

LEONARD VICTOR RUTGERS

INTERACTION AND ITS LIMITS: SOME NOTES ON THE JEWS OF SICILY IN LATE
ANTIQUITY

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 115 (1997) 245–256

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn

INTERACTION AND ITS LIMITS: SOME NOTES ON THE JEWS OF SICILY IN LATE ANTIQUITY¹

Introduction

With the exception of Rome, where several Jewish catacombs and a collection of some 600 Jewish funerary inscriptions have come to light, the archaeological and epigraphical evidence bearing on the Jewish communities in the western part of the Roman world can hardly be called abundant. Given the paucity of the evidence and its fragmentary nature, one might be tempted to conclude that little can be said about the daily lives of Jews who had taken up residence in the Diaspora during Late Antiquity.

Upon closer consideration, however, this conclusion is not as self-evident or inevitable as one might have thought. In fact, much can be learned about the Jewish communities of the Diaspora, especially when the pertinent remains are placed into a larger context, that is, by taking into account both Jewish and non-Jewish evidence originating in the same general area. That a comparative approach to Jewish archaeological and epigraphical materials from the Diaspora is not merely a feasible project, but one that yields interesting results, is a thesis on which I have elaborated in a monographic study on the Jews of late antique Rome.² In this article I will argue that this approach can be useful also in studying Jewish communities that have left behind only scattered archaeological remains and no more than a handful of inscriptions. Our test case will be the Jewish archaeological and inscriptional remains from Sicily.

Because the Jewish material remains from Sicily are few and far between, it would seem logical to suppose that one can derive only conclusions which are narrowly antiquarian in nature. Thus it hardly comes as a surprise to note that in recent publications dealing with these remains, more comprehensive or systematic interpretations of how Jews in late antique Sicily related to either their own community or to the (non-Jewish) Roman world at large are, for the most part, absent.³

The purpose of this article is to show that such more comprehensive interpretations are not entirely beyond our reach, that is, as long as one adopts a comparative perspective, and provided one pays atten-

¹ The following abbreviations are used in this article:

- CIJ J. B. Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*, Città del Vaticano 1936, 1952) 2 vols.
 BS II M. Schwabe and B. Lifshitz, *Beth She'arim*. Vol. 2. *The Greek Inscriptions*, New Brunswick 1974.
 Solin H. Solin, *Die griechischen Personennamen in Rom*. Ein Namenbuch, Berlin 1982.
 JIGRE W. Horbury and D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*. With an Index of the Jewish Inscriptions of Egypt and Cyrenaica, Cambridge 1992.
 JIWE 1 D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*. Vol. 1. Italy (excluding the City of Rome), Spain and Gaul, Cambridge 1993.
 JIWE 2 D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*. Vol. 2. The City of Rome, Cambridge 1995.
 Rutgers L. V. Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome*. Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora, Leiden 1995.
 Curbera J. B. Curbera, *Jewish Names from Sicily*, ZPE 110, 1996, 297–300.

Note that a guide on the Jews of Sicily in Antiquity has just been published, N. Bucaria, *Sicilia Judaica*. Guida alle antichità giudaiche della Sicilia, Palermo 1996.

² Rutgers.

³ JIWE 1, nos. 143–161. For a somewhat outdated and not always critical survey, see C. Gebbia, *Comunità ebraiche nella Sicilia imperiale e tardo antica*, *Archivio storico per la Sicilia orientale* 75, 1979, 241–75. Largely uncritical are the articles by S. Calderone, *Comunità ebraiche e cristianesimo in Sicilia nei primi secoli dell'era volgare*, in: V. Messina and S. Pricoco, *Il Cristianesimo in Sicilia dalle origini a Gregorio Magno*, Caltanissetta 1987, 41–60 and F. Oliveri, *Jewish Women in Ancient and Medieval Sicily*, *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*. Div. B, vol. I, Jerusalem 1994, 130–4. For a comprehensive recent review of Jewish archaeological materials from Sicily, see now C. Colafemmina, *Ipogei ebraici in Sicilia*, in: *Italia Judaica*. Gli ebrei in Sicilia sino all'espulsione del 1492. Atti del V convegno internazionale. Palermo, 15–19 giugno 1992, Rome 1995, 304–29. For making some of these materials available to me, I would like to thank N. Bucaria.

tion to the following aspects: the languages used in epitaphs, the content of these inscriptions, the onomastic repertoire employed, the relationship of Jewish to non-Jewish archaeological remains, and the intellectual predisposition of those working with Jewish physical remains (which is especially important in cases where one has to rely on excavation reports that were written earlier in our century).

The Surviving Epigraphic Evidence⁴

In addition to two amulets, one inscribed stamp, one ring and one Samaritan inscription, we now know of the existence of at least thirteen inscriptions from Sicily that are identifiably Jewish.⁵

While twelve of the inscriptions that are certainly Jewish were carved using Greek, the single most important Jewish inscription from Sicily is a bilingual that has an opening formula in Hebrew and then continues in Latin. Eleven inscriptions contain names which help us in understanding the onomastic practices of Sicilian Jews. In these inscriptions we encounter nine Greek names,⁶ one Hebrew (double) name,⁷ two bilingual names (Latin and Hebrew, and Latin and Greek, respectively),⁸ and, possibly, one Latin name (though interpreted as Greek by others).⁹

Several other inscriptions considered Jewish by some scholars also survive but their identifications as Jewish are not without problems. G. Manganaro maintains that an inscription from the theatre at Syracuse, which he dates to the third or fourth century C.E., should be reconstructed as [*Loc(i) Iud*]/*aeorum*.¹⁰ Similarly, A. Ferrua has suggested that an inscription in Greek from Catania mentioning a certain Eusebios the presbyter should be reconstructed as πατήρ [συναγωγῆς].¹¹ D. Feissel has suggested that an inscription from Syracuse refers to someone who was a native from Haifa. The person in question, however, seems to have been Christian rather than Jewish.¹² It has also been suggested that judaizing formulae occur in inscriptions from Syracuse, but the evidence is ambiguous at best.¹³

Finally, in an article published recently in this journal, Curbera remarks that one inscription found in the catacomb of S. Giovanni in Syracuse should likewise be added to the corpus of Jewish inscriptions from Sicily. Criticizing P. Orsi, the discoverer of this inscription, for reconstructing the name appearing in the inscription as Ἰλάριος rather than Ἰλάσιος, Curbera adduces parallels from Sardis, Antioch, and Jaffa to argue that the extremely rare name Ἰλάσιος is a “very Jewish name”, and that its appearance in a Christian inscription (the inscription in question ends with the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ) should be taken as evidence for an incompletely converted Jew or for a judaizing Christian of gentile origin.¹⁴

This interpretation, however, is problematic for the following reasons. If the hypothetical scenario suggested by Curbera is correct, that is, that we are dealing with a Jew who converted but who did not

⁴ Curbera’s conclusions should be treated with care, for they are not based on all the epigraphic evidence presently available (he fails to use *JIWE* 1). I will deal with several of Curbera’s observations in the course of this article.

