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Shaye J. D. Cohen

The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Ser., Vol. 72, No. 1. (Jul., 1981), pp. 1-17.

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EPIGRAPHICAL RABBIS*

By SHAYE J. D. COHEN

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America

IN HIS WELL KNOWN WORK, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, E. R. Goodenough argued that most of the Jews of antiquity, not only in the diaspora but also in the Land of Israel, were not Rabbinic Jews. They did not look to the Rabbis for leadership and guidance; their Judaism was non-Rabbinic. Goodenough based his thesis on the archeological remains of ancient Jewry, especially the Dura synagogue, which he felt could be explained by appeal not to the Talmud and Midrash but to Philo and other "Hellenistic" texts. Goodenough's Philonic interpretation has convinced few, but his discovery of non-Rabbinic Judaism (to be more precise, non-Rabbinic Judaisms) remains the subject of vigorous debate.¹

In this essay I propose to assess one part of Goodenough's thesis by collecting and analyzing the ancient inscriptions which refer to rabbis. Goodenough was aware of these epigraphical rabbis but dismissed them as private individuals who were not part of *the* Rabbinic movement. He felt that these inscriptions could not prove a strong Rabbinic presence, let alone dominance, in Jewish life.² On this point I believe Goodenough's conclusions are correct, but the question deserves more than mere ex cathedra judgments. Relying upon the standard corpora, I have assembled

* I am grateful to the Abbell Publication Fund of the Jewish Theological Seminary for its support, and to my friend Professor Shaya Gafni of the Hebrew University for reading a draft of this essay and offering several valuable suggestions.

¹ E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, I-XIII, Princeton, 1953-68; M. Smith, "Goodenough's *Jewish Symbols* in Retrospect," *JBL*, 86 (1967), 53-68. Since the publication of Smith's survey article, many books and articles have appeared which discuss various aspects of Goodenough's work. For a recent bibliography see A. Th. Kraabel, "The Diaspora Synagogue: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence since Sukenik," and J. F. Strange, "Archaeology and the Religion of Judaism in Palestine," both in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, 19.1, Berlin, 1979, pp. 477-510 and 646-85, respectively.

² Goodenough, I, 90, 241.

the following catalogue of epigraphical rabbis.³ No doubt this catalogue is incomplete and will be enriched by future discoveries and by texts which I have missed. But we may assume that the catalogue is representative of the material as a whole. My terminus ad quem is the seventh century, and the numeration refers to the rabbi, not to the inscription.

Diaspora

1. Paul Monceaux, *Revue archéologique*, 4th series, 3 (1904), 372, No. 152: from Volubilis (North Africa), a Hebrew epitaph for *Matrona bat Rabbi Yehudah*. Uncertain date.

2-3. Lifshitz, prolegomenon to *CIJ*, I, 57-58, No. 665a: from Emerita (Spain), a Latin epitaph erected apparently by *Simeon filius de Rebbi Ja[cob?]* in memory of a son of *Rebbi Se[muel?]*. The deceased had the rank of *orans* (cantor). Perhaps 7th century.

4-5. *CIJ*, I, No. 611: from Venosa (Italy), a Latin-Hebrew epitaph for Faustina, for whom Lamentations (or lamentations; TRHNVS = θρήνους) were recited by *duo apostuli et duo rebbites*. Apparently 5th/6th century.

6. *CIJ*, I, No. 568: from Naples (see Lifshitz, prolegomenon, 44), a Latin-Hebrew (?) epitaph for *Benus (=Venus) filia rebbitis Abundanti*. Uncertain date.

³ J. B. Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum, I: Europe*, Rome, 1936, reprinted with prolegomena by B. Lifshitz, New York, 1975 (hereafter *CIJ*, I); *idem*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum, II: Asie-Afrique*, Rome, 1952 (hereafter *CIJ*, II); B. Mazar, *Beth She'arim*, I, English edition, New Brunswick, 1973 (hereafter *BS*, I); M. Schwabe and B. Lifshitz, *Beth She'arim, II: The Greek Inscriptions*, English edition, New Brunswick, 1974 (hereafter *BS*, II); N. Avigad, *Beth She'arim III*, English edition, New Brunswick, 1976 (hereafter *BS*, III); B. Lifshitz, *Donateurs et fondateurs dans les synagogues juives*, Paris, 1967; J. Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic: The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues*, Israel, 1978 (Hebrew). Many of these texts can be found also in F. Hüttenmeister and G. Reeg, *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel, I: Die jüdischen Synagogen, Lehrhäuser und Gerichtshöfe*, Wiesbaden, 1977, and in J. A. Fitzmyer and D. J. Harrington, *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts*, Rome, 1978. I have always preferred the readings of *BS*, Lifshitz, and Naveh over those of *CIJ*. On the title "Rabbi," see H. Shanks, *JQR*, 53 (1962-63), 337-45, and 59 (1968-69), 152-57, with S. Zeitlin's replies, *ibid.*, pp. 345-49 and 158-60; E. Lohse, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, VI (1968), 961-65 (who lists many of the inscriptions which mention rabbis); and E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus*, rev. and ed. by G. Vermes and others, Edinburgh, 1979, II, 325-26 (with bibliography).

7. *CIJ*, II, No. 736 = Lifshitz No. 83: from Lapethos (Cyprus), a Greek ex-voto inscription of *Rabbē Attikos*. 3rd century.

Israel

8. Naveh, No. 6: from Dabbura (Golan), a Hebrew inscription marking the study hall (*bet midrash*) of *Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar*. Perhaps 2nd century (see below).

