

Inscribing Pompeii: A Reevaluation of the Jewish Epigraphic Data

By

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Abstract

This study examines the scant epigraphic evidence from Pompeii which has traditionally been linked to a Jewish community. I (re)contextualize and reevaluate this data according to its archaeological, philological, and social context to challenge the long held, and widely published view that a Jewish community existed in the city. My analysis largely rejects the conclusions of previous scholars, highlighting problems with historical methodology and scholarly assumption throughout the discussion. My approach involves incorporating theoretical discussions of community and Jewish identity, which are essential elements in positing the existence of a historical religious community. I argue that the epigraphic evidence points to the individual presence of Jewish persons, either as slaves or traders, in Pompeii. The evidence does not, however, indicate the presence of a Jewish community and associated religious practice. The reassessment of this evidence holds potential for a more accurate understanding of the demographics and diversity of first-century Roman cities, as well as furthering our knowledge of Jewish Diaspora communities.

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I. Introduction

1.1 The Issue

Accurate historical reconstructions are never easy to formulate, but it is certain that an accurate picture of the past cannot be assembled from tenuous speculation. Historian David Hackett Fischer insists that “an empirical statement must not be more precise than its evidence warrants.”¹ Fischer’s statement indicates one of the cardinal, yet inadvertent, oversights committed by historians: to judge a premise as true based on the possibility of its truth. Since an empirical statement is reliant on its context, when scholars generate facts based on the possibility of truth, the facts often exist in contextual relativity without corroborating sources to verify their accuracy. To a certain degree this practice abandons pretexts of objectivity since there are no overarching rules, procedures, or fixed benchmarks for measuring the facts. This lack of an objective historical methodology means that the facts do not exist independently of the historian. For this reason, the hypotheses generated by historians must be supported by evidence, and we must resist regarding hypotheses as true unless there is compelling evidence in support of them. Accordingly, it is not sufficient to suggest that a hypothesis was *possibly* the case, but, instead, to determine its probability.

While no one can ever know what *really* happened in the past, as scholars we have the responsibility to try to construct a representation based on close inspection and an estimation of probability. The problematic methodology of deriving facts from the possibility of truth, as described by Fischer, has become embedded in scholarship, particularly when evaluating historical circumstances with obscure, ambiguous, or fragmentary evidence. This paper focuses

¹ David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (London: Routledge, 1971), 63.

on one example of this situation – the notion that a Jewish community existed in Pompeii, as deduced from an extremely small amount of epigraphic data.

More than 10,000 inscriptions – defined as “a piece of writing or lettering, engraved, etched, incised, traced, stamped, or otherwise imprinted into or onto a durable surface”² – have been found at Pompeii, most often classified as graffiti or *dipinti*.³ The inscriptions commonly appear in brushed Latin (*scriptura actuarial*), used for formal or public notices, and Latin cursive, employed in everyday or casual writing.⁴ The value of these inscriptions as historical material cannot be underestimated. In the case of Pompeii, when attempting to identify evidence for a Jewish community in the city, these inscriptions are the only available source of information.

The inscriptions treated in this study can generally be regarded as private messages. In contrast to official inscriptions like municipal announcements or dedicatory plaques, these inscriptions are unofficial – and as a rule, they were not meant for posterity.⁵ As such, the epigraphic data constitute an indispensable source of social history. When placed in their proper context, these inscriptions provide critical contributions for the reconstruction of antiquity – for the purpose of this study, the inscriptions may be able to provide clues regarding the existence of a historical religious community, the Jews of Pompeii.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, the primary motivation for positing a Jewish community was to lay a foundation for hypothesizing an early Christian community. Since Christianity was a movement that originated and initially spread among Jews, the presence of

² John Bodet, “Epigraphy and the Ancient Historian,” *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient History from Inscriptions*, John Bodet, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 2.

