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A BILINGUAL GREEK-SAMARITAN INSCRIPTION FROM APOLLONIA-ARSUF/ SOZOUSA: YET MORE EVIDENCE OF THE USE OF ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ ΜΟΝΟΣ FORMULA INSCRIPTIONS AMONG THE SAMARITANS


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In the framework of the 23rd season of excavation at the site of Apollonia-Arsuf (summer 2014), excavations in Area P1 in the southern part of the site uncovered a bilingual Greek-Samaritan inscription (fig. 1). The inscription was unearthed set in a mosaic pavement consisting of medium to small white tesserae (1–1.5 cm on average) in a later room whose floor and walls were plastered (L6226) (fig. 2). Hence the mosaic and the inscription that adorned it are only partially preserved.

The plastered room seems to belong to a structure whose character is yet to be defined. It is trapezoid-shaped, ca. 7.5 × 6.5 m, with three pier bases crossing it in the center from east to west. An opening (ca. 2.7 m wide) is visible on the north; there may have been another opening on the east (ca. 1.5 m wide). A semicircular plastered niche (ca. 0.75 m long) is apparent on the south. While the height of its walls is somewhat unified (0.5 m), their thickness is uneven (0.3–1.0 m). The reason for this seems to be the reuse of earlier walls (contemporaneous with the mosaic pavement?) especially in its southern part, where a plastered room (L6235) was unearthed whose construction and plastering is similar to that of the trapezoidal room on its north. These two rooms were likely to have been part of the same building.

The mosaic was uncovered in the room’s southern half with the inscription close to its center. It is rectangular, and double-framed with black tesserae (reconstructed dimensions are 1.3 × 1.4 m). It is aligned in an east-west orientation, that is, the person reading it would face east toward Mount Gerizim. Surrounding the single black frame around the inscription itself is a partially preserved tri-color (black, red and white) guilloche-patterned frame (fig. 3). It seems that the double-framed rectangular panel with the inscription in its center and the surrounding guilloche were encircled by a round medallion of which only a small part has survived on the west. Our measurements show that neither the double-framed black rectangular panel nor the lines of the inscription are totally aligned; hence we cannot exclude the possibility that parts

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1 I am indebted to L. Di Segni and R. Zadok for their valuable comments on aspects related to this study, and to the anonymous reader of ZPE. Responsibility for the ideas expressed below is mine alone.

2 The excavation season was conducted from July 20 to August 26, 2014. This season was mostly confined to our ongoing (2012–2015) project funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (GZ: SCHO 520/14–2), “Die kreuzfahrerzeitliche Stadt Apollonia/Arus in Israel: Struktur – Kulturanaption – Stadt-Umland-Bezeichnungen”, co-headed by B. Scholkmann of the University of Tübingen and O. Tal, Tel Aviv University. Still, excavations in Area P1 during this season formed part of a “dig for a day” project operated jointly by our team and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority. H. Yohanan was the area supervisor and T. Harpak was the registrar. S. Pirsky and S. Alon drew the plans and S. Pirsky drew the mosaic inscription. Photographer: P. Shrago. For an overview of the site and the history of its excavations, see I. Roll, Introduction: History of the Site, Its Research and Excavations, Apollonia-Arsuf: Final Report of the Excavations, vol. 1: The Persian and Hellenistic Periods (with Appendices on the Chalcolithic and Iron Age II Remains), I. Roll and O. Tal, Tel Aviv 1999, 1–62. A more updated overview is to be found in K. Galor, I. Roll and O. Tal, Apollonia-Arsuf between Past and Future, Near Eastern Archaeology 72/1, 2009, 4–27; and in O. Tal and I. Roll, Arsuf: the Site, Settlement and Crusader Castle, and the Material Manifestation of Their Destruction, The Last Supper at Apollonia: The Final Days of the Crusader Castle in Herzliya, ed. O. Tal, Tel Aviv 2011, [8]–[51] in the English section.

