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commemorating one Phoibadios**

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Adam Łajtar

A METRIC EPITAPH FROM GALILEE
COMMEMORATING ONE PHOIBADIOS*

During excavations carried out in 1966/67 at the Crusader fortress of Bel-voire in Galilee, midway between Bet Shean (ant. Skythopolis) and Tewe-rija (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.¹ It was published by P. Porat in the article in *Scripta Classica Israelica* 7 (1983/84) 113f. (photo p. 116²). The inscription was read and translated as:

σῶμα Φοιβαδίου (υ) Ἰουλίου) Θίου
τόδε σῆμα καλύπτ(ε)ι ψυχά [ἐς]
[ο]ὐρανὸν εἴ, κ(αὶ) φρ(οῦ)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 $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ 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:

σῶμα Φοιβαδίοιο θίου | τόδε σῆμα καλύπτει·
 $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ [δ' | ο]ὐρανὸν εἶκε φίλη μακάρεσ[σι θεοῖσιν].

1. θείου 2. καλύπτει 3. ἴκε

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 $\mu\acute{\alpha}\kappa\alpha\rho\epsilon\varsigma$ θεοί clearly indicates its pagan origins.

1. The name Φοιβάδιος is rare. It appears three times in Greek papyri from Egypt, namely *P. Sorb. II* 69, lines 9,12 (Hermoupolis, 7th cent. A.D.), *P. Ross. Georg. V* 28,2 (Oxyrhynchos, 4th cent. A.D.) and *P. Giss. I* 55,6 (Thebes, 6th cent. A.D.). A feminine form of it — Φοιβαδία — occurs in *P. Oxy. LIX* 4005,6 (6th cent. A.D.).

³ W. PEEK, *Gr. Vers-Inschr.* 1756 (= *Anth. Pal.* XVI 31):

σῶμα μὲν ἐν κόλποις κατέχει τόδε γαῖα Πλάτωνος·
 $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ δ' ἰσόθεος 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 Φοιβάδα (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 Θεῖος 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* οὐρανὸν ἔκεν or ἔκει is Homeric; cf. e.g. Homer, *Ilias* I 317 (κνίσῃ), II 458 (αἶγλῃ), VIII 192 (κλέος); VIII 509 (σέλας), XVII 425 (ὄρυμαγδός); cf. also *Hymn. Orph.* 38,11 (θόρυβος), Quintus Smyrn., *Posthom.* XVI 89 (μολπή), *Oracul. Sibyll.* IV 131 (πυρσοός). As for inscriptions see *IGUR* III 1336,C,11 (κλέος).

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 θεοῖσι. 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 θεοῖσιν (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], *Scutum* 476; *Fragmenta Hesiod.* 30,24; 176,4; Theognis, *Elegiae* I 741; Aristophanes, *Pax* 1075 and 1106 (hexam.); Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* V 66,6,17; Lucianus, *Verae historiae* 2,28,12.

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² G. GABRA, *Cairo. The Coptic Museum and Old Churches*, Cairo 1993, no. 1, 38.

³ *L'art copte en Egypte 2000 ans et christianisme*, Paris 2000, no. 23, 65.