³ The painted inscriptions are classified as *dipinti*, whereas incised inscriptions or inscriptions written with an other medium are classified as graffiti. Rebecca R. Benefiel, “Wall Inscriptions and GIS,” in *Latin on Stone: Epigraphic Research and Electronic Archives*, Francisca Feraudi-Gruénais, ed. (United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2010), 45.

⁴ Lawrence Keppie, *Understanding Roman Inscriptions* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 18.

⁵ Jean-Paul Descoeudres, “History and Historical Sources,” in *The World of Pompeii*, John Dobbins and Peder W. Foss, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 10.

Christians in Pompeii was, for Victorian scholars, a logical and organic progression of a Jewish community. During this time there was a fascination with the luxury and intrigues of the Roman Empire ostensibly displayed in the ruins of Pompeii. The remains of the town provided a setting never before available for examining ordinary people and everyday life. In contrast to the perception of the decadent Roman lifestyle, Jews, and subsequently, Christians were conceptualized as moral champions living in a degenerate society. And since the epigraphic data from Pompeii seem to echo names and scenes from the Hebrew Bible, scholars posited that a significant number of Jews (and Christians) lived in the city prior to its destruction.⁶ From the earliest excavations scholars have argued without solid evidence that the *facts* “point to the existence of a Jewish colony at Pompeii”⁷; that “in the midst of a colorful population lived a community of Jews”⁸; that Pompeian businesses attempted to “serve the niche market of the local Jewish community”⁹; and even that Pompeii was home to Jewish-Christians and contained *sacraria*, the “earliest Christian meeting places . . . [leaving] no doubt that there were [Jews and] Christians in Pompeii before the eruption.”¹⁰

In the minds of the early scholars of Pompeii, the presence of a Jewish community was a necessary basis for advancing the hypothesis of a Christian community, which, for them, served as testimony to the sizable geographic spread and influence of early Christianity.¹¹ The imaginations of these scholars were captivated by the relationship between early Christianity and

⁶ Tibor Grüll and László Benke, “A Hebrew/Aramaic Graffito and Poppaea’s Alleged Jewish Sympathy,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* Vol. 62 No. 1 (Spring 2011), 39.

⁷ August Mau, *Pompeii: Its Life and Art*, Francis W. Kelsey, trans. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1899), 17.

⁸ Carlo Giordano and Isidoro Kahn, *The Jews in Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae and in the Cities of Campania Felix*, Wilhelmina F. Jashemski, trans. (Rome: Bardi Editore, 2001), 414.

⁹ Mary Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius: Pompeii Lost and Found* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 24.

¹⁰ Alastair M. Small, “Urban, Suburban and Rural Religion in the Roman Period,” in *The World of Pompeii*, John Dobbins and Pedar W. Foss, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 194-195.

¹¹ See Shelley Hales and Joanna Paul, editors, *Pompeii in the Public Imagination: From its Rediscovery to Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

polytheism to such an extent that Judeo-Christian narratives were frequently imposed on the ancients in an attempt to moralize and counter-balance Roman decadence.¹²

However, the importance of an accurate reconstruction of the demographics and diversity of Pompeii extends beyond criticizing Victorian religious polemic and is paramount in understanding how first century Roman towns functioned socially, politically, and economically. Moreover, the analysis of purported Jewish communities provides insight into the extent of the Diaspora in the first century and how such communities can be described and characterized. Since evidence for Diaspora Judaism is attested only by archaeological and epigraphic data,¹³ we can attempt to deduce certain practices or modes of life shared by the Jews of antiquity. In the case of Pompeii, however, the inscriptions tell us little about religious beliefs or the conduct of religious life. Thus, in contrast to other well known Jewish communities, determining the significance and implications of the Jewish inscriptions at Pompeii is a complex issue since it is not clear or obvious whether the people who composed them and whether the people mentioned in them were Jews.