⁵ Curbera. N. Bucaria, *Antichi anelli e sigilli giudaici in Sicilia*, *Sicilia Archeologica* 28, 1995, 129–134.

⁶ *JIWE* 1, nos. 146, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, and 155.

⁷ *JIWE* 1, no. 158.

⁸ *JIWE* 1, no. 145.

⁹ *JIWE* 1, no. 157.

¹⁰ G. Manganaro, *Iscrizioni latine nuove e vecchie della Sicilia*, *Epigraphica* 51, 1989, 185. See also the commentary in *JIWE* 1, 200.

¹¹ A. Ferrua, *Note e giunte alle iscrizioni cristiane antiche della Sicilia*, Città del Vaticano 1989, no. 440 = *IG XIV*, 534. And see G. Manganaro, *Greco nei pagi e latino nelle città della Sicilia ‘romana’ tra il I e VI sec. d.C.*, *L’epigrafia del villaggio*, *Atti VII Coll. AIEGL*, Forlì, 1989, Faenza 1993, 564 n. 45.

¹² D. Feissel, *Syria* 59, 1982, 339–40.

¹³ Contra L. Cracco Ruggini, *La Sicilia e la fine del mondo antico (IV–VI secolo)* in: E. Gabba and G. Vallet, *La Sicilia antica*. Vol. II, 2. *La Sicilia romana*, Palermo 1980, 501.

¹⁴ Curbera 299–300. The inscription in question can be found in Wessel (above n. 27) no. 591 (and not 592 as Curbera reports).

change his name while doing so, it is not at all clear why the failure to change one's name should be regarded as evidence for the incompleteness of a conversion or as evidence for the existence of "judaizing gentile Christians". More fundamentally, even though it is true that the name Ἰλάσιος appears with some regularity in Jewish inscriptions, it is not clear what is specifically Jewish about the name. After all, it occasionally appears in non-Jewish inscriptions too, as, for example, in Asia Minor.¹⁵ Finally, Curbera's suggestion that the Hilasios inscription should be regarded as yet another piece of evidence that documents the intensity of the interaction between Jews and Christians in late antique Syracuse is also misleading. To substantiate this claim Curbera maintains that in the very same catacomb in which the Hilasios inscription was found two other inscriptions were discovered in which "a Jewish menorah and a Christian cross were engraved side by side", but this assertion is not correct.¹⁶ P. Orsi, who first published the two inscriptions in question and who also illustrated them in an article published exactly a century ago, never noticed that a menorah was also included in these inscriptions.¹⁷ This is because the two supposed menorahs are not menorahs at all, but rather stylized palm branches or trees of the kind one also encounters in other inscriptions from the S. Giovanni catacomb. They both lack the semicircular branches characteristic of the classical menorah. Furthermore, in the case of the second inscription, the tree has thirteen rather than seven branches. It was Wessel who first suggested tentatively that the trees might have been menorahs ("*candelabrum septem ramorum*"), but Wessel was wrong.¹⁸ The content of the inscriptions as well as the appearance, in one inscription, of a Chi-Rho monogram (and not of two crosses, as Curbera maintains!) indicates that the two inscriptions are Christian and that they lack clear Jewish influences.

The Language and Content of the Jewish Funerary Inscriptions from Sicily

One of the main features of Jewish epigraphic practices in the ancient world is the constant process of negotiation between what is specifically Jewish and what is commonly practiced by the non-Jewish world of antiquity. This is evident in the use of epithets in the Jewish inscriptions from Rome, as well as in the citation of biblical verses evidenced in Jewish inscriptions found throughout the Roman Empire.¹⁹ When non-Jewish epigraphic practices are adapted for Jewish usage, local non-Jewish practices are often the single most important factor in determining the content of Jewish inscriptions. This explains why Jewish inscriptions found in a certain place often display certain phrases and formulae not occurring in Jewish inscriptions found in other places. Thus, while Jewish inscriptions from Rome often start with ἐνθάδε κείμενοι, Jewish inscriptions from Venosa not only prefer ὅδε κίτε, but frequently start with the word τάφος – a word never found on Jewish inscriptions from Rome.²⁰

The suggestion that Jewish epigraphic practices often combine local with specifically Jewish customs gains further credibility when we turn to the languages and names used in Jewish inscriptions from Sicily. These Jewish inscriptions are practically all in Greek, and in this they conform to what was customary on the island. Traditional Sicilian epigraphic practice was strong enough for the inhabitants of Roman Sicily to have written a significant segment of their public and private inscriptions in Greek well into the fourth century C.E. The influence of Greek was in fact so pervasive that even Roman colonists who had been settled on the island under Augustus quickly adapted to local epigraphic practice in

¹⁵ E. Schwertheim, *Die Inschriften von Hadrianoi und Hadrianeia* (I. K. 33), Bonn 1987, no. 80.

¹⁶ Curbera 300.

¹⁷ P. Orsi, *Gli scavi a S. Giovanni di Siracusa*, *RQSchr* 10, 1896, 19 no. 22 (291) and 31 no. 50 (319) respectively.

¹⁸ Wessel, above n. 27, nos. 225 and 226. This is where Curbera got his information.

¹⁹ P. W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, Kampen 1991, 37–9; 61–72; Rutgers 191–201; S. Fine and L. V. Rutgers, *New Light on Judaism in Asia Minor During Late Antiquity: Two Recently Identified Inscribed Menorahs*, *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3, 1996, 1–23.

²⁰ For the Roman materials, see *JIWE* 2, nos. 543–44. For the evidence from Venosa, see *JIWE* 1, nos. 42–116.

that they switched to Greek for their funerary inscriptions.²¹ This is not to intimate that Latin was entirely absent under the Principate, but it is clear that it was not before Late Antiquity that Latin started to spread more evenly as a language for inscriptions. This trend further intensified with the rise of Christianity on the island and the concomitant influx of Latin-speaking church officials.²² In short, the Jewish inscriptions, few though they are, document how, in late antique Sicily, Greek had remained the predominant language for inscriptions.