9. *CIJ*, II, No. 979 = Naveh, No. 15: from Ramah (between Akko and Safed), an Aramaic synagogue inscription honoring *Rabbi Eleazar bar Peraḥyah (Petaḥyah?) and his sons*. Uncertain date.

10. *CIJ*, II, No. 989 = Naveh, No. 29: from Sepphoris, an Aramaic synagogue inscription honoring *Rabbi Yudan [bar Tan]ḥum* for a donation. Uncertain date. This is perhaps the same *Rabbi Yudan* memorialized in an Aramaic epitaph from Sepphoris (*CIJ*, II, No. 990).

11. *CIJ*, II, No. 857 = Naveh, No. 33: from Hammat-Gadara, an Aramaic inscription honoring several individuals for their contributions to the synagogue, the first of whom is *Rab* (sic) *Tanḥum ha-Levi ba[r Ḥa]l(f)ah*. 4th-6th century.

12-13. *CIJ*, II, No. 853 = Naveh, No. 36: at Naveh (Beisan), a 13th century traveler reported seeing a Hebrew-Aramaic inscription mentioning *R. Yudan and R. Levi son of Asher*.

14. *CIJ*, II, No. 994 = *BS*, I, 199-200: from Beth Shearim (catacomb I, hall G), a Hebrew epitaph for *Rabbi Yizḥaq bar Moqim*. This individual is mentioned also in several Greek epitaphs, two of which (*CIJ*, II, Nos. 995, 1033 = *BS*, II, Nos. 18, 20) prefix a P for Πββι to his name.

15. *CIJ*, II, No. 1041 = *BS*, I, 200-01, and II, No. 31: from Beth Shearim (catacomb I, hall G), a Hebrew-Greek epitaph for *Parigori* (Hebrew) = *R. Parēgoris* (Greek).

16. *BS*, I, 201 (= *CIJ*, II, No. 1042?): from Beth Shearim (catacomb I, hall G), a Hebrew epitaph for *Yizḥaq ben Yoseph Biribbi*.

17. *CIJ*, II, No. 1052 = *BS*, I, 201, and II, No. 41: from Beth Shearim (catacomb I, hall G), a Hebrew-Greek epitaph for [*Rabbi*] *Yoseph ben Yizḥaq* (Hebrew) = *Ribbi Iose the pious, son of Isakios* (Greek).

18. *CIJ*, II, Nos. 1054-55 = *BS*, II, No. 43: from Beth Shearim (catacomb I, hall G), a Greek-Hebrew epitaph for (name lost) *son of Iose, the pious* (Greek) = *Rabbi* (name lost; Hebrew).

19. *BS*, II, No. 45: from Beth Shearim (catacomb I, hall I), a Hebrew-Greek epitaph for *Yehoseph* (Hebrew) = *Rib Yoaas*[*ph*]⁴ (Greek).

20. *CIJ*, II, No. 1006 = *BS*, II, Nr. 61: from Beth Shearim (catacomb I, hall K), a Greek epitaph for *Leontios father of Ribbi Parēgorios and Julianus the palatinus*. Schwabe and Lifshitz note (*BS*, II, p. 39) that the office of *palatinus* did not exist before the time of Diocletian. Julianus and his brother Paregorios can therefore be assigned to the first half of the 4th century.

21. *BS*, III, 238, No. 8: from Beth Shearim (catacomb 14, hall A), a Hebrew epitaph for *Rabbi Shim^con*.

22. *BS* II, No. 174 = *BS*, III, 238-39, No. 9: from Beth Shearim (catacomb 14, hall A), a Hebrew-Greek epitaph for *Rabbi Gamaliel* (Hebrew) = *Rabi Gamaliēl* (Greek).

23. *BS*, II, No. 175 = *BS*, III, 239, No. 10: from Beth Shearim (catacomb 14, hall A), a Hebrew-Greek epitaph for *Rabbi Aniana* (Hebrew) = *Of Rabbi Anianos the dwarf* (Greek). This same person may be referred to in another epitaph from the same room, *BS*, III, 239-40, No. 11: *Anina the Little* (Hebrew).

24. *BS*, II, No. 180: from Beth Shearim (catacomb 16, hall A), a Greek epitaph for *(The) pries*[*t R*]abi *Hieron*[*ymus*].

25-26. *BS*, III, 241-43, No. 15: from Beth Shearim (catacomb 20, hall A), a Hebrew inscription on a sarcophagus mentioning the names of the fathers of the two women (each named Atio/Ation) buried within: *Rabbi Gamaliel ben Neḥemiah* and *Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Gamaliel*.

27-28. *BS*, III, 243, No. 16: from Beth Shearim (catacomb 20, hall A), a Hebrew epitaph for *Rabbi Yehoshua birabbi Hillel ben Ation*. Avigad notes that *birabbi* (בִּירָבִי) here is not a title but a contraction of בֶּן רַבִּי.

29. *BS*, III, 243-45, No. 17: from Beth Shearim (catacomb 20, hall A), a Hebrew inscription on a sarcophagus mentioning *Rabbi Anianah and* (name lost) *the holy ones, the sons of* (name lost).

30. *BS*, III, 246-47, No. 21: from Beth Shearim (catacomb 20, hall A), a Hebrew epitaph for *Miriam bat Rabbi Yonathan*.

⁴ *BS* II has Ιωαασ[φ] (misprint for Ιωασα[φ]?).

31-32. *BS*, III, 247-48, No. 22: from Beth Shearim (catacomb 20, hall A), a Hebrew inscription on a sarcophagus containing the remains of *the three sons of Rabbi Yudan ben Rabbi Miyashah* (?).