In exploring the Jewish evidence from Pompeii, this study tackles the methodological issues of how to conduct constructive research when dealing with sparse, fragmentary, and ambiguous evidence. I examine the epigraphic remains of individuals who have been identified as Jews living in Pompeii prior to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. Previous scholarly analyses of these inscriptions have concluded that the evidence indicates both a Jewish community and an associated religious practice; by critiquing these methods and discourses, I call into question both of these widespread notions. I find the firm conclusions about the

¹² See Simon Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction, and the Proclamation of Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); also see section 5.2 of this paper.

¹³ Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora* (The Netherlands: Brill, 1998), 1: “no body of diaspora literature has survived that can point to a specific Jewish diaspora culture.”

presence of a Jewish community to be unsupported by the sparse evidence in Pompeii. The evidence does indicate that some individuals who could have been Jews were involved in business or were in servitude. Through this investigation, I also address the importance of critical analytical research into the spread of Diaspora communities, focusing on the extent to which we can be sure such communities existed. While it may seem that the conclusions I reach in this study are largely negative, my analysis questions received notions and calls to task poor methodology. In this sense, a positive conclusion is produced since a rigorous reexamination of historical evidence leads us to new understandings of antiquity and a further refined logic of historical thought and historiography.

In what follows, I avoid a descriptive approach that seeks to measure how much, if at all, Jewish culture and values permeated Pompeian life, as scholars have done (perhaps implicitly) in the past. Instead, I seek only to assess the epigraphic data on a case-by-case basis in order to determine how many, if any, of the inscriptions can be firmly situated into a Jewish context or, more broadly, relate to a Jewish community. In preparation of this analysis, I first provide a brief historical background of Pompeii. Then I review the principal texts that have been critical in the analysis of the epigraphic data. Next, I turn to more theoretical and methodological concerns, exploring definitions of community, as well as examining indications of Jewish identity, both in antiquity and in contemporary culture. After establishing this foundation, I consider the proposed Jewish epigraphic evidence from Pompeii. Finally, I conclude my exploration of the Pompeian inscriptions by reflecting on the implications of a possible Jewish presence in the city.

1.2 Historical Background

“At last the darkness thinned and dispersed into smoke or cloud; then there was real daylight, and the sun even shone out, but a lurid glow as it is during an

eclipse. The sight that met our still terrified eyes was a changed world, buried deep in ash like snow.”¹⁴ - Pliny the Younger, Letter 6.20

Pliny’s description of the eruption of Vesuvius provides an indication of the degree to which life was disrupted by the events of August 24, 79 CE. As Pliny describes, when the ash had dissipated from the sky, he and countless others were faced with a changed world. Not only did many people, including Pliny’s famous uncle, perish in the eruption, but entire cities – Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Nuceria among the most prominent – vanished.

Pompeii was forgotten until 1594, when an engineer, Domenico Fontana, was cutting a water canal from the Sarno River to Torre Annunziata. In the process of digging, he tunneled through the southern half of Pompeii (known then as *civitas*), revealing buildings, wall paintings, and inscriptions.¹⁵ But Fontana’s finds did not encourage exploration of the site and official excavations did not begin until 154 years later in 1748.¹⁶ As the city was indiscriminately uncovered it was perceived as a Roman town “frozen in time.” This perception is still advanced today, particularly by travel guides who wish to convey the notion that tourists visiting Pompeii encounter the vibrant, functioning town that first century Pompeians experienced. But this description is a drastic oversimplification. At the time of its destruction, Pompeii was not a vibrant, functioning town. Conversely, Pompeii was, to a certain extent, already in ruins. The city was still in the process of recovering from a devastating earthquake seventeen years earlier,

¹⁴ “Tandem illa caligo tenuata quasi in fumum nebulamve discessit; mox dies verus; sol etiam effulsit, luridus tamen qualis esse cum deficit solet. Occursabant trepidantibus adhuc oculis mutata omnia atoque cinere tamquam nive obducta.”

