JOSEPH S. PARK

Conceptions of Afterlife in Jewish Inscriptions

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe
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Conceptions of Afterlife in Jewish Inscriptions

With Special Reference to Pauline Literature

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

Ancient Judaism and questions concerning death and afterlife are two areas in which I have always had a keen interest, and not long ago, I was blessed with the opportunity to study both together, in much detail. The present work is a revised and reformatted version of the doctoral dissertation which I completed on that occasion, at Cambridge University in 1997.

Once again, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all who have made this undertaking, as well as the previous study, possible. The research facilities at Tyndale House Library still deserve mentioning, as well all those who made overseas study tolerable, even memorable. I salute my former (and present) teachers and mentors: Dr. Thomas E. Schmidt, Professor Robert H. Gundry, Professor Donald A. Hagner, Professor Seyoon Kim, and my doctoral supervisor, Professor William Horbury. Even now, your true dedication to the task of biblical scholarship often reminds me how complacent I am.

I am very grateful to Professor Martin Hengel for reading my work and accepting it into the *WUNT* series. Without his comments and suggestions this work would be much the poorer. In addition, I would like to thank Ms. Ilse König, Production Manager at Mohr-Siebeck, for her patient, always cheerful guidance of the manuscript process.

This book is dedicated to my wife Christine, my dear daughter Marcella, and William, my newly-born son.

Los Angeles, April 2000 Joseph S. Park

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As is commonly acknowledged, one advantage of the study of Jewish inscriptions is that it allows a more representative view of the beliefs and feelings of the Jewish people than that provided by the literary evidence, which is usually the product of a certain religious and social group.[1] In addition, despite the importance of convention, there is a certain amount of spontaneity and immediacy in the funerary inscriptions. This is because they are a conscious effort to preserve the sentiments of those affected by death, which furthermore normally comes without warning or preparation. Finally, it may be noted that these sentiments are available to the modern researcher more or less directly, unlike literary evidence, which normally entails a process of transmission. It is in virtue of these characteristics that the ancient Jewish inscriptions are especially appropriate for the primary task intended in this study: an examination of beliefs concerning the afterlife existence.

Of course, the potential benefit of an investigation such as this is not simply a better understanding of afterlife beliefs in this body of evidence, but also an opportunity to compare the results to that of other literary and non-literary evidence, thereby enriching knowledge in both directions. It is with this in view that a secondary task, a comparison with the indications of afterlife in Pauline literature, is intended.

This choice of Pauline literature over other possible bodies of evidence, both literary and artifactual, with which comparison could be made is based on several reasons. Firstly, the epistolary nature of Paul's writings, which even during theological expositions never departs far from a concern for the concrete and practical circumstances of everyday life, seems closer to the nature of inscriptions than other literary forms. Also, the Pauline epistles comprise a corpus of manageable size which seems to have a reasonable amount of internal unity. At the same time, there is contained within this relatively small body of literature a great variety of expressions having to

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[1] Cf., e.g., P. W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991) 11.

do with afterlife beliefs, and a comparison of these expressions with those in the inscriptions may lead to a clearer understanding of these elements in both fields. In addition, a comparison with the inscriptions may help to evaluate a conclusion drawn by some scholars in view of this variety in Pauline literature: that Paul is inconsistent, or shows development, in regard to afterlife expectations. This, of course, is just one of several controversies involving the topic of afterlife in Pauline literature.

With this last observation, we approach what seems to be, besides the goals of simple evaluation of the evidence and comparison with other bodies of evidence, a third possible benefit of examining the Jewish inscriptions: the opportunity to examine some of the larger issues of interpretation which encompass many separate disciplines and literature through a body of evidence which has had, as of yet, no comparable treatment. In order to put this task into perspective, it is first necessary to examine some previous research in these areas. This, it is hoped, will not only provide some general methodological warnings and guidelines, but also result in the formulation of some general questions to be kept in mind in the course of our investigation. Next, we discuss some of the methodological problems more specific to funerary inscriptions, and proceed to outline the organization and general mode of examination adopted in this study.

1. Previous Trends of Scholarship in Paul and Jewish Inscriptions

A brief account of previous research in Pauline literature and Jewish inscriptions is presented here with a view to isolating some significant points of controversy in the study of afterlife expectations in these two fields. These points will then help to form the general background for our present investigation. We begin with Pauline literature, the serious modern study of which began before that of the Jewish inscriptions.[2]

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[2] Cf. Albert Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters* (trans. W. Montgomery; London: A. and C. Black, 1912); W. G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigations of its Problems* (trans. S. McLean and H. C. Kee; London: SCM Press, 1973); W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (4th ed.; London: SPCK, 1980); Stephen Neill and N. T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861–1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); E. J. Epp and G. W. MacRae, eds., *The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1989).

