E. LEIGH GIBSON

The Jewish Manumission Inscriptions of the Bosporus Kingdom

Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
75

Mohr Siebeck

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The Jewish Manumission Inscriptions of the Bosporus Kingdom

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

The completion of this project affords the welcome opportunity to thank publicly those individuals and institutions that have provided me with invaluable assistance in completing this project.

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To Bob McLennan, Andy Overman, and Doug Edwards, directors of the Black Sea Project, I owe my introduction to the Bosporus region and the Jewish manumission inscriptions. Brent Shaw read chapter 3 and provided invaluable feedback on a range of materials. David Stern read chapter 4 and offered welcome guidance. Ben Wright shared a forthcoming publication that proved helpful to that same chapter. Ross Kraemer and Pieter van der Horst read a paper on which chapter 6 is based, and each provided valuable advice and encouragement at an early stage of this project. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company graciously granted permission to reprint many of Irina Levinskaya's important new editions of the Bosporan inscriptions

This project has taken me beyond my own language capabilities, and I am indebted to several individuals who helped me access key materials. Gonda van Steen and Demi Andrianou lent their expertise in Modern Greek, translating important articles by Petsas. To David Friedel and, es-

pecially, Gabriella Safran, I owe heartfelt thanks for the care with which they translated the Russian and Polish materials cited throughout this monograph. They both showed tremendous patience and care in the preparation of this material, which often included highly technical philological and epigraphic analysis. Larry Kim tutored me in Italian and also provided expert research assistance. I also extend my thanks to the staff of Princeton University's Firestone Library, especially Mary George, Sandy Rosenstock, and Jochen Twele, who cheerfully and expertly helped me to locate obscure materials. Abigail Winograd's editorial expertise has greatly improved the text and I humbly acknowledge her contribution. Needless to say, any errors that remain are entirely my own.

Finally, I acknowledge my deepest debt—to Andrew Strauss. At every stage of this project, he has offered sage criticism, editorial wisdom, technical expertise, and, above all, loving support.

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Translations, Sigla, and Abbreviations

Unless otherwise stated, biblical translations are from the Revised Standard Version; Mishnah translations are from Herbert Danby, trans., *The Mishnah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938); the Babylonian Talmud translations are from I. Epstein, ed., *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud,* trans. Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1963); the Palestinian Talmud translations are from Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation,* Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism, ed. William Scott Green and Calvin Goldscheider (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982–); the Sifra translations are from Jacob Neusner, *Sifra: An Analytical Translation,* Brown Judaic Studies (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); the Sifre translations are from Reuven Hammer, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy,* Yale Judaica Series, vol. 24 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); the Mekhilta translations are from Jacob Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta: de-Rabbi Ishmael: A Critical Edition on the Basis of Manuscripts and Early Editions with an English Translation, Introduction, and Notes*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1933–50); and the translations of classical texts are from their Loeb Classical Library editions. Translations of inscriptions are my own unless otherwise noted.

No attempt has been made to bring the various systems of annotation employed by the editors of the many inscriptions cited here in line with one another, as such a project would be tantamount to providing new editions of the inscriptions. Readers interested in such a level of detail are urged to consult the editions cited for each Greek inscription. Two works have provided the bulk of the inscriptions, however: *CIRB* and Irina A. Levinskaya and S. R. Tokhtas'ev, "Inscriptions from the Bosporan Kingdom," in Irina A. Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting,* The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 227–46. The sigla system of the latter is more refined than that employed by the editors of the *CIRB*. For the convenience of the reader, I include a chart below comparing the major sigla systems used by each set of editors.

Levinskaya and Tokhtas'ev		*CIRB*
( )	encloses the resolution of an abbreviation	( )
[ ]	encloses a restoration	[ ]
< >	encloses a letter mistakenly omitted on the stone and added by the editor	( )
{ }	encloses a superfluous letter	< >
⌜ ⌝	encloses a correction by the editor	( )

Table 1. Sigla

Abbreviations follow the *Journal of Biblical Literature* standard, with the following additions:

CII Jean-Baptiste Frey, ed., *Corpus inscriptionum iudaicarum: Recueil des inscriptions juives qui vont du IIIe siècle avant Jésus-Christ au VIIe siècle de notre ère* (Rome: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1936 and 1952).