¹⁵ Pedar W. Foss, “Rediscovery and Resurrection,” in *The World of Pompeii*, John Dobbins and Peder W. Foss eds. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 29.

¹⁶ Initial excavations at Pompeii, although lacking a sense of archaeology as a practice or academic discipline, were initiated by the Bourbons. Official excavations at Herculaneum began ten years earlier in 1738, but the city (especially the theatre) had been explored through tunnels in 1710-1711.

which left much of the town abandoned and in disrepair.¹⁷ Additionally, a large number of Pompeians, heeding the geological warnings preceding the eruption, had already evacuated the city, taking their possessions with them.¹⁸ The destruction of Pompeii, both from the earthquake and from Vesuvius, was compounded in the weeks and months following the eruption as survivors, proprietors, and looters returned to the city to salvage or plunder the contents of buried homes and shops.¹⁹ This post-eruption activity calls into question what can authentically be attributed to the inhabitants of 79 CE and what should be attributed to later looters.

Consequently, Pompeii cannot be considered a city frozen in time, but a city disrupted. What survives is emphatically not a frozen moment, but traces of a stripped city. As Mary Beard accurately describes, “[Pompeii] bears the marks (and the scars) of all kinds of different histories.”²⁰ These histories, in turn, give rise to what she calls the “Pompeii paradox”: the fact that we know so much, yet so little about ancient life in the city. But the remains of Pompeii yield evocative clues about the human narratives of its inhabitants. As Jean-Paul Descoeudres relates, there are two sources of information at our disposal to reconstruct the human narratives of Pompeii: the written and the unwritten.²¹ I am concerned strictly with the written.

¹⁷ In *Natural Questions* 6.1.1-3 and 6.1.10 Seneca describes that Pompeii “has been laid low by an earthquake.” The earthquake was also commemorated in the home of Lucius Caecilius Iucundus by two marble reliefs depicting the trembling and crashing monuments in the Pompeian forum.

¹⁸ In letter 6.20 Pliny describes many warning signs that an eruption was eminent. He explains that earthquakes preceded the eruption for several days, but were not of much concern since they were frequent in the region of Campania. Due to the severity of the earthquakes he records that the sea was drawn back and that the shoreline had retreated, all the while noting that a black cloud was rising from Vesuvius. Corollary to Pliny’s account, volcanologist Haraldur Sigurdsson avers that symptoms of an eruption would have been occurring months or years before the eruption. These symptoms would have included “inflation of the volcano and surrounding land, earthquakes, increased thermal activity, change in the ground water table and increased volcanic gas emission. Minor phreatic or steam explosions also typically occur shortly before the main eruption”; see Haraldur Sigurdsson, “The Environmental and Geomorphological Context of the Volcano,” in *The World of Pompeii*, John Dobbins and Peder W. Foss eds. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 49.

¹⁹ Mary Beard explains that salvagers tunneled their way through the volcanic ash and entered homes, leaving a series of holes in the walls. One salvager documented his activity by writing the words “House Tunneled” on the door of one house. Additionally, Roman coins post-dating the eruption, from the late first to the fourth centuries, have been found in the ruins; see Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius*, 11.

²⁰ Mary Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius*, 15.

²¹ Jean-Paul Descoeudres, “History and Historical Sources,” 9.

1.3 Sources and Editions

The written remains of a possible Jewish community in the city have been primarily documented in four principal scholarly texts, which list and, to varying degrees, categorize the inscriptions as remnants of Jews and affirm the presence of a religious community. Such an affirmation, however, is premature and in need of revision. Nevertheless, these texts provide a framework for a discussion of the inscriptions and are indispensable resources for studying Judaism, Christianity, polytheism, or social history in antiquity through epigraphic data.

