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JEWISH NAMES FROM SICILY

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## JEWISH NAMES FROM SICILY\*

Epigraphical, archaeological and literary sources prove the existence of Jewish communities in Sicily in imperial and late imperial times: Agrigento, Noto, Siracusa, Catania, etc<sup>35</sup>. We know the names of nearly twenty Sicilian Jews; these names show the same tendencies that we can see in the Jewish onomastics of Rome, Cyrene or Alexandria. There is only one Hebraic name, *Aurelius Samohil*, and there is only one Latin name, Ἰουστός, both from Catania. The majority are Greek: Εἰρήνα, Ἀμάχιος, Λεοντία, Καλλιόπη, Ἰάσων, Ζωσιμιανός. Many of them can be explained as translations (adaptation in the case of Ἰάσων) of Semitic names, according to the well-known trend of the Jewish onomastics to remain loyal to national tradition and to adapt themselves to the usages of the environment<sup>36</sup>. Sometimes these names lend themselves to interesting considerations.

1. In *Römische Quartalschrift* 14 (1900) p. 194–195, P. Orsi published a Jewish epitaph from the Cappuccini's cemetery in Syracuse, dated V–VIP. It was published again by Frey, *CIJ* I 652. L. Robert, *Hellenica* 3 (1946) p. 98, A. Ferrua, *Epigraphica* 3 (1941) p. 44, and D. Feissel, *BCH* 105 (1981) pp. 486–487 n. 23, have discussed aspects of this text:

κατὰ τοῦ μελ-  
λητεικοῦ μη-  
δὶς ἀνύξη ᾧδε,  
ὅτει Νόφειος  
κὲ Νύ(ν)φη κί(ν)τε.

\* Abbreviations: *CIJ* (= J. B. Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* I, 1938; I<sup>2</sup>, 1975 rev. by B. Lifshitz; II, 1959); *CPapJud.* (= V. A. Tcherikover et alii, *Corpus Papyrorum Iudaicarum* I–III, Cambridge Mass. 1957–1964); Solin (= H. Solin, “Juden und Syrer im westlichen Teil der römischen Welt”, *ANRW* 29.2 [1983] pp. 587–789); Wessel (= C. Wessel, *Inscriptiones Graeca Christianae Veteres Occidentis*, Bari 1989).

<sup>35</sup> See C. Gebbia, “Comunità ebraiche nella Sicilia imperiale e tardoantica”, *Arch.Stor.Sic.Or.* 75 (1979) pp. 241–275. Epigraphical texts are collected in *CIJ* I<sup>2</sup> nn. 650–654 (with the additions of B. Lifshitz) and in Solin pp. 746–747. Add *SEG* 26, 1173, from Rome.

<sup>36</sup> In general see J. Juster, *Les Juifs dans l'empire Romain*, Paris 1914, II pp. 220–234; Solin, pp. 639–643 and 711–713; *CPapJud.* I p. 27–29.

εὐλογί-  
α τοῖς ὀσί-  
οις  
ᾧδε

Orsi and Frey read: μηδὶς ἀνύξη, ᾧδε ὁ Τεινόφειος κὲ Νύφη κῆτε. The different syllable division and the different punctuation (comma after, not before ᾧδε) are due to a suggestion of D. Comparetti quoted (but not adopted) by Orsi. Independently, Ferrua (followed by Feissel) proposed the same reading.

