

## JEWES AND CHRISTIANS IN CAMPANIA: SOME EVIDENCE FOR THE FIRST CENTURY SURVEYED<sup>1</sup>

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Most of the evidence which has been cited for a Jewish presence on the Bay of Naples in the 1st Century AD is archaeological.<sup>2</sup> Much of it comes from Pompeii, and can in consequence be dated to before the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79. Some of the Pompeian evidence is admittedly inconclusive, but not all. The Pompeian evidence will be discussed below. But first, it seems worthwhile to cite a piece of evidence from elsewhere, a tombstone inscription from Naples (CIL X.1971 = CIJ I<sup>2</sup> 556)<sup>3</sup>:

. . . AVDIA. ASTER  
. IEROSOLYMITANA  
. . . PTIVA. CVRAM. EGIT  
. . . CLAVDIUS. AVG. LIBERTVS  
. . . CVLVS ROGO VOS FAC 5  
. . . TER LEGEM NE QUIS  
. . HI TITULUM. DEICIAT CV  
. . M AGATIS. VIXIT ANNIS  
XXV

i.e. [Cl]audia Aster [H]ierosolymitana [ca]ptiva curam egit.  
[Ti(berius)] Claudius Aug(usti) libertus [Mas]culus. Rogo vos  
fac[ite prae]ter legem ne quis [mi]hi titulum deiciat cu[ra]m  
agatis. vixit annis xxv

"Claudia Aster, a captive from Jerusalem, undertook this duty.  
Tiberius Claudius Masculus, a freedman of Augustus. I ask you  
to see to it, that you take pains, that no one casts down this  
inscription for me, contrary to the law. He lived 25 years."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the many friends and colleagues with whom I have discussed the contents of this article. Those shortcomings which remain are due to me alone.

<sup>2</sup> For Jews of the 1st century diaspora living in Italy, see in general Schürer 1986:73ff.

<sup>3</sup> The reader is asked to note the following abbreviations:

CGL: *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum* ed. G. Goetz, Leipzig 1888-1923.

CIJ I<sup>2</sup>: *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum* I<sup>2</sup>. ed. J.B. Frey, New York 1975.

CIL: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin 1862-.

NRSV: *New Revised Standard Version*, London 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Except where noted, all translations are my own.

The inscription gives clear evidence for Jews in Campania (lines 2-3), and it can be dated to the time of Claudius or Nero, since it is a memorial to one of Claudius' freedmen (line 4), who did not live very long (lines 8-9).

Returning now to Pompeii, inconclusive evidence for a Jewish presence is provided by a wall-painting in the House of the Physician, which depicts the judgment of Solomon (Museo Nazionale, Naples 113197). The evidence is inconclusive since the painting contains an element of caricature (cf. Ward-Perkins and Claridge 1979: catalogue 99). At most, it suggests Jewish influence, although it might otherwise betray a debt to a common fund of traditional eastern stories.

A further piece of inconclusive evidence is CIJ I<sup>2</sup> 562, an inscription which is illegible but which might be in Hebrew.

Of greater moment is CIL IV.4976 SODOMA/ GOMORA (= CIJ I<sup>2</sup> 567). The analogy between the destruction of these two biblical towns and that of Pompeii is an obvious one. It has been suggested (e.g. by Sogliano: see CIL ad loc.) that the inscription might have been written after the eruption of Vesuvius, possibly by an early excavator (the inscription was found 1.8 metres above Pompeian pavement level), but a more attractive explanation is that it was written during the ash-fall (see CIL ad loc.).

Additionally, allowing the inference that there existed at Pompeii a Jewish community large enough even to influence the economy, there are inscriptions on several *amphorae* which can feasibly be taken to refer to kosher food. We have, for instance, MUR CAST (CIL IV.2609), i.e. "*muria casta*", possibly a kosher pickle.<sup>5</sup> Given the continuing fame of Neapolitan seafood, this pickle most certainly would have contained fish (as, clearly, does the *muria* at Pliny *Hist. Nat.* 31.94), and the fish would have complied with Jewish food laws, as laid down e.g. at *Deut.* 14.9-10: "Of all that live in water you may eat these: whatever has fins and scales you may eat. And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you" (NRSV); cf. *Lev.* 11.9-12.