1.1 Trends of scholarship in Paul since F. C. Baur

1.1.1 From Baur to Schweitzer

It is understandable that Pauline scholarship through the latter half of the nineteenth century looked mainly to the Greco-Roman world for enlightenment. After all, F. C. Baur, in his well-known thesis on the development of early Christianity, had pointed to Paul as the hellenizer of the Gospel. Despite the subsequent counterarguments of A. Ritschl and others for a unity of teaching between the so-called Jewish Christianity and Paul, the movement of scholarship during the following years was firmly in the direction of Greek influence.[3] All this, it must be remembered, was taking place in the decades in which the archeological artifacts of the ancient world were being collected and published with an unprecedented intensity. These developments were leading scholars not only to revise lexicons, but, in the face of the bewildering variety of religious or superstitious beliefs in Greco-Roman civilization, to regard early Christianity, especially in its Pauline presentation, as just one religion in the general Religionsgeschichte, likely to have received from as well as given to the surrounding religions considerable influence. Although caution and even pessimism was expressed in this area by some, others readily saw a far reaching influence of the Hellenistic mystery religions on Paul, especially in regard to his view of the sacraments.[4]

In these rapid developments, it is evident that although the Religionsgeschichte approach in principle sought to evaluate Christianity in the light of other religions of the time, including contemporary Judaism, the main focus was on the Hellenistic religions, to the consequent neglect of the former.[5] Compared with the Greek sources, it was seen to be either a chaotic mixture of apocalyptic speculation or a lifeless legalism. Indeed, a degeneration to "rabbinic modes of thought" was a convenient explanation of those items in Paul which were seen not to fit the particular "system" proposed by a scholar. Even those who purported to take seriously Paul's "Jewish" background were more likely than not to have in mind a Judaism

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[3] Schweitzer, 12-21.

[4] Schweitzer, 181-205, lists G. Anrich and F. Cumont among the former, O. Pfleiderer, A. Eichorn, W. Heitmüller, and R. Reitzenstein among the latter. Also, Kümmel, 255-257; Neill, 171.

[5] Notable exceptions include several scholars who, although having a Religionsgeschichte perspective, yet studied Jewish materials, e.g., W. Bousset, H. Gressmann, and H. Gunkel.

more in conformity to their own religious ideals — that of selected OT prophets.[6]

This neglect of the Jewish sources was due, however, not only to the prejudiced perspective of Religionsgeschichte, but more basically to the lack of a clear knowledge of the Jewish literature. Schweitzer points out how often scholars ignore the late date of the rabbinic literature, and argues that the lively and assorted depictions given by the Pseudepigrapha are probably much more accurate for the Judaism before A.D. 70. In addition, he argues, there is much confusion in terminology, so that "Hellenistic influence," can refer to the non-Jewish Greek sources such as Plato in some authors, but in others, to Jewish writings, for example from Alexandria, which seem to have been imbued with Greek influence. These misunderstandings betray the fact that the confusion was more than terminological. In Baur's thesis of Paul's hellenization of the gospel for gentile Christianity, as well as in succeeding treatments of early Christianity, there is the erroneous presupposition of a great divide between Palestine and the rest of the Greco-Roman world which keeps the former from foreign influence, and thus sharply distinguishes "Palestinian Judaism" from that found everywhere else, the "Hellenistic Judaism."

If the documents of contemporary Judaism generally did not receive the attention they deserved, neither, it seems, did eschatology itself. Now this seems to have been a reciprocal relationship: on the one hand, neglect of the Jewish apocalyptic literature ruled out any incentive to undertake a comprehensive examination of Jewish eschatological expectations, while on the other hand, the preference of scholars for soteriology or sacramental concepts caused them to ignore Jewish sources, which were seen to have little to say on these matters.