3 Area P (and its new extension Area P1) are located on the inside and adjacent to the medieval town walls. Its proximity to the town wall, particularly to the point where a breach 21 m long can be seen (where we believe the Mamluk army destroyed the fortifications during the fighting in March 1265), as well as its elevation, are of importance. Area P’s main discovery was a formidable platform built into earlier strata and dated to the end of the Crusader period, assumed to have served Crusader artillery; see in this respect, T. and Roll (note 2 above, [37]–[38] in the English section). Area P1’s upper level is mostly characterized by thick white mortar surfaces (to facilitate Crusader maneuvering), in which many 13th-century arrowheads were found, similar to those unearthed in the Crusader castle, attesting to the fierce fight with the Mamluks. On the latter, see D. Ashkenazi, O. Golan and O. Tal, An Archaeometallurgical Study of 13th-Century Arrowheads and Bolts from the Crusader Castle of Arsuf/Arsus, Archaeometry 55/2, 2013, 235–257.

4 The motif as depicted around the inscription can be defined as a shaded, four-strand guilloche on a white ground, see e.g. C. Balmelle ed., Le décor géométrique de la mosaique romaine, vol. 1: Répertoire graphique et descriptif des compositions linéaires et isotropes, Paris 1985, pl. 73c. It is more familiar in 5th- and 6th-century CE mosaic pavements in the region; see for example R. Ovadiah and O. Ovadiah, Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements in Israel, Rome 1987, 202, motif B4.
Fig. 1. Site plan
of the mosaic pavement have slightly moved over the years. Moreover, small parts of the inscription were extracted from the floor in later periods and over time it was covered by whitewash that accumulated on the floor (unconnected to the later plastering). Nonetheless, the inscription itself was found almost complete. The Greek letters were made of red *tesserae* and those of the Samaritan inscription were made of black *tesserae*. While the Greek inscription is composed of five rows (and an uneven additional row with the suffix of the last word) that of the Samaritan inscription has one row. Based on the division of the letters of both the Greek and the Samaritan, it seems that the craftsman who made the inscription was not highly skilled and its wording may have been changed (that is, expanded) while the work was underway.

As the inscription’s preservation is quite good and, as noted, it was found almost complete, we were able to transcribe the letters in the following manner:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ΕΙϚΘΕΟ} & \ldots \\
\text{ΣΟΒΟΘΘ} & \ldots \\
\text{ΓΑΔΙΨΝΑ} & \\
\text{ΚΛΟΥΨΑΙΝ} & \\
\text{ΚΠΙΑΝΤΙΟΙΚΑΣ} & \\
\text{ΙΟΙ} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

Hence, the transliterated and restored version of the inscription may be read as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Εἷς} & \text{ θεὸς \[μόνο-\]} \\
\text{ὁ} & \text{ βοηθῶν} \\
\text{Γαδιωνακ} & \text{ (αἰ) Ἰουλιανῷ} \\
\text{καὶ} & \text{πᾶσιν} \text{ τοῖς} \text{ ἀξίοις} \\
\text{Ή} & \text{ Λιανου} \\
\end{align*}
\]

While the translation of the Greek is “One only god/who helps/Gadiona/and Iulianus/and all who deserve it”, that of the Aramaic (written in Samaritan script) may be translated as “(made it from his) possession in this place”.

The combination of Aramaic and Latin names as dedicators is interesting. The name Gadiona would apparently be the Greek transcription of the Semitic name *gdywn*. Hence it would represent an Aramaic form, known to have been used among Jews (and other ethnic groups) despite its theophoric (Baʿal Gad) connotation. Iulianus was a common Latin name that was used among the different populations of Byzantine Palestine. Thus recovering these names in Samaritan contexts is not surprising.

As for the Aramaic part, the third Samaritan letter from right may be read as -*gimmel*- but the root *פעג* has no meaning and would make no sense. The second Samaritan letter from left can be read as -*resh*- hence *בדה* – *in this place* – can also be read as *ברה* – *his son* but this seems less probable, given the Greek content of the inscription, where two private names are in the dative form as well as “all the righteous ones”.

