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THE JEWS AND THE NAME OF MOSES IN ANTIQUITY – A REPLY

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THE JEWS AND THE NAME OF MOSES IN ANTIQUITY – A REPLY

Two years ago in this journal I put forward a hypothesis that the name Moses was not used by the Jews in Antiquity but was used exclusively by Christians. In this journal too, Margaret H. Williams argued that my hypothesis is incorrect; her conclusion is as follows: „Moses, then, was not used as a personal name solely by Christians in Graeco-Roman antiquity. It formed a part, albeit small, of the Jewish onomasticon too”.¹

But the evidence gathered in her paper is by no means sufficient for drawing such a conclusion. First the author quotes „the clearest example *MAMA* III 607 = *CIJ* II 793, an early Byzantine epitaph from the necropolis of Corycus in Cilicia, which runs: σωματοθήκη [Μ]ωσῆ προταναρίου Ἑβραῖος = sarcophagus of Moses, head of the guild of goldsmiths, Jew.” This inscription is not at all clear: the name on the sarcophagus could have been Ioses as well. Secondly, the author recalls a post-Constantinian epitaph from Athens, *CIJ* I 713, which „plausibly has been restored as follows: Κ(οι)μητήριον Θεοδούλα[ς] καὶ Μωσ[έως]”. My arguments concerning this inscription were neither discussed nor mentioned. In footnote 7 of my article I wrote: „But perhaps we are dealing rather with Καίμωσ (= Καίμος), a variant of a well-attested Semitic name ... (cf. Wuthnow, *Die semitischen Menschennamen*, p. 61; for the different variants of the name see pp. 163-164). If this is correct, then both names, Theodoula and Kaimos, were given in the nominative instead of the genitive, and with a haplography in the last line, or omission of καί. In summary: Κ(οι)μητήριον Θεοδούλα (καὶ) Καίμωσ (or Κ(οι)μητήριον Θεοδούλα, Καίμωσ).” I think that this restoration is as plausible as that of Lifschitz, to say the least.

In my paper I did not discuss the case of the name Mousaios. I believe that it was used by Jews and was considered by some of them (minority? majority?) to be an equivalent of the name Moses. It might be added that the occurrence of this name in the Jewish onomasticon could be viewed as an argument *against* the hypothesis that the Jews in Antiquity used the name Moses. The names Mousaios and Moses are of course quite different. When Jews, however, named their sons Mousaios, they may have wished by choosing this name to call the name Moses to mind without actually using the biblical name.

After reading the paper by Margaret H. Williams, I maintain my previous stance: there is no evidence to say that the name of Moses was a part of the Jewish onomasticon in Antiquity. Until an inscription of undoubtedly Jewish origin, in which the name Moses appears in an explicit and clear form, has come to light, the name Moses should be considered Christian as far as its usage is concerned. Last but not least, it might be added that a name of this kind, which is so strictly connected with the religious beliefs, would be either widely spread or completely avoided (the name Jesus in Spanish-speaking countries can be mentioned again in this context). *Tertium* is hardly probable ...

¹ My article: „Did the Jews use the name of Moses in Antiquity?”, *ZPE* 115 (1997) 257-260; Margaret H. Williams’ reply: „Jewish use of Moses as a personal name in Graeco-Roman Antiquity – a note”, *ZPE* 118 (1997) 274.