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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.
A METRIC EPITAPH FROM GALILEE
COMMEMORATING ONE PHOIBADIOS*

During excavations carried out in 1966/67 at the Crusader fortress of Belvoire in Galilee, midway between Bet Shean (ant. Skythopolis) and Teverija (ant. Tiberias), a slab of basalt bearing an antique inscription in Greek was found in the inner courtyard where it had been used as a door step. It was published by P. Porat in the article in Scripta Classica Israelica 7 (1983/84) 113f. (photo p. 116). The inscription was read and translated as:

σώμα Φοιβαδίο(υ) Ίο(υλίου) Θίου
tοδε σήμα καλύπτει ψυχά [ές]
[ο]ύρανόν εί, κ(αί) φρ(ού)δη μάκαρες.

This grave covers the body of Phoibadios the son of Julius Thias. Soul, you are gone to heaven and departed to the blessed ones.

* I would like to thank Benedetto Bravo with whom I discussed this inscription and to whom I owe a great deal of suggestions.

1 The stone is currently kept in the Beit Gordon Museum at Degania A. Dimensions of the slab: h. 32 cm, w. 95 cm, th. 15 cm. The slab is broken both on left and right sides. The letters of ca 5 cm high become smaller toward the end of the inscription in the right-hand corner and the script is somewhat constricted in this place.

2 As far as I can see this publication drew little attention. Neither the epitaph studied here nor four other inscriptions published by Porat in the same article were reprinted in Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum. They are also lacking in the Bulletin Épigraphique, most probably because the Bulletin Épigraphique did not appear in print exactly in the middle of the eighties, after the death of Louis Robert.
In his commentary to the inscription the editor remarks that the formula ψυχή ἐς οὐρανόν appears to be Christian. This, together with letter forms which seemed to be of a later period, inclined Porat to date the inscription to the 5th/7th cent. A.D.

The translation of the inscription and subsequent commentary presented by the editor are not satisfactory. In the photo I read:

σώμα Φοιβαδίοιο θίου | τόδε σήμα καλύπτει:
ψυχή [δ' | ο]ύρανόν εἶκε φίλη μακάρε[σι θεοίσιν].

This grave covers the body of the godly Phoibadios; his soul, dear to the blessed gods, has gone to heaven.

What we in fact have before us is a funerary epigram in two hexameters. The first hexameter is metrically incorrect in the first and third feet. The third foot would be correct if the author of the epitaph had used the standard genitive form Φοιβαδίου, instead of the poetic Φοιβαδίοιο. This is clear proof of the weakness of the poetic abilities of the author. He knew poetic forms but was not able to use them in metrically correct verses.

The compositional axis of the epigram is the body-soul dichotomy going back to Plato. Only the mortal body lies in the grave beneath the tombstone. The soul, which shares immortality with the gods, has gone to heaven. A number of funerary epigrams making use of this juxtaposition has been preserved from Antiquity both in stone and in manuscript form. They are collected in W. Peek’s, Griechische Vers-Inschriften [1955], nos 1754-1777 who sets them apart as a group in its own right which he labels “Kontrastierender Typus”. The earliest example of this group is the epitaph of Plato himself that once stood in the Athenian Academy3, with the most recent ones being of the 3rd century A.D. As is suggested by the letter forms, the epitaph of Phoibadios should be dated to the 2nd/3rd century A.D. There is nothing specifically Christian in it and the expression μάκαρες θεοί clearly indicates its pagan origins.


3 W. Peek, Gr. Vers-Inschr. 1756 (= Anth. Pal. XVI 31):
σώμα μὲν ἐν κόλποις κατέχει τόδε γαῖα Πλάτωνος;
ψυχή δ’ ἵαθθος τάξιν ἔχει μακάρων.
Three other versions of this epigram are known; Anth. Palat. VII 60-61 and Diog. Laert. III 44.
We also know of similar names; Φοίβαδος (G. Sacco, Iscrizioni greche d'Italia. Porto, Roma 1984, no. 80) and Φοίβόδα (T. B. Mitford, The Inscriptions of Kurion, Philadelphia 1971, no. 144, 5).

Theoretically, one can also consider the possibility of reading Θίου (for Θείου). Without being popular the name Θείος is well attested. However, the filiation indicated simply by a father’s name in genitive form following the name of the dead is not suitable for a metric epitaph, therefore I consider this interpretation to be questionable.

5. The iunctura οὐρανόν ἴκεν or ἴκει is Homeric; cf. e.g. Homer, Ilias I 317 (ἐνίσχη), II 458 (ἀγάλμα), VIII 192 (κλάος); VIII 509 (σελατάος), XVII 425 (ὁρμογεφός); cf. also Hymn. Orph. 38.11 (Θορύβος), Quintus Smyrn., Poetethm. XVI 89 (μολάπη), Oracul. Sibyll. IV 131 (μυροφός). As for inscriptions see IGUR III 1336, C.11 (κλάος).

The lacuna on the right-hand side which, on the evidence of lines 1 and 2 may be estimated to 2-3 letters, is apparently too small for the word θείον. Possibly, this word was written not at the end of line 3 but rather beneath it, where the stone surface has been slightly chipped away. However, the case is not altogether clear for the letters become smaller towards the end of the inscription.

The expression φίλος (φίλη) μακάρεσσι θείοσι (or its plural form) occurs repeatedly in Greek dactylic poetry, both in the middle of the verse and final position; cf. e.g. Homer, Od. I 82, [Hesiod], Scultum 476; Fragmenta Hesiod. 30, 24, 176, 4; Theog. Nis, Elegiae I 741; Aristophanes, Pax 1075 and 1106 (hexam.); Diodorus Siculus, Bibliotheca historica V 66, 6, 17; Lucianus, Verae historiae 2, 28, 12.