In addition to *amphorae* which contain "*muria casta*", *amphorae* have been found at Pompeii with inscriptions possibly referring to a kosher brand of *garum*, the fish sauce for which the city was renowned (cf. e.g. Pliny *Hist. Nat.* 31.94). Note CIL IV.2569 GAR CAST, i.e. "*garum castum*" (although note that the first letter is indistinct), and see the notes ad loc. in CIL, where the reader is invited to compare CIL IV.2611 PAN CAST (perhaps [g]A[r] (um) CAST), and an urn, possibly from Pompeii but now in the British Museum, which is inscribed GAR CAST.<sup>6</sup>

Of some importance too is the witness of inscriptions which preserve Jewish names, for instance Maria (CIL IV.1507.6 = CIJ I<sup>2</sup> 564, in a list of female slaves working in a weaving establishment; cf. CIJ I<sup>2</sup> 565, an electoral proclamation containing the same name), or Martha (CIL IV.5244 = CIJ I<sup>2</sup> 566: MARTHAE HOC TRICLINIUM/ EST. NAM IN TRICHILINIO (sic) CACAT (written on the wall of a latrine); cf. perhaps also

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<sup>5</sup> That *castus/-a* means a "kosher" is certainly feasible, but since hard evidence is in short supply, a degree of caution is advisable. Note, however, that *castus* can be used to gloss *καθαρός* (CGL II.216.47), *καθαρός* being the Greek word commonly used of kosher food: see *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (ed. G.W.H. Lampe, Oxford 1961), s.v. *καθαρός* §F1; cf. Origen *De Oratione* 27.12 τὸ καθαρὸν βρῶμα καὶ τὸ ἀκάθαρον κατὰ τὸν Μωυσῆως νόμον. Note also *Acts* 10.14, 11.18.

<sup>6</sup> This and the preceding paragraph form the starting point to a note on Pliny *Hist. Nat.* 31.95 (about kosher *garum*) which will appear elsewhere in a forthcoming edition of *Acta Classica*.

the uncertain evidence of CIL IV. 3763 MARITE, where it is possible that Greek and Latin letters have been mixed together).

Lastly, and of decisive importance, there is CIL IV.6990 = CIJ P 563: TY/ ILIIX/ IYDAIKOY. Although this inscription is difficult to interpret, Greek and Latin having apparently been mixed together here too, that IYDAIKOY is a Latinised spelling of the Greek genitive Ἰουδαϊκόν seems clear enough, and the evidence of the inscription for a Jewish presence at Pompeii is indisputable. TY is presumably a syncopation of the Greek genitive form τοῦ of the definite article. ILIIX, i.e. ILEX, is probably a name, perhaps a spelling of Felix.<sup>7</sup> A possible interpretation, taking the genitives into account, might be "Felix, <the slave> of a Jew".

So much for archaeological evidence for Jews. What about Christians? Once again, there are archaeological finds which have been cited as evidence, and once again they are owed mostly to Vesuvius. Although the evidence of all these finds is inconclusive, it seems to me that they are nonetheless of sufficient interest to merit a brief survey.

In an upper room in the House of the Bicentenary in Herculaneum, there is a cupboard above which, carved into the stucco, is the impression of a cross. According to C.J. Hemer, however,<sup>8</sup> this impression "is likely to have been made not by a Christian cross but by a bracket supporting a shelf or the like". To be sure, the wall around the cross shows signs of having been covered by a square fixture of sorts.

It has been suggested that the two examples of the ROTAS-SATOR word-square found amongst the graffiti from Pompeii (CIL IV.8123, 8623) suggest Christian activity there.<sup>9</sup> But it is not certain whether the word-square was invented by Christians, for all it may have been used by them later. Given that the Pompeian examples pre-date all others by many years, their discovery is by no means a sure indication of a Pompeian congregation of early brethren.

Finally, also cited as evidence for Christians at Pompeii has been CIL IV.679.4 CHRISTIRAI (?) (see CIL ad loc.); but it is impossible to found certain conclusions on a one-word inscription whose first two letters are rather indistinct.

That there is no conclusive archaeological evidence for a Christian presence on the Bay of Naples in the 1st Century AD is not to say that there were no Christians, however, or necessarily that they left no trace of their presence. On the contrary, since many early Christians were also Jews, it is possible that remains testifying to a Jewish presence were in fact left by practising Christians. But for certain indication of Christian activity, one has to look outside the realm of archaeology, in literature. There are two passages to consider, and the testimony they give initially appears contradictory. But after closer examination, the apparent witness of the later passage can be seen to be misleading.

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<sup>7</sup> "Ilex", i.e. "oak tree", seems not to be attested elsewhere as a name.

<sup>8</sup> Hemer 1989:155 n.156.

<sup>9</sup> ROTAS  
OPERA  
TENET  
AREPO

SATOR is an anagram of PATERNOSTER written twice to form a cross, with a shared N in the middle, and with A and O (alpha and omega) also written twice, taking up the remaining letters. For bibliography regarding the word-square, see Hemer 1989:156 n.156.

