

UNIVERSITÀ DI NAPOLI L'ORIENTALE
DIPARTIMENTO ASIA AFRICA E MEDITERRANEO
CENTRO DI STUDI EBRAICI

JUDAICA VENUSINA
II

CATACOMBE EBRAICHE IN ITALIA JEWISH CATACOMBS IN ITALY

ATTI DEL CONVEGNO INTERNAZIONALE
PRIN 2022 *VENUSIA JUDAICA*

NAPOLI, 29-30 OTTOBRE 2024

a cura di

Giancarlo Lacerenza e Maria Amodio



UniorPress
Napoli 2025



Finanziato
dall'Unione europea
NextGenerationEU



Ministero
dell'Università
e della Ricerca



Italia domani
PIANO NAZIONALE
DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA



UNIVERSITÀ DI NAPOLI
L'ORIENTALE



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI
FEDERICO II

Questo volume è un esito del PRIN 2022

*Venusia Judaica: Advanced Tools for Epigraphical, Archaeological, Geomineralogical Investigation,
Sustainable Fruition and Preservation of the Jewish Catacombs of Venosa*

Finanziato dall'Unione Europea – Next Generation EU, Missione 4 Componente 1, CUP 2022LF72JW

CENTRO DI STUDI EBRAICI
UNIVERSITÀ DI NAPOLI L'ORIENTALE
DIPARTIMENTO ASIA AFRICA E MEDITERRANEO
PIAZZA S. DOMENICO MAGGIORE 12, 80134 NAPOLI
cse@unior.it

UNIORPRESS

VIA NUOVA MARINA 59, 80133 NAPOLI
uniorpress@unior.it

In copertina: *Juedische Katakomben bei Venosa*

da K. Stieler, E. Paulus, W. Kaden, *Italien. Eine Wanderung von den Alpen bis zum Aetna*, Engelhorn, Stuttgart 1876.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

ISBN 978-88-6719-332-5

INDICE

Saluti istituzionali | *Welcome Addresses*

ROBERTO TOTTOLI, Rettore dell'Università di Napoli L'Orientale	IX
ROBERTA GIUNTA, Direttrice del Dipartimento Asia Africa e Mediterraneo	X
TOMMASO SERAFINI, Direttore dei Musei e parchi archeologici di Melfi e Venosa	XI
LUIGINA TOMAY, già Soprintendente Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio della Basilicata	XIII
DARIO DISEGNI, Presidente della Fondazione per i Beni Culturali Ebraici in Italia	XV
GIANCARLO LACERENZA, Coordinatore del PRIN <i>Venusa Judaica</i>	XVI

Atti del Convegno | *Conference Proceedings*

I. *Apulia*

MARIA AMODIO

Gli insediamenti funerari della Maddalena a Venosa: questioni aperte e prospettive di ricerca 1-49

GIANCARLO LACERENZA

L'ambulacro L nelle catacombe superiori di Venosa: primi dati sul contesto e sui reperti epigrafici 51-89

PIERGIULIO CAPPELETTI – CONCETTA RISPOLI

I materiali geologici delle catacombe di Venosa: caratterizzazione e stato di conservazione 91-110

LEOPOLDO REPOLA – VITO MUSCIO – MARIA ALESSANDRA LETIZIA

Modelli digitali e *data visualization*. Analisi e valorizzazione delle catacombe di Venosa 111-126

PAOLA DE SANTIS

I complessi catacombali di *Canusium* e *Venusia*: peculiarità ed elementi di confronto. Ricerca, esperienze e metodologie 127-164

II. *Sardinia et Sicilia*

SABRINA CISCI

Nuove testimonianze ebraiche da Sulci (Sant'Antioco) 167-195

Appendice

GIANCARLO LACERENZA, Le epigrafi nel nuovo ipogeo ebraico di Sant'Antioco:
prime osservazioni 197-210

GIOVANNI DI STEFANO – ANGELICA FERRARO

Gli ipogei giudaici degli Iblei in Sicilia 211-221

VITTORIO G. RIZZONE

Le catacombe ebraiche di Malta fra tradizione locale e strutturazione comunitaria 223-243

III. *Roma*

MARZIA DI MENTO – ELSA LAURENZI

Le catacombe di Villa Torlonia: stato della ricerca e nuovi dati 247-268

DOROTA HARTMAN

Biblical and Eschatological Imagery in the Jewish Catacombs of Rome: An Overview 269-282

JESSICA DELLO RUSSO

“The Very Business of the Place.” Growing the Global Audience for the Jewish
Catacombs of Italy 283-311

Autori | *Authors*

313-318

DOROTA HARTMAN

BIBLICAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL IMAGERY
IN THE JEWISH CATACOMBS OF ROME: AN OVERVIEW*

Abstract

This article examines the epigraphic formulae attested in the Jewish funerary inscriptions of Rome — drawn principally from the catacombs of Villa Torlonia, Vigna Randanini, and Monteverde — with a view to recovering the biblical and eschatological beliefs of the communities that produced them. After a preliminary discussion of the linguistic landscape of the corpus, the article offers a systematic analysis of the main formulaic clusters: laudatory epithets encoding a distinctly Jewish moral vocabulary (φιλόνομος, φιλέντολος, φιλόλαος, φιλοπένης), closing augural clauses centred on peace (ἐν εἰρήνῃ, *shalom*), and the theology of resurrection implicit in the κοίμησις metaphor and its Latin equivalent *dormitio*. The analysis concludes that the biblical contribution operates not through explicit scriptural quotation but through a dense network of formulaic allusions mediated by liturgical practice, constructing a coherent eschatological imaginary in which the deceased is perpetually blessed and oriented towards resurrection.