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7 The two καί are written in abbreviated form, the first is apparently -κ- with an abbreviation mark in the form of a diagonal stroke; the second may have been similar or had a shallow -κ- sign. Alternatively, it may have been written as -κε-, with a round-backed epsilon.
Fig. 2. Area plan
As ρ’lh ( Heb) according to my understanding is used as (an abbreviated) possessive pronoun in this context, the suggested translation “(made it from his) possession in this place” would relate to the building in which the inscription was placed. In this manner both parts of the inscription, the Greek and the Aramaic, not only interact with each other but also lack a verb (that of the benefactors’ deeds), which was obviously apparent to those who read the inscription while the building in which it was placed was still in use. The use of ρ’lh as a possessive pronoun seems quite common, as can be seen for example in an Aramaic inscription from the synagogue at Korazim, and also from an Aramaic inscription on the mosaic pavement of the synagogue’s exedra at Eshtemoa. Like in our inscription, the inscription from the synagogue at Eshtemoa seems to display ρ’lh in a singular form despite plural benefactors.

On the whole, the Samaritan letters as they appear in the inscription lack the common diagonal alignment seen, for example, in other Samaritan inscriptions on mosaic pavements (see below) and it either implies inexperienced craftsmanship or an earlier date (second half of the 4th century).

In two recent papers I have argued that it is reasonable to assume that the Εἷς θεὸς μόνος formula inscriptions in Palestine have an exclusive Samaritan provenance. Indeed, these inscriptions are far fewer than the other Palestinian Εἷς θεὸς formula inscriptions, but they are found in Roman and Byzantine sites in Samaria and in cities where Samaritan communities are attested by both the archaeological finds and the written sources. The current discovery of a bilingual Greek-Samaritan Εἷς θεὸς μόνος formula inscription lends support to my previous conclusion.

In this context it should be noted that Ameling has recently argued in the CII II, while reproducing an Εἷς θεὸς μόνος inscription from Caesarea Maritima, that the formula “in itself is no indication of pagan,

8 Originally a qat-form formation meaning “possession” in Jewish Aramaic + the possessive suffix 3rd sg. masc. -ה- (and -ה-,

9 The inscription is engraved on the frontal base of a decorated stone chair. It reads: Εἷς Ἰωνίας, Ἰωνίας τοῦ Ἰωακείμου / Ἰωνίας Ἰωνίας τοῦ Ἰωακείμου – for the good remembrance of Yodan Bar Ishmael who made this portico[,] and stairs from his possession, may it be shared with its righteous, cf. Beyer (note 8 above, 382–383); see also J. Naveh, On Stone and Mosaic: The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues, Jerusalem 1978, 36–38, No. 17 (Hebrew). Given the archaeological data the synagogue is dated to either the 4th or the 5th century CE, see Z. Yeivin, The Synagogue at Korazim: The 1962–1964, 1980–1987 Excavations, Jerusalem 2000, 106 (Hebrew, English summary 30*–31*).


13 I. Roll and O. Tal, A New Greek Inscription from Byzantine Apollonia-Arsuf/Sozousa: A Reassessment of the Εἷς θεὸς Μόνος Inscriptions of Palestine, Scripta Classica Israelica 28, 2008, 139–147; O. Tal, A Winepress at Apollonia-Arsuf: More Evidence on the Samaritan Presence in Roman-Byzantine Southern Sharon, Liber Annus 59, 2009, 319–342, where a historical overview on the site in Byzantine times can also be found (pp. 319–321). See also A. Chaniotis, T. Corsten, R. S. Stroud and R. A. Tybout, Apollonia (Arsuf). Acclamation of ‘the one and only god’, 5th/early 6th cent. A.D. (59–1704), SEG 59, no. 1704, where my interpretation of the formula as Samaritan is given by the editors. Interestingly, this inscription was discovered in Area O and the one discussed in this paper in Area P1; these areas are located in the northern and southern parts of the excavated sites (fig. 1), some 450 m apart.