CIRB Vasili Vasilevich Struve et al., eds., *Corpus inscriptionum regni Bosporani* (Leningrad: Akademia nauk SSSR, Institut istorii, 1965).

CPJ Victor Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks, *Corpus papyrorum judaicarum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957, 1960, 1964).

FD École française d'Athènes, *Fouilles de Delphes* (Paris: Boccard, 1902–).

IC M. Guarducci, ed., *Inscriptiones creticae* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1935–50).

IG Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, *Inscriptiones graecae* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1873–).

IOSPE Vasilii V. Latyschev, ed., *Inscriptiones antiquae orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini graecae et latinae* (St. Petersburg: Archaeological Society of the Russian Empire, 1895–90).

LSJ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised by H. Stuart Jones, with supplement by E. A. Barber (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

NE *Numismatika i èpigrafika.*

PHI 7 *Packard Humanities Institute Greek Documentary Texts* CD-ROM 7.

POxy Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898–).

RSV Revised Standard Version.

SEG H. W. Pleket and R. S. Stroud, *Supplementum epigraphicum graecum* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Sijthoff & Noordhoff, 1923–).

SGDI Hermann Collitz et al., *Sammlung der griechischen Dialekt-Inschriften* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1884–1915).

Chapter 1

Introduction

The epigraphic treasures of the north coast of the Black Sea include several provocative inscriptions that record the freeing of slaves in Jewish settings. Dating to the early centuries of the common era, these Greek manumissions originate in a region known in antiquity as the Bosporan Kingdom.

> To the most high god, almighty, blessed, in the reign of King Tiberius Julius Sauromates, loyal to the emperor and a friend to the Romans, pious, Teimotheos, son of Numphagoros Makarius, along with his sister Helidos, wife of Nanobalamurus, according to the vow of our father, Numphagoros Makarius, we set free our slave Dorea . . .[1]

> In the reign of King Tiberius Julius Rhescuporis, loyal to the emperor and a friend to the Romans, pious, in the year 377, on the 12th of the month of Peritios, I, Chreste, former wife of Drusus, in the prayerhouse, set my slave Heraklas free once and for all according to my vow, [to be] unassailable and undisturbed by any heir, to go wherever he should want without restraint just as I vowed, except for θωπείας ["flattery"] and προσκαρτερήσεως ["perseverance"] for the prayerhouse, and joining in assent are my heirs Herakleides and Helikonias, and also serving as joint guardian is the community of the Jews.[2]

What was the occasion for the manumission? Were the slave owners Jews? Were the slaves Jews? Did the owners manumit their slaves in accordance with biblical laws? What is this mysterious θωπείας (flattery) and προσκαρτερήσεως (perseverance) required of the slave even after his manumission?

My interpretation of these and the other Bosporan manumission inscriptions proceeds along two lines. Through a careful comparison of this corpus with manumission inscriptions from elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world, I assess the degree to which these manumissions are typical of the rich tradition of Greek manumission inscriptions. Through an investigation of Greco-Roman Judaism's relationship with ancient slave practices, I consider the possibility that these inscriptions reflect Jewish slave owners' application of biblical laws to their slaveholding practices. These two lines of inquiry ultimately enable me to address larger themes in the study of

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[1] *CIRB* 1125.
[2] *CIRB* 70.

Greco-Roman Judaism, especially the extent of Jewish isolation from or interaction with Greco-Roman culture.

The inscriptions from the Bosporan Kingdom are not unknown to students of Greco-Roman Judaism. Indeed, the corpus's mention of prayer-houses, synagogues, the most high god, and, possibly, god-fearers has won some notoriety for these inscriptions in studies of these controversial terms.[3] They have, however, rarely received their own comprehensive and detailed study, for two primary reasons.