1.1.2 A. Schweitzer

The situation began to change when in 1873 the first volume of Schürer's *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte*, in subsequent volumes retitled *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, appeared, as well as F. Weber's *System der altsynagogalen palästinensischen Theologie aus Targum, Midrasch und Talmud dargestellt* in 1880. By the time Schweitzer wrote his *Paul and His Interpreters*, it seems that much progress had been made in the understanding of Second Temple Judaism, and this was beginning to affect the attitudes at least of those who chose to take it seriously. Works such as W. Bousset's *Die Religion des Judentums im*

[6] Schweitzer, 44–52.

neutestamentlichen Zeitalter,[7] which in carrying out the task of Religionsgeschichte in the wider sense presents several points of contact between Judaism and Iranian religion, doubtless reinforced the warning already voiced by Schürer against a simple division between "Palestinian" and "Hellenistic" Judaism.[8] The attention given to eschatology, meanwhile, had been growing with the recognition that it is, if not as according to Schweitzer the most important force, at least one of the central components of Paul's theology. Both of these developments are especially prominent in R. H. Charles's *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life*,[9] as well as his critical editions of the Pseudepigrapha. However, the original tendency to look for Greek influence was not diminished, as appears from the many scholars of these decades and those to come who continued to postulate a "Hellenization" of Paul's eschatology.

As valid as Schweitzer's criticism of his predecessors are, however, we see that he himself was guilty of two misconceptions which have been handed down since his day. Firstly, there is a geographical misunderstanding: as can be seen from his uncompromising insistence that Paul received no influence whatsoever from Greek or Hellenistic Jewish sources, Schweitzer seems to ignore the results of newer scholarship and perpetuate the notion of a sharp distinction between Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism.[10] Schweitzer also subscribes, however, to a chronological misconception: the late date of the rabbinic literature is used as the basis for a strict separation between a lively Judaism which contained both legal and apocalyptic elements, as seen in the *Revelation of Ezra*, and post-70 "Rabbinism," "which is no longer borne on the tide of great national and spiritual movements" and "becomes ossified, and confines itself to mere unproductive commentating upon the law."[11] Now this treatment probably resulted not from a thorough examination of the content

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[7] (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1903); edited and reissued by H. Gressmann as *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (1926).

[8] Schürer, vol. 1 pp. 29–50.

[9] (London: A. and C. Black, 1913). Other treatments of Jewish eschatology include that of H. Gressmann, *Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1905); P. Volz, *Jüdische Eschatologie von Daniel bis Akiba* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1903).

[10] Cf., e.g., his declaration that "Whatever views and conceptions are brought up for comparison, the result is always the same — that Paulinism and Greek thought have nothing, absolutely nothing, in common" (p. 99).

[11] Schweitzer, 51. Davies, pp. xi, sees the problem as a "sharp distinction between apocalyptic and Pharisaism and other aspects of Judaism." But this evaluation is based on Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*; his later *Paul and His Interpreters* presents an impression of Judaism in temporal succession rather than juxtaposition.

of the rabbinic literature itself, but as the most expedient way to distance these texts, which were generally disparaged at the time, from the non-rabbinic contemporary Jewish literature in the light of which Schweitzer wished to portray Paul. Nevertheless, this was a heavy blow against the scholarly perception of rabbinic literature.

1.1.3 Since Schweitzer

It is indicative not only of their plausibility but also the stature of their original proponent's scholarly legacy that these beliefs were not seriously challenged until well into our century, and occasionally appear in discussions of first-century Judaism even in the present. The denigration of rabbinic literature was the first problem to be corrected. A great resurgence of interest was caused by the appearance of Strack and Billerbeck, followed by important studies for example by G. F. Moore, W. D. Davies, and others, with the result that today the rabbinic literature is seen to be much more variegated and have much more to offer New Testament scholarship than merely an example of the kind of legalism portrayed in the Gospels.[12] This turn of events would undoubtedly have taken much longer if not for those more moderate scholars of the Religionsgeschichte school such as W. L. Knox, who, following the example of Charles, gave due weight to the rabbinic literature, even if his conclusions favored a hellenization of Paul's expectations.[13]

This strong renewal of interest in rabbinics, however, in view of the fact that it was to a large extent a reaction to previous scholarship, was not without its problems. Davies, for example, seems simply to take over the theory of the development of Paul's eschatology, substituting the rabbinic dual spatial and temporal concept of the עולם הבא for the Hellenistic conceptions.[14] A more serious side-effect of this emphasis on the rabbinic, and hence Jewish, background of Paul, supported especially by Bultmann's description of the Pauline use of σῶμα, was the denial by many scholars of any anthropological dualism in Paul's eschatology.[15] That this question

[12] H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Münich: C. H. Beck, 1922-1961); G. F. Moore, *Judaism* (3 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927-1930).

[13] *St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles* (Cambridge: University Press, 1939). Also to be mentioned in this connection is the sober work of Knox's teacher, A. D. Nock, as well as that of F. C. Burkitt and C. H. Dodd.

[14] Davies, 285-320.