14 See in this respect L. Di Segni, Εἷς θεὸς in Palestinian Inscriptions, Scripta Classica Israelica 13, 1994, 100–101. nos. 18, 19, cf. ed. T. S. Burns and A. Chaniotis, T. Corsten, R. S. Stroud and R. A. Tybout, Apollonia (Arsuf). Acclamation of ‘the one and only god’, 5th/early 6th cent. A.D. (59–1704), SEG 59, no. 1704, where my interpretation of the formula as Samaritan is given by the editors. Interestingly, this inscription was discovered in Area O and the one discussed in this paper in Area P1; these areas are located in the northern and southern parts of the excavated sites (fig. 1), some 450 m apart.

16, 20a, Formula C on p. 111. To these we may add J. Patrich, The Warehouse Complex and Governor’s Palace (Areas KK, CC, and NN, May 1993–December 1995), Caesarea Papers, vol. 2, ed. K. G. Holom, A. Raban and J. Patrich, Portsmouth 1999, 97; idem, Urban Space in Caesarea Maritima, Israel, Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity, ed. T. S. Burns and J. W. Eadie, East Lansing 2001, 81, note 17, where he states that most Εἷς θεὸς inscriptions in Palestine come from a Samaritan milieu. See also SEG 49, no. 2054. Another such formula is known from Raqqi in the Carmel where it is ascribed to a Samaritan synagogue. L. Di Segni, Two Greek Inscriptions at Horvat Raqqit, Raqqit: Marinos’ Estate on the Carmel, Israel, S. Dar, Oxford 2004, 196–197. See also SEG 55, no. 1731.
Jewish, Christian or Samaritan adherence.\textsuperscript{15} Ameling refers to Peterson’s work on \textit{Εἷς θεός},\textsuperscript{16} for intensification of the formula with pagan examples, where \(\text{μόνος}\) is not an indication for monotheism but rather the god’s unique quality. He further argues against a Samaritan adherence: “Actually, there are three instances of \(\text{εἷς θεός μόνος}\) in Samaria, one of them certainly Christian (Di Segni 100 no. 16 [note 14 above]); one of the other two, \textit{SEG} 40, 1503, was found in the context of a church – which leaves only one: Di Segni 101 no. 20 – not enough to indicate this formula as Samaritan.” Ameling’s arguments suffer from inaccuracies.

Peterson’s own discussion of the \(\text{μόνος}\) “neben \(\text{Εἷς θεός}\) mentions manuscripts, a gemstone and a stele of not only non-Palestinian milieu but rather a different formulation.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, the \textit{ΧΜΓ} in Di Segni 100 no. 16 has no clear Christian adherence and cannot be regarded as “certainly Christian”. It is most likely a \(ψῆφος\), the number (643) corresponding to a formula,\textsuperscript{18} rather than the initials of Christ and its epithets. Furthermore, several inscriptions in the Mount Gerizim Theotokos Church are engraved on reused stone slabs (most probably originated from an earlier Samaritan cultic place); many are fragmentary, among them the formula \(\text{Εἷς θεός/Εἷς θεός μόνος}\) is apparent or can be safely reconstructed; from the latter, two such instances were published,\textsuperscript{19} but other are known as well. Thus, it is safe to say that there are more than three instances of the use of this formula in Samaria. Still, Ameling omitted examples from Apollonia-Arsuf and Raqit (Carmel),\textsuperscript{20} which are definitely Samaritan according to their context.\textsuperscript{21}

The recently found inscription from Apollonia/Sozousa is unique, as there are not many examples of bilingual Greek-Samaritan dedicatory inscriptions.\textsuperscript{22} The ones that we do know of are normally from synagogues (or assumed to have come from synagogues). The earliest evidence we have is the debased Ionic-style column capital from Emmaus-Nicopolis, found in secondary use in the floor of the northern

\textsuperscript{15} Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae Palaestinae. Volume II: Caesarea and the Middle Coast 1121–2160, Berlin 2011, no. 1342. He also adds that Patrich (note 14 above, 2001, 81) “misses a cross and therefore believes it possible that this inscription is Samaritan”. But this has no actual basis.

\textsuperscript{16} E. Peterson, \textit{Εἷς θεός: Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen}, Göttingen 1926, 256.

\textsuperscript{17} Peterson (note 16 above), 196.