First, Western scholars lack interest in, and—even more important—knowledge of, the ancient history of the Black Sea region. Tackling these inscriptions demands familiarity with a substantial body of secondary material, including the vast body of work by Eastern European scholars who have intensely scrutinized the ancient history of their homelands.[4] A Western scholar unable to read Russian (among the many languages in which this material has been published) meets considerable challenges in contextualizing and interpreting the manumissions. Second, a related problem is the corpus's availability: the Jewish manumission inscriptions have not been readily accessible in Western collections. The Soviet collection of Bosporan inscriptions, Struve et al.'s *Corpus inscriptionum regni Bosporani* (*CIRB,* 1965), includes all of the then known manumissions and fragments, but the accompanying commentary is in Russian. Additional discoveries have been published in various journals. Several but not all of the inscriptions are available in Frey's *Corpus inscriptionum iudaicarum* (*CII,* 1936–52). Lifshitz's new edition of the first volume[5] greatly improves the coverage, but the most comprehensive publication of the inscriptions remains *CIRB.* The new collections and editions of Greco-Roman Jewish inscriptions, either in print or in preparation, have been organized on regional bases. The north coast of the Black Sea, far removed from the centers of ancient Jewish life and the leading cities of antiquity, has escaped the attention of these projects.[6] Recently, however, many of the bet-

[3] Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and Irina A. Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting,* The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), provide thorough summaries of these debates but reach different conclusions.

[4] For background on Soviet interest in the ancient history of the Black Sea region, see these works by Hugh F. Graham: "Soviet Scholarship and the Black Sea Region," *Classical Journal* 56 (1960–61): 194–202; "The Classics in the Soviet Union," *Classical World* 54 (1960–61): 205–13; and "The Significant Role of the Study of Ancient History in the Soviet Union," *Classical World* 61 (1967): 85–97.

[5] Jean-Baptiste Frey, ed., *Corpus inscriptionum iudaicarum. Vol. 1: Europe,* Prolegomenon, addenda and corrigenda by Baruch Lifshitz, 2d ed. (New York: Ktav, 1975).

[6] Among them are Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome,* ed. Carolyn Osiek, 2d ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995); David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*

ter preserved inscriptions, in new editions with English commentary, have been collected in a surprising location: Levinskaya's *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*.[7]

I have responded to many aspects of these challenges but have not entirely met them. My work does not constitute a new edition of the inscriptions; indeed, I have not consulted the stones themselves, several of which have been lost or destroyed since their initial publication. Because I lack knowledge of Russian and Polish, I have had translated many of the articles most relevant to the manumissions, especially the Russian and Polish studies of Nadel.[8] But I have not been able to read widely in the vast secondary literature in various Eastern European languages. Some may well suggest that a new study of these inscriptions should have awaited a student with excellent skills in these languages. I believe, however, that these inscriptions have an important contribution to make to the study of Greco-Roman Judaism, one that should not be delayed any longer.

Material Evidence in the Study of Greco-Roman Judaism

At the beginning of this century, Greco-Roman Judaism was primarily the purview of scholars of Christianity, who were often motivated by theological concerns. For such scholars, Greco-Roman Judaism served as a canvas for depictions of the rise and triumph of Christianity. Cohen characterized that scholarship in this way:

> [It] had a vested interest in proving that Christianity was the legitimate and authentic expression of all that was good and enduring in the Hebrew Bible (the universalist ethics and the spirituality of the prophets); that the triumph of "the Law" was a relatively late development in Israelite religion (a reaction to the destruction of the Tem-

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993–95); William Horbury and David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Gert Lüderitz, *Corpus jüdischer Zeugnisse aus der Cyrenaika* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1983); Y. Le Bohec, "Inscriptions juives et judaïsantes de l'Afrique romaine," *Antiquités africaines* 17 (1981): 165–229; and J. Ferron, "Inscriptions juives de Carthage," *Cahiers de Byrsa* 1 (1950): 175–206. Members of a Tübingen-based project are at work on new editions of Jewish inscriptions of Greece and Asia Minor: Pieter Willem van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs: An Introductory Survey of a Millennium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 B.C.E.–700 C.E.)* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991), 13 n. 6.

[7] See note 3.