33. *BS*, III, 248, No. 23: from Beth Shearim (catacomb 20, hall A), a Hebrew inscription on the sarcophagus of *Rabbi Yoshua*. This same person is apparently mentioned by the Hebrew inscriptions on the nearby sarcophagi of *Kura Megah, the wife of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi* (*BS*, III, 248-49, No. 24) and of (name lost) *daughter of Rabbi Yehoshua* (*BS*, III, 249-50, No. 25).

34-35. *BS*, III, 250-51, No. 26: from Beth Shearim (catacomb 20, hall A), a Hebrew inscription on the sarcophagus of [*Rabbi*] *Gamaliel ben Rabbi Eliezer [who died] at the age of seventeen years*. Avigad has restored the title *Rabbi* and the phrase *who died*, but the restorations seem secure.

36-37. *BS*, III, 251-54, No. 28: from Beth Shearim (catacomb 20, hall A), a Hebrew inscription on the sarcophagus of *Rabbi Hillel ben Rabbi Levi who made this cave*.

38. *BS*, II, No. 202: from Beth Shearim (near the synagogue), a Greek inscription: *Of Rib Samuel who arranges, and of Judah who puts to sleep*. The editors explain that Samuel was the official in charge of arranging the limbs of the dead, while Judah was the official in charge of laying out the corpses. The editors also suggest that the title *Rib* applies to both Samuel and Judah, but I see no reason to assume this.

39. *BS*, II, No. 208: from Beth Shearim (near the synagogue), a Greek inscription (epitaph?): *Of Antoninus (son) of Judah (son) of Ribbi Parēgorios*.

40. *BS*, II, No. 219: from Beth Shearim (catacombs 25-26), a Greek epitaph (plus שלום) for *Kura Miriam daughter of Rabi Judah*.

41. *BS*, I, 26: in 1904 the German excavators at Beth Shearim discovered the following inscription which can no longer be found: *Binyamin bar Yizḥaq Rabban Torah*.

42. *CIJ*, II, No. 1165 = Naveh, No. 43: a fragmentary Aramaic inscription from the synagogue at Bet Alpha, apparently recording the collective donation to the synagogue by the residents of the town, and singling out one individual (name lost) *birabbi*. 6th century.

43. *CIJ*, II, No. 892: from Joppa, an Aramaic epitaph for *Yudan son of Rabbi Tarphon Birabbi*. 2nd/3rd century?

44. *CIJ*, II, No. 893: from Joppa, a Hebrew epitaph for *Tanhum Biribbi*. 2nd/3rd century?

45. *CIJ*, II, No. 895: from Joppa, a fragmentary Hebrew epitaph with the word *Rabbi*. 2nd/3rd century?

46. *CIJ*, II, No. 900: from Joppa, a Greek-Hebrew epitaph for *Rab Judah son of Jonatha* (Greek) = *Rab Yudan ha-Kohen Berab* (Hebrew). 2nd/3rd century?

47. *CIJ*, II, No. 951: from Joppa, a Greek epitaph (plus שָׁלוֹם) for *Samuel (son) of Gallus Bērebi*. 2nd/3rd century?

48. *CIJ*, II, No. 1199 = Naveh, No. 60: an Aramaic inscription from Naaran (near Jericho) honoring *Haliphu daughter of Rabbi Saphrah* for her support of the synagogue. 6th century.

49. *CIJ*, II, No. 1218: an ossuary from Jerusalem with an inscription in Hebrew letters *Rab Hana*.

50. *CIJ*, II, No. 1285 (No. 25): an ossuary from Jerusalem with a fragmentary inscription in Hebrew letters *ben Rabban*.

51. *CIJ*, II, No. 1286 (No. 7): an ossuary from Jerusalem with a fragmentary inscription in Hebrew letters *ben Rabban*.

52. *CIJ*, II, No. 1410: from Jerusalem, an inscription in Hebrew letters in a burial cave: *Rabbi Yehudah*. Uncertain date.

53. *CIJ*, II, No. 1414: from Jerusalem (?), a Greek-Hebrew epitaph for *Rabbi Samu[el] archēs[ynagogue, a Ph]rygian of Do[rylaeum]* (Greek). The restoration ἀρχησ[ὀνάγωγος Φ]ρύγιος seems certain. Uncertain date.

54. Naveh, No. 70: An Aramaic inscription from the synagogue at En Gedi, thanking *Rabbi Yosah bar Halphi* and *Hezeqeyo bar Halphi* for their particularly conspicuous support of the synagogue. An earlier Aramaic inscription, laid in the mosaic just above our text, thanks *Yosah, Ezron, and Hezeqeyo the sons of Halphi* for their support. During the interval between these inscriptions, Ezron ceased supporting the synagogue (perhaps he died) and Yosah became a Rabbi. Late 5th or early 6th century.

55-56. Naveh, No. 75: from Hurbat Susyah (near Eshtemoa), a Hebrew inscription honoring *His holiness Master Rabbi Isi ha-Kohen the Honorable Birabbi* for building the mosaic and plastering the walls of the synagogue, which he had vowed at the (wedding) feast of *Rabbi Yohanan ha-Kohen the Sopher Birabbi his son*. Uncertain date.

57. Naveh, No. 82: from Hurbat Susyah (near Eshtemoa), an Aramaic inscription thanking [*Rabb*]i *Yudan the Levite son of Shim[on]* for his support of the synagogue. Uncertain date.