The linguistic features as well as the arrangement of formulae in the Jewish inscriptions from Sicily show that all these inscriptions can be dated to the late antique period. Thus, Jewish inscriptions from Catania have ἐνθάδε κίτε rather than the classical ἐνθάδε κείται.²³ A Jewish inscription from Sofiana has βρεσβύτερος instead of the classical πρεσβύτερος, substituting β for π in a way also encountered in a contemporary non-Jewish inscription from Syracuse.²⁴ While in Greek inscriptions dating to an earlier period the subject usually precedes the ἐνθάδε κείται formula, this pattern is reversed on late antique inscriptions.²⁵ The Jewish inscriptions from Sicily follow the late antique pattern. Similarly, the one Jewish inscription from Sicily carved in Latin displays several peculiarities characteristic of vulgar Latin, as is evident from the use of the *pronomem relativum* (*que* instead of *quae*) as well as the dropping of the final “m”.²⁶

A long time ago, while acknowledging the existence of occasional overlapping, A. Ferrua tried to work out some principles by which early Christian inscriptions from Sicily might be distinguished from pagan ones.²⁷ Ferrua’s point of departure was his observation that some formulae appear only in inscriptions that are identifiably pagan, while other formulae appear exclusively in epitaphs that are certainly Christian. Upon closer inspection, however, the distinctions suggested by Ferrua turn out to be too rigid. The use of words and formulae such as ἐτῶν, ἐνθάδε κείται at the beginning of an inscription – especially frequent in inscriptions from Syracuse – or the inclusion of the verb ἠγόρασεν (also popular in Syracuse)²⁸ appear with some regularity not only in early Christian, but also in Jewish inscriptions from the island.²⁹ This suggests that the formulae in question are to be considered as generally late antique rather than typically Christian.

In terms of vocabulary, the Jewish inscriptions from Sicily by and large employ the same language we encounter also in contemporary non-Jewish inscriptions. For example, the somewhat unusual κούπα on a Jewish inscription from Catania – conceivably a loan from the Latine *cupa* – finds an exact parallel in a (presumably early Christian) inscription from that same city.³⁰ Similarly, Jewish inscriptions share with their pagan and early Christian counterparts the injunction not to open a tomb (μηδεὶς ἀνοίξῃ).³¹

²¹ G. Manganaro, (above n. 11); 546–54; 573. For some good examples of typically Roman names in Greek inscriptions, see also G. Manganaro, *Iscrizioni, epitaffi ed epigrammi in greco della Sicilia centro-orientale di epoca romana*, MEFRA 106, 1994, nos. 1–2.

²² Cracco Ruggini, above n. 13, 485–89. Manganaro, above n. 10, *passim*.

²³ *JIWE* 1, no. 146.

²⁴ *JIWE* 1, no. 157 and C. Wessel, *Inscriptiones Graecae christianae veteres occidentis*, edd. A. Ferrua and C. Carletti, Bari 1989, no. 309.

²⁵ Rutgers 185 with further references. Note, however, that especially in late antique inscriptions from Syracuse there is a fair amount of switching back and forth between the earlier and the later formula.

²⁶ *JIWE* 1, no. 145.

²⁷ A. Ferrua, *Epigrafia sicula pagana e cristiana*, *RACrist* 18, 1941, 151–243, esp. 172, 174, 176, 180, 211(overlap), 218–21, 223, 233, 238–9, and 242. Some of these premises are accepted by *JIWE* 1, 193.

²⁸ E.g. *IG XIV*, 81, 82, 85, 98, 105, 190, 529, 538. Compare also Wessel, above n. 24, nos. 853–82. Note that the term also occurs on Malta, in Southern Italy, and in Rome (e.g. *IG XIV*, nos. 603, 994a, and 1548).

²⁹ E.g. *JIWE* 1, nos. 146 (exactly the same formulation as in *IG XIV*, 523), 148 (similar formulation as in *IG XIV*, 83 and 96), 149, and 150.

³⁰ *JIWE* 1, no. 149 and Ferrua, above n. 11, 239 no. 135; Wessel, above n. 27, no. 840 and cf. no. 870 and *IG XIV*, 1342, from Rome).

³¹ *JIWE* 1, nos. 151 and 151. Non-Jewish examples: *IG XIV*, 237, 426 and 554; Ferrua, above n. 11, 242.

There are, however, two elements in the Jewish inscriptions from Sicily which they share, at least in part, with Jewish inscriptions from Rome rather than with non-Jewish inscriptions from Sicily. Of the nine Jewish inscriptions from Sicily, three refer to presbyters. This seems to reflect a trend that is well documented in Jewish inscriptions from Rome, specifically, the tendency to include a reference to the role the deceased played within the Jewish community.³² Along similar lines, a Jewish inscription from Syracuse ends with the formula εὐλογία τοῖς ὄσιοις ὧδε. Analyzing the epithets appearing in pagan, early Christian and Jewish inscriptions from Rome, I have argued that while Christians normally employ the word ἅγιος in their funerary inscriptions, Jews prefer to use ὄσιος instead.³³ Although I do not wish to argue here that in Late Antiquity the word ὄσιος always and everywhere was an exclusively Jewish term (it was not),³⁴ it is certainly remarkable that the inscriptional remains from Sicily reflect the same pattern as in Rome in that non-Jewish inscriptions likewise favor the use of the term ἅγιος over ὄσιος.³⁵

Jewish Onomastic Practices on Sicily in the Light of Jewish and non-Jewish Namegiving Practices in Antiquity

If one accepts that a “process of negotiation” between Jewish and non-Jewish elements is the proper way to characterize the languages used in Jewish funerary inscriptions, this characterization applies even more so to the names employed in Jewish epitaphs. Before reaching any conclusion on the patterns that possibly underlie Jewish name-giving practices, let us first review the available evidence.

As has already been pointed out, the names most frequently used by Sicilian Jews were Greek. While the inscriptions thus seem to suggest that local factors were the most determining elements in the choice of the language of the name by Sicilian Jews in antiquity, it can be observed that names that were popular among Jews in other parts of the Roman world occur in six out of the ten inscriptions. These names include Ἰάσων, Εἰρήνα, Ἰούδας, and Λεοντία. Some of the other names appearing in the Jewish inscriptions from Sicily were more generally used in antiquity, and were not usually employed by the Jews of the Diaspora. They include Εὐρέσι,³⁶ Ζωσιμιανος,³⁷ and Νύμφη.³⁸

That some of these Greek names used by Sicilian Jews may have had specifically Jewish connotations, at least for their users, follows from the fact that in a Jewish inscription from nearby Malta, the name Εἰρήνα³⁹ is used as *agnomen* for a woman whose primary name had a distinctively more pagan ring, namely Διονυσιάς.⁴⁰ In fact, the name Irene is one of the names most frequently attested for Jewish women throughout the Diaspora, occurring as it does in Egypt, Cyrene, and Rome.⁴¹ Even more

³² For the Roman materials, see Rutgers 198–201.

³³ Rutgers 194.

³⁴ In the eastern part of the Mediterranean it appears in early Christian inscriptions also, e.g. in Roman Arabia and in Roman Palestine, e.g. IGLS 2945; IJ 43; SEG 40, 1990, nos. 1494 and 1498. On the use of the term ἅγιος by Christians, see the examples collected by Y. E. Meimaris, *Sacred Names, Saints, Martyrs and Church Officials in the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Pertaining to the Christian Church of Palestine*, Athens 1986, 14f.

³⁵ E.g. IG XIV, 556 and 557. JIWE 1, 203 maintains that ὄσιος was much used by Christians in Rome, but this is wrong; see Rutgers 194.