[8] Benjamin Nadel, "The Bosporan Manumissions" (in Russian) (Ph.D. diss., Leningrad, 1947).

ple in 587 B.C.E.); and that the Judaism Christianity left behind was a sterile, empty, and 'legalistic' religion.[9]

During this century, however, the study of Greco-Roman Judaism has become an established specialty, and each of the aforementioned representations of ancient Judaism has been challenged and overturned.[10] New numismatic, epigraphic, and archaeological discoveries relating to Greco-Roman Judaism, as well as reassessments of well-known evidence, have played an important role in reversing this appraisal of Judaism, especially Diaspora Judaism, during the rise of Christianity. Goodenough's monumental multivolume work on Jewish symbols, the discovery of the Sardis synagogue, best known through Kraabel's publications, and Reynolds and Tannenbaum's publication of the now famous god-fearer inscription from Aphrodisias are among the most notable studies of this type.[11] Each contributed to the recasting of Greco-Roman Judaism as vibrant and alive, attractive to outsiders, and engaged with the larger non-Jewish cultural context. So far the Jewish manumission inscriptions of the Bosporan Kingdom have played only a supporting role in these discussions. But given their length and number—at least sixteen, seven of which are well preserved—the Bosporan Jewish manumissions are a rich source for information about Jewish life in the Diaspora. They deserve detailed consideration and should take their place among the well-known finds mentioned above.

Not only do these inscriptions merit attention based on their number and size, but they also offer a perspective on Greco-Roman Judaism that differs from that of most Jewish inscriptions. According to van der Horst's calculation, about 80 percent of the extant Jewish inscriptions are epitaphs.[12] The majority of these private inscriptions are terse. They generate data

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[9] Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Modern Study of Ancient Judaism," in *The State of Jewish Studies,* eds. Shaye J. D. Cohen and Edward L. Greenstein (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 56.

[10] For accounts of these changes, see Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, eds., *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), and Cohen, "Ancient Judaism," 55–73.

[11] Goodenough's work is available in its original thirteen volumes and in a condensed form: Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953–68), and *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period,* abridged, edited and with foreword by Jacob Neusner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). Kraabel's work has been collected in J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan, eds., *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of and in Dialogue with A. Thomas Kraabel,* South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism, vol. 41 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992). The Aphrodisias inscription appears in Joyce Maine Reynolds and Robert F. Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias: Greek Inscriptions with Commentary,* CPS Supplement, vol. 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987).

[12] van der Horst, *Jewish Epitaphs,* 15.

about ancient Jews and the languages they spoke, their life expectancy, and their professions, but they yield little about other aspects of their lives. Even on issues of death and afterlife, funerary inscriptions provide scant information.[13] Dedicatory inscriptions are another important type of extant Jewish inscription. Sometimes these inscriptions are more forthcoming, relating details of persons' social status and sometimes even the nature of a person's connection to the synagogue. More often they are simple, merely recording the donor's name and contribution. Manumission inscriptions, on the other hand, contain significant detail and sometimes even a short narrative within the text of the inscription. They record an interaction between, at the very least, an owner and a slave. Frequently witnesses, heirs, magistrates, or religious officials are also involved, a circumstance that permits glimpses of social interaction that are usually hidden or only obliquely mentioned in dedications and funerary inscriptions.

But the student of manumission inscriptions also faces constraints. These inscriptions have an archival dimension; that is, they serve as a public record of a legal transaction and employ formulaic language in a way that may flatten the details of the ancient transaction. In addition, they depict the transaction from only one vantage point, that of the owners. Like all other ancient historical sources, they are imperfect, but the Bosporan manumission inscriptions do provide an interesting opportunity and one that has long been ignored. The goal of this project, then, is to contextualize the Jewish manumission inscriptions from the Bosporus as fully as possible and to use them as a springboard for better understanding the Jewish communities of the north coast of the Black Sea.

The Identification of Jewish Inscriptions

Even when these inscriptions have surfaced in scholarly discussion, they have been imported for the references to prayerhouses, the most high god, and, potentially, god-fearers. These terms have special places in Jewish vocabulary and usage, but they are not exclusive to Jewish contexts. Hence the problem arises, When does their appearance indicate that the inscription was formulated in a Jewish context? So far I have employed the concept of a Jewish manumission in a cavalier manner, as if its implications were self-evident and the criteria for such identification certain. This is far from the case, however. Many students of Jewish inscriptions have toiled over the question, When can an inscription rightly be called Jewish?

[13] van der Horst has done an admirable job with the extant evidence. See van der Horst, *Jewish Epitaphs,* 114–26.