Extra Ordinem

58. Y. Yadin, *IEJ*, 11 (1961), 46, and E. Y. Kutscher, *Leshonenu*, 25 (1961), 126-27: from the Judean desert, a letter of Bar Kokhba referring to רבנו בטניה בר מיסה. Since the letter and the archive of which it is a part still await final and complete publication, and since this text differs in provenance and type from all the other inscriptions considered here, I shall not include *Rabbenu Betaniah* in my subsequent discussion. I list him here only for the sake of completeness.

Dubia

Two inscriptions have been rejected from this catalogue because they are too problematical. One (*CIJ*, II, No. 943) has been emended to yield *Barabbi*, but the emendation is impossible; see Frey's note and the discussion by Schwabe and Lifshitz to *BS*, II, No. 89 = *CIJ*, II, No. 1110. The other has not been satisfactorily deciphered and in any case seems to be of post-7th century origin (*CIJ*, II, No. 1403).

Analysis

A full analysis of all aspects of these forty-eight inscriptions and fifty-seven Rabbis would swell this essay beyond reasonable length. Here I shall touch briefly upon three points (1. titulature; 2. patronymics; 3. social standing) before turning to the areas which bear on Goodenough's thesis: 4. the definition of "Rabbi" and the identification of the epigraphical rabbis; 5. rabbinic control of ancient synagogues; 6. rabbinic control of diaspora Jewry.

1. The Title Rabbi appears in a bewildering variety of forms (brackets indicate that the given form has been restored in the inscription):

רבי (transliterated <i>Rabbi</i>)	1, 8, 9, 10, 14, [17], 18, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, [34], 35, 36, 37, 45, 48, 52, 54, [57]— twenty-eight examples
Rebbi	2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Ραββη	7
Ραββι	23, 53

Ραβι	22, 24, 40
Ριββι	17, 20, 39
רב	11, 49
Ραβ	46
Ριβ	19, 38
בירבי	42 (postpositive)
ביריבי	16, 44 (postpositive)
Βηρεβι	47 (postpositive)
רב פלוני רב	46
רבי פלוני בירבי	(27?), 43, 55, 56
רבן	50, 51
רבן תורה	41 (postpositive)
רבנו	58
ר	12, 13 ⁵
P	14, 15

Whether there is any substantive difference among these forms, both in our corpus and in Rabbinic texts, requires investigation.⁶

2. In both our corpus and Rabbinic texts, the patronymic is usually expressed in the form "Rabbi X ben Y" (9, 10, 11, 14, [17], 25, 28, 33, 46, 54, [57]) or "X ben Y Biribbi" (16, 47). In Rabbinic texts we cannot deduce from this form that Y was not a Rabbi himself (e.g., Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel), but I am not sure whether this applies to our corpus as well. Contrast No. 25 (Rabbi Gamaliel ben Nehemiah) with No. 26 (Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Gamaliel), both mentioned in the same inscription. The same contrast is evident in the inscription which mentions rabbis 27-28. (Other cases of "Rabbi X ben Rabbi Y" are 31, [34], 36).⁷ Perhaps these formulae were subject to local and chronological variations, but the matter requires further investigation.

⁵ Nos. 12 and 13 are known only from a medieval source which might have abbreviated an original רבי or רב to ר.

⁶ These inscriptions are valuable to philologists who have long debated the proper pronunciation of the Rabbinic רב and בירבי.

⁷ Related inscriptions which follow a different pattern are No. 56 (a rabbi son of a rabbi) and No. 20 (a rabbi son of a non-rabbi). Nos. 26, 31, 34, and 36, as well as 30, 33, and 43, actually have the pleonastic form / רבנו בנו בתו / פלוני פלוני, which for the sake of convenience, I have shortened in the text. The short form רבי פלוני appears in No. 48 and in No. 27 (בירבי = רבי). I include No. 28 (Rabbi Hillel ben Ation) in this discussion although it seems that Ation (אטיון) is the name of a woman (see No. 26). Avigad, quoting Lifshitz, remarks that Ation could be the name of either a man or a woman, and argues that the Ation of No. 28 was Hillel's father and not his mother. In the case

The larger question, of which this subject is but a part, is the social mobility of Rabbinic society. To what extent was the Rabbinate open to outsiders? To what extent was the Rabbinate the possession of certain families?⁸

3. Our corpus shows that many rabbis were well-to-do. Rab Tanḥum (No. 11) was in the company of Kuros Patrik, not to mention Kuros Hoples, Kura Proton, Kuros Sallustius, and Comes Pheroras (Naveh, No. 32), when he contributed one third of a gold dinar to the synagogue at Hammat-Gadara. In fact, we may assume that all the synagogue donors recorded in the inscriptions, whether rabbinic or not, were relatively prosperous. The epitaphs reveal similar data. The sarcophagi of catacomb 20 of Beth Shearim could not have been cheap (Nos. 25-29, 31-37). Rabbi Paregorios had a brother who was a *palatinus* and a father who was a goldsmith (No. 20).

4. We turn now to the areas which are our major concern. The term "rabbi" is ambiguous. It may be either a popular designation for anyone of high position, notably—but not exclusively—a teacher, or it may be a technical term for someone who has been "ordained" and has achieved status and power within that society which produced the Mishnah, the Talmudim, and related works. This ambiguity is beyond dispute; practically all Semites used the word *rab* and its forms to designate individuals of rank, and we have no reason to assume that every Jew so designated helped to write the literature and shape the Judaism we call Rabbinic. What is subject to dispute is the point at which the ambiguity was resolved and the unofficial or popular use of the term fell into desuetude.⁹ (For the sake of convenience,

of "X ben Y Biribbi," I have assumed that it is X, not Y, who is the rabbi. The ambiguity is greatest at No. 43—does *Birabbi* refer to Yudan or to Rabbi Tarphon? I have assumed the latter because of the form *Rabbi* . . . *Birabbi*; for other examples of a non-rabbinic son of a rabbinic father, see Nos. 2 and 39. If the former is correct, our number of epigraphical rabbis should be increased by one.

