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PSAMBATHION AT TOMIS

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In the second volume of the corpus of inscriptions from Scythia Minor which covers Tomis and its vicinity¹ we come across the name Ψαμπαθι... . It appears in a funerary inscription from the Severan period the contents of which is somewhat unclear owing to the damages². The editor of the corpus, I. Stoian, did not complete the name leaving it unaccented and without any commentary, while in the index, compiled by Al. Suceveanu, it was classified as a *nomen incertum*. It is my opinion that this name could be satisfactorily explained on the grounds of Graeco-Egyptian onomastics.

The name Σαμβαθαῖος (derived from Σαββαθαῖος) begins to appear in Greek papyri and inscriptions from the Ptolemaic period onwards. It is a transcription of the Hebrew name *šabatai* meaning "born on the Sabbath" and it is limited to the Hellenistic spheres of the Jewish Diaspora³. An interesting phenomenon is to be observed in documents of the Roman period. V. Tcherikover has demonstrated its existence on the basis of Greek papyri from Egypt in which a new form of the name has replaced the old one: Σαμβαθίων for men (the hypocoristic Σαμβᾶς) and Σαμβάθιον for women. At this point the name stops being a strictly Jewish one. With the growing popularity of the custom of observing the Sabbath among non-Jews, the name which simultaneously changes its meaning to "one who observes the Sabbath" becomes extremely popular throughout almost the entire *Imperium Romanum*, and in Egypt especially.

It is this very name, a transcription of the Hebrew *šabatai*, preceded by the Egyptian masculine article *p3*, used commonly in this position in the onomastics of Graeco-Roman

¹ Inscriptiile din Scythia Minor grecești și latine, vol. II: Tomis și teritoriul său, ed. I. Stoian, București 1987 (quoted further as Stoian, Inscriptiile).

² Stoian, Inscriptiile, n. 253/89. The full text of the inscription is as follows:

...Ποντια[νός...ὁ
καὶ] Τομείτης [φυλῆς
Αἰκο]ρέων τεχν[εῖτης
... χρυσοχόος Λ...
ἀρχι]τεκτόνων[ν ζῶν καὶ
φρονῶν ἑαυτῷ [καὶ. . .
... Ψαμπαθι. . . .

The place in which this name appears suggests that it may have been the patronymic, but this is not self-evident.

³ On the subject of Greek transcriptions of the name *šabatai* in their linguistic as well as social and cultural contexts: W. Schulze, *Kleine Schriften*, pp. 290-295; V. Tcherikover, *The Sambathions*, *Scripta Hierosolymitana* I, 1954, pp. 79-98. The same article, revised to include additional papyrological data, was published again in *CPJ* III, 1964, pp. 43-87. See also H.C. Youtie, *Sambathis*, *HThR* 37, 1944, pp. 209-218 (= *Scriptiunculae* I, Amsterdam 1973, pp. 467-477), whose point of departure differs from Tcherikover's, but whose findings parallel the other's in many points.

Egypt, which is clearly recognizable in the inscription in question. The presence of the masculine article permits to reconstruct a masculine ending. Taking into account Tcherikover's chronology of the Greek transcription of the name *šabatai*, it is the ending -ίων that should most probably be restored in our inscription which is dated to the 2nd-3rd cent. A.D. The name should, therefore, read Ψααμπαθί[ων]⁴.

Were we to accept this line of reasoning, we would be faced with but one more problem: how to explain the presence of this sort of name in Scythia Minor? Since we are dealing here with a form that is typically Egyptian, we should presume the migration of a particular person and not the spreading of the name itself and, consequently, that the man mentioned in the inscription was an Egyptian. This appears quite probable for there are inscriptions which confirm the presence of Alexandrians, presumably merchants, in Kallatis⁵ and in Tomis itself⁶. In Tomis their numbers must have been considerable if they could in the middle of the 2nd century A.D. constitute a special ethnic club, οἶκος τῶν Ἀλεξανδρέων, which fostered their home cult of Sarapis and embraced the traditional system of measuring time according to the Egyptian calendar⁷. In the light of these facts the presence of the name Ψααμπαθίων in Tomis is readily explained.

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⁴ Other possibilities include: Ψααμπάθι[ος] and Ψααμπάθι[ς]. However, the -ιος, -ις endings are hardly popular in this group of proper names.

⁵ R. Vulpe, *Histoire ancienne de la Dobrudja*, București 1938, p. 209: Θέων Ποτάμωνος Ἀλεξανδρέως (3rd cent. BC.).

⁶ Stoian, *Inscripțiile*, n. 463/13: . . . πῖος Σέππονος οἰνέμπορος Ἀλεξανδρίας. Ἄνουβ[. . .], the author of a funerary inscription commemorating his wife Καβεῖθ[η] was presumably also an Egyptian, *ibid.*, n. 314/150.

⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 153/38; the inscription is dated to March 26th, A.D. 160.