon's

4 *BJ* I.156.

5 *Ant.* 14.205.

6 *BJ* I.396.

7 *Ant.* 15.217

8 *HN* (5.70).

9 A.H. M. Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*² (Oxford 1971) 273–5.

10 See n.9 above, p. 276.

11 9:36;11:5.

12 R. Cagnat, G. Lafaye, *IGRRP*, 3.1209.

13 *RE* 21 (1953) col. 65 (s.v. Popillius, no. 36).

men saw it there in 1798, and heard that it came from Beirut, but Schürer showed that it could not have originated there.¹⁴ Lepsius' *Denkmäler* (1842–5)¹⁵ publishes the inscription in full, and he had seen it at Jaffa. Professor Ronald Syme, however, has pointed out^{15a} that *legati* of senatorial rank were not sent to procuratorial provinces. Claudius may indeed have restored Jaffa to city status, firstly because he does seem to have granted the title of *Claudiopolis* to Tiberias.¹⁶ This probably meant little in terms of the city's status — it already possessed institutions on the Greek model — but we do know that the emperors disliked the attempts of Antipas and Philip to develop cities of purely Jewish populations, but seem to have favoured cities whose inhabitants were mixed.¹⁷

Whatever the case, it is clear that by the year 66 the port was largely, if not entirely, Jewish. It was captured and garrisoned both by Cestius Gallus¹⁸ and Vespasian,¹⁹ and the latter took care to devastate its territory, indicating that the farms and villages around the town were largely Jewish also. The future emperor, however, was thoroughly aware of the importance of sea-lines as a component of political security, and took a number of steps aimed at strengthening the Roman fleets in the Mediterranean and elsewhere;²⁰ among these measures he appears to have reorganized the *Classis Syriaca*.²¹ Jaffa would therefore have become important to him, and evidently one of the Flavian emperors bestowed upon the port the name of *Flavia Ioppa*, a title which it still retained in the earlier 3rd century.²² The opinion has been expressed that this was done by Domitian, but in view of Vespasian's special interest in the oriental fleets, the act must be attributed to the latter ruler. The title 'Flavia',

14 E. Schürer, *Gesch. d. Jüd. Volkes*, 2 (Leipzig 1907) 131–2; 152.

15 R. Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien* (Osnabrück 1849–58). The first edition of Volume 12 appeared in 1842–5; the inscription, pl. 100, no. 589.

15a Personal communication.

16 *JGR*, I, 111.132.

17 See Applebaum, 'Antipatris-Kefar Sabba and Antipatris de-Qisari', ap. *Josephus Flavius, Collected Papers*, ed. U. Rappaport (Jerusalem 1982) 13–15 (Heb.).

18 *BJ* 2.507.

19 *BJ* 3.417–431.

20 C.G. Starr, *The Roman Imperial Navy, 31 BC–AD 342* (London 1960) 115 ff.; D. Kienast, *Untersuchungen zu den Kriegsflotten der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Bonn 1966) 87–89; J. Rey-Coquais *JRS* 68 (1978) 70ff.

21 Kienast, see n.20 above.

22 F.G. Hill, *BMC, Greek Coins, Palestine (Galilee, Samaria and Judaea)* (London 1914) 44, nos. 1, 2 (Elagabalus).

however, can tell us something more. At the end of his Jewish war, Vespasian established at Shechem a new city under the name of Flavia Neapolis.²³ An inscription at Ephesus,²⁴ dated to the year 123/4, records that Flavia Neapolis possessed typically Hellenistic city institutions, shown by the formula η βουλή καὶ ὁ δῆμος. As the citizens called themselves Σαμαρεῖς, it is probable that they were preponderantly hellenized Samaritans. We are therefore justified in concluding on the basis of analogy that Jaffa now received from the emperor a similar constitution or his approval of one already extant, and was accordingly inhabited by a certain number of non-Jewish Latin or Greek-speaking residents.

About thirty years later, however, in the year 101/2, we find Judah acting as *agoranomos* in Jaffa. He was still discharging the function in the year 106/7. What are we to conclude from this? The earliest known datable burial in the Jewish cemetery at Abbu Kabir, near Jaffa, is that of Rabbi Judah,²⁵ who was active in the middle of the 2nd century, but the arrival of Jews from Cyrene who were buried there²⁶ cannot be much after 115-117 and might be earlier. Hillel of Cyrene, who enlisted in Ben Kosba's force, might have been born at Jaffa in about 115, as he was then young and fit, and a member in a picked group of ἀδελφοί.²⁷

We do have some evidence of Trajan's policy towards Jewish towns in Judaea; if numismatic interpretations are acceptable, he would seem to have transferred the administrations of Tiberias and Sepphoris, both 'mixed' cities, to gentile hands.²⁸ And *in pari materia*, we may return to the Ephesus inscription. It honours the governor of Asia, Q. Pompeius Falco, for his aid to Flavia Neapolis, and as it calls him both saviour and benefactor (σωτήρα καὶ εὐεργέτην), the city must have been in dire distress, possibly even in danger, under Falco's governorship for Judaea, which ended in 107. His record shows that he was a capable soldier, and he later governed Britain in a critical period;²⁹ his earlier service as governor of unruly Lycia would point in the

23 BJ 4.449.

24 AE 1972 (1975) 178, no. 577.

25 S. Klein, *Jüdisch-Palästinensisches Corpus Inscriptum* (Berlin 1920) no. 110; cf. M. 'Eduyot, (8:2).

26 Klein, (see n.25 above), no. 34; Frey, *CIJ*, 2, 905-950.

27 P. Benoît, J. Milik, R. de Vaux, *Les grottes de Muraba' at II* (Oxford 1961) 218, no. 90c, ii.

28 G. F. Hill, *BMC Greek Coins, Palestine* (London 1914) pp. xi sq.; xiii sq.

29 H. Dessau, *ILS*, 1035-6.

same direction. Furthermore his term in Judaea (a second praetorian governorship) was irregular, and indicates contemporary trouble.³⁰ This may have been in connection with Trajan's annexation of Nabataea in 106. If we bring these dates into conjunction with the predicament of Flavia Neapolis, the later date of 106 on one of Dr. Kaplan's *agoranomos* inscriptions, and the coins ending with Trajan which dated the destruction of the building where the inscriptions were found, we face the probability that the trouble indicated took place in the same year — 106.