⁸ G. Alon, *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World*, Jerusalem, 1977, pp. 436-57 ("The Sons of the Sages"); E. E. Urbach, "Class Status and Leadership in the World of the Palestinian Sages," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, 2 (1968), 38-74.

⁹ On the popular use of the term rabbi, see Lohse and Shanks (1968-69). On the use of רב, רבן, and related forms in Semitic languages, see, e.g., C. F. Jean and J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'ouest*, Leiden, 1965, p. 271. Even today in some Jewish circles the titles *rab* or *reb* are simply the equivalents of "mister."

throughout the rest of this essay lower-case "rabbi" and "rabbinic" refer to the general usage, and upper-case "Rabbi" and "Rabbinic" refer to the traditions of Talmudic tradition). Goodenough, who assumes that the popular usage persisted for centuries, contends that our epigraphical rabbis were merely prominent individuals, not ordained Rabbis. We may test this argument by examining two questions: 1) can any of our epigraphical rabbis be identified with Rabbis known from literary sources? 2) is the Judaism of these rabbis "Rabbinic Judaism"?

Of the fifty epigraphical rabbis of Israel, thirty-three are archeologically dated in the period of the composition of the Mishnah and of the Palestinian Talmud (100-400 C.E.): the twenty-eight rabbis of Beth Shearim (Nos. 14-41) and the five of Joppa (Nos. 43-47). The former necropolis was in use from the 2nd to the mid-4th centuries, the latter from the 2nd to the 3rd centuries.¹⁰ Of the remaining seventeen rabbis, three apparently lived before 100-400 C.E. (Nos. 49-51, Jerusalem ossuaries¹¹), one apparently (No. 11) and three definitely (Nos. 42, 48, 54) lived after 100-400 C.E., and ten are of uncertain date (Nos. 8, 9, 10, 12-13, 52, 53, 55-56, 57). We might expect to be able to identify many, if not most, of the thirty-three rabbis who died, and presumably flourished, during the height of Rabbinic creativity, as well as a few of the ten undatable rabbis. But our expectations are disappointed. Such identifications have been made by several scholars, but *not one is certain*. The uncertainty is caused in part by the fact that the onomasticon of the epigraphical rabbis closely resembles that of the literary Rabbis. Names like Isaac, Joseph, Paregorios, Simeon, Gamaliel, Anina, Judah, and their variations (e.g., Yosi, Isi, Aniana, Yudan) appear frequently in both corpora,¹² rendering mere similarity of names an inadequate means of identification. And even when a name of the form "X

¹⁰ A few of the Beth Shearim burials may be later than the 350's, but the vast majority are not. See *BS*, I, 3-7 and *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, I, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1975, pp. 229-47. On Joppa see *CIJ*, II, p. 119.

¹¹ Goodenough, II, 114-15; E. M. Meyers, *Jewish Ossuaries*, Rome, 1971, pp. 39-44 (who unfortunately ignores the terminus ante quem for the ossuaries).

¹² J. Umanski, *Hakmē ha-Talmud: A List of all the Tannaim and Amoraim of the Jerusalem Talmud*, Jerusalem, 1952 (Hebrew). Against Avigad's identification of Nos. 21-23 with the three successors of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch mentioned in B.Ket. 103a-b (*BS*, III, 62-65), see Schwabe and Lifshitz, *BS*, II, p. 148, n. 6.

ben Y” occurs identically in both corpora, we must be hesitant. Rabbis Joshua ben Levi, Yudan bar Tryphon, and Yudan bar Simeon are Palestinian Amoraim, but can they be identified with Nos. 33, 43, and 57?¹³ Obviously a secure identification requires some other data, e.g., identical name of offspring or identical area of activity, to supplement a similarity in nomenclature. This criterion renders uncertain the identification of Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar (No. 8) with the tanna of that name, in spite of the appearance of the unusual and unexplained **הקפר**, since Rabbinic sources never place their Eliezer (or Elazar) ha-Qappar (or Bar Qappara) in the Golan.¹⁴ (In fact, Rabbinic sources say very little about the Golan, one of the most important areas of Jewish settlement in the “Rabbinic period.”) Equally attractive but uncertain is the identification of R. Isi ha-Kohen (No. 55) with the Amora R. Asi (**איסי**, or **אסי**, or **יסא**) who, although settled in Tiberias, traveled at least once to Eshtemoa.¹⁵ It is difficult, however, to believe that a text with such a fulsome use of titles is a product of the Talmudic age. Uncertainty remains for this as well as for all the other proposed identifications.

