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A Greek or Latin Inscription from the Tel Arza Burial Cave

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An inscription (10.5 cm long; Fig. 1) was engraved on the Doric architrave of the *distylos in antis* facade of the Second Temple period burial cave uncovered at Tel Arza (see Wiegman and Baruch, this volume: Fig. 12). The inscription, located to the left of the northern *anta*, consists of five letters of varying heights: the first two letters from the left are 2.2 and 2.4 cm high, the next two are 1.4 cm high, and the last one is 1.2 cm high. The characters appear to be Greek, the expected language in Jewish inscriptions of this period that are neither Aramaic nor Hebrew. The inscription reads:

ΕΛΙΗΑ

Ελιηα

The shape of the first two letters is peculiar. Both the *epsilon* and the *lambda* are reversed. The epsilon has abnormally long horizontal bars, the upper and bottom of which meet the ends of the vertical stem at some distance. The odd shape of the *epsilon* and the *lambda* may point to the writer's inexperience, as is also evident in the irregular size and alignment of all the characters.

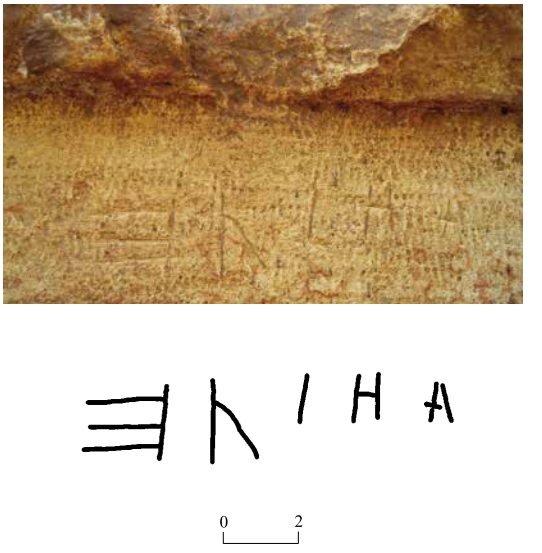

Fig. 1. The inscription.

Greek and Hebrew/Aramaic inscriptions above tomb entrances of the Second Temple period are known in Jerusalem (see *CIIP* I/1: Nos. 38, 39, 42 and 137). Sometimes, the inscriptions are located above a single loculus or on its stone door (see *CIIP* I/1: Nos. 135, 347, 357, 359, 440 and 460), but in all cases, they record the name of the deceased, sometimes accompanied by a funerary formula. Therefore, it seems quite clear that our inscription represents a personal name, despite its modest size in comparison with other examples.[1] The only personal name that this sequence could possibly refer to is the Hellenized form of the Hebrew name Elijah (אליהו). This name appears in Greek in several variants. It is rendered as Ηλιου in the Septuagint (e.g., III Kings 17:1), but usually as Ἠλίας (genitive Ἠλία or Ἠλίου) in Josephus and other authors, as well as in inscriptions (cf. Wuthnow 1939:51, 127). The spelling Εἰλίας or Ἐλίας is rare and occurs only in inscriptions from the Byzantine period (cf. Wuthnow 1930:45; *SEG* XVI: No. 851; *CIIP* I/1: No. 1021; *IGLS* XXI/2: No. 100). But, even if we reluctantly accept the form Ἐλία as a misspelling of Ἠλία, meaning '(Tomb) of Elijah', it is difficult to account for the *eta* between the *iota* and the *alpha*, unless it represents the archaic Greek glyph that indicated a voiceless fricative consonant; this glyph was later passed on to the Latin and rendered the aspirate /h/. In Attic Greek, this letter disappeared, and the aspiration was represented by a harsh breathing (*spiritus asper*), while the glyph *H* was used for a long *E*. In the Late Roman period, however, in other parts of the Greek-speaking world, inscriptions still used the letter *H* to imply an initial aspiration, as for instance in Ηέλιος for Ἥλιος, Helios, the Sun-god (from Rhodus: *IG* XII/1: No. 928). A closer example is found on a Tetrarchic boundary stone from southern Golan, where the name of a village that is known from the Jewish sources as Kefar Ḥarib (כפר חריב) is transcribed κώμη Καπαρ Ηαριβου (*SEG* XL: No. 1469).[2] In our inscription, however, this *eta*-like mark in the middle of the name cannot represent a harsh breathing but only the Latin letter *H*.

The Latin letter *H* may have been inserted here to better express the sound of the *he* in the Hebrew form of the name Eliahu. In Hebrew, the letter *he* may either denote a vowel, functioning as a *mater lectionis*, or it may be a consonant, a voiceless fricative like the Latin /h/. In the name Eliahu, the *he* is a consonant. As there is no corresponding consonant for this letter in Greek or in Latin, the name Eliahu is usually not transcribed but Hellenized or Latinised. The same phenomenon occurs in the name אברהם: in Greek, there is no way to

[1] The examples cited above appear to be written with larger letters and have greater visibility. The comparison, however, is not easily made, for in almost all cases those epitaphs reported in *CIIP* were gathered from previous publications lacking measurements, and could not be located and measured.