³⁶ JIWE 1, no. 144 with commentary; Solin 1225–26.

³⁷ JIWE 1, no. 150; Solin 826.

³⁸ JIWE 1, no. 151 and 152 with commentary ad. loc.; Solin 400–1. For a non-Jewish example from Sicily, see Wessel, above n. 27, no. 1351. Note that the name Ἀμάχιος does not appear in Jewish inscriptions from Sicily, contra Curbera 297.

³⁹ In two Jewish inscriptions from Sicily, JIWE 1, no. 145 and 151.

⁴⁰ JIWE 1, no. 166.

⁴¹ V. Tchirikover et al. (eds.), *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, 3 vols., Cambridge 1957–64, nos. 144.18 and 501.4; JIGRE nos. 32, 67, and 115; G. Lüderitz, *Corpus der jüdischen Zeugnisse aus der Cyrenaika*, Wiesbaden 1983, nos. 2, 29c, 33d, 52a, 67a–b, 73, App. 9a, App. 10 (?), App. 11c.; JIWE 2, nos. 59, 68, 369, 489, and 560.

interestingly, its Hebrew equivalent, namely Salome, which appears in Roman Palestine in Hebrew as well as Greek characters, is among the names that (along with Mariamne) far outrank any other name for Jewish women.⁴² Yet, as will be explained in greater detail shortly, it is important to note that for non-Jews, there was nothing specifically Jewish about the name Irene. Thus, throughout the Greek speaking world, including Sicily, from the first through the fourth centuries, women not infrequently bore the name.⁴³ Something very similar also holds true for the name Ἰάσων, which appears twice in Jewish inscriptions from Sicily.⁴⁴ Particularly popular in Jewish inscriptions from all parts of the Mediterranean, this name also appears in non-Jewish inscriptions from the island.⁴⁵ The same applies to the name Εἰρηνῆς (= Εἰρηναῖος) attested in a Jewish inscription from Catania.⁴⁶ Several non-Jewish examples of this name have been documented in Syracuse; and elsewhere, too, among Jews and non-Jews alike, it was one of the more popular names.⁴⁷ The name Λεοντία, which should perhaps be considered as a translation and adaptation of the name Judith,⁴⁸ appears, in both its masculine and feminine form, in Jewish and non-Jewish inscriptions alike, and seems to have enjoyed particular popularity in the Late Antiquity.⁴⁹ So does the name Καλλιόπη, which, however, seems to have been more popular among non-Jews than among the Jews themselves.⁵⁰

Evidence for the use, among Sicilian Jews, of names originating in the eastern part of the Mediterranean is extremely scarce, but it is not lacking altogether. Curbera interestingly suggests that the name Νόφειος is of Egyptian origin as it is a variant of Νούφιος, as found in Egyptian inscriptions.⁵¹ To this

⁴² T. Ilan, Notes on the Distribution of Jewish Women's Names in Palestine in the Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods, *JJS* 40, 1989, 95 nos. 62–4, 198–9 and 200.

⁴³ Solin 423–28, and cf. id., *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der griechischen Personennamen in Rom*, Helsinki 1971, 110–11; P. M. Fraser and E. Matthews (eds.), *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names. Vol. I. The Aegean Islands, Cyprus, Cyrenaica*, Oxford 1987, 147 s.v.; M.J. Osborne and S.G. Byrne (eds.), *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names. Vol. II. Attica*, Oxford 1994, 139 s.v. For non-Jewish examples from Sicily, see IG XIV, 116 and 177 and Ferrua, above n. 11, no. 339a. For the appearance of this name on an oil lamp from Sicily, see O. Garana, *Le catacombe siciliane e i loro martiri*, Palermo 1961, 267 fig. 48.

⁴⁴ *JIWE* 1, nos. 149 and 155.

⁴⁵ Jewish examples: CIJ 749; Tcherikover, above n. 41, many examples in the index p. 179, especially in ostraca from Edfu; N. Avigad, *Aramaic Inscriptions in the Tomb of Jason*, *IEJ* 17, 1967, 101; BS II, 154; B. Lifshitz, *Donateurs et fondateurs dans les synagogues juives*, Paris 1967, no. 100; L. Roth-Gerson, *The Greek Inscriptions from the Synagogues in Eretz-Israel*, Jerusalem 1987, in Hebrew, nos. 6 and 7; L. Y. Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel*, Jerusalem 1994, n. 20, no. 477; Lüderitz, above n. 41, nos. 7b, 8, 15, (Jewish?), 72 (Jewish?), 77.3 and 77.10; J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias*, Cambridge 1987, p. 6, face b., l. 14; *JIWE* 2, nos. 34, 474, 538. For the non-Jewish examples from Sicily, see M.T. Manni Piraino, *Iscrizioni greche lapidarie del Museo di Palermo*, Palermo 1973, no. 26 and IG XIV, 325. Other non-Jewish examples in Solin 489.

⁴⁶ *JIWE* 1, no. 148.

⁴⁷ *JIWE* 1, no. 148; Lüderitz, above n. 41, nos. 6, 7c, 9 (Jewish?), 77.10, 77.11; *JIWE* 2, nos. 287, 416. For the non-Jewish parallels, see Ferrua, above n. 11, nos. 24, 107, 115, 215, 331, and 413, asserting, incorrectly, (p. 108) that no Jewish examples of this name have been documented on Sicily. For non-Jewish examples from places other than Sicily, see Solin 426–28. For Jewish examples, see B. Lifshitz, *La nécropole juive de Césarée*, *RB* 71, 1964, nos 1 and 2.

⁴⁸ *JIWE* 1, no. 193. This suggestion is likely in light of what Lev.R. 32.5 has to say about the name Judah. Note how in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 49:9) Judah is compared to a lion. Probably for that reason the editors of BS II, 172 believe that rather than from Judah, the name Leontios derives from אריה, which also means lion. Note, furthermore, that we also know of an inscription mentioning a certain Aurelius Olympios who belonged to the φύλη Λεοντίων or tribe of Judah, see L. Robert, *Nouvelles inscriptions de Sardes*, Paris 1964, 46.

⁴⁹ For Jewish examples, see CIJ 715; L. Robert, *Un corpus des inscriptions juives*, *REJ* 101, 1937, 83–4; Lifshitz, above n. 45, nos. 37 and 77 a–b; BS II, nos. 61, 92, referring to yet another Jewish example of this name from Tiberias; Osborne and Byrne, above n. 43, s.v. (a Jewish example from Attica); Reynolds and Tannenbaum, above n. 45, p. 6, face b. l. 21 (twice); *JIWE* 2, nos. 28, 104, 228, 438. For non-Jewish examples, see Solin 1054–55. For the appearance of the name Salome in the Diaspora, see CIJ 782, and 874.