The inscriptions give little information on the nature of the Judaism practiced by these individuals. Most of the Israeli epigraphical rabbis spoke Hebrew or Aramaic, but some knew Greek as well (Nos. 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 46). Those rabbis who are mentioned in Greek texts alone (Nos. 20, 24, 38, 39), or in Greek texts accompanied by **שלום** or some equivalent (Nos. 40, 47, 53), are especially interesting—why should Talmudic scholars be memorialized in Israel only in Greek?¹⁶ Can we believe that the Greek-speaking Rabbi Hieronymus (No. 24), Rabbi Samuel ben Gallus (No. 47), and Rabbi Samuel the

¹³ S. Klein, *Jüdisch-palästinisches Corpus Inscriptionum*, Vienna, 1920, reprinted Hildesheim, 1971, pp. 39-40, identifies Yudan bar Tryphon (No. 43) with the amora of that name, although Rabbinic sources never place that amora in Joppa. (Klein’s appeal to Lev. Rabbah 20:10 is ineffective, since he is relying upon an incorrect text; see Margalioth’s edition, p. 467). Klein similarly identifies R. Tanhum (No. 44) and R. Yudan ha-Kohen (No. 46).

¹⁴ This identification is generally accepted (see Naveh, following D. Urman, the original editor). I do not say that the identification is *impossible*, only that it is uncertain.

¹⁵ S. Safrai, *Immanuel*, 3 (1973-74), 48-50.

¹⁶ Perhaps we should distinguish between those Greek texts whose primary reference is to a rabbi (Nos. 24, 38, 47, 53) and those which merely mention a rabbi in connection with someone else (Nos. 20, 39, 40).

Phrygian archisynagogue (No. 53) were Talmudic scholars who helped shape the course of "Rabbinic Judaism"? Of the eight sarcophagi from catacomb 20 of Beth Shearim which bear inscriptions referring to rabbis, five are plain (Nos. 29, 31-32, 33, 36-37), one is decorated by a gable, other architectural motifs, a shell, and a bird (No. 33), one is decorated by wreaths, lines, and discs (Nos. 25-26), and one, that of Rabbi Gamaliel ben Rabbi Eliezer, is decorated by shells, lions, birds, fish, lion heads, bull heads, vines, and circles (Nos. 34-35).¹⁷ What sort of rabbi was this Gamaliel? And as for the "holy ones" buried in the plain sarcophagi, why were they interred in catacomb 20, which contained also numerous sarcophagi decorated with scenes from Greco-Roman mythology?¹⁸ It is one thing for a Rabbi to permit a Jew to make a living by producing art work,¹⁹ quite another for a rabbi to be buried near sarcophagi decorated with unambiguous pagan motifs. Among our non-Rabbinic rabbis we must include at least some of the diaspora epigraphical rabbis, certainly the Greek-speaking Rabbi Attikos (No. 7), and the Latin-speaking Rabbi Abundantius father of Venus (No. 6). I conclude then that Goodenough is correct. We cannot securely identify any of our epigraphical rabbis with figures known to us from Talmudic texts. Some of our epigraphical rabbis were far more tolerant of pagan art than Talmudic Rabbis would have been. Even in antiquity not all rabbis were Rabbis.

Nor should this conclusion surprise us, given the complexity and diversity of Judaism in late antiquity. There was no central registry of Rabbis, no central office which had exclusive rights to bestow Rabbinic ordination. Judaism did have an approximation of such a central authority, the patriarchate, but most Rabbis were ordained by their private and independent teachers, not by

¹⁷ *BS*, III, 136-64. The list of inscribed sarcophagi (p. 161) is helpful. Of the three sarcophagi which bear inscriptions referring to R. Yehoshua (No. 33), those of R. Yehoshua himself and his wife are undecorated, that of his daughter is the "gable" sarcophagus (p. 145). On the sarcophagus of the Ation girls, see pp. 138-39; on the "shell" sarcophagus, see pp. 143-45.

¹⁸ On these decorated marble sarcophagi, see *BS*, III, 164-73. "Holy ones" (הקדושים) appears in the epitaph of Rabbi Anianah (No. 29). What this means is not certain; it certainly does not refer to their abhorrence of images (Goodenough, XII, 65-66, against Avigad and Urbach).

¹⁹ E. E. Urbach, "The Rabbinical Laws of Idolatry in the Second and Third Centuries," *IEJ*, 9 (1959), 149-65 and 229-45.

the patriarch.²⁰ Within Rabbinic Judaism we find contrasting schools and trends which must not be homogenized. For example, some Rabbis were mystics, others were not. The literature redacted in Lydda and Caesarea quotes Rabbis and utilizes terminology not found in the literature redacted in Sepphoris and Tiberias.²¹ And if there was no uniformity within the Rabbinic house, who could monitor and enforce standards on all the leaders of Jewry in Israel and in the diaspora? Who could prevent various communities from bestowing the title "rabbi" on their prominent citizens regardless of their practices and beliefs? Hence it makes no sense to assume that all rabbis in antiquity were Talmudic scholars.

5. But even if Goodenough and I are wrong; even if "rabbi" became a technical term exclusively by the second century C.E.; even if all epigraphical rabbis were members of that elect society which produced the Talmudic texts—even if all this is so, nevertheless our corpus vindicates another of Goodenough's arguments: the Rabbis did not control the synagogues of antiquity. The chief officials of the Greek-speaking synagogues in both Israel and the diaspora were *presbyters*, *archons*, *archisynagogues*, and even *hazzanim*, but not rabbis (or Rabbis).²² One prominent individual in the Sardis synagogue was a (the?) "priest and sage-teacher" (*hiereus kai sophodidaskalos*), but he too was not (necessarily) a Rabbi.²³ The Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions are much more chary with their references to authority figures, but they also do

²⁰ Alon, 374-435 ("Those Appointed for Money"), and especially Alon's *History of the Jews in Erez Yisrael in the Period of the Mishnah and Talmud*, II, Israel, 1961, pp. 125-51 (Hebrew). W. Bacher, *MGWJ*, 38 (1894), 125-27, suggests that the patriarch kept a register of ordained Rabbis, but at best the register would have listed only Rabbis who were ordained by the patriarch himself.