[15] R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* vol. 1 p. 195. S. Laeuchli, "Monism and Dualism in the Pauline Anthropology," *Biblical Research* 3 (1958) 16, characterizes the trend as "Go and sell what thou possessest and buy a Strack-Billerbeck."

arouses strong disagreement even in recent discussions is an indication of the work that still needs to be done in this field.[16]

Moreover, these circumstances suggest that the strict Palestine/Diaspora distinction has not yet been put to rest. It is true that such notable developments as Scholem's work in Jewish mysticism, the discovery of the Qumran documents, Goodenough's work in Jewish archeology, and most representative of this direction of argument, Hengel's history of Judaism in the period after Alexander, have done much to clear the air.[17] Yet there remains the need for further investigation into the historical, philosophical, and religious circumstances of the time of Paul, in order that our understanding of his thought may become more and more nuanced. In addition, there remains equally necessary the task of challenging older treatments in light of these newer insights.

This general examination yields a picture of scholarship at first prone to extremes, but gradually refined both by new discoveries and careful re-evaluation of the extant material. With the growing realization of the historical circumstances of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, it is now widely acknowledged that enlightenment can come from the whole variety of beliefs and outlooks available at this time. It is only in the context of this general progression of research that the previous work in the more specific area of Jewish inscriptions can be explained.

1.2 Developments in the study of Jewish non-literary evidence

As has been seen is the case for Pauline scholarship, the research into Jewish inscriptions and funerary art during the last century and a half has also been concerned with the question of Jewish or Greek background. A significant difference, however, is that while the questions of foreign influence in Paul generally arose only after many centuries, the Jewish inscriptions and funerary art were discovered and published for the most part precisely during the time when the idea of "hellenization" was most lively. Moreover, the artifacts themselves, due to either their Diaspora provenance or, in the case of Palestinian provenance, seemingly pagan content, formed a part of the archeological developments which caused this

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[16] Cf., e.g., R. H. Gundry, *Sôma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology*, SNTSMS 29 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); J. W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

[17] G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Schocken Pub. House, 1941); E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman World* (13 vols.; New York: 1953–1965); M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1974).

trend in the first place. As a result of these factors, the history of scholarship in this area has dealt mainly with the question of the extent to which these artifacts can be related to various Jewish and even Christian literary evidence. Nevertheless, a close parallel is maintained with Pauline scholarship since both disciplines were affected by the same historical trends in the scholarly perception of ancient Judaism and Christianity in antiquity.

1.2.1 Beginnings to Goodenough

As indicated above, the earliest stage of discussion on the eschatological significance of the artifacts was initiated in the height of the Religionsgeschichte period. F. Cumont, in consideration of the accompanying pagan symbols of immortality as well as passages from Daniel and Philo, concluded that the *menorah* in the center of the "seasons" sarcophagus from the Randanini catacomb in Rome was a symbol of immortality.[18] H. Gressmann followed with an eschatological interpretation of a gold glass with the words οἶκος ἰρήνης and an image of a torah-shrine.[19] Next came the study of the Roman Torlonia catacomb by Beyer and Lietzmann, which, although in disagreement with Cumont and Gressmann on the details in interpretations, nevertheless supported an eschatological interpretation of the material, especially the stars over the torah-shrine.[20]

Of course, this symbolic interpretation was not the unanimous voice of scholarship. Beyer and Lietzmann's work was soon questioned, for example, by Rengstorf's detailed criticism, not to mention J. B. Frey, editor of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum*, who at several occasions voiced his judgement that the paintings are purely decorative.[21] These objections, in turn, were criticized by the appeal first of Marmorstein and then Rieger to rabbinic parallels which seem to speak of the various motifs in question in an eschatological context.[22] Doubtless a reflection of the surge of interest in rabbinics at this time, these last two works show the

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[18] F. Cumont, "Un fragment de sarcophage judéo-païen," *RevArch* 4 (1916) 1–16.

[19] H. Gressmann, "Jewish Life in Ancient Rome," in *FS to Abrahams* (1927) 170–191.

[20] H. W. Beyer and H. Lietzmann, *Die Jüdische Katakombe der Villa Torlonia in Rom* (Berlin: 1930).

[21] K. H. Rengstorf, "Zu den Fresken in der Jüdischen Katakombe der Villa Torlonia in Rom," *ZNW* 31 (1932) 33–60; J. B. Frey, "La Question des Images Chez les Juifs à la Lumiére des Récentes Découvertes," *Bib* 15 (1934).