Il presente articolo esamina le formule epigrafiche attestate nelle iscrizioni funerarie giudaiche di Roma — tratte principalmente dalle catacombe di Villa Torlonia, Vigna Randanini e Monteverde — al fine di ricostruire le credenze bibliche ed escatologiche delle varie congregazioni giudaiche che le produssero. Dopo una breve discussione preliminare del paesaggio linguistico del corpus, l'articolo offre una presentazione dei principali raggruppamenti formulari: epiteti laudativi che codificano un vocabolario morale specificamente giudaico (φιλόνομος, φιλέντολος, φιλόλαος, φιλοπένης), clausole augurali conclusive incentrate sul concetto di pace (ἐν εἰρήνῃ, shalom), e la teologia della resurrezione implicita nella metafora della κοίμησις e nel suo equivalente latino dormitio. L'analisi conclude che il contributo biblico non opera attraverso citazioni scritturali esplicite, bensì attraverso una rete di allusioni formulari mediate dalla pratica liturgica, costruendo un immaginario escatologico coerente in cui il defunto è perpetuamente benedetto e orientato verso la resurrezione.

Keywords: Jewish and Christian funerary formulary; catacombs; Septuagint; κοίμησις; eschatology.

Parole chiave: formulario funebre giudaico e cristiano; catacombe; Settanta; κοίμησις; escatologia.

* Research carried out within the framework of the PRIN 2022 Project “Venusia Judaica: Advanced Tools for Epigraphical, Archaeological, Geomineralogical Investigation, Sustainable Fruition and Preservation of the Jewish Catacombs of Venosa” (2023-2026), funded by the European Union – Next Generation EU, Mission 4 Component 1, CUP 2022LF72JW, directed by G. Lacerenza (P.I.) at the Department of Asia, Africa, and the Mediterranean of the University of Naples L’Orientale, and by P. Cappelletti, head of the research unit at the Department of Earth, Environmental and Resources Sciences of the University of Naples Federico II.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, it was not possible to present this paper at the 2024 conference. I am grateful to the editors for including it in the Proceedings nonetheless. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Jewish inscriptions of Rome constitute one of the most valuable sources for the study of the Jewish diaspora in the late ancient world. Originating predominantly from the catacombs of Villa Torlonia, Vigna Randanini, and Monteverde, and collected in the corpus *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe II* (JIWE II) edited by David Noy (1995), they amount to approximately 600 texts datable across a chronological span from the third to the fifth century CE. An analysis of the recurring epigraphic formulae in this corpus reveals not only the community's linguistic habits, but also its strategies of identity self-representation, the dialectic between cultural integration and religious specificity, and the internal structure of individual congregations (*synagogai*). Moreover, these inscriptions provide both direct and indirect evidence regarding the religious beliefs of the deceased. Although such indications are almost invariably implicit and highly concise, they preserve traces of the subjects' underlying theological framework, which can occasionally be discerned through Scriptural allusions embedded within the texts.

Without claiming to provide an exhaustive exposition of the matter — a subject which, needless to say, has been addressed on previous occasions¹ — let alone a definitive resolution within this context, we shall focus for the present on an attempted response to a question that is deceptively simple yet profoundly complex: what were the beliefs of the 'people of the catacombs'?

2. THE USE OF GREEK: JUST A MATTER OF LANGUAGE?

Before addressing the individual formulae and the epigraphic biblical insights, it is nonetheless helpful to recall the linguistic landscape of the corpus. As is well known, Greek is by far the predominant language (approximately 75% of inscriptions), followed by Latin (approximately 20%), while Hebrew and Aramaic appear mainly in brief insertions, names or isolated clauses.² It is generally held that this distribution reflects the sociolinguistic composition of the Roman diaspora, heir to a Greek-speaking tradition consolidated from the second century BCE onwards, as attested by the papyri and the Septuagint.³ Latin, though in the minority, grows progressively in the third and fourth centuries, signalling a more intense interaction with Roman culture. Bilingual or mixed inscriptions — in which a Hebrew formula (*shalom*, שלום) is often embedded in a Latin or Greek text — testify to a functional multilingualism in which languages do not exclude one another but perform complementary and symbolically differentiated roles.

This general situation has led several scholars to conclude that Greek functioned as the dominant vernacular of Roman Jews in the Imperial period. This inference, however, deserves critical scrutiny. The linguistic profile of a funerary corpus need not mirror the everyday spoken lan-

¹ I cite here only the essential bibliography: Frey 1936: CXVIII-CXLIV; Leon 1960: 244-250; Smallwood 1976: 120-143; Barclay 1996: 282-319; Williams 1999; further references below.

² Leon 1960: 75-92; Kant 1987; Rutgers 1995: 176-191; Noy 1997; Lacerenza 2003; Cappelletti 2006: 177-203. For a comparison with the use of Greek in Christian inscriptions, see Felle 2018.

³ In Judaea, this occurred, self-evidently, within a framework of bilingualism or even — in certain contexts — trilingualism: see Schwartz 2001: 145-160; Spolsky 2014: 11-135; Ong 2015.

guage of a community; rather, it may reflect the conventions, prestige hierarchies, and religious associations specific to the epigraphic and mortuary domain.

The assumption that epitaph language straightforwardly indexes vernacular use, rests indeed on a logic that has been questioned in other sociolinguistic contexts.⁴ Furthermore, in the specific case of Jewish funerary epigraphy, such an assumption is entirely tenuous, given that over the centuries Jews frequently employed Hebrew in epitaphs even when their vernacular language was altogether different.⁵ Funerary inscriptions are not spontaneous communicative acts, but highly ritualized, socially regulated productions, often composed under the influence of established formulae and community-specific conventions. The choice of language in such a register is therefore overdetermined by factors that operate independently of everyday linguistic competence. A community may consistently bury its dead in one language while conducting the business of daily life in another. This disjunction between the funerary register and the vernacular is well attested in ancient Mediterranean epigraphic cultures more broadly and should likewise be considered a viable hypothesis also for the Jewish case in the catacomb texts.