²¹ S. Lieberman, *The Talmud of Caesarea*, Jerusalem, 1931, and *Sifre Zuta: The Midrash of Lydda*, New York, 1968 (both in Hebrew).

²² See especially two of the inscriptions of the synagogue of Apamea (late 4th century), the former dated by the archisynagogues, the gerusiarch, and the presbyters (Lifshitz, No. 38), the latter dated by the *hazzan* (αἰζζαυα) and deacon (Lifshitz, No. 40). Volubilis, home of Rabbi Yehudah (No. 1), had a synagogue and a *patēr tēs synagōgēs*. See E. Frézouls in *Acta of the Fifth International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy 1967*, Cambridge, 1971, pp. 287-93. It is unfortunate that the relative chronology of the two Volubilis inscriptions is unknown.

²³ *BASOR*, 187 (1967), 29, and fig. 48.

not support the notion of Rabbinic dominance.²⁴ The rabbis of our corpus who are mentioned by synagogue inscriptions appear as donors (Nos. 7, 9, 10, 11, 12?, 13?, 42, 48, 54, 55, 56, 57), not as the leaders of the synagogues. Rabbi Samuel (No. 38) and the grandson of Rabbi Paregorios (No. 39) apparently had special seats reserved for them in the synagogue at Beth Shearim, but there is no sign that they or any other rabbi controlled the synagogue. The rank of *orans* bestowed on the son of Rabbi Samuel (No. 3) is of unknown significance, and in any event the epitaph in question comes from the very last period of our survey, if not beyond it. Similarly, we do not know the communal function of the *duo apostuli et duo rebbitas* recorded in the famous inscription from Venosa (Nos. 4-5). One thing that the text does make clear is that the public recitation of lamentations at funerals by these four men was quite exceptional and worthy of comment. We can hardly deduce that the two rabbis were in charge of normal liturgical activities. To sum up, the synagogue is not the primary locus of our epigraphical rabbis.

Only two rabbis of our corpus may be exceptions. The first is Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar whose school (*bet midrash*) was discovered in the Golan (No. 8). Schools and synagogues were distinct, the Talmud regularly distinguishing between them, but there was some overlap, since synagogues were often used for study and schools for prayer. If the inscription was set up in the lifetime of Rabbi Eliezer ha-Qappar, we could conclude that we have an example of a school (and perhaps a synagogue) which was run, if not actually owned, by a rabbi.

The other exception is Rabbi Samuel archisynagogue, a Phrygian of Dorylaeum (No. 53), the only rabbi known to have been an archisynagogue. Other diaspora archisynagogues were buried in the Land of Israel, but they were not rabbis.²⁵ It is most unfortunate that we do not know when Samuel became a rabbi. Was it while he was still an archisynagogue in Phrygia, or was it only after he came to Israel? Of course, if Samuel died in Phrygia and received only secondary burial in Israel, our choice is clear.

²⁴ An inscription from Nabratta is dated by "the reign" (בסדר) of Hanina and Luliana who are given no titles (Naveh, No. 13); the Dura synagogue is dated by the "presbyterate (בקשישותה) of Samuel ha-Kohen . . . the archon (ארכון)" (Naveh, Nos. 88-89; cf. the Greek version, Lifshitz, Nos. 58-59).

²⁵ BS, II, Nos. 164 (Beirut), 203 (Pamphylia), 221 (Sidon), and 212 (fragmentary).

Perhaps a reexamination of the stone, which in 1925 was in the collection of the Greek patriarch of Jerusalem,²⁶ might determine what sort of burial Samuel received. Such a reexamination might also determine the date and provenance of the inscription, both of which are now unknown.

6. Aside from these two possible exceptions, our corpus shows that the Rabbis did not control the synagogues in either Israel or the diaspora. It shows even more clearly that the Rabbis were not the leaders of diaspora Jewry. Only five diaspora inscriptions mention rabbis. One (No. 7) is a synagogue inscription from the Greek east (a record of a donation), the other four are epitaphs from the Latin west. Of these, two (Nos. 1 and 6) are simple epitaphs which reveal nothing about the social status of the rabbis mentioned. Of the remaining two, we have already remarked that one is probably of medieval date (Nos. 2-3), and that the other (Nos. 4-5), while attributing some prominent communal function to two rabbis, does not reveal much else. Even if we assume that all these men were ordained Rabbis—a very dubious assumption in the light of my previous discussion—the Rabbinic presence in the diaspora was meager. Of the hundreds of Jewish inscriptions from the Latin west, only four refer to rabbis. Of the hundreds of Jewish inscriptions from the Greek east (excluding Israel), only one refers to a rabbi. The Jewish community of Rome alone left behind over five hundred inscriptions, many with references to *archisynagogues*, *archons*, *gerousiarchs*, *grammateis*, *patres synagogae*, *matres synagogae*, *exarchons*, *hyperetai*, *phrontistai*, *prostatai*, priests, teachers, and students, but not one with a reference to a rabbi.²⁷ Not only did diaspora Jewry have no Rabbis of its own, it also did not look to Israel for Rabbinic leadership. True, there was traffic between Israel and the diaspora throughout antiquity, some of the rabbis of Beth Shearim being of diaspora

²⁶ It was first published by F. M. Abel, *RB*, 34 (1925), 577-78.