Whether or not we accept this conclusion, we are still faced with the position of Judah the *agoranomos* in the city of Jaffa prior to 106. It is inherently improbable that Vespasian, when constituting Flavia Joppa, gave citizen-rights to the Jewish population so soon after the great revolt, and even less so on the analogy of Flavia Neapolis; that they acquired them under Trajan is unlikely, in the light of his policy vis-à-vis Judaea's two major mixed cities. But 'twin' communities differing from one another in status and rights, though resident in one town, were not uncommon in the Roman empire. It was on this principle that Nero decided the dispute between the Greeks and the Jews of Caesarea in the year 66.³¹

In general it is plain that in most of the Greek cities of the earlier empire where Jews resided, the Jewish πολιτεύματα composed parallel bodies with the πολιτεύματα of the cities in which they lived.³² In the Roman colony of Patrae the original Greek inhabitants continued to retain a distinctive civic status.³³ Cases of parallel Roman and non-Roman corporations within one settlement were notably common in Africa and elsewhere: classical instances were Thugga in Numidia, Agbia in Africa and Monasterio near Merida in Spain.³⁴

30 R. Syme, *Tacitus*, I (Oxford 1958) p. 222, no. 5.

31 *Ant.* 20. 182–4.

32 S. Safrai, M. Stern (edd.) *The Jewish People in the First Century*, I, i, (Assen 1974) pp. 434ff. and especially 452–3. At Cyrene and Ptolemais a small number of Jews were enlisted as citizens in the reign of Augustus (Applebaum, *Jews and Greeks in Ancient Cyrene* [Leiden 1979] pp. 185–6.)

33 Pausanias, *Descriptio Graecae* 7.18.7; Korneman, *RE* IV, i, (=i. Reihe, 7. Halbbd.) (1900) col. 582 s.v. Coloniae.

34 Dessau *ILS* 9399, 6827, 6921. Thugga comprised a *civitas* and a *pagus* which ultimately merged. Agbia also consisted of a *pagus* and a *civitas*. Monasterio included *mancipes* and *incolae*.

Concerning the actual population of Jaffa in the period of Trajan we can only conjecture. There may have been an element of Roman veterans, a reasonable supposition in view of the importance of the harbour, and a fragmentary Latin inscription, perhaps from here, has a military look.³⁵ A tile of the X Fretensis found in the same burnt building as Judah the *agoranomos*' inscriptions, suggests a legionary detachment stationed at Jaffa to secure the legion's line of communication.³⁶ This might well be interpreted to mean that Judah was an official of the Roman population, the more so since his weights were entirely in Greek. Greek, however, was the language of most of the Jews of Jaffa, and this is plain from the epitaphs of the Jewish cemetery at Abbu Kabir (2nd–5th centuries CE). Moreover, Jewish urban officials were not common in Greek cities in the first century of the common era — a rare example was Jason son of Ele'azar in Cyrene. On the other hand the *agoranomos* was an accepted official in Jerusalem as early as the 2nd century BCE (II *Macc.* 3:4), and is frequently referred to in Jewish towns of Judaea in rabbinical literature.

It may be further significant that Dor first struck coins with the legend ναύαρχις under Trajan, while Sidon issued similar coins under Vespasian, Domitian and Trajan.³⁷ These issues might be taken to imply that Jaffa too, under Trajan if not before, had become in some way connected with the Classis Syriaca. But clearly the Jewish element in Jaffa was already considerable; this and other considerations must be remembered if we are to arrive at an assessment of the role of Judah the *agoranomos*.

Jaffa was, after Caesarea, Judaea's major port, and a Jewish one; the Jewish population, whether instinctively or for practical reasons, held on to it obstinately and returned to it consistently. One reason was certainly that it afforded access to Jerusalem. After 70 their obstinacy did not change; it was the Jewish door of access to and from the Diaspora, the traditional home of Jewish seamanship and the livelihoods dependent thereon. The Roman government was sensible to this situation, and Jaffa was a source of revenue. Its attitude, accordingly, was ambivalent. Jews were needed for the port — navigationally it was a difficult roadstead — and for trade, which meant revenue in the form of customs and excise. On the other hand the Jews of Jaffa were suspect and in need of constant surveillance. The policy of twin communities was therefore politic, and the Greek *politeuma* was probably never large. It might — as was the case in Alexandria of Egypt till Claudius' time —

35 *CIL* 3.6645.

36 *JQR* 54 (1963) p. 111.

37 Rey-Coquais, see n.20 above.

include a handful of influential hellenized Jews who were important for economic reasons and as a means of liaison with the Jewish section. Judah may have been one of these. Comparable would have been the role of John the customs official of Caesarea, found negotiating with Gessius Florus on behalf of the Jewish community in the year 66.³⁸ Alternatively, Judah was acting for the Jewish *politeuma*. That independent Jewish magistrates fulfilled such functions in Hellenistic cities in Judaea might be assumed from the lead weight adorned with the seven-branched candelabrum found by Dr. Kaplan at Ashdod.³⁹

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38 *BJ* 2.287.

39 *Eretz Yisrael* 1 (1951) pp. 73ff.