The *Corpus Inscriptionem Latinarum (CIL)* consists of seventeen volumes, containing over 180,000 inscriptions from antiquity. Volume IV of this series, accompanied by three supplements, documents inscriptions found around Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae (*Inscriptiones parietariae Pompeianae, Herculanenses, Stabianae*). The original volume, edited by K. Zangemeister and R. Schoene, was published in 1871, with the first supplement appearing in 1898. The volume progresses through the excavations in a linear fashion, recording inscriptions one street at a time. Following the publication of the first supplement, Guiseppe Fiorelli devised a new system for describing the topography of the site. He divided Pompeii into nine regions and assigned each edifice a unique three number reference: region, block, doorway. The second supplement (1909), edited by A. Mau, and the third supplement (1952-1970), edited by M. della Corte and P. Ciprotti, follow Fiorelli's system, while the first part remains tied to the earlier topography of the town.

The *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum (CIJ)*, compiled by J.B. Frey, consists of two volumes originally published in 1936 and 1952. Volume one contains inscriptions from Europe; volume two from Asia and Africa. Both volumes contain inscriptions concerning Jews dating from the third century BCE to the seventh century CE. The inscriptions contained in the *CIJ*

were collected in the 1930's and the analyses of many of them have been either updated or dismissed in more recent publications.²²

Carlo Giordano and Isidoro Kahn's book, *The Jews in Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae and in the Cities of Campania Felix*, was first published in 1966, and partly revised in 2001. Giordano and Kahn present a history of Jews in the region of Campania Felix, followed by a list of the epigraphic and visual evidence for Jews in various cities of the region. Giordano and Kahn's approach to the evidence is indiscriminate and outdated; they are very inclusive of what is Jewish, including some material that is clearly non-Jewish. Additionally, they tend to generalize their conclusions, which are based on tendentious evidence.²³

David Noy's *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, published in 1994, consists of two volumes. Volume one contains inscriptions from Italy, Spain, and Gaul; volume two from Rome. Noy is regarded by some as the "Frey of our days," but his work surpasses the quality of Frey's and is far more comprehensive.²⁴ Noy publishes each inscription with English translations, full commentary, and an up-to-date bibliography (although now almost twenty years old). His presentation of evidence is judicious and he provides well researched explanations and interpretations. In the appendix he discusses inscriptions he disqualifies as Jewish, but in the case of Pompeii, he does not address the full range of possibilities.

While these four scholarly collections detail the possible Jewish epigraphic evidence from Pompeii, and occasionally provide criteria for identifying an inscription as Jewish, they do not provide any theoretical discussion of what constitutes a community, nor any definitions of

²² The *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis* (a three volume set) is a partially updated version (or substitution) of the *CIJ*. The volumes treat inscriptions from Eastern Europe (vol. 1), Asia Minor (vol. 2), and Syria and Cyprus (vol. 3).

²³ David Noy, review of *The Jews in Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae and in the Cities of Campania Felix*. 3rd edition revised and enlarged by Laurentino García y García; translated by Wilhelmina F. Jashemski, by Carlo Giordano and Isidoro Kahn, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, February 28, 2004.

²⁴ Pieter Willem van der Horst, *Jews and Christians in Their Graeco-Roman Context* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2006), 72.

Jewish identity, which are critical elements in positing the existence of a historical religious community. In an attempt to fill the lacunae in the discussion of the Jewish epigraphic data, I now turn to these methodological and theoretical considerations.

II. What is Community?

The notion of a Jewish community in Pompeii has been constructed according to the conjecture of scholars over the past two hundred years.²⁵ Without ancient literary attestations of a Jewish community in the city, scholarly speculation has originated from the sparse archaeological record, through the tendentious interpretation of epigraphic data. Since the epigraphic evidence for a Jewish presence in Pompeii is exceptionally equivocal, we need to determine the criteria for identifying a community: how much physical evidence is needed to claim that a community existed in any given location? More importantly, how should the term community be understood?