In this connection, a more compelling explanation for the preponderance of Greek in Jewish epitaphs may be sought in the sacred associations of the language itself. Greek occupied a unique position in the symbolic economy of Diaspora Judaism by virtue of its being the language of the Septuagint. For communities whose liturgical and scriptural life was conducted substantially in Greek, the language would inevitably have accumulated a register of sanctity — a quality of holiness derived not from its ethnic origins but from its association with divine revelation and communal worship. It is entirely plausible, under this hypothesis, that Greek came to be perceived as the appropriate language for communicating with or about the dead precisely because of this sacred character: a language fit for the threshold between the living and the divine.⁶

Analogously, the persistence of some Hebrew in certain Jewish epitaphs demonstrates that the symbolic and religious valences of a language, rather than its practical currency in daily communication, could govern epigraphic choice in mortuary contexts. Greek, as the language of the Septuagint, may thus have served a function structurally analogous to that of Hebrew: a sacred tongue deployed at the boundary of life and death, regardless of whether the deceased or their mourners habitually spoke it.⁷ It follows that the 75% figure, while striking, should be approached with caution as demographic or sociolinguistic evidence. What the epitaphic record demonstrates with confidence is not that three quarters of Rome's Jewish population spoke Greek as a primary language, but that three quarters of those who commissioned or composed funerary inscriptions operated within a community where Greek carried sufficient symbolic capital to be deemed the appropriate vehicle for commemorating the dead. These are significantly different claims, and conflating them risks projecting onto the living the linguistic preferences of the grave.

⁴ See, for instance, Meyer 1990; Adams 2003; Clackson 2015.

⁵ Noy 2000; Ameling 2009.

⁶ Rajak 2009; Hartman 2015.

⁷ van der Horst 1991; Noy 1999; Rajak 2014.

3. THE PEOPLE

3.1. *Opening Formulae, Identification and Titles*

That being said, within the general structure of the epitaphs—which, it should be noted, sometimes exhibit high degrees of linguistic and socio-cultural differentiation—one can distinguish several sets of formulas arranged in a sequence that is not necessarily regular, nor are they always all present, which are as follows. All such data have been meticulously indexed in JIWE II, which significantly facilitates further research.⁸

A first group of formulae concerns the presentation of the deceased. The most common structure is of the type: ἐνθάδε κείται + name + communal title. The Greek formula ἐνθάδε κείται ('here lies') is of Hellenistic pagan ancestry, widely attested in the funerary epigraphy of the eastern Mediterranean. Its use in the Jewish inscriptions of Rome shows a sense of continuity and demonstrates how the local congregations adopted a formulary shared with its surrounding environment, adapting it to its own needs.

One of the most distinctive features of the corpus is the frequent mention of communal offices whose interpretation is still, in various cases, controversial.⁹ Recurring titles include: ἀρχισυνάγωγος (head of the synagogue, a charge that could be honorary and transmitted within families); γερουσιάρχης (head of the council of elders); γραμματεὺς (secretary, a crucial figure not necessarily exclusively connected to administrative tasks); ἄρχων (title used for an uncertain office, which could be held several times); πατήρ/μήτηρ συναγωγῆς (honorary titles probably bestowed on founders or benefactors). These offices and titles reveal the degree of institutionalisation achieved by the Jewish communities of Rome, organised into at least eleven distinct *synagogai* or congregations, with administrative structures similar to those of the Roman *collegia*.¹⁰

3.2. *Laudatory Formulae: Religion and the Epigraphic βίος*

A second group of formulae concerns the praise of the deceased, condensed into adjectives and set phrases that constitute a specific epigraphic moral vocabulary. Among the most significant qualifications and posthumous eulogies: φιλόνομος ('lover of the Law'), a specifically Jewish qualification signalling, in this context, observance of the Torah (see, for example, JIWE II 212 and 502, respectively from Vigna Randanini and Villa Torlonia); φιλέντολος ('lover of the commandments', JIWE II 240 and 281 from Vigna Randanini; JIWE II 576 and 564, bearing Latin *filentolia*, both from unknown place). The case of JIWE II 240 is moreover particularly noteworthy for the redundancy of epithets applied to the deceased, φιλόλαος φιλ[έντολ]ος φιλοπένης, 'lover of the people, lover of the commandments, lover of the poor'.¹¹

⁸ Noy 1995: 541-549.

⁹ The bibliography on this subject is extensive and has at times focused on individual offices or functions. For a first overview, see Frey 1936: LXVIII-CXI; Leon 1960: 167-194; Rajak – Noy 1993; Williams 1994 and 1998 (sections dedicated to community organization).

¹⁰ Rocca 2017; Id. 2022: 72-129.

¹¹ The adjective φιλοπένης (*philopénēs*, 'lover of the poor'), although conventional in its epigraphic usage, acquires particular resonance within a Jewish context, where it evokes the centrality of charitable giving as a reli-

It is noteworthy that these eulogistic formulae tend to cluster around the semantic field of religious observance and communal identity: terms such as φιλόνομος and φιλέντολος are not generic moral qualifications but rather encode a distinctly Jewish value system, anchoring individual virtue to the fulfillment of divine commandments and loyalty to the Law.¹²

The term φιλόλαος deserves further attention. While in classical Greek λαός denotes ‘people’ in a generic sense, its usage in the Jewish epigraphic and scriptural tradition carries a markedly more specific weight. In the Septuagint, λαός functions as the standard rendering of the Hebrew *‘am*, and in the vast majority of its occurrences it designates the people of Israel as God’s chosen community. While in the New Testament and related literature the singular form of λαός normally refers to the Jewish people, it carries the technical resonance of the covenantal community par excellence.¹³ It is therefore plausible that, in a Jewish funerary context, φιλόλαος was not a merely civic or generic qualification, but rather implied affection and solidarity specifically towards the Jewish community, the *‘am Yisra’el*. If so, the formula would operate on two levels simultaneously: as a recognisable Hellenic encomiastic *tópos* and as a coded affirmation of communal loyalty, intelligible in its full depth only to those who shared the same scriptural horizon.¹⁴