⁵⁰ *JIWE* 1, no. 146. For Jewish examples, see BS II, nos. 136, 137, and 200 with the commentary on p. 125. Non-Jewish examples in Solin 389; on Sicily, see Wessel, above n. 27, nos. 948 and 1321.

⁵¹ *JIWE* 1, no. 152.

may be added that this name also appears in papyri from Egypt.⁵² Whether our Nopheios “was from Egypt,” as Curbera proposes, is, of course, another matter, which cannot be solved on the basis of this inscription alone. Curbera’s tentative suggestion that a certain Ἀττινις mentioned in another Jewish inscription from Sicily may likewise have been from Egypt can, once again, neither be proved nor disproved,⁵³ but it should be borne in mind that this name may be Latin in origin.⁵⁴

Names that are specifically Jewish occur only in exceptional cases in the Jewish inscriptions from Sicily. The name Ἰουδάς, Σαβατίας, Σαβανας or Σαβαλίας in a Jewish inscription from Sofiana is such a typically Jewish name.⁵⁵ In the light of bilingual inscriptions from Jerusalem and Beth She’arim, this name can be considered a direct transliteration of the Hebrew יהודה.⁵⁶ In Late Antiquity, the name Judas, which occurs very often in Jewish inscriptions, acquired an even stronger Jewish association as a result of its being used disparagingly in inscriptions in the form of the so-called “curse of Judas”.⁵⁷ The use of names derived from the word “Sabbath” was likewise widespread in Antiquity, not only among Jews, but also among pagans and Christians.⁵⁸

Perhaps the most interesting name in Jewish inscriptions from Sicily is that of שמׁוּאֵל or *Aurelius Samohil*, rendered bilingually in an inscription from Catania.⁵⁹ The use of the *gentilicium* Aurelius should not surprise us for it was one of the most popular *gentilia* in Late Antiquity, among Jews and non-Jews alike. In Rome, Aurelius, together with Iulius, ranked highest in frequency.⁶⁰ In other places, however, among Jews, Aurelius far outranks other *gentilia* of imperial origin such as Iulius, Aelius, or Flavius. It was especially popular among Jews in Asia Minor, where it appears mostly as *duo nomina* and where it is not infrequently used by both husband and wife.⁶¹ It was also *en vogue* in Roman Palestine itself, witness epigraphic evidence from Tiberias and Caesarea.⁶² That there was nothing unusual about the combination of typically Jewish and typically Roman names follows from a late antique fragmentary papyrus from Oxyrhynchos, which mentions a person likewise called Aurelios Samuel.⁶³

The appearance of the name Samohil (= Samuel) raises the question of the use of biblical names by Jews. On the basis of a passage in Eusebius, in which the ecclesiastical historiographer relates how Christians in Roman Palestine had adopted biblical names, scholars frequently suppose that the occur-

⁵² D. Foraboschi, *Onomasticon alterum papyrologicum. Supplemento al Namenbuch di F. Preisigke*, Milan 1967, 210 (Νούφιος, Νούφιος). I owe this reference to Dr. G. Mussies.

⁵³ Curbera 298–99, to which can be added the examples collected by Foraboschi, previous note, 60.

⁵⁴ *JIWE* 1, no. 157 commentary. Cf. also the M. Ἀτεῖνος Πτολεμαῖος from Sala in Mauretania in: M. Euzenat, *Grecs et orientaux en Maurétanie tingitane, Antiquités Africaines* 5, 1971, 167.

⁵⁵ *JIWE* 1, no. 158.

⁵⁶ *BS* II, no. 29. Rahmani, above n. 45, no. 35.

⁵⁷ See P. W. van der Horst, *A Note on the Judas Curse in Early Christian Inscriptions*, *OCP* 59, 1993, 211–15. D. Feissel has also frequently commented on this curse, see *BCH* 101, 1977, 224–8; *BCH* 104, 1980, 466 and 474; and *BCH* 107, 1983, 617–8.

⁵⁸ Y. Le Bohec, *Inscriptions juives et judaïsantes de l’Afrique romaine*, *Antiquités Africaines* 17, 1981, 167, 197–8, 206 who calls them judaizers; a Christian example in *IGLS* 21, 1986, no. 57; Reynolds and Tannenbaum, above n. 45, 104; G. Mussies, *Jewish Personal Names in Some Non-Literary Sources*, in: J. W. van Henten and P. W. van der Horst (eds.), *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy*, Leiden, 1994, 270–2.

⁵⁹ *JIWE* 1, no. 145

⁶⁰ Rutgers 162

⁶¹ *CIJ* 642, 719, 720, 752, 760 (two examples), 761, 764, 768, 774, 775, 776 (two examples), 778 (two examples), 779, 780, 788, 795 (two examples), 798 (two examples); Tcherikover, above n. 41, nos. 473, 474, 477, 503, 508; L. Robert, *Épitaphes juives d’Éphèse et de Nicomédie*, *Hellenica*. Vol. XI–XII, Paris 1960, 384, 386, 392, 397, 405. Id., above n. 15, nos. 4, 5, 6, and 14 (?); *MAMA* 6, 316 and 325; Le Bohec, above n. 58, 174–75, nos. 10 and 11 (probably not Jewish); G. Nahon, *Inscriptions hébraïques et juives de France médiévale*, Paris 1986, no. 272 (Jewish?); *SEG* 39, 1989, no. 1222; *JIWE* 1, nos. 9 (?).

⁶² *SEG* 26, 1976–77, 1688; *CIJ* 680 referring to Aurelius Dionysius Judaeus Tiberiensis, see also the commentary of Robert, above n. 48, 80; B. Lifshitz, *Inscriptions de Césarée*, *RB* 74, 1967, 54 no. 6 (Jewish?); *JIWE* 1, no. 15.

⁶³ Tcherikover, above n. 41, no. 503.

rence of biblical names documents that its bearer was Christian.⁶⁴ The evidence, however, is not that straightforward. When we look at Jewish inscriptions from Israel, such as the ossuary inscriptions from first century Jerusalem or the slightly later collection of epitaphs from Beth She`arim, it is evident that in Roman Palestine itself, biblical names never lost their popularity.⁶⁵ This explains why Jews in Scythopolis were greatly surprised when they discovered that Christians too were using biblical names.⁶⁶ Although Christians did of course use names found in the Hebrew Bible, study of early Christian inscriptions from Rome and Carthage reveals that the use of biblical names among Christians was far from common.⁶⁷ In the Diaspora, biblical names were not exceedingly popular among Jews, but they did occur to some extent.⁶⁸ Among these names, the name Samuel appears remarkably frequently, especially in Greek inscriptions in which the Hebrew שמואל is normally rendered as Σαμουήλ.⁶⁹ A special Jewish-Greek rendering of the name Samuel similar to the one suggested for a Jewish Greek inscription from Corycos might have existed, but it does not seem to have been very popular.⁷⁰ It has been claimed that the Latin transcription of the name Samuel, Samohil or Samuhel, appears “numerous times in early Christian literature,” but a CD-ROM subject search of the PL shows that this rendering of the name is the exception rather than the rule.⁷¹