Perhaps the most simple way to define community is as an aggregation of households. This essentialist definition presumes community to be a pre-existing and natural social entity.²⁶ But Karen Spierling and Michael Halvorson caution that the danger of attempting to define community “lies not in trying to analyze community dynamics but in attempting to impose too great a clarity, simplicity, or transparency on the operations of any particular community.”²⁷ In opposition to the essentialist perspective, Isabella Sandwell explains that communities “do not have an objective existence that naturally arises out of an essential and distinct package of traits. Rather, they result from boundaries that are constructed by human actors, who choose to identify themselves with some people and differentiate themselves from others.”²⁸ Following Sandwell, I assume an interactional approach, which posits that a community is socially constituted rather

²⁵ Hypotheses about a Jewish community in Pompeii began to emerge in publications in the late 1800's. Among the scholars proposing this idea were K. Zangmeister, G. Fiorelli, A. Kiessling, G. De Rossi, A. Mau, G. Minervi.

²⁶ Marcello A. Canuto and Jason Yaeger, “Introducing An Archaeology of Communities,” in *The Archaeology of Communities: A New Perspective*, Marcello A. Canuto and Jason Yaeger, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 5.

²⁷ Michael J. Halvorson and Karen Spierling, “Introduction: Definitions of Community in Early Modern Europe” in *Defining Community in Early Modern Europe*, Michael J. Halvorson and Karen Spierling, eds. (Cornwall: Ashgate, 2008), 3.

²⁸ Isabella Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews and Christians in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

than being seen as a basis for social interaction.²⁹ Following this approach, in the case of a Jewish group at Pompeii, a community cannot be perceived as a static, homogenous social unit maintained by residential proximity. Because they would have existed within a larger community, Jews in Pompeii would not constitute a community simply because they are present – rather, they would have to distinguish themselves from the rest of the population in some way. A community, in this case, then, is a dynamic institution that is dependent on human agency for its continued operation and existence.³⁰ In other words, a community is constructed by its members, rather than constructing its members.

The actions of community members are organized by material conditions and by social and cultural structures. As such, there must be physical venues for the community which are evident in the archaeological record. It is critical to note, however, that the existence of material culture does not necessarily reflect a community.³¹ A community is not simply a cluster of observable material remains; instead it is grounded in the daily lives and routines of its members. Daily routines indicate “how [community members] make their world work given where they live, [and] what they must do to survive there.”³² Common concerns create a shared set of mental dispositions for acting within the physical and social world, creating a contrast of “us” versus “them.” This differentiation then becomes manifest in material symbols. As will be made clear below, this mentality is especially evident in Jewish Diaspora communities, where self-definition and socio-cultural assimilation are in constant tension. In this type of religious community, as we see in Rome for instance, the development of places of worship and funerary hypogea abound.

²⁹ Canuto and Yaeger, 3.

³⁰ Ibid., 5.

³¹ See Lewis Binford, “Archaeological Systematics and the Study of Culture Process,” *American Antiquity* Vol. 31 No. 1 (October 1965), 203-210, and David L. Clarke, *Analytical Archaeology* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1981).

³² John Watanabe, *Maya Saints and Souls in a Changing World* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 217.

These elements clearly demarcate the customs and mores of the religious community from the broader population.

In many Diaspora communities worship places were frequently adapted from private homes and other nonpublic architecture.³³ The best known example of this type of adaptation is the synagogue at Dura-Europos in Syria.³⁴ Given the private nature of the household and collegial organization, or “small ethnic enclaves,”³⁵ of Diaspora Judaism, it is often difficult to detect the presence of such worship spaces. Yet, for cities where a Jewish community is thought to have existed, there is often incontrovertible corroborating evidence, whether it be literary, epigraphic, or archaeological. Such is the case in Rome. The reconstruction of the Jewish community there is based largely on nonliterary data, such as epigraphic remains – predominantly funerary inscriptions, in which distinct worship communities are sometimes mentioned.³⁶ While no identifiable architectural remains of an early synagogue in Rome have yet surfaced, H.J. Leon has identified eleven (possibly fourteen) synagogue communities in Rome from inscriptions.³⁷

Along with the evidence at Rome, a *de novo* Jewish construction was found in Ostia in 1961. The synagogue at Ostia dates from the first century CE and was specifically built for

³³ The practice of in-home or private worship parallels other “foreign” religious groups in the Roman world, such as the Christians and the followers of Mithras.