This alignment between Greek linguistic expression and Jewish religious content suggests that Greek functioned not merely as a vernacular of convenience, but as a vehicle capable of conveying and preserving core theological and ethical commitments of the community. On the Latin side, adjectives such as *innocens*, *benemerens*, and *dulcissimus/a* draw on the Roman encomiastic repertoire, without any specific reinterpretation in a Jewish key.¹⁵

3.3. Closing Clauses, Whishing Formulas and Symbols

Inscriptions frequently close with augural formulae, which are generally repetitive or standardized. The most common is שלום (*shalom*, ‘peace’) and evenmore so ἐν εἰρήνῃ, ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ κοιμησις αὐτοῦ/αὐτῆς (‘in peace’, ‘may his/her repose be in peace’) or its Latin shorter variant *in pace*, which introduces a conception of death as a peaceful sleep in anticipation of resurrection — a theological notion that finds correspondence in rabbinic texts and distinguishes this corpus from contemporary pagan epigraphy. The insertion of the Hebrew *shalom* — even in texts that are otherwise entirely Greek or Latin — functions, furthermore, as a primary identity marker: it is the sacred language breaking into the vernacular text to affirm the religious belonging of the deceased. The formula is sometimes extended to שלום על ישראל (*shalom ‘al Yisra’el*, ‘peace upon Israel’), a direct echo of synagogal liturgy, which is difficult not to see as connected to the

gious and social obligation — a concept deeply embedded in Jewish ethical thought and closely associated with the Hebrew notion of *sedāqāb*, which encompasses both ‘righteousness’ and ‘almsgiving’.

¹² The fact that these designations could be applied even to children, as in the case of JIWE II 212, suggests, however, that particularly in such instances these expressions were essentially conventional.

¹³ Strathmann 1942; Lohfink 1975; Davies 1982; Gladd 2019.

¹⁴ See also, for comparison, the mosaic inscription from Elche, JIWE I 180, which appears to define the building as πρ[οσ]ευχῆ λαο[ῦ]. For a recent discussion, see Bar-Magen Numhauser 2021: 295-299 and *passim*.

¹⁵ van der Horst 1991: 61-72.

φιλόλαος seen above, whereas ‘Israel’ is to be understood – as seems likely – as ‘people of Israel’ and not Eretz Israel.¹⁶ The biblical implications of these additions will be addressed further on.

Usually in the lower part of the epitaph, or alongside the text, in a space often intentionally left blank by the stonecutter, the epitaphs present a series of recurring symbols that function as identity formulae of a visual nature: the *menorah*, the *shofar*, the *lulav*, and the *etrog*. These iconographic elements perform a function analogous to that of the textual *shalom*: they signal belonging to the Jewish community in an immediately recognisable manner, regardless of the language of the text.¹⁷ A comparison with the coeval Christian epigraphic tradition illuminates both the structural parallels and the deep divergences in the use of visual identity markers.¹⁸

Notwithstanding the obvious differences, the structural logic underlying both traditions is, however, comparable: in both cases, a set of immediately recognisable visual signs is deployed at the margins of the inscription to mark communal belonging and assert a shared eschatological horizon.

4. BIBLICAL QUOTATIONS AND ALLUSIONS

The identification of biblical material in funerary inscriptions raises a preliminary methodological question: distinguishing between explicit quotation (recognisable reproduction of a scriptural text), formulaic allusion (use of biblical phrases that have entered the liturgical or paraenetic repertoire), and lexical echo (casual convergence with the biblical text mediated by common usage). In the Jewish epigraphic corpus of Rome, explicit quotations are rare; allusions and formulae of biblical derivation are far more frequent, reflecting both the synthetic character of funerary epigraphy and the typically oral and liturgical mode through which Scripture was transmitted in the community.¹⁹

4.1. *The Formula ἐν εἰρήνῃ, ‘in peace’*

The funerary clause ἐν εἰρήνῃ (*en eirēnē*, ‘in peace’) and its variants — εἰς εἰρήνην, *in pace*, *cum pace* — are the formulae of the most probable biblical derivation in the entire corpus. The phrase recalls first and foremost Isaiah 57:2 in the Septuagint: εἰσελεύσεται εἰς εἰρήνην (‘he shall enter into peace’), a verse interpreted in the rabbinic tradition as a promise of rest for the righteous after death. Equally, Psalm 4:9 (LXX) — ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ κοιμηθήσομαι (‘I will lie down in peace and sleep’) — offers a direct model for the metaphor of death as peaceful sleep, widely

¹⁶ It is worth noting that this expression isn’t limited to funerary epigraphy; it also appears, for instance, in the art of synagogues: Hachlili 2013 (Jericho and Huseifa synagogue inscriptions; see Fine 2005 for interpretation).

¹⁷ Noy 1999; Williams 2011; Stern 2019.

¹⁸ For a recent overview of the ‘epigraphic landscape’ of the Christian catacombs of Rome, with particular reference to the material from the catacomb of Santa Domitilla, see Felle 2023; in addition to, of course, the essential and extensive survey in Felle 2006.