\textsuperscript{18} See in this respect M. Avi-Yonah, Abbreviations in Greek Inscriptions (The Near East, 200 B.C. – A.D. 1100), \textit{Supplement to the Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine} 9, 1940, 111.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{SEG} 40, nos. 1502, 1503; Di Segni (note 14 above), 101, no. 20a.

\textsuperscript{20} Notes 13 and 14 above, respectively.

\textsuperscript{21} One of the papers in which the example from Apollonia-Arsuf was published (Tal, note 13 above) was cited in the introduction of the site entry in the same \textit{CIIP} II volume (Caesarea and the Middle Coast), but oddly enough is omitted from the list of Apollonia’s inscriptions.

\textsuperscript{22} There are of course many bilingual amulets but these are beyond the scope of this paper.
aisle of the Crusader-period church, with the θεός inscription on one side and (his name is blessed forever) on the opposite side within a tabula ansata. Another instance of Greek and Samaritan inscriptions written together is the mosaic pavement of the synagogue at Shāʾalvim (Salbit); here the Greek and Samaritan inscriptions were separated from one another yet appear on the same mosaic pavement. While the Samaritan inscription — the Lord will reign forever and ever more; Exod. 15:18) was discovered in the central section of the northern part of the hall, in front of the place where the bemah and the Ark of the Law must have been, the two written in Greek were found in the center of the hall (a medallion) and more to the rear of it. A similar phenomenon of separated Greek and Samaritan inscriptions on the same mosaic pavement is also known from the Samaritan synagogue at Tell Qasile. Only one-third of the building survived. The Samaritan inscription was discovered in the central section of the southern aisle, while the two written in Greek were found close to the entrance. In this context, the inscription in Samaritan script from the room adjoining the synagogue of Beth-She’an/Scythopolis should be mentioned. Naveh has shown, however, that the text of this medallion inscription although written in Samaritan script is in the Greek language (God help Ephraim and Anan). Given the comparative evidence at hand, it would be logical to assume that the newly discovered inscription from Apollonia/Sozousa also belongs to a Samaritan synagogue that was at a certain stage dismantled and occupied by later remains. The alignment of the inscription, toward Mount Gerizim, lends support to such a conclusion. As we have similar phenomena of abandoning (or deactivating) Samaritan elements in the northern part of the site where a wine press featuring a dedicatory Samaritan inscription written in Greek on its treading floor was found intentionally filled with refuse probably in the context of the 529 CE rebellion, one can assume a similar fate for the current building. Still, as excavations are limited and partial in the area of discovery, and well-secured dating material of the remains that cover the mosaic is almost absent, the date of the reoccupation of the building where the inscription was found, as well as the character of the earlier and later (Early Islamic) remains, is left to be discovered in the future.

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23 As published by C. Clermont-Ganneau, Note II, Expedition to Amwas (Emmaus-Nicopolis), Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement 14, 1882, 24–33; and more recently D. Barag, Samaritan Writing and Writings, From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East, ed. H. M. Cotton, R. G. Hoyland, J. A. Price and D. J. Wassertein, Cambridge 2009, 311–314 for its history of research and revised dating in the 5th–6th centuries CE.


26 It reads: ḥaʾīrīm/ḥaʾīrīm (a semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the direction of the qibla); here the Greek ḥaʾīrīm/ḥaʾīrīm should be mentioned. Naveh has shown, however, that the text of this medallion inscription although written in Samaritan script is in the Greek language (God help Ephraim and Anan).

27 Interestingly, the color of the Samaritan letters in all mosaic pavements that exhibit Samaritan and Greek inscriptions is normally black (or dark gray) while that of the Greek letters is normally red.

28 N. Zori, The Ancient Synagogue at Beth-She'an, Eretz 8, 1967, 149–167 (Hebrew, English summary 73*).


30 It is tempting to suggest that the semicircular plastered niche excavated on its south side (see above, fig. 2) served as a miḥrab (a semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the direction of the qibla). In such a case, a cult place (a Samaritan synagogue) would have been transformed into another cult place (a mosque).

31 Tal (note 13 above).