[2] For this village, see Tsafrir, Di Segni and Green 1994:163, and for the Jewish sources, see Reeg 1989:346–347.

render the consonant *he*, and hence the name is simply written Αβρααμ or Αβρααμιος; while in Latin the name is consistently spelled with an *H*, i.e., Abraham.[3]

The identification of the fourth character in the inscription as a Latin *H* raises two questions: (1) is there any evidence for mixing Latin and Greek letters in inscriptions of this period? and (2) would an inexperienced Greek writer have had the knowledge to use another alphabet to render the sound of the Hebrew name? Mixing Latin and Greek is not unknown in late antique epigraphy, but to my knowledge, it has no parallels in the Second Temple period. Hence, the inscription might not be in Greek after all, but rather in Latin. In fact, the only character that can be identified as Greek rather than Latin is the reversed *lambda*; however, its shape, abnormal in Greek, is not abnormal if the character is not a *lambda* but an example of *L* in Ancient Roman Cursive script, which was used in this period (Thompson 1966:203–211, Tb in front of p. 218; Marcos 2017:13–15).[4] Latin is rare, but not unknown in Jewish inscriptions of the Second Temple period. Three ossuaries inscribed in Latin were found in Jerusalem (*CIIP* I/1: Nos. 40, 391, 570; No. 127, a plaque from a Jewish burial cave may have also been written in Latin) and several others bear Latin names, albeit in Greek script (*CIIP* I/1: Nos. 416, 423–424, 486, 507).[5] There were certainly Jews from Latin-speaking countries, most likely from Rome, living in Jerusalem at that time.[6] The man who engraved the name *ELIHA* on the facade of the Tel Arza tomb may well have been one of them.[7] If so, he must have been a Latin speaker with minimal literacy.[8] The form *Eliha* represents the Latin genitive of the nominative *Elias*, and the addition of *H* shows that the man knew Hebrew and had a keen sense of the pronunciation of the name in

[3] Even in Greek, an attempt is sometimes made to render the *he* by inserting an intrusive letter. See the various spellings in papyri and inscriptions: Αβρααυμιος, Αβραιμιος, Αβραυμιος, Αβρααμιος (Preisigke 1922:4; Wuthnow 1930:10–11), Αβραζαμιος (Foraboschi 1971:16). A similar phenomenon occurs with the Hebrew letter *'ayn*, for which Greek and Latin have no corresponding sound or glyph. At the beginning of a word, the letter *'ayn* is rendered with a G (עזה, Γάζα, Gaza), while elsewhere, it is either ignored or exchanged with another letter, for instance, the toponym אדרעי in Latin becomes Adra, Adraa and Adraha, and in Greek—Ἄδρα, Ἄδραα, but also Ἀδράφη, Ἀδρασσος (with fricatives), Ἄδαρα, Ἀδρία (with vowels). For the various spellings, see Di Segni and Tsafrir 2017:122–143, 147–149.

[4] The *L* with a sloping down base, sometimes detached from the stem or attached along it, was first attested in the third century CE, disappearing in the New Roman Cursive. Like other cursive letters, which had subsequently been absorbed in the monumental alphabet, this shape of the *L* appears on stone, e.g., at Caesarea (*CIIP* II: Nos. 1278, 1286) and Bet She'an (Last, Laniado and Porath 1993:230), during the late third–early fourth century CE.

[5] The head of the synagogue of Theodotos Vettenus is identified by a Latin name and thus, he may have arrived at Jerusalem from a Latin-speaking country (see *CIIP* I/1: No. 9).

[6] Acts 6:9 mentions a 'synagogue of the Libertines' (freedmen) in Jerusalem. It has been suggested that they may have been descendants of Jewish slaves brought to Rome by Pompey.

[7] Another possible explanation may be that he was a native of the country who had professional connections with the Roman administration and thus was able to write some Latin.

[8] Literacy in Latin was uncommon among Jews, even in Latin-speaking countries. Most epitaphs dictated by Jews in those regions are in Greek, and some are in Greek letters, though worded in Latin.

this language, though he was probably illiterate in it, or he would have engraved the name in Hebrew letters.

The choice of the genitive—'of Elijah'—indicates that the inscription represents the name of the deceased and not of the mason/stonecutter of the facade, for in this case the name would have most likely been written in the nominative. On the other hand, the location of the inscription and the small size of its letters stand in contrast to the magnificent facade of the tomb. Therefore, it seems that the deceased was not a member of the aristocratic family that had purchased this tomb, but rather someone connected to the family in a humble capacity, or even a stranger, whose family had violated the private property. The burial of bodies in tombs belonging to others was so common in antiquity, that many funerary inscriptions included prohibitions, accompanied by threats of fines or of divine vengeance, against trespassers (Di Segni 2009:142*–145*, and see references therein).

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