The first collections of Jewish inscriptions appeared in the mid-nineteenth century,[14] but *CII* was and remains the most comprehensive collection of Jewish inscriptions. The Frey collection, "useful for its comprehensiveness rather than editorial accuracy,"[15] was haphazard in many respects, omitting many then recent finds and inconsistently categorizing inscriptions.[16] Frey's failure to prescribe criteria for identifying inscriptions as Jewish and his inability to apply consistently those principles implicit in his own work have left ample fodder for debate.

Subsequent students of Jewish inscriptions have sought to redress Frey's oversight and have discussed the criteria that identify Jewish inscriptions. In an important survey article, Kant described six criteria that point to an inscription's Jewish identification: use of Jewish symbols (e.g., a *menorah*); self-identification; typical Jewish names; reference to Jewish religious customs; the presence of an inscription in a Jewish catacomb or cemetery; and the mention of a synagogue or Jewish office.[17] But Kant himself confessed, "This way of determining Jewishness . . . by no means points to a perfectly clear boundary between Jews and non-Jews in the ancient Mediterranean."[18]

Complete confidence in the identification of Jewish inscriptions is beyond the scholar's reach even when such neat lists of criteria apply. Kraemer thoroughly explored these interpretive challenges in the application of positive criteria (such as those listed above) as well as negative criteria (precluding an inscription's identification as Jewish in the face of references to pagan deities or the adjective "Christian") in the identification of

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[14] M. A. Levy, "Epigraphische Beiträge zur Geschichte der Juden," *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Juden und Judentums* 2 (1861): 261–324, and, later, Johannes Oehler, "Epigraphische Beiträge zur Geschichte des Judentums," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte über Wissenschaft des Judentums* 53 (1909): 292–302, 443–52, 525–38.

[15] Laurence H. Kant, "Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 20.2: 681.

[16] For reviews of Frey's work, see Louis Robert, "Un corpus des inscriptions juives," *Revue des études juives* 101 (1937): 73–86, and Jeanne Robert and Louis Robert, review of *CII*, vol. 2, by J. B. Frey, *Revue des études greques* 67 (1954): 101–4.

[17] Kant, "Jewish Inscriptions," 682. Horbury and Noy offer the following criteria for identifying Jewish inscriptions from Egypt: the inclusion of names used primarily by Jews, the use of Jewish terminology, the use of Hebrew, and provenance from the "predominantly Jewish site of Tell el-Yehoudieh" (*Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*, 1:xi). Noy, in his subsequent study, altered this list, eliminating the occurrence of Jewish names and adding the criteria of Jewish symbols, the use of Hebrew or Aramaic, the use of specifically Jewish symbols, the use of Jewish terminology, and, in some specific cases, provenance from a Jewish catacomb (*Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, 1:ix).

[18] Kant, "Jewish Inscriptions," 683.

Jewish inscriptions. Reinforcing Kant's caution, she concluded that the appearance of positive indications of Judaism is not always so decisive.[19]

In order to give a sense of these difficulties, let me consider what might on the surface be taken as three sure indications of Judaism: the presence of Jewish names, the existence of a *menorah,* and the description "Jew." For one, many ancient Jews did not bear biblical or theophoric names. As a result, the absence of Jewish names cannot be taken as proof that the individuals involved in the inscriptions were not Jews. Nor can the presence of Jewish names point to the definitive identification of a Jew: Christians certainly adopted biblical names. Nor can the occurrence of a *menorah* assure a Jewish identification. According to Kraemer, the *menorah* was never associated with pagan usage, but it did appear in Christian contexts.[20] Even the term "Jew," in its Greek or Latin form, could, at least hypothetically, apply to a non-Jewish resident of Judaea![21]

Negative criteria are difficult to implement as well, but in a different way. The invocation of pagan deities by itself in an otherwise Jewish inscription or even an indication of Jewishness in an otherwise pagan context has often been thought to eliminate the possibility of a Jewish identification, based on the reasoning that ancient Jews would not have engaged in such practices. This reasoning, however, runs the risk of eliminating evidence of ancient Jewish life by applying normative standards to social life. Even more fundamental than the discussion of positive or negative indicators is the recognition that the criteria set out will bring to the surface only those inscriptions in which some indication of Jewishness has deliberately been included. Kraemer suggested that "we take seriously the possibility, if not the probability, that many inscriptions made by Jews will not contain any specifically Jewish items."[22] The implication is that the collection of inscriptions that modern scholars can identify as Jewish is unlikely to be a true cross section of inscriptions authored by Jews or inscribed on their behalf. Rather, the collection of identifiably Jewish inscriptions will comprise only those examples in which Jews chose to connect the inscription to Jewish communal life.