Summarizing the evidence that has just been presented, it may be concluded that among the Jews of Sicily, Greek names of the type one also encounters in non-Jewish inscriptions were particularly popular. This is an important observation. In antiquity, names could and did serve as cultural indicators. That this is so follows from what ancient Jewish literary sources have to say about onomastic change, and also from the use of *agnomina* we encounter in Jewish inscriptions from Rome, Edfu in Egypt, and Beth She`arim in Galilee.⁷² The fact that Sicilian Jews preferred Greek names that were generally popular

⁶⁴ Eusebius, *de mart. pal.* 11. 8, PG 20.1504; A. von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, Leipzig 1924, 442–4; CIJ 1420 commentary; G. H. R. Horsley, *Name Change as an Indication of Religious Conversion in Antiquity*, *Numen* 34, 1987, 1, 8–11; R. S. Bagnall, *Religious Conversion and Onomastic Change in Early Byzantine Egypt*, *BASP* 19, 1982, 105–23; E. Wipszycka, *La valeur de l’onomastique pour l’histoire de la christianisation de l’Égypte. À propos d’une étude de R. S. Bagnall*, *ZPE* 62, 1986, 173–81.

⁶⁵ BS II, 207–8; 230–54; Rahmani, above n. 20.

⁶⁶ G. Stemmerger, *Juden und Christen im Heiligen Land. Palästina unter Theodosius und Konstantin*, München 1987, 259 n. 168.

⁶⁷ I. Kajanto, *Onomastic Studies in the Early Christian Inscriptions of Rome and Carthage*, Helsinki 1963, 93. Similarly already von Harnack, above n. 68, 445.

⁶⁸ Contra S. Honigman, *The Birth of Diaspora: The Emergence of a Jewish Self-Definition in Ptolemaic Egypt in the Light of Onomastics*, in: S. J. D. Cohen and E. S. Frerichs (eds.), *Diasporas in Antiquity*, Atlanta 1993, 117–20 who argues that among the Jews in Rome and Asia Minor, there was a general increase, in Late Antiquity, in the use of biblical names without providing any statistical evidence that could prove her point. The only inscription in which Jews can be found to have predominantly borne biblical names is the Aphrodisias inscription. But one inscription hardly suffices to posit a general trend.

⁶⁹ For Jewish examples in Hebrew, see CIJ 666, 828b, 841, 866, JIWE 1, no. 177. For Jewish examples in Hebrew and Greek, see CIJ 820. For Jewish examples in Greek, see CIJ 803, 829, 831, 848 (Jewish?), 861, 873, 903, 951, 952, 965, 970, 1414, 1417, 1420 (Jewish?); MAMA III, 684; M. Schwabe, *A Jewish Sepulchral Inscription from Caesarea Palaestinae*, *IEJ* 1, 1950–51, 50; B. Lifshitz, *Inscriptions de Césarée en Palestine*, *RB* 72, 1965, no. 7; Lifshitz, above n. 45, no. 58; Lifshitz, above n. 45, nos. 71; Tcherikover, above n. 41, 14.2.15, 15.26.41, and 112.6; BS II, nos. 62, 99, 206, 94, 96, 115, 202; Reynolds and Tannenbaum, above n. 45, face a ll. 9–11, 13, 21, 26; face b, l. 30; Roth-Gerson, above n. 45, no. 2; JIWE 1, no. 69; JIWE 2, nos. 174, 187. For Jewish examples in Hebrew and Latin, see, in addition to the inscription from Catania, JIWE 1, no. 121: שמואל [S]ameul.

⁷⁰ M. H. Williams, *The Jewish community of Corycos. Two More Inscriptions*, *ZPE* 92, 1992, 248–52 with interesting remarks on a supposedly Jewish Samoues/Samoës from Corycos. She maintains that Jews (as opposed to Christians) preferred to use the name Samuel in its undeclined form. Similar differences in the use of biblical names by Jews as opposed to Christians are suggested by S. V. Spyridakis, *Notes on the Jews of Gortuna and Crete*, *ZPE* 73, 1988, 173.

⁷¹ JIWE 1, 189. On the PL CD-ROM, I found 23 examples of Samuhel as opposed to 2576 examples of Samuel.

⁷² Rutgers 173 and 163–4 respectively. To this should be added an inscription from Caesarea in which the name of the deceased is rendered into Greek twice: Θάρσι Ἰσθῆρ ἢ κὲ Ἀμφαίθα. The first tries to capture the sound of the name

over other types of names can be taken to mean, therefore, that in this specific respect Jews interacted with their non-Jewish contemporaries.

When asked to explain the popularity of Greek names among the Jews of Sicily, let alone to define the nature of this onomastic interaction between Jews and non-Jews, we find ourselves in much more difficult situation. We have seen that in a number of cases, scholars explain the popularity of certain names by suggesting that these names are direct translations of typically Jewish names.⁷³ Put differently, the choice of certain Greek names by Jews, not only in Sicily, but in the Diaspora in general, was dictated by the wish to preserve one's identity through the translation of specifically Jewish names.⁷⁴ Although this suggestion seems reasonable, it is not a very helpful one. To be sure, many typically Jewish names, once translated, can no longer be distinguished from typically Greek ones. Consequently, when a Greek name is the only evidence that survives, we simply cannot know whether certain names were chosen by Jews because they were popular Greek names or whether they were consciously appropriated as Greek translations of names derived from the Jewish tradition.

The Jewish Archaeological Evidence from Sicily

It is not a new idea to suggest on the basis of archaeological evidence that the interaction between Jews and Christian in Syracuse was particularly intense.⁷⁵ A new review of the available evidence indicates, however, that, when it came to burial, the societal boundaries between Jews and non-Jews were less fluid than has previously been suggested.

The group of hypogea referred to as “dei Cappuccini” are a case in point.⁷⁶ In one of these hypogea, P. Orsi discovered the only two ancient Jewish inscriptions ever found in Syracuse.⁷⁷ In other hypogea belonging to the same group, Orsi discovered several lamps carrying a floral decoration as well as, in one case, the representation of a warrior. Thus the evidence from Syracuse testifies to a phenomenon that is well known throughout southern Italy, Sicily, and Malta – not to mention Rome – specifically, that Jews buried in the same general areas in which non-Jews too buried their dead, but that Jews were *not* normally interred in the same tomb or funerary complex as non-Jews.⁷⁸

It is true that archaeological evidence published subsequently by Orsi seems at first glance to militate against this assertion. In 1915 Orsi summarily discussed the results of his excavations in three small catacombs in Syracuse, the Belloni, Trigilia, and the Bonaiuto catacombs. What these catacombs had in common was that in all of them isolated examples of Jewish lamps decorated with menorahs were found together with lamps bearing early Christian iconographical themes. On the basis of this evidence Orsi

אסור, which means star, while the second Greek name tries to render meaning, see B. Lifshitz, *Inscriptions grecques de Césarée en Palestine (Caesarea Palaestina)*, RB 68, 1961, 115–6 = BS II, no. 88.

