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A Decorated Basalt Door from Naṣr ed-Din (Bet Ma'on), near Tiberias

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Three fragments of a basalt door were retrieved from the excavation at Naṣr ed-Din, which belong to a large group of about 25 stone doors discovered in the city of Tiberias. Such doors are known to have originated in burial contexts, their facades usually adorned in a manner that resembled wooden doors of residences. The door from Bet Ma'on is the first to be found outside Tiberias, and it probably belonged to a contemporary mausoleum mentioned in the Talmud.

Keywords: Roman period, burial, stone door, mausoleum, Tiberias, Talmud

Introduction

Three fragments of a decorated basalt-stone door, which was probably used in a mausoleum, were discovered on the surface of the excavation at Naṣr ed-Din, near Tiberias (see Avshalom-Gorni, Leibner and Ben Nahum, this volume: Fig. 41:1, 2). Although the fragments do not join, they seem to belong to one and the same door. A large group of about 25 similar doors has been discovered in Tiberias since the nineteenth century, most of which were made of basalt and some of limestone. The doors' facades were usually decorated with sunken rectangular panels, round bosses and door knockers (which were never used for actual knocking), probably resembling the wooden doors of residences.

The Door from Naṣr ed-Din: Parallels and Dating

The door from Naṣr ed-Din is decorated with round bosses, resembling nail heads in a wooden door, a sunken rectangular panel and a flower made in relief. Of all the doors uncovered in Tiberias, only four were discovered *in situ* within tombs: the mausoleum on Alhadaf Street (Betzer 2013:33, Fig. 33:2; Stepansky 2016: Site 6, Figs. 1, 2); the mausoleum in Rasko Square, today Rabin Square (Betzer 2013:52; Stepansky 2016: Site

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23); the mausoleum at Yad Shitrit (Vitto 2008:10*–12*); and the mausoleum on Palmaḥ Street (Stepansky 1999:76*). The rest of the doors were discovered in secondary use, or in random discoveries throughout the city, including 11 doors that served as pillar bases in secondary use in the Tiberias Friday Mosque of the Early Islamic period, where they still remain today (Cytryn-Silverman 2009; Betzer 2013:72–74, Site C5, Figs. 70–72); one of these doors is adorned with a seven-branched menorah (Betzer 2013:75, Fig. 74; Cytryn-Silverman 2021:104–105 and cover illustration).[2]

The stone doors of Tiberias have been discussed previously (Stepansky 1999:76*; Vitto 2008:10*–12*). Betzer (2013:22–23, 93–95) proposed a typology for these doors and considered their distribution throughout the country, for example, at Bet She‘arim (Mazar 1973:151), and outside the country, for example, at Tadmor (Palmyra) and Bosra (Bostra; Betzer 2013:93). The door from Naṣr ed-Din should be assigned to Betzer's Type 3.3.1, a type that imitates wooden doors and dates to the second–fourth centuries CE (Betzer 2013:22, 94).

In the municipal archaeological garden in the Lower City of Tiberias there are two complete doors with a decoration almost identical to that of the door from Naṣr ed-Din (Fig. 1). These doors were integrated in a residence in the Jewish quarter of the Ottoman period (Avissar 1973:48; Biger and Schiller 1987:61; Dudman and Ballhorn 1988:175; Stepansky

Fig. 1. Two complete stone doors from Tiberias decorated in the same manner as the door fragments from Naṣr ed-Din.

[2] Betzer (2013:75) described the door as made of limestone; however, it is made of basalt (Cytryn-Silverman 2021:104). The door is stored today in the Institute of Archeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on Mount Scopus.

2016: Site 46, Fig. 3). Other doors of this type were discovered throughout the city of Tiberias: on Ha-Yarden Street (Hirschfeld and Reich 1988:117; Hirschfeld 1991:3; Betzer 2013: Fig. 26); at the entrance to the ‘Great Cave’ in the old Jewish quarter (Betzer 2013:25, Fig. 9); and in random discoveries whose place of origin is unknown (Landau 1967:172; Dudman and Ballhorn 1988:32, 35; Betzer 2013:28, Site A.9).

Conclusions

The uniqueness of the door from Naṣr ed-Din is its place of discovery, near Tiberias, on the eastern edge of the site identified with ‘Bet Ma‘on’ (see Avshalom-Gorni, Leibner and Ben Nahum, this volume). It is possible that the door belonged to a magnificent mausoleum, ‘*Nafsha Desirkin*,’ which according to the Jerusalem Talmud (*‘Eruvin* 55:1, 22b) had stood in a prominent location in the landscape between Bet Ma‘on and Tiberias (Eliav 1995). In a Greek burial inscription discovered by Oliphant in the nineteenth century CE in the old Jewish quarter of Tiberias (Schumacher 1886:266–267) it is written: “As a token of respect to our late master Syrikius, we your servants have erected (this memorial structure)” (Di Segni 1988:76–77). It is assumed that the inscription refers to the construction of the mausoleum of Syrikius, the same ‘Sirkin’ mentioned in the Talmud (Schwabe 1967:185; Di Segni 1988:77; Eliav 1995:81). Thus, it appears that the magnificent mausoleum had once stood near the excavation site at Naṣr ed-Din.

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