¹⁹ van der Horst 1991: 37-39; Cappelletti 2006: 183-186; Tsalamponi 2010; van der Horst 2013.

attested in our corpus.²⁰ It is significant that *in pace* is widely attested in contemporary Christian inscriptions: this is a case of formulaic convergence in which two communities draw on the same biblical and liturgical substrate to construct a shared funerary imaginary, albeit with different theological implications.²¹

4.2. Shalom and Other Liturgical Hebrew Benedictions

שלום *shalom*

The insertion of שלום, *shalom*, in Greek or Latin texts is not merely a generic identity marker: it refers to a precise biblical-liturgical horizon. The root *šlm* is pervasive in the Hebrew Bible, but the epigraphic formula is anchored directly to Isaiah 57:2, particularly through the reinterpretation offered by the Septuagint;²² on the other hand, it is also linked to the *Birkat Kobanim* (Priestly Blessing, Numbers 6:24-26), whose concluding verse — וַיִּשֶׂם לָהֶן שְׁלוֹם (we-yašem lekha *shalom* ‘and grant you peace’) — was recited in synagogal worship and had acquired a strong eschatological significance. Inscription JIWE II 193 (Monteverde) carries both *shalom* and ἐν εἰρήνῃ in their most extensive form (ἐν εἰρήνῃ κοιμησῆς αὐτοῦ and שְׁלוֹם עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל) and it clearly illustrates how the two linguistic traditions converge around the same biblical semantic root. The formula *shalom* ‘al Yisra’el — which also occurs at least in JIWE II 92, 186 and 529 — recalls directly Psalms 125:5 and 128:6, as well as the closing of certain blessings of the *Amidah*. This formula situates the individual deceased within the eschatological community of Israel, transcending the individual dimension of mourning.²³

εὐλογία *eulogia*

Beyond the ubiquitous *shalom*, the funerary epigraphy of the Jewish community of Rome attests to a further cluster of formulaic expressions that deserve separate consideration: εὐλογία and ἀμήν. The term εὐλογία — ‘blessing, praise’ — occupies an ambiguous position in the Ro-

²⁰ In Venosa, the metaphor of ‘sleeping’ applied to death is found in the recurring mention of the tomb as *mishkavah*, ‘couch, bed’ (see the list of attestations in Noy 1995: 335-336). This term is absent from the Jewish inscriptions of Rome, which are generally laconic concerning direct reference to the sepulchre: however, see the references to the tomb as an ‘eternal dwelling’ (JIWE II 164, Monteverde, οἶκος αἰώνιος; JIWE II 577, unknown provenance, *domus aeterna*), or ‘dwelling of peace’, as in JIWE II 513, Villa Torlonia, οἶκος εἰρήνης. In JIWE II 588, on a gold glass, οἶκος εἰρήνης can be applied both to the tomb and to the Temple carved on the object.

²¹ On this point, see Park 2000: 102-110. In general terms, and on methodological issues, useful hints in Rutgers 2000.

²² Troxel 1989. Compare recent translations of Isaiah 57:2 according to the MT בּוֹא שְׁלוֹם יְנוּחוּ עַל-מִשְׁכְּבוֹתָם הַלֵּךְ נְכוּחוּ הַלֵּךְ הַלֵּךְ ‘He entereth into peace, They rest in their beds, Each one that walketh in his uprightness’ (JPS Tanakh), in the Septuagint: ἔσται ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ ταφῇ αὐτοῦ ἦρται ἐκ τοῦ μέσου ‘his burial will be in peace; he has been taken away from their midst’ (NETS).

²³ About ‘Israel’ in the late Second Temple Period, see Staples 2021. Regarding the late period, see the recent study by Tobolowsky 2025.

man Jewish corpus, since it functions simultaneously as a common personal name (JIWE II 111, Monteverde; JIWE II 291, *Eulogie matri dulcissime*, Vigna Randanini; JIWE II 451, Villa Torlonia) and as a formulaic acclamation. It is attested on several occasions. A marble plaque from the Monteverde catacomb (Fig. 1), now in Naples and datable to the third or fourth century CE (JIWE II 185), bears the word *εὐλογία* in Greek characters, and scholars continue to debate whether it records the name of a deceased woman or constitutes a closing benediction. In a gold glass with many Jewish symbols (JIWE II 591) within a fragmentary text appear the Latin expression *bibas cum eulogia*, likely referring to a blessing—perhaps not a generic one, but rather a blessing over food or drink, in this case presumably over wine. This could support the hypothesis that these gold glasses were used for a sort of *kiddush*.

In any case, this very ambiguity is epigraphically significant: it reflects the deep entrenchment of the vocabulary of blessing in the onomastic repertoire of the community, to the point where the distinction between name and formula becomes unstable. In either reading, *εὐλογία* situates the epitaph within a semantic field of divine favour and communal benediction that resonates throughout Jewish liturgy.

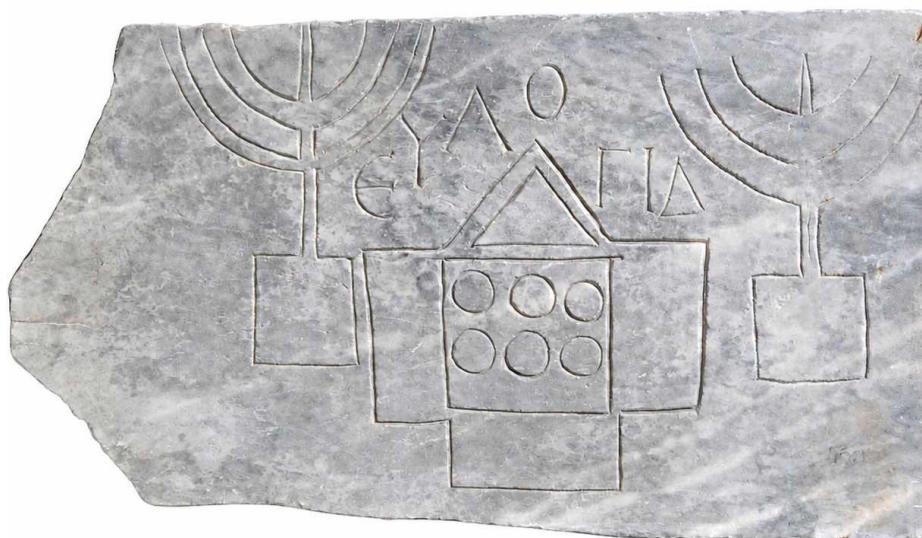


Fig. 1. Burial plaque from Monteverde, JIWE II 185
(courtesy University of Naples L'Orientale – Center for Jewish Studies).