⁷³ Note also that there existed a middle way in that names of Semitic origin could be transliterated (instead of directly translated) into Greek. Thus, while in inscriptions from Roman Palestine, we twice encounter IOYΔΕΙΘ, next to the original יְהוּדִיָּה (see Ilan, above n. 42), we find, in inscriptions from El-Hammeh and Beth She'arim, the originally Greek name Λεόντιος transcribed into לִיאֲנִיָּס and לִיאֲנִיָּס respectively, see CIJ 858; B. Mazar, *Beth She'arim. Report on the Excavations During 1936–1940*. Vol. 1. Catacombs 1–4, New Brunswick 1973, 204 no. 93. Comparable is the אֲתֵנְגֹרָס (Athenagoras) or the יסן (Jason) mentioned in ossuary inscriptions from Jerusalem, see Rahmani, above n. 45, nos. 86 and 477.

⁷⁴ For references, see Rutgers 144 n. 13. Note also that the Jews were certainly not the only ones following this practice, see P. van Minnen, *A Change of Names in Roman Egypt after A.D. 202?*, ZPE 62, 1986, 87–92.

⁷⁵ The idea derives from Orsi, see below. It was followed by B. Pace, *Arte e civiltà della Sicilia antica*. Vol. 4, Genova 1949, 66–7, H. Solin, *Juden und Christen im westlichen Teil der römischen Welt. Eine ethnisch-demographische Studie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der sprachlichen Zustände*, ANRW II.29.2, 1983, 747 no. 6 and by myself in: L. V. Rutgers, *Evidence for the Interaction of Jews and Non-Jews in Late Antiquity*, AJA 96, 1992, 113. In the present article I revise some of the ideas developed in the AJA article.

⁷⁶ P. Orsi, *Nuovi ipogei di sette cristiane e giudaiche ai cappuccini in Siracusa*, RömQSch 14, 1900, 187–209.

⁷⁷ JIWE 1, nos. 151–52.

⁷⁸ Rutgers 96–99.

concluded that the tombs in question once belonged to “promiscuous and syncretistical” groups.⁷⁹ Is such a conclusion really convincing?

It should be recalled that, as Orsi himself noted on many an occasion, the tombs in question had been subject to a process of continuous spoliation from ancient down to modern times. Not only do we not know the precise archaeological context in which Orsi made his discoveries (his reports are too general to be of much value, and, not infrequently, they lack even the most basic kind of information such as reliable plans). More importantly, given the state of confusion in these subterranean cemeteries, we *cannot* know the original archaeological context into which our lamps belong. That archaeological materials from different underground tombs that had originally nothing to do with one another, were mixed up at a later point in time, seems, however, highly plausible. For example, in his brief discussion of the Bonaiuto catacomb, Orsi observed how this catacomb was the result of the joining together of two hypogea that had developed separately. It is quite conceivable, therefore, that archaeological materials that originally belonged to hypogea that were used by different groups were mixed up at a later stage in the development of these underground sites. In any event, lamps, being small portable objects, are not generally reliable indicators for reconstructing the religious preferences of the people near whose tombs they are found. It should finally also be observed that Orsi’s line of reasoning in these matters was not always consistent. When Orsi found, in 1915, one pagan oil lamp with a representation of Artemis in a catacomb that otherwise yielded only Christian lamps, he considered this piece as “infiltration or pagan residue”.⁸⁰ Yet, when, in the very same year, Orsi came across a single Jewish oil lamp in another subterranean complex in the same general area, as happened in the case of the Trigilia catacomb, he immediately assumed that this was sufficient evidence to prove the sectarian nature of the beliefs of those buried in this catacomb.

As early as the late nineteenth century Orsi had decided that “small sects of dissenting Christians” could be identified archaeologically, and all his subsequent discoveries were interpreted in the light of his earliest findings. A brief review of the arguments put forward in his earlier work indicates, however, that Orsi’s argumentation is not very convincing. His main proof for the presence of sectarian tombs seems to be that these tombs are all small and not connected to the larger catacombs in Syracuse, that they normally lack monumental wall paintings, and that they contained, along with early Christian oil lamps, isolated examples of lamps with “obscene” representations (i.e. probably erotic lamps).⁸¹ Further research into the life and work of P. Orsi would be necessary to establish why he reached such conclusions. At this point one can fairly suggest that the archaeological materials discovered by Orsi allow for a much simpler scenario, namely that we are dealing with small, family-owned tombs, whose owners did not have enough money for elaborate wall decoration (the wall paintings may also have disappeared subsequently). Also, these owners simply liked oil lamps with different kinds of representations, which would hardly be surprising in light of what we know about the use of decorated oil lamps in antiquity (or the oil lamps might also have slipped in).⁸²

In view of the above discussion there is no convincing evidence to argue that Jews and Christians were buried together. It is certainly significant that nowhere in Sicily, not even in Syracuse, do we have undisputable evidence (for example, in the form of inscriptions) which suggests that Jews and Christians contemporaneously used the same tomb complexes. At sites where the evidence is unambiguous, as, for example, in Noto, the finds uniformly indicate the exact opposite, namely that Jews and Christians buried in the same general areas (even close to one another), but never in the same tomb complex. This

⁷⁹ P. Orsi, *Piccole catacombe di sette nella regione S. Lucia-Cappuccini*, NSc 1915, 205–7.

⁸⁰ P. Orsi, *Ipogei cristiani in contrada Cappuccini*, NSc 1915, 363. See also A. M. Marchese, “Gli ipogei Cappuccini XII–XV a Siracusa”, *Sicilia Archeologica* 27, 1994, 23–5.

⁸¹ Orsi, above n. 80, 187 and 203.

⁸² For a updated discussion of catacomb archaeology in Syracuse (S. Giovanni), see now M. Griesheimer, *Genèse et développement de la catacombe Saint-Jean à Syracuse*, MEFRA 101, 1989, 751–82.

suggests that there existed limits to the interaction between Jews and non-Jews in Late Antiquity. More specifically it suggests that these limits became more tangible when burial of the deceased members of the respective communities was involved.

Conclusions

On the basis of the materials presented in this short article the following conclusions can be drawn with regard to the history of the Jews on Sicily in Late Antiquity.

