

A GREEK INSCRIPTION FROM THE FRENCH HOSPITAL COMPOUND, YAFO (JAFFA)

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The mosaic inscription from Yafo (see Dayan, Levy and Samora-Cohen, this volume) is set within a round medallion (external diam. 76 cm, inner diam. 62 cm) composed of a double frame: the innermost is a single row of black *tesserae*, while the outer one consists of two rows of white *tesserae* enclosing a pattern of white rhombi and red triangles (Fig. 1). The inscription is rendered in three lines of black *tesserae* on a white background; underneath is an ivy leaf in black *tesserae*. The characters are very regular, averaging 6.5 cm high. They are of the square alphabet, resembling those of the inscriptions in the lower church at Khirbat Bata



Fig. 1. The inscription.

in Carmi'el (Tzaferis 1992:131–134, Nos. 3–30; *SEG XLII*: Nos. 1458–1468), although the latter are rectangular rather than square. The lower mosaic pavement at Carmi'el belongs to an early church that was dismantled to erect a larger building, the pavement of which is dated by an inscription to year 526/7 CE (Tzaferis 1992:129–130, No. 1).¹ The early pavement cannot therefore be later than the mid-fifth century CE (see Di Segni 1997:330–339). Many of the fourth- and fifth-century epitaphs from Ghor es-Safi are even more similar to our inscription, though they are engraved on stone rather than set in mosaic (Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou 2005:75–85). A date in the early Byzantine period (fourth–fifth century CE) can therefore be suggested for the present inscription.

The text reads:

ΕΥΨΥΧΙΤΩ
 ΚΑΝΠΑΝΤΕΣ
 ΟΙΩΔΕΤΑΥΤΑ

Εὐψυχ(ε)ίτω-
 σαν πάντες
 οἱ ὧδε ταῦτα.

Translation:

Be of good courage, all who (are buried) here. This (is it!).

The verb εὐψυχέω appears here in the third person plural of the imperative, with πάντες as the subject. In funerary inscriptions, it is more common in the second person (singular or plural) of the imperative, and often, it is accompanied by the words οὐδείς ἀθάνατος, i.e., ‘Nobody is immortal.’ Like the corresponding expressions θάρσει, χαῖρε, εὐτύχει, the expression εὐψύχει is meant as a blessing to the deceased and farewell from the living, acknowledging that death is the common destiny of all.² The same meaning is invested in the final word of the inscription:

¹ The inscription refers to the building of the church in the year 590, indiction 5. The excavator calculated the year according to the era of ‘Akko-Ptolemais, which he mistakenly believed to have begun in 47 BCE, and therefore dated the church to 543/4. The date was corrected to 541/2 by Meimaris (1992:139, No. 5), based on the true epoch of the era of Ptolemais, Autumn 49 BCE, and this date was accepted by *SEG XLII*: No. 1456, as well as by Feissel and Gatier 1993:559–560, No. 628 (= Feissel 2006:214, No. 687). However, the location of Khirbat Bata makes it very unlikely that it belonged to the territory of Ptolemais—in all likelihood it was in Second Palestine, probably in the territory of Sepphoris, and the date must therefore be reckoned by the era of the metropolis, Bet She’an-Scythopolis, 64 BCE. The new church must thus be dated to 526/7.

² For examples of εὐψύχει in epitaphs from Palestine and neighbouring countries, see *CIIP* I: No. 1011 (Jerusalem); *CIIP* II: Nos. 1444, 1484, 1531 (Caesarea); Welles 1938:455, No. 230 (Gerasa); Di Segni and Dahari 2009; Clédat 1915:35–36, Nos. 1–3 (north Sinai). Many examples come also from Egypt (e.g., *SEG VIII*: Nos. 476, 616; *SEG XIV*: Nos. 858, 864; *SEG XXVIII*: Nos. 1496, 1500, 1514–1515 and many others) and from Syria (e.g., *JGLS* I: No. 90; *JGLS* III:1: Nos. 844, 886, 917, 934, 954, 970, 972, 974; *JGLS* III:2: No. 1029).

ταῦτα, neuter plural of the pronoun οὗτος, ‘this’. As in this case, the expression can be found alone at the end of an epitaph, sometimes in the singular, τοῦτο, always meaning ‘This is it!’ Some examples of this formula from our region can be dated to the second or third centuries CE.³ In some cases, a fuller formula is found: ὁ βίος ταῦτα, ‘This is life!’, or τοῦτο (τὸ) τέλος, ‘This is the consummation’.⁴ These latter formulas also appear in a Christian context (see n. 4), and some examples date to the fourth century CE. The absence of Christian symbols in our inscription on the one hand, and the lack of examples of the ταῦτα and similar formulas later than the fourth century on the other, may suggest dating the inscription to the earlier, rather than to the later, part of the period suggested by the palaeography, perhaps to the fourth rather than to the fifth century CE.

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³ An epitaph from Apamea with this formula is dated to 236 CE (*JGLS* IV: No. 1355). Another example is engraved on a second–third-century CE sarcophagus from Caesarea: *CIIP* II, No. 1515; others from Syria, also from the same period, are reported in *JGLS* I: No. 48; *JGLS* II: Nos. 455, 636; *SEG* XXXIX: No. 1580. See also Feissel 1995:389, n. 55.

⁴ Three examples of the formula ‘This is life’ at the end of Christian epitaphs are dated July 2, 373; May 28, 376; April 12, 355 (Meimarìs and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou 2005:130–131, 133–134, Nos. 33, 36, and see p. 131 for examples of this and similar formulas; 2008:57–59, No. 3). For the formula ‘this is the consummation,’ see an example from Bostra (*JGLS* XIII:1: No. 9431).

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