van der Horst also reflected on the problem of identifying Jewish inscriptions. Considering the four criteria set out by Tcherikover in his work on Jewish papyri (inclusion of the word *"Ioudaios"* or *"Hebraios,"* the appearance of terms like "synagogue" and "Sabbath," origin in an exclu-

[19] Ross S. Kraemer, "Jewish Tuna and Christian Fish: Identifying Religious Affiliation in Epigraphic Sources," *Harvard Theological Review* 84 (1991): 142.

[20] Kraemer, "Jewish Tuna and Christian Fish," 151.

[21] Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Religion, Ethnicity, and 'Hellenism' in the Emergence of Jewish Identity in Maccabean Palestine," in *Religion and Religious Practice*, ed. P. Bilde et al. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1990), 208.

[22] Kraemer, "Jewish Tuna and Christian Fish," 162.

sively Jewish area, and the occurrence of Jewish names),[23] van der Horst voiced this opinion: "[W]hen taken together, these four criteria establish a solid case for regarding a papyrus or an inscription as Jewish," but he did not consider any single aspect sufficient to secure a definitively Jewish identity.[24] The inclusion of only one indication may yield false positive results. Two hypothetical examples, one an inscription recording the death of a person murdered by someone identified as a Jew and one an inscription that warns Jews, Christians, and pagans against vandalism, reveal the imperfection of these criteria when applied rigidly.[25] Neither of these cases is a Jewish inscription in the sense that most scholars intend, but both meet many scholars' criteria. To avoid such errors, van der Horst suggested that an inscription bear more than one marker of Jewishness in order to be designated a Jewish inscription. But he cautioned against applying his higher standard of multiple-attestation too stringently, as it could well exclude "valuable material the Jewishness of which is not manifest enough."[26]

What are the implications of these methodological problems for the Jewish manumissions from the Bosporus? The challenge of distinguishing Jewish from Christian inscriptions as a result of Christian appropriation of Jewish symbols is not in play in the Bosporan context. The manumission inscriptions are dated to the first and second centuries CE, significantly predating the first Bosporan Christian inscription.[27] The challenge in this region is distinguishing Jewish and pagan evidence.

I have already tipped my hand in the title of this project, indicating that I consider a subset of the Bosporan manumissions to be connected in some way to Jews or a Jewish community. The basis for such an identification rests in the many references in these inscriptions to the prayerhouse, the most high god, and, most convincingly, the phrase "synagogue of the Jews." In some cases, more than one indicator appears in the same inscription. These cases, I would like to suggest, can be quite confidently identified as Jewish, meeting the multiple-attestation standard for identification outlined by van der Horst. The Jewish manumission inscriptions meet this higher standard, in some cases within a single inscription and certainly within the corpus as a whole. While there may still be skeptics, the evi-

[23] Victor Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks, *Corpus papyrorum judaicarum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957, 1960, 1964), xvii–xx.

[24] van der Horst, *Jewish Epitaphs,* 17.

[25] van der Horst, *Jewish Epitaphs,* 17.

[26] van der Horst, *Jewish Epitaphs,* 18.

[27] Ellis Minns, *Scythians and Greeks: A Survey of Ancient History and Archaeology on the North Coast of the Euxine from the Danube to the Caucasus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 610 n. 2. Levinskaya agreed that Christian provenance is impossible with the early manumission inscriptions (Levinskaya, *Book of Acts,* 109).

dence in favor of the identification of the majority of Bosporan manumissions as Jewish is strong. This study reviews the evidence in favor of this identification and points out the weaknesses of the claim where appropriate but does not dwell on them. There are many more interesting aspects of these manumissions to consider.