ἀμήν amen

The term *ἀμήν* (registered in Rome only once on a funerary gold glass, JIWE II 596), presents a more straightforwardly performative character. Borrowed into Greek and Latin as a transliteration of the Hebrew and Aramaic *אָמֵן* *amēn*, it functions in funerary contexts as a solemn ratification of what precedes — a formulaic affirmation analogous to, and likely derived from, its use as a congregational response in synagogal liturgy. It must be said that its scant presence in Rome is striking when compared to the numerous attestations, both in Hebrew and Latin, in other parts of Italy (Venosa, Sicily and Sardinia) and twice in Spain. Apparently, the formula

therefore entered the Jewish inscription formulary later than others.²⁴ Its appearance at the close of an inscription the same gesture of communal assent that would have accompanied prayer and scripture-reading in the synagogue: the epitaph, in this sense, becomes a frozen liturgical act, and the reader who encounters it is implicitly cast in the role of the responding congregation.

Taken together, *shalom*, εὐλογία and ἀμὴν disclose a funerary epigraphy that is not merely commemorative but actively liturgical in its ambition — one in which the stone inscription reproduces, and perhaps perpetuates, the cadences of communal worship. The deceased is not simply named and mourned; they are, in a sense, perpetually blessed, affirmed, and commended to eternity.

4.3. *The Vocabulary of Virtue and Jewish Wisdom Literature*

The moral qualifications attested in the Roman inscriptions show points of contact with the biblical sapiential tradition. In Jewish funerary epigraphy, the deceased is sometimes characterized through the lens of the sapiential ideal of δίκαιος, ‘just, righteous’.²⁵ This designation is not merely a moral tribute but reflects a profound theological conviction: that a life lived in accordance with the Torah transforms the individual into a permanent exemplar of divine wisdom. By applying the epithet of δίκαιος to the departed, these texts bridge the gap between earthly existence and eternal memory, drawing directly upon the authority of Proverbs 10:7: “The memory of the righteous is a blessing” (*zekher ṣaddiq livrakha*).²⁶

In this context, the “blessing” is twofold: for the living, the deceased becomes a source of merit and inspiration, a “light” (recalling the metaphor in Proverbs 6:23) that continues to guide the community; for the deceased, the act of remembrance ensures their continued presence within the collective consciousness of Israel, a theme echoed in non-canonical works like Sirach, where the enduring name of the righteous is equated with life itself (Sirach 37:26; 39: 9-11; 41:13). Consequently, the use of such formulae in the Jewish catacombs serves, in some way, also to sanctify the tomb, turning the site of death into a *locus* of blessing and a testament to the enduring validity of the Covenant.

4.4. *The koimēsis and the Theology of Resurrection*

The metaphor of death as κοίμησις (‘sleep, repose’) — rendered in Latin as *dormitio* or *requies* — has deep biblical roots. Daniel 12:2, in the Septuagint καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν καθευδόντων ἐν τῷ

²⁴ See the list in Noy 1993: 339 (section VII h, thirteen occurrences).

²⁵ Attestations are limited in number: see, however, in general terms van der Horst 1991: 61-72. It is a matter of regret that the reading of JIWE II 153 (Monteverde) cannot be verified: this epitaph, painted on a loculus and now lost, was tentatively read as תהי לברכתה תהי *le-birkata tebi* (‘may it be for a blessing’). *Si vera lectio*, it would represent an expression — Aramaic more than Hebrew — clearly connected with Proverbs 10:7 (see below), that became very frequent in Jewish funerary epigraphy, particularly from the Early Middle Ages onwards.

²⁶ It is noteworthy that the Book of Sirach provides on this topic a striking parallel; specifically, the eulogy of Moses in Sirach 45:1 mirrors this very structure, suggesting that the epigraphic formula may have emerged from a liturgical or scholastic engagement with the text.

πλάτει τῆς γῆς ἀναστήσονται ('many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake'),²⁷ the *locus classicus* of the doctrine of resurrection in the Old Testament, along with Isaiah 26:19 and Ezekiel 37:1-14. In none of these passages is use actually made of the predicate κοιμάω 'to sleep, to rest' or of its derivative κοίμησις; nevertheless, the notion of death as 'eternal rest' (κοίμησις αἰῶνος) is attested in Sirach 46:19; and is, of course, a metaphor recurrently employed in the New Testament.²⁸ Then in the Jewish inscriptions of Rome, the κοίμησις is not a neutral metaphor but one charged with theological implications.²⁹

This charge is evident in the most frequent closing formula attested across all the Roman Jewish catacombs: ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ κοίμησις αὐτοῦ/αὐτῆς, 'in peace his/her sleep'. The formula recurs with remarkable consistency throughout the corpus. A representative sequence of community officials illustrates its scope: the epitaph of Poly[—]nis, *archisynagōgos* of the Vernaclesians (JIWE II 117, Monteverde), closes with the declaration ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ κοίμησις αὐτοῦ; likewise those of Pomponius, twice *archōn* of the Calcaresians (JIWE II 165, Monteverde), of Hilarus, leader of the Volumnesians (JIWE II 167, Monteverde), and of Pancharios, *patēr* of the synagogue of Elaia, φιλόλαος φιλέντολος, who 'loved the people (of Israel) and the Law' (JIWE II 576, unknown provenance). Even in collective epitaphs the formula persists: the touching inscription for Fortunatos and Eutropis, two children aged three who 'died on the same day', ends with ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ κοίμησις αὐτῶν (JIWE II 118, Monteverde). The same semantic field is also expressed in the optative ἐν εἰρήνῃ κοιμηθῆτω 'may he sleep in peace' used in the epitaph of Proclus, leader of the Tripolitans (JIWE II 166, Monteverde), a form that shifts the accent from declarative confidence to eschatological wish.