³⁴ See Hachlili, 39: “The Dura-Europos synagogue was constructed in a renovated dwelling house in a residential area . . . The synagogue building retained its dwelling house form; it was secluded, inconspicuous and indistinguishable from the neighboring houses.”

³⁵ L. Michael White, “Synagogue and Society in Imperial Ostia: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence,” *The Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 90 No. 1 (January 1997), 52.

³⁶ Funerary inscriptions often document the traits, professional and familial associations, accomplishments, and convictions of the owner of the grave. One or more of these elements may indicate religious affiliation.

³⁷ H.J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960), 135-66. More recently, van der Horst has amended the number of synagogue groups to ten; see P.W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs: An Introductory Survey to a Millennium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 BCE - 700 CE)* (The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1991)73-84. The number of groups depends on how the various group names are identified in the epitaphs. As Michael White notes, “some of these [names] clearly refer to particular congregations, but in other cases they may be ethnic markers or may refer to a subgroup of one of the other known congregations (see White, “Synagogue and Society in Imperial Ostia,” 24).

liturgical usage.³⁸ A menorah relief is located on each of the extended corbels of the architraves of the apsidal niche on the south side of the main hall, indicating a self-conscious Jewish identity. The synagogue was continually modified and built over as indicated by the style of masonry of its later stages: *opus vittatum* and *opus latericium*.³⁹ In addition to the synagogue, Ostia has yielded two inscriptions directly relating to its Jewish community. The first inscription, found during the excavation of the synagogue, is often referred to as “the donation of Mindius Faustus.” The text is inscribed on a plaque that was found, reused, in repair work of the floor. It reads:

Pro Salute Aug(usti) / οἱ κοδόμησεν κὲ αἰπό— / ησεν ἐκ τῶν αὐτοῦ δο— /
μάτων καὶ τὴν Κειβώτον / ἀνέθηκεν νόμῳ ἁγίῳ / Μίνδιος Φαῦστος / [. . .]
ΔΙΩ [. . .]⁴⁰

The inscription clearly refers to both the construction of a building and the dedication of the ark itself, leaving no doubt of the patronage for the synagogue. The second inscription, funerary in nature, was found at Castel Porziano, south of Ostia. This inscription has traditionally been linked with the synagogue at Ostia, but since the left third of the stone is missing, there are some questions as to its origin. Nevertheless, the extant contents seem to refer to a Jewish community, presumably at Ostia:

[Collegium?] Iudeorum / [in col. ost. commor]antium qui compara / [verunt ex
conlat]ione locum C. Iulio Iusto / [gerusiarchae ad m]unimentum struendum /
[donavit rogantib]us Livio Dionisio patre et / [col(legii) patro]no gerusiarche et
Antonio / [. . . diab]iu anno ipsorum consent(iento) ge[r-] / [us(iae), C. Iulius Iu]

³⁸ White, 27. Cf. Maria Floriani Squarciapino, “La sinagoga di Ostia,” *Bolletino d’Arte* (1961): 326-37; and Squarciapino, “Die Synagoge von Ostia Antica,” *Raggi: Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte und Archäologie* Vol. 4 (1962): 1-8. The dating of the synagogue to the first century CE is certain based on its construction in *opus reticulatum mixtum*, a building style common in Ostia from the Flavian period (69-96 CE) through the reign of Hadrian (117-138 CE), but no longer used after the mid-second century.