[22] A. Marmorstein, "Jüdische Archäologie und Theologie," *ZNW* 32 (1933) 32–41; P. Rieger, "Zu den Fresken in der Jüdischen Katakombe der Villa Torlonia in Rom," *ZNW* 33 (1934) 216–218.

beginnings of the attempt to interpret the artifacts in the larger context of Jewish belief.[23]

1.2.2 Goodenough

The scholarship on the artifacts up to this point, then, although in sharp disagreement concerning the legitimacy of a symbolic interpretation, was nevertheless united in its wide Religionsgeschichte approach which considered both pagan and rabbinic sources. We come to a definite turning point with the work of E. R. Goodenough, whose method and approach is just as pivotal (for better or worse) for this field as Schweitzer is for the interpretation of Paul. As is the case for Schweitzer, Goodenough's contribution to research in the field can be described as a mixed blessing.

No one can deny that his work is a landmark in the scholarly perception of ancient Judaism. His massive thirteen-volume work, even if not convincing in its thoroughgoing proposal of an extensive mystical Judaism, nevertheless forced the scholarly world to face up to and deal with a hitherto unprecedented collection of Jewish art.[24] Moreover, in view of the flood of responses and subordinate discussions initiated by his representation in greater scope of the argument for a symbolic eschatological significance of many motifs, his work can be said to have been an important catalyst in the further integration of the non-literary material in its religious context.

Yet this work of integration was severely handicapped: although he strongly repudiated the division of types of Judaism along geographic lines, Goodenough was not able to escape the myth of a purely legal rabbinism which, unlike Schweitzer, he was willing to allow to have existed side by side with his more lively mystical Judaism in and out of Palestine.[25] The consequence of this for research into the artifacts, which Goodenough did not consistently follow, is made clear by Fischer: Goodenough "wendet sich gegen jene Forschungsrichtung, die die Kunstwerke und Symbole des Diasporajudentums vom Standpunkt des rabbinischen Judentums her interpretiert."[26] That Fischer proceeds from this precedent to attack the use

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[23] This is in contrast to Frey's "La Vie de l'au-delà, dans les Conceptions Juives au Temps de Jésus-Christ," *Bib* 13 (1932), in which the inscriptions are merely used to illustrate rabbinic themes.

[24] M. Smith's "Goodenough's Jewish Symbols in Retrospect," *JBL* 86 (1967) 53–68, is a fair summary and criticism.

[25] Cf. Davies, viii n. 6.

[26] U. Fischer, *Eschatologie und Jenseitserwartungen im Hellenistischen Judentum*, ZNW 44 (Berlin/New York, 1978) 247.

made of the rabbinic material by Marmorstein and Rieger illustrates the influence of this misconception.[27]

1.2.3 Since Goodenough

The years since Goodenough have seen much progress in the discussion of methodology as well as the task of integration of the artifacts with the literary evidence. Further research has made clear, for example, that the rabbinic literature cannot simply be ignored.[28] Yet even Fischer, notwithstanding this last error, demonstrates a much nuanced understanding of the field in his insistence that the Palestinian/Diaspora distinction is not completely insignificant. Noticeable as well are his objection to a blind assumption of symbolic intention and his call for an interpretation of symbols which takes into account their accompanying inscriptions.[29] Indeed, this last point is very important to the argument of Maser, who, against Fischer's overall negative conclusions, brings together the grave frescoes with their accompanying inscriptions and rabbinic references to the עולם הבא.[30]

This task of integration, it may be seen, already had an important precedent in H. Cavallin's *Life After Death. Paul's Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead in 1 Cor. 15. Part 1: An Enquiry into the Jewish Background.*[31] This work is the first to consider the artifacts side by side with the Pseudepigrapha, rabbinic, and other Jewish literature in a survey of Jewish eschatological expectations. Even more significant, however, is the author's original intention to use the results of this study as a background for the Pauline eschatology of 1 Corinthians 15: although not carried out, we have here at least the recognition that the artifacts may not only enlighten Judaism, but, in view of the close relationship between

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[27] Fischer, 246-247.

[28] Cf., e.g., S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1950). One may mention as examples of the deepening interest in Judaism the work of J. Neusner and E. P. Sanders, as well as the diligent updating of H. L. Strack's *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash.*

[29] Fischer, 250-254; cf. also the call for consideration of context by T. Rajak, "Inscriptions and Context: Reading the Jewish Catacombs of Rome," in P. W. van der Horst and J. W. van Henten, eds., *Studies in Ancient Jewish Epigraphy* (Leiden: Brill,1993).

[30] P. Maser, "Darstellungen des Olam Hab-ba in der Spätantiken-jüdischen Kunst Roms?" *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* supp. vol. 9 (1982) 225-238.

[31] (Lund: Gleerup, 1974).

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