So instead of looking again at the question of whether they are Jewish or, even more problematic, how Jewish they are, I prefer to ask a different set of questions. I suggest that the manumission contract, its dynamics, and its place within Bosporan, Jewish, and Greco-Roman traditions are far more rewarding arenas of investigation and involve questions that the texts of the inscriptions themselves support. For the sake of conciseness, I refer to those inscriptions with connections to Judaism as "the Jewish manumissions," whatever kind of relationship that entails. But my focus is on the prayerhouse as the location of the manumissions and the owners' choice to manumit their slaves in that context. What might this tell us about owner and slave? What might this tell us about Bosporan Judaism's interaction with ancient slave practices? Eventually my investigation of these questions will enable me to assess whether Jews in this community adopted and/or adapted a Greek or a Bosporan practice or whether the inscriptions grow out of specifically Jewish practices. Clearly this last issue may be of great interest to scholars whose primary concern is to evaluate whether these Bosporans were really Jews and, if they were, what kind of Jews or pseudo-Jews they were. Many interested in these latter questions have typically assumed that the nature and the dynamics of the manumission transaction were self-evident, and they have immediately jumped to questions of Jewish identity. But the conundrum of these manumissions and their often highly unusual language has yet to be resolved. The question of the Jewishness of the inscriptions, if it is at all answerable, can come only after the thorough investigation of the core of the inscriptions themselves: the manumissions and their surrounding conditions. It is the central project of this study to examine and explain that core element.

My line of attack on this problem is to contextualize as fully as possible these manumissions in order to understand better the limits of their possible interpretations. With respect to the controversial terms "prayerhouse," "most high god" and "god-fearer," these inscriptions have been quite thoroughly investigated. As I have asserted, the density with which these terms appear in the inscriptions exceeds any available standard, and the inscriptions can be confidently identified as connected in some way to Jewish communities. The element of the inscriptions that still requires a thorough contextualization is the core manumission transaction.

Part I of this work establishes three backdrops against which the Jewish Bosporan manumissions can be judged. Chapter 2 begins with a brief ex-

amination of the history, diplomatic and social, of the Bosporan Kingdom. Such an introduction is necessary for two reasons. First, the region is unfamiliar to many: an introduction to the basic contours of its history is my starting point. Second, when turning to the inscriptions themselves, the reader must have a sense of this rather remote area's connection to the larger Greco-Roman culture and the appropriateness of comparing its manumissions with those from Greece, the Aegean Islands, and Asia Minor. The second part of the chapter looks at the evidence (apart from the manumissions) for Jews and Jewish communal life in the region. Without examining the numerous epigraphic fragments and their dispersion across the north coast of the Black Sea, one might mistakenly presume the manumissions to be the sole evidence for Judaism in the area. This chapter concludes that the hellenization of the Bosporan Kingdom was substantial but not complete and was at its apex among the Greek immigrants who were engaged in commerce and among those who had close personal and cultural contacts with them, namely, the local aristocracy.

Having laid the foundation for a comparison with Greek practices, I turn to the tradition of Greek manumission inscriptions preserved throughout the Greco-Roman period. Chapter 3 examines this long-standing and widespread practice. In order to assess the extent to which the Bosporan manumissions were a product of a hellenic inheritance, a thorough introduction to the range of manumission inscriptions is essential. Thus, the chapter introduces the variety of Greek manumission practices. In addition, two themes shape the chapter. First, the place of religion in these manumissions is always at hand, What difference, if any, did it make if the manumission was connected in some way to a deity or a temple? Second, the motivation behind a manumission inscription is explored in order to enrich the understanding of the dynamics among the slave, the owner, and the larger cultural context.

Chapter 4 examines the relationship between Greco-Roman Judaism and slavery. The biblical passages on manumission and slavery are well-known, and they have long been the basis of an apologetic account of Judaism's relationship with slaves. Late-twentieth-century scholarship has refuted this claim convincingly but has yet to build a positive account of Judaism's slave practices and attitudes toward slaves. Given that Jews did own slaves throughout this period in much the same ways as their pagan cohorts did, I ask whether Jewish religious beliefs or communal structures influenced Jewish slave-owning practice or differentiated it from the larger pagan culture. Clearly this investigation lays the groundwork for a central question of part II, To what extent do the Bosporan Jewish manumissions reflect uniquely Jewish practices?

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