A comparison with its Latin equivalent proves equally instructive. The inscription *dormitione Alexandro bene merenti in pace* (EDB27383), datable to the fourth or fifth century, translates the Greek semantic complex with full fidelity: *dormitio* renders κοίμησις, and *in pace* renders ἐν εἰρήνῃ. In the Roman Jewish corpus *dormitio* appears few times, particularly within two formulas only indirectly linked with the state of 'peace': *dormitio tua in bonis* (JIWE II 233; maybe also in JIWE II 377; in JIWE II 207 *in bono*) and *dormitio tua inter dicaeis* (JIWE II 343, all three inscriptions from Vigna Randanini), where *dicaeis* transparently renders the Greek δίκαιοι. Another, unusual hybrid case — discussed at length by Noy — is furnished by JIWE II 608, a marble plaque from the Monteverde catacomb, which is also a text of particular antiquity (the

²⁷ In the Theodotion version the verb ἀναστήσονται is not employed; instead, the form ἐξεγερθήσονται appears — a future passive of ἐξεγείρω, meaning 'they will be awakened' or 'they will be roused out,' as opposed to the more common ἀναστήσονται (from ἀνίστημι), which broadly denotes 'they will rise' and functions as the standard technical term for resurrection in biblical Greek.

²⁸ Matthew 25:52; John 11:11; Acts 7:60, 13:36; 1 Corinthians 7:39, 11:30, 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15; 2 Peter 3:4. On κοιμάω and κοίμησις in the Jewish background of the New Testament the most directly relevant monograph is Park (2000), which explicitly connects the κοίμησις/κοιμάω language of Jewish funerary inscriptions with the Pauline corpus. Drawing on epigraphic evidence from across the Mediterranean world, mostly from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Park examines the various indications of belief in — or denial of — afterlife attested in these inscriptions, and compares his findings with the corresponding Pauline evidence, concluding that the two bodies of evidence show substantial agreement.

²⁹ A substantial discussion of the κοίμησις formula in Jewish epitaphs, in van der Horst 1991: 115-118 and *passim*.

formula *Dis Manibus* also appears there), for a child named Fofos (uncertain reading). Here the Greek formula has been transliterated into Latin letters: *en irene [cym]isis a[utou]*, a remarkable graphic testimony to the degree to which the formula had become a quasi-liturgical, untranslatable unit for the Roman Jewish community, felt to be most properly expressed in the language of Scripture and prayer. The burial ground is not the space of final dissolution, but as a dormitory, a place of temporary rest pending awakening.³⁰

5. CONCLUSIONS

The formulaic analysis of the Jewish inscriptions of Rome shows a community deeply integrated into the Hellenistic-Roman cultural environment, capable of adopting its epigraphic codes while preserving irreducible distinctive elements: community-specific titles, a moral vocabulary centred on observance of the Law, the formula of peace as an eschatological horizon, and the insertion of the Hebrew *shalom* as a seal of identity.

The biblical contribution — filtered through the Septuagint and mediated by liturgical practice — manifests itself not in explicit quotations but in a network of formulaic allusions that constructs a coherent eschatological imaginary: from the *koimēsis* as sleep awaiting resurrection to peace as the fulfilment of the Priestly Blessing: the *berakhab*. The epigraphic formula is therefore not a mere conventional residue, but an active instrument of identity negotiation between religious particularism and integration into the Mediterranean *koine*.

It is finally relevant to note what the corpus does *not* contain: sustained explicit quotations from the Torah, the Prophets, or the Psalms of the kind attested in the synagogal inscriptions of the eastern diaspora or in the floor mosaics of Palestinian synagogues. This absence is not evidence of scriptural ignorance, but rather reflects the liturgical mediation through which Scripture reached the faithful of the Roman diaspora: not as a text read individually, but as a repertoire of oral formulae — blessings, prayers, chants — that sediment into everyday language without need of explicit quotation. The inscriptions of Rome thus show us a community that lives within the Bible without quoting it, incorporating its lexicon and theology into the minimal and repetitive forms of funerary epigraphy.

Bibliographic References

- Adams, J.N. 2003 *Bilingualism and the Latin Language*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Ameling, W. 2009 “The Epigraphic Habit and the Jewish Diasporas of Asia Minor and Syria”, in H. Cotton *et al.* (eds.), *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 203-234.

³⁰ A particularly interesting, if isolated, case is JIWE II 491 (Villa Torlonia), in which the deceased, a proselyte, is said to have *dormitione accepit*, a phrasing more commonly associated with Christian contexts. As Noy has already noted, however, this particular epitaph also displays echoes of pagan formulaic language, which suggests that “although the deceased man adopted Judaism, his mother did not adopt Jewish epigraphic style”.