A tactic commonly employed by opponents of the faith in the early days of Christianity, so Tertullian alleges (*Apol.* 40.1-2), was to blame Christians for natural disasters: "On the contrary, the term 'faction' must be applied [sc. not to Christians but] to those who unite in the hatred of good and evil men, and who cry out against innocent blood, in addition blatantly fabricating this empty charge in defence of their hatred, that Christians are the cause of every civil disaster and every public misfortune from the beginning of time. If the Tiber overflows its banks, if the Nile does not run up onto the land, if the heavens stand still, if the earth moves, if there is famine or plague, the cry goes up at once: "Christians to the lions!"<sup>10</sup> Tertullian therefore gives a list of disasters for which Christians could not be held responsible, and among these, he cites the eruption of Vesuvius (*Apol.* 40.8): "But they did not complain about Christians in Etruria and Campania, when fire from heaven engulfed Vulturni, and fire from the mountain Pompeii".<sup>11</sup>

It is possible, but would be wrong to infer from the above quotations that Tertullian thought that there were no Christians in Campania in AD 79: firstly, his stance is rhetorical and even rather emotional, and, secondly, Tertullian would not have set out to contradict the second of the two relevant literary passages, *Acts* 28.13-14, a passage which he must have read,<sup>12</sup> and which specifically states that there were Christians in Puteoli (Pozzuoli) when Paul passed through on his way to Rome: "... then we weighed anchor and came to Rhegium. After one day there a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found believers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome" (NRSV).<sup>13</sup>

The Tertullian passages just quoted cannot be taken to deny that there were 1st Century Christians in Campania. But equally, since they do not make any clear statements to the fact, they cannot be used as hard evidence that there were Christians. The argument that there were Christians therefore boils down to the question of Luke's reliability as an historian when writing *Acts*. As it happens, there is no reason to doubt his word, since it is not a matter in which he is likely to lie, and since his account can be proved accurate in other parts. We are told, for instance, that he and Paul travelled to Puteoli on an Alexandrian ship (*Acts* 28.11), and he is accurate at *Acts* 28.13-14 as regards the best route for grain ships from Alexandria and the quickest way to Rome for passengers travelling on them.<sup>14</sup> Also, where Luke's facts can be checked in other parts of the *Acts*, he is invariably

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<sup>10</sup> "at e contrario illis nomen factionis accommodandum est, qui in odium bonorum et proborum conspirant, qui adversus sanguinem innocentium conclamant, praetextantes plane ad odii defensionem illam quoque vanitatem, quod existiment omnis publicae cladis, omnis popularis incommodi a primordio temporum Christianos esse in causa. [2] si Tiberis ascendit in moenia, si Nilus non ascendit in rura, si caelum stetit, si terra movit, si fames, si lues, statim 'Christianos ad leonem!'"

<sup>11</sup> "sed nec Tuscia iam atque Campania de Christianis querebantur, cum Vulturnias de caelo, Pompeios de suo monte perfudit ignis".

<sup>12</sup> Note *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 22-23.

<sup>13</sup> ὅθεν περιελόντες κατηντήσαμεν εἰς Ῥήγιον· καὶ μετὰ μίαν ἡμέραν ἐπιγενομένου νότου δευτεραῖοι ἦλθομεν εἰς Ποτιόλους· οὗ εὐρόντες ἀδελφοὺς παρεκλήθημεν παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐπιμεῖναι ἡμέρας ἑπτὰ· καὶ οὕτως εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην ἦλθομεν.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. e.g. Suet. *Tit.* 5.3, describing Titus' actions to allay suspicions that he was plotting against his father Vespasian, and that he intended to set himself up as king in the East: *quare festinans in Italiam, cum Regium, dein Puteolos oneraria nave appulisset, Romam inde contendit expeditissimus* ("And so hurrying to Italy [sc. from Alexandria], travelling on a supply ship, he

found to be accurate.<sup>15</sup> No doubt the Christians he mentions at Puteoli would have been members of the church at Rome, albeit doubtless also associated with the community of Jews which, according to Josephus, had existed at Puteoli as early as 4 BC (*B.J.* 2.104, *Ant.* 17.328; cf. CIJ I<sup>2</sup> 561, although this inscription cannot be precisely dated).

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put in at Rhegium and then Puteoli, and from there he went post-haste to Rome"); see Bruce 1986 at *Acts* 27.6.

<sup>15</sup> For Luke's qualities as a historian, see generally Bruce 1984:80-92.