Although it is evident that the sparse Jewish remains from Sicily do not permit us to reconstruct the demography of the Jewish population there in ways that are statistically reliable, they are nevertheless highly suggestive in the following respect. Ten inscriptions were found in coastal cities, including Taormina, Catania, Syracuse, and Agrigento, and only three inscriptions came to light in places located further inland, namely Chiaramonte Gulfi and Sofiana. The archaeological finds testifying to the existence of Jewish communities on Sicily further reconfirm this picture. While coastal cities and sites including Pachino, Erice, Lilibaenum, Mozia, and Acireale are again well represented, there also exists some documentation for the existence of Jewish communities at inland sites such as Comiso, Noto Antica, Rossolini, Palazzolo Acreide, and Lentini.⁸³ Such evidence can be taken to mean that Jewish communities tended to cluster in exactly those Sicilian cities which were economically most viable during the first few centuries of Roman rule over the island – cities that had in common that they all had port facilities and were easily accessible.⁸⁴ It is certainly no coincidence that in the late sixth century several of Pope Gregory's letters, which contained instructions on how to treat the Jewish communities in different parts of Sicily, were directed at church officials in Agrigento, Palermo, Syracuse, and Catania respectively.⁸⁵

Insofar as the inland sites are concerned, a Jewish presence there seems to concentrate itself on the southeastern part of the island, in an area that can be delimited by drawing an imaginary line from Catania to Gela. Again, this is exactly the area where, during the third and fourth centuries, there was a relatively high degree of prosperity among the population at large, as is indicated by the number of cemeteries that were constructed and the number of inscribed stones that were erected during this period.⁸⁶ Thus, insofar as the western part of the later Roman Empire is concerned, the southeastern tip of Sicily provides us with one of the very few good examples of Jews living in the countryside. What happened to these communities in the Early Middle Ages remains largely unknown. It is only from the High Middle Ages onwards that one finds again extensive documentation on Jewish communities on the island. At that point, Jewish communities can be found in every corner of Sicily, not only in coastal cities, but also in the interior.⁸⁷

When we try to fit the Jewish evidence from Sicily into the larger framework of Jewish life in the Diaspora in Late Antiquity, the following picture emerges. The Jews of late antique Sicily were very similar to the Jews in late antique Rome in various respects. In their funerary constructions, both adopted what was locally common, yet insofar as we are able to tell, Jews were always buried in tombs in which fellow-Jews were laid to rest, but not in tombs utilized for the burial of non-Jews. In their inscriptions, Jews adapted to and interacted with the local non-Jewish population, both linguistically and onomastically. This explains why the majority of the Jewish inscriptions from Sicily are in Greek, and

⁸³ Colafemmina, above n. 3, esp. 317.

⁸⁴ See Cracco Ruggini, above n. 13, 484.

⁸⁵ Ep. 6.33 (Catania); 8.21 (Syracuse), 8.23 (Agrigento), 8.25 (Palermo); 9.55 (Palermo, PL 77. 824–5; 923–5; 927–8 and 993–4.

⁸⁶ Cracco Ruggini, above n. 13, 485.

⁸⁷ M. R. Mancuso, *Insedimenti ebraici in Sicilia*, in: R. la Franca (ed.), *Architettura judaica in Italia: ebraismo, sito, memoria dei luoghi*, Palermo, 1994, 127–230.

why the names used in them find their best parallels in contemporary non-Jewish inscriptions rather than in contemporary Jewish inscriptions from North Africa (which are mostly in Latin) or in the earlier Jewish inscriptions from Cyrene (which are mostly in Greek).⁸⁸

We have seen that all Jewish inscriptions from Sicily are invariably late antique. It would be tempting to follow Le Bohec in saying that the situation on Sicily was similar to North Africa in that there were hardly any Jews on the island before the late second century C.E., and that the Jewish community reached its “apogée” only in the third.⁸⁹ Convincing as such a line of reasoning regarding the development of the Western Diaspora may seem at first sight, it should be recalled that this is an argument *ex silentio* that fails to do justice to the internal dynamics of the archaeological and epigraphical evidence on which it is based. In this part of the Roman world, artifacts that are identifiably Jewish do not generally predate the late second century, and the same holds true for the majority of the inscriptions. Exactly because we cannot yet determine the reasons underlying these internal dynamics of Jewish archaeological and inscriptional or, for that matter, of non-Jewish inscriptional practice,⁹⁰ it would be premature to draw conclusions that are based on the presence or absence of epigraphical and archaeological materials

The onomastic evidence discussed in this article suggests that in the Diaspora the two most important factors determining Jewish onomastic preferences are language and “the Jewish tradition”. When Jewish inscriptions are in Hebrew, as for example in medieval France, Jewish and especially biblical names appear.⁹¹ When Greek was the main language in Jewish inscriptions, as was the case with the Jewish inscriptions from Sicily, Greek names, which were locally common, appear in significant numbers in Jewish inscriptions. And when Latin was used, as for example in Jewish inscriptions from Rome, Latin onomastic preferences can be seen to exert a strong influence on Jewish name-giving practices.⁹² As I have argued elsewhere, it is highly significant that we find a relatively high percentage of Greco-Roman names in Jewish funerary inscriptions. In tombs in which only Jews were laid to rest and which were visited, if at all, by Jews rather than non-Jews, one might expect that specifically Jewish names would dominate the epigraphic record. On Sicily (or, for that matter, in Rome) this was not the case.⁹³ Still, in antiquity, non-Jewish names never completely replaced Jewish names. Even outside the Land of Israel, where onomastic interaction between Jews and non-Jews was by definition more intense than in the Jewish homeland, Jewish names continued to belong to the general stock repertoire of names from which people could and did choose. Thus, Jewish inscriptional evidence from Sicily shows that, for Jews in the Dispersion, interaction with Greco-Roman culture went hand in hand with an identifiable attachment to Jewish traditions.

University of Utrecht

Leonard Victor Rutgers

⁸⁸ The best parallels to the Jewish onomastic evidence from Sicily may be found in the Jewish inscriptions from Rome. Yet, rather than suggesting that these two groups of Jewish inscriptions are somehow related, it makes more sense to explain the onomastic characteristics of both collections as resulting from the interaction with local non-Jewish Greek onomastic practices.

⁸⁹ Le Bohec, above n. 58, 203, cited approvingly by Lund, above n. 89, 259, who suggests, however, that the Jewish communities of North Africa may have reached their peak in the fourth through sixth centuries C.E.

⁹⁰ R. MacMullen, *Corruption and the Decline of Rome*, New Haven and London 1988, 3–4, 6–7 has argued that there is a perceptible decline in the erection of exactly datable inscriptions starting in the second century, yet his graphs may very well be misleading insofar as they only include such datable inscriptions. We have no way of knowing whether the pattern reflected by datable inscriptions reflects reliably trends affecting inscriptional practices as a whole.

⁹¹ Nahon, above n. 61, index.

⁹² Rutgers 158–63.

⁹³ Cf. Rutgers 174. I would like to thank Prof. dr. P. W. van der Horst and Dr. G. Mussies for their critical remarks on an earlier version of this article. I would also like to thank Dr. S. Goranson for his careful editing of my English text.