- Bar-Magen Numhauser, A. 2021 *Hispanojewish Archaeology: The Jews of Hispania in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages through Their Material Remains*, 2 vols., Brill, Leiden – Boston.
- Barclay, J.M.G. 1996 *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark.
- Cappelletti, S. 2006 *The Jewish Community of Rome: From the Second Century B.C. to the Third Century C.E.*, Leiden, Brill.
- Clackson, J. 2015 *Language and Society in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Davies, W.D. 1982 *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism*, University of California Press, Berkeley CA.
- EDB Epigraphic Database Bari, <https://www.edb.uniba.it/>
- Felle, A.E. 2006 *Biblia epigraphica. La sacra scrittura nella documentazione epigrafica dell'orbis christianus antiquus (III-VIII secolo)*, Edipuglia, Bari.
- 2018 “The Use of Greek in the Early Christian Inscriptions from Rome and Italy (3rd-4th Cent.)”, in C. Breytenbach, J.M. Ogereau (eds.), *Authority and Identity in Emerging Christianities in Asia Minor and Greece*, Brill, Leiden – Boston: 303-325.
- 2023 “Paesaggi epigrafici nelle necropoli della Roma tardoantica. Alcuni casi esemplari per una ‘epigrafia archeologica’”, in St. Ardeleanu, J.C. Cubas Diaz (eds.), *Funerary Landscapes of the Late Antique Oecumene: Contextualizing Epigraphic and Archaeological Evidence of Mortuary Practices*, Heidelberg University Publishing: 407-428.
- Fine, S. 2005 *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology*, Cambridge University Press.
- Frey, J.-B. 1936 *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum. I. Europe*, Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana – Librairie Orientaliste Geuthner, Città del Vaticano (= *Corpus of Jewish Inscriptions*, with a Prolegomenon by B. Lifshitz, Ktav, New York 1975²).
- Gladd, B.L. 2019 *From Adam and Israel to the Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God*, InterVarsity Press Academic, Downers Grove IL.
- Hachlili, R. 2013 *Ancient Synagogues – Archaeology and Art: New Discoveries and Current Research*, Brill, Leiden – Boston.
- Hartman, D. 2015 “Greek and Hebrew”, in G.K. Giannakis (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics*, Brill, Leiden, II: 52-56.
- Horst, P.W. van der 1991 *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs: An Introductory Survey of a Millennium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 BCE – 700 CE)*, Kok Pharos, Kampen.
- 2013 “Biblical Quotations in Judaeo-Greek Inscriptions”, in B.J. Koet *et al.* (eds.), *The Scriptures of Israel in Jewish and Christian Tradition: Essays in Honour of M.J.J. Menken*, Brill, Leiden – Boston: 363-376.
- JIWE I = Noy 1993
- JIWE II = Noy 1995
- JPS = *Jewish Publication Society Hebrew-English Tanakh*, 2nd ed., Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia 1999.
- Kant, L.H. 1987 “Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin”, in W. Haase *et al.* (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II. 20.2, de Gruyter, Berlin – Boston: 671-714.
- Lacerenza, G. 2003 “Le iscrizioni giudaiche in Italia dal I al VI secolo: tipologie, origine, distribuzione”, in M. Perani (ed.), *I beni culturali ebraici in Italia*, Longo, Ravenna: 71-92.
- Leon, H.J. 1960 *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia.
- Lohfink, G. 1975 *Die Sammlung Israels: eine Untersuchung zur lukanischen Ekklesiologie*, Köselverlag, München.

- Meyer, E.A. 1990 "Explaining the Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire: The Evidence of Epitaphs", *Journal of Roman Studies* 80: 74-96.
- NETS = A. Pietersma, B.G. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title*, Oxford U.P., New York - Oxford 2007.
- Noy, D. 1993 *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe, vol. I: Italy (Excluding The City of Rome), Spain and Gaul*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- 1995 *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe, vol. II: The City of Rome*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- 1997 "Writing in Tongues: The Use of Greek, Latin and Hebrew in Jewish Inscriptions from Roman Italy", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 48: 300-311.
- 1999 "'Peace upon Israel': Hebrew Formulae and Names in Jewish Inscriptions from the West Roman Empire", in W. Horbury (ed.), *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh: 135-146.
- 2000 *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers*, Classical Press of Wales, Duckworth.
- Ong, H. 2015 "Ancient Palestine is Multilingual and Diglossic: Introducing Multilingualism Theories to New Testament Studies", *Currents in Biblical Research* 13: 330-350.
- Park, J.S. 2000 *Conceptions of Afterlife in Jewish Inscriptions: With Special Reference to Pauline Literature*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- Rajak, T. 1994 "Inscription and Context: Reading the Jewish Catacombs of Rome", in J.W. van Henten, P.W. van der Horst (eds.), *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy*, Brill, Leiden: 226-241.
- 2009 *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Rajak, T. – Noy, D. 1993 "Archisynagogoi: Office, Title and Social Status in the Greco-Jewish Synagogue", *Journal of Roman Studies* 83: 75-93.
- Rocca, S. 2017 "In the Shadow of the Patriarch: The Organization of the Jewish Communities in Roman Italy in Late Antiquity", *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 83 2/3: 93-118.
- 2022 *In the Shadow of the Caesars: Jewish Life in Roman Italy*, Brill, Leiden.
- Rutgers, L.V. 1995 *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, Brill, Leiden.
- 2000 "Death and Afterlife: The Inscriptional Evidence", in A.J. Avery-Peck, J. Neusner (eds.), *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden, vol. 4: 293-310.
- Schwartz, S. 2001 *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.*, Princeton University Press, Princeton – Oxford.
- Smallwood, E.M. 1976 *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian*, Leiden, Brill.
- Spolsky, B. 2014 *The Languages of the Jews: A Sociolinguistic History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Staples, J.A. 2021 *The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism: A New Theory of People, Exile, and Israelite Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Stern, K.B. 2019 "When Is a Menorah Not Just a Menorah? Rethinking Menorah Graffiti in Jewish Mortuary Contexts", *Near Eastern Archaeology* 82/3: 164-171.
- Strathmann, H. 1942 *λαός*, in G. Kittel, G. Friedrich (eds.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, IV: 29-57 (also in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI 1964, IV: 29-57).
- Tobolowsky, A. 2025 *Israel and Its Heirs in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Troxel, R.L. 1989 *Eschatology in the Septuagint of Isaiah*, PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison.

- Tsalampouni, E. 2010 "Citations of Biblical Texts in Greek Jewish and Christian Inscriptions of the Graeco-Roman and Late Antiquity: A Case of Religious Demarcation", in D. Wiebe, P. Pachis (eds.), *Chasing Down Religion: In the Sights of History and the Cognitive Sciences. Essays in Honour of Luther H. Martin*, Barbounakis Publications, Thessaloniki: 459-478.
- Williams, M.H. 1994 "The Structures of Roman Jewry Reconsidered", *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 104: 129-141.
- 1998 *The Jews among Greeks and Romans: A Diasporic Sourcebook*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore MD.
- 1999 "The Contribution of Jewish Inscriptions to the Study of Judaism", in W. Horbury *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism: Volume 3, The Early Roman Period*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 75-93.
- 2011 "Images and Text in the Jewish Epitaphs of Late Ancient Rome", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 42: 328-350.