JAIME B. CURBERA

JEWISH NAMES FROM SICILY


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Epigraphical, archaeological and literary sources prove the existence of Jewish communities in Sicily in imperial and late imperial times: Agrigento, Noto, Siracusa, Catania, etc. 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, *Ioëstow*, both from Catania. The majority are Greek: *Eirēna*, *'Amáchios*, *Λεοντία*, *Καλλιλόπη*, *'Ióson*, *Ζωσιμιωνός*. Many of them can be explained as translations (adaptation in the case of *'Ióson*) 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. Sometimes these names lend themselves to interesting considerations.


   κατὰ τοῦ μέλ-
   λητεικοῦ μη-
   δις ἄνυξι δῶδε,
   ὅτει Νόφειος
   κὲ Νύ(ν)φη κῦ(ν)τε.

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Orsi and Frey read: μηδὲς ἄνυξῃ, ὅδε ὁ Τεινόφειος κῆ Νώφη κῆτε. The different syllable division and the different punctuation (comma after, not before ὅδε) 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 Νῷφειος is new both in Sicily and among Jews. D. Feissel thought it was a form of Νῦ(ν)φιος, but the shift /u/ > /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, Ἄνψη. In reality, the name we find in Egyptian inscriptions is Νῦψιος, the Greek transcription of the Egyptian name ṣfr. Since the shift ου > ο is well documented at this time, and specifically in Egypt, it is not difficult to recognize in the epitaph from Syracuse a variant of the Egyptian name Νῦφιος. If so, there is no doubt that Νῷφειος was from Egypt. 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. A Jewish inscription of Milan (CIJ 1 644), for example, commemorates a certain Ἰο[λ]εσσα Αλεξανδρίνις. 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, 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. Adamestianu, Rendiconti Lincei 10 (1955) p. 569 pl. 6 (= SEG 15, 599; J. and L. Robert, BE 1958, 563; CIJ 1 653 B). Editors dated the text IV–Vp. It is the epitaph of a member of the council of the elders:

'Αττίνις βρ<ε>σβύτερος

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37 See A. Neubauer, La géographie du Talmud, Paris 1868, p. 409.
38 H. Ranke, Die ägyptischen Personennamen I, Glückstadt 1935 (= 1957), p. 194–204. It means “Good” or “Beautiful”.
40 For the use of Egyptian names by Egyptian Jews, see CPapJud. I p. 43, II pp. 116–118.
43 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. Beşevliev, Spätgriechische und spätlateinische Inschriften aus Bulgarien, Berlin 1964, n. 187: βρεσβύτερος.
The name 'Attīνις is not documented elsewhere and has caused some difficulty. 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 -iow. Many of these names are derived from other personal names. In the Egyptian papyri, for example, we find Φιλίππιως, Θεοδότιως, Φιλότιως, Πτολέμιως or 'Αμύντι(ο)ς, all derived from Φιλίπποις, Θεόδοτος, Φιλότος, Πτολεμαίος and 'Αμύντας. The name 'Attīνις, in consequence, may be interpreted as a syncopated nominative of 'Αττίνι(ο)ς, not previously documented but correctly formed from 'Αττίνος (or 'Αττίνως). The use of Macedonian names by Jews (especially Egyptian Jews) is well known, and 'Αττίνος is a Macedonian name. We lack evidence to determine the origin of this person, but 'Αττίνος and 'Αττίνως are well documented in Egypt, and we already know of an Egyptian Jew in Sicily (§ 1). Was also 'Αττίνις 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–VI). The text was reproduced by C. Wessel, n. 592.

着手が有
τε Ἡλάσιος
ζήσας ἐτη λ’, ἐ-
κοιμήθη πρ(ό) γ’ εἰδό(ν)
Σεπτεμβρί-
ων. εἰ(λ)ήνη
σοι ἐν Χρ(ιστῷ).

Orsi (followed by Wessel) supposed Ἡλάσιος to be an error: the correct form should have been Ἡλάριος. The name Ἡλάσιος, however, is well documented. In an inscription of the synagogue of Sardes there is an Εἱλάσιος. An ἄρχισυνάγωγος from Antiochia was called Ἡλάσιος, and a Jewish inscription from Jaffa has preserved the name of Ἀννα Ἐιλασίου.

44 “Der Name ist anscheinend singulär” (Neutsch); “the form of the name of the deceased is not known” (Lifshitz).
45 See CPapJad. 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).
47 L. Robert, Nouvelles inscriptions de Sardes, Paris 1964, p. 47
48 lSyrie IV 1319 and 1320 (of 391)
(CIJ II 907). Whatever the etymology of the name\textsuperscript{49}, the available evidence shows that 'Ιλάσιος 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\textsuperscript{50}. Commenting on these inscriptions, M. Simon has thought of “Juifs incomplètement convertis, ou chrétiens de la Gentilité séduits par les pratiques juives”\textsuperscript{51}. I think a similar explanation is valid for the presence of the name 'Ιλάσιος 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\textsuperscript{52}.

American School of Classical Studies, Athens

Jaime B. Curbera\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{49} 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 Eιλάσιος (H. Delehaye, Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae, Bruxelles 1902, c. 447) supports the Greek etymology.

\textsuperscript{50} Published by P. Orsi in Römische Quartalschrift 1896 pp. 19 (n. 291) and 31 (n. 319) (= Wessel 226 and 225).


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