The name Νόφειος is new both in Sicily and among Jews. D. Feissel thought it was a form of Νύ(ν)φιος, but the shift /ü/ > /o/ is phonetically unlikely. D. Comparetti noted that this name is known in Egyptian inscriptions, but he thought it was the Hebraic term for Memphis, *Noph*<sup>37</sup>. In reality, the name we find in Egyptian inscriptions is Νούφιος, the Greek transcription of the Egyptian name *nfr*<sup>38</sup>. Since the shift ου > ο is well documented at this time, and specifically in Egypt<sup>39</sup>, it is not difficult to recognize in the epitaph from Syracuse a variant of the Egyptian name Νούφιος. If so, there is no doubt that Νόφειος was from Egypt<sup>40</sup>. The presence of Egyptian Jews in Sicily is not surprising, for the Alexandrian Jews are known to have maintained a wide range of economic connections with other parts of the world<sup>41</sup>. A Jewish inscription of Milan (*CIJ* I 644), for example, commemorates a certain *I[o]ses Alexandrinus*. It is worth noting that in the Middle Ages there are close personal and commercial ties documented between Jews of Egypt and those of Sicily<sup>42</sup>, perhaps following traditions reflected in this epitaph.

2. A Jewish grave stone from Soffiana (province of Enna) was published by B. Neutsch, *Arch.Anzeiger* 69 (1954) col. 693 pl. 26, and by D. Adamesteanu, *Rendiconti Lincei* 10 (1955) p. 569 pl. 6 (= *SEG* 15, 599; J. and L. Robert, *BE* 1958, 563; *CIJ* I<sup>2</sup> 653 B). Editors dated the text IV–V<sup>p</sup>. It is the epitaph of a member of the council of the elders:

Ἀττίνις βρ<ε>σβύτερος<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See A. Neubauer, *La géographie du Talmud*, Paris 1868, p. 409.

<sup>38</sup> H. Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen* I, Glückstadt 1935 (= 1957), p. 194–204. It means “Good” or “Beautiful”.

<sup>39</sup> See F. Th. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* I, Milan 1976, pp. 211–212.

<sup>40</sup> For the use of Egyptian names by Egyptian Jews, see *CPapJud*. I p. 43, II pp. 116–118.

<sup>41</sup> See A. Kasher, “The Nature of Jewish Migration in the Mediterranean Countries in the Hellenistic-Roman Era”, *Mediterranean Historical Review* 2 (1987) esp. pp. 60–62. For the participation of Egyptian Jews in the maritime trade in IV–V<sup>p</sup>, see *CPapJud*. I p. 105.

<sup>42</sup> See S. D. Goitein, “Sicily and Southern Italy in the Cairo Genizah Documents”, *Arch.Stor.Sic.Or.* 67 (1971) pp. 9–33.

<sup>43</sup> In *RAC* 51 (1975) p. 361 Ferrua says we should read βρεσβύτερος, but there is no trace of the first ε. For the use of βρ- for πρ-, cf. V. Beševliev, *Spätgriechische und spätlateinische Inschriften aus Bulgarien*, Berlin 1964, n. 187: βρεσβύτερος.

The name Ἀττίνας is not documented elsewhere and has caused some difficulty<sup>44</sup>. J. and L. Robert suggested that it was a syncopated form of the Latin *Atinius*, but the scarcity of Latin names among Sicilian Jews and the double τ invite us to consider another explanation. At this time one of the most distinctive features of Greek and Latin onomastics is the frequency of names formed with the suffix -ιος. Many of these names are derived from other personal names. In the Egyptian papyri, for example, we find Φιλίππιος, Θεοδότιος, Φιλώτιος, Πτολέμιος or Ἀμύντι(ο)ς, all derived from Φίλιππος, Θεόδωτος, Φιλώτας, Πτολεμαῖος and Ἀμύντας. The name Ἀττίνας, in consequence, may be interpreted as a syncopated nominative of Ἀττίνι(ο)ς, not previously documented but correctly formed from Ἀττίνοϛ (or Ἀττίνας). The use of Macedonian names by Jews (especially Egyptian Jews) is well known<sup>45</sup>, and Ἀττίνοϛ is a Macedonian name<sup>46</sup>. We lack evidence to determine the origin of this person, but Ἀττίνοϛ and Ἀττίνας are well documented in Egypt, and we already know of an Egyptian Jew in Sicily (§ 1). Was also Ἀττίνας an Egyptian Jew?