²⁷ H. J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, Philadelphia, 1960, pp. 167-94. In Rome we find a *didaskalos* (*CIJ*, I, No. 333; cf. No. 594, from Venosa), a *mathētēs* (*CIJ*, I, No. 190), a *mathētēs sophōn* (*CIJ*, I, No. 508), even three *nomomathēs* (*CIJ*, I, Nos. 113, 193, and 333) and a *nomodidaskalos* (*CIJ*, I, No. 201), but these teachers, students, students of the sages, students of the law, and teachers of the law, are not rabbis. See M. Schwabe, *Tarbiz*, 21 (1949-50), 116-17. All Rabbis and some rabbis were teachers (see John 1:38 and 20:16), but not all teachers were Rabbis. For other *didaskaloi* see *CIJ*, II, Nos. 1266, 1268, 1269 (Jerusalem ossuaries), and *CIJ*, II, No. 1158=*BS*, II, No. 124. Cf. the *sophodidaskalos* of the Sardis synagogue (note 23, above).

origin,²⁸ but there is no evidence either that the Rabbis of Israel made a sustained effort to control diaspora Jewry²⁹ or that diaspora Jewry regarded the scholars in Israel as their leaders.³⁰ Thus Goodenough is vindicated: diaspora Jews in antiquity did not live under the spiritual hegemony of the Land of Israel. Indeed, the burden of proof is not upon Goodenough but upon those who assert that the Jews of the "Rabbinic period" followed Rabbinic norms. This assertion is accompanied by little evidence.³¹

Conclusion

If we allow the epigraphical evidence to speak for itself and do not impose upon it ideas derived from literary sources, we may reach the following conclusions from our analysis of the catalogue of forty-eight inscriptions: for centuries "rabbi" remained a popular title which could describe individuals who were not part of that Hebrew and Aramaic-speaking society which produced the Talmud; synagogues in both Israel and the diaspora were not led by men titled "rabbis"; the Rabbinic presence in the diaspora was meager. If we circumscribe the sphere of activity of the

²⁸ Those buried in catacomb I, hall G (rabbis Nos. 14-18) are of Palmyrene origin, although their titulature is apparently Palestinian; see *BS*, I, 86-87 and II, 10-15.

²⁹ The patriarchal *apostoloi* are known only from Roman and Christian sources. They are mentioned neither in Rabbinic texts nor in Jewish inscriptions. Frey notes that the *duo apostuli* of Nos. 4-5 are later than the extinction of the patriarchate.

³⁰ Three diaspora inscriptions refer to the patriarch or patriarchs, *CIJ*, I, Nos. 650 (Sicily), 694 (Stobi), and 719 (Argos), but it is far from certain that they refer to the patriarchs in Israel. Theoretically the patriarch was the head of the Roman diaspora but there may have been a large gap between theory and practice. Furthermore, we should not assume that the patriarch was always interested in enforcing Rabbinic norms, since he and the Rabbis, especially in the 3rd century, were often at odds with each other. See L. Levine, "The Jewish Patriarch (Nasi) in Third Century Palestine," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, 19.2, Berlin, 1979, pp. 649-88.

³¹ For example, Marcel Simon, followed by W. H. C. Frend and C. Aziza, argues that the Jews of North Africa in the 2nd-5th centuries were "Rabbinic" Jews who followed Rabbinic ordinances, but every bit of evidence adduced, including the Hebrew inscription of Volubilis, is fragile. See M. Simon, *Recherches d'Histoire Judéo-Chrétienne*, Paris, 1972, pp. 48-50; W. H. C. Frend, "Jews and Christians in Third Century Carthage," *Paganisme, Judaïsme, Christianisme: Mélanges offerts à Marcel Simon*, Paris, 1978, pp. 185-94; C. Aziza, *Tertullien et le Judaïsme* (Publications de la Faculté des Lettres . . . de Nice, No. 16), Nice, 1977, pp. 15-43. For a partial rebuttal see T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 90-93 and 282-85.

Rabbis, we limit the extent of Rabbinic Judaism; it is difficult to imagine Rabbinic Judaism without Rabbis. What was the nature of this non-Rabbinic Judaism in the diaspora and the synagogue, I do not know. In this essay I did not treat this aspect of the subject (which would include an analysis of synagogue art) beyond noting that Goodenough's Philonic thesis is unconvincing. If we allow the term "rabbi" to include more than just the Rabbis of the Talmud, we admit that even in Israel, where Rabbinic influence was strong, many Jews were led by men who might not have found favor in the eyes of those who were establishing what was to become, but still was not, "normative" Judaism. At what point the synagogue became the focal point of Rabbinic activity, the diaspora began to look to Israel and Babylonia for leadership, and "rabbi" became a technical term with a specific meaning, requires investigation. Perhaps the Arab conquest served as the catalyst for these changes. In any case, a great desideratum is the collection and analysis of all Rabbinic texts which explicitly refer to the Rabbinic presence in, and control of, synagogues and diaspora. In the absence of such a work, archeology is our only sure guide.³²

ADDENDUM

Subsequent to submitting this article I was informed by Professor Lee Levine of the Hebrew University that a Hebrew epitaph for *Rabbi Abun* has been discovered at Kazrin (Golan). The inscription is mentioned in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. Lee Levine, Jerusalem, 1981, p. 115.

³² The issues raised in this paper may be compared with the scholarly debate concerning the interpretation of the art of the Dura synagogue, as well as J. Neusner's work on the Jews of Babylonia, especially his *Talmudic Judaism in Sasanian Babylonia*, Leiden, 1976, pp. 87-107 ("The Rabbi and the Jewish Community").