3. In *Römische Quartalschrift* 10 (1896) p. 23 n. 28, P. Orsi published a Christian epitaph from the catacomb of San Giovanni in Syracuse (V–VIP). The text was reproduced by C. Wessel, n. 592.

ἐνθάδε κεῖ-  
τε Ἰλάσιος  
ζήσας ἔτη λ´ ἐ-  
κοιμήθη πρ(ὸ) γ´ εἰδῶ(ν)  
Σεπτεμβρί-  
ων. εἰ{ι}ρήνη  
σοι ἐν Χρ(ιστ)ῶ.

Orsi (followed by Wessel) supposed Ἰλάσιος to be an error: the correct form should have been Ἰλάριος. The name Ἰλάσιος, however, is well documented. In an inscription of the synagogue of Sardes there is an Εἰλάσιος<sup>47</sup>. An ἀρχισυνάγωγος from Antiochia was called Ἰλάσιος<sup>48</sup>, and a Jewish inscription from Jaffa has preserved the name of Ἰλῶνα Εἰλασίου

<sup>44</sup> “Der Name ist anscheinend singular” (Neutsch); “the form of the name of the deceased is not known” (Lifshitz).

<sup>45</sup> See *CPapJud.* I p. 29 and W. Horbury – D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*, Cambridge 1992, p. 71. Not all these names were those of the rulers (Πτολεμαῖς, Βερενίκη, etc.): in Cyrene, for example, there is a Jew called Ἀμύντας (G. Lüderitz, *Corpus jüdischer Zeugnisse aus der Cyrenaika*, Wiesbaden 1983, n. 63 D).

<sup>46</sup> See O. Masson, “Une question delphique: qui étaient les ‘Mysiens’ de Lilaia?”, *REG* 106 (1993) pp. 163–167 (esp. 165–166).

<sup>47</sup> L. Robert, *Nouvelles inscriptions de Sardes*, Paris 1964, p. 47

<sup>48</sup> *ISyrie* IV 1319 and 1320 (of 39IP)

(*CIJ* II 907). Whatever the etymology of the name<sup>49</sup>, the available evidence shows that Ἰλάσιος is a very Jewish name. It is not a Biblical name, something which could have explained its use by Christians; thus its presence in a Christian inscription draws our attention. In two inscriptions of the same catacomb there are a Jewish *menorah* and a Christian cross engraved side by side<sup>50</sup>. Commenting on these inscriptions, M. Simon has thought of “Juifs incomplètement convertis, ou chrétiens de la Gentilité séduits par les pratiques juives”<sup>51</sup>. I think a similar explanation is valid for the presence of the name Ἰλάσιος in a Christian inscription. It is a new testimony of the interaction of Jews and Christians which, at the time, had been noted in archaeological and literary sources<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> R. Mouterde thought of a Semitic name *El 'asah*. L. Robert (l. c. n. 14) and A. Ferrua, *Note e giunte alle iscrizioni cristiane antiche della Sicilia*, Città del Vaticano 1989, n. 129, related the name with the Greek words ἰλαστήριον and ἰλασμός. The name of the martyr of Cyzicus Εὐιλάσιος (H. Delehay, *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, Bruxelles 1902, c. 447) supports the Greek etymology.

<sup>50</sup> Published by P. Orsi in *Römische Quartalschrift* 1896 pp. 19 (n. 291) and 31 (n. 319) (= Wessel 226 and 225).

<sup>51</sup> M. Simon, *Recherches d'histoire Judéo-Chrétienne*, Paris–The Hague 1962, p. 187.

<sup>52</sup> See L. R. Rutgers, “Archaeological Evidence for the Interaction of Jews and Non-Jews in Late Antiquity”, *AJA* 96 (1992) pp. 102–118.

<sup>53</sup> My thanks to the Spanish Ministry of Education for its support.