³⁹ White, 29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 39: “For the well-being of the Emperor. Mindius Faustus [. . . DIO . . .] constructed (the edifice or hall) and made it out of his own gifts, and he set up the “ark” for the sacred law [. . .].”

stus gerusiarches fecit sibi / [et coniugi] suae lib(ertis) lib(ertabusque) posterisque eorum / [in fro]nte p(edes) XVIII, in agro p(edes) XVII.⁴¹

The style of this inscription is common. The epitaph is in the form of a *titulus*, a standardized plaque affixed to the front of a tomb. The text displays an honorific title, gerusiarch, bestowed on C. Julius Justus by the Jewish community.⁴² This combination of material remains has convinced scholars that a Jewish community existed in Ostia due to the obvious participation of Jews in the social and religious life of the city. Displays of cultural identity and religious tradition are evident both in the architectural and epigraphic remains.

Ostia shares many similarities with another Italian port city, Puteoli. Here, a Jewish community can be deduced from both literary sources and funerary inscriptions. Josephus states that from 4 BCE there was a group of “Jews who dwelt there.”⁴³ He claims that, after becoming shipwrecked at this Italian settlement, he observed the community and befriended a “Jew by birth” in 63 CE.⁴⁴ Most famously, Puteoli is mentioned in Acts 28.13-14. Luke writes that Paul encounters “ἀδελφούς” (brothers) – presumably fellow Jews⁴⁵ – during his stay. In addition to

⁴¹ Ibid., 43: [The Community] (Collegium or Synagogue) of the Jews dwelling [in the colony of Ostia, who from the collection acquired] a place (or plot) for C(aius) Julius Justus, [gerusiarch, so that] he might construct a monument, [(hereby) have donated it to him at the request] of Livius Dionysus, father [and patron of the collegium], gerusiarch, and of Antonius (? archon) for life, in the year of their office, by consent of the gerusia. [C. Julius Ju]stus, gerusiarch, made (this monument) for himself and his wife, [together] with their freedmen and freedwomen and their descendants, in width, 18 feet; depth, 17 feet.

⁴² A gerusia “reflected the self-definition of a Jewish group that organized itself as a typical *collegium*, club, or religious and craft association.” It was not a central council of elders serving all the local Jewish congregations as once thought. Additionally, the titles of *pater* and *patronus* for Livius Dionysus indicate that the gerusiarch “carried substantial leadership and patronal functions within the organization” (see White, 46).

⁴³ Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum*, ii 2.104. Cf. *Antiquities*, xvii 12.23-5.

⁴⁴ Josephus, *Vita*, 3.16.

⁴⁵ In many biblical translations the word ἀδελφούς is commonly translated as “believers.” This inaccurate translation gives the impression that the word refers to Christians, but this is incorrect. Paul identifies as a Jew. This is clear in Romans 9.3-5 where he calls Israelites his “brethren” and “kinsmen according to the flesh.” For more information about Paul’s Jewish identity, see Samuel Sandmel, *The Genius of Paul*, (New York: Ferrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1958), 48-49. Sandmel considers Paul to be at home in Hellenistic Judaism. Similarly, Daniel Boyarin deems Paul as “an important Jewish thinker . . . convinced that he was a Jew living out Judaism”; see Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 2.

the attestations in Acts and Josephus, funerary remains substantiate the notion of a Jewish community. For instance, one epitaph reads:

Hic requiescit in pace / Benus filia Rebbetis / Abundantis qui vixit / annus pl[us]
m[inus] XVII d[e]p[osita] II id[us] / Iun[ias]⁴⁶

The Latin inscription is followed by two lines of a perplexing Hebrew script. According to Noy, the only portion that can be fully transliterated from the Hebrew is *Beshalom [...] Benus*.⁴⁷ The epitaph, dated to sometime before the fourth century CE, commemorates the seventeen year old daughter of Rabbi Abundans. The mention of a Rabbi here may be evidence of Jewish religious practice. In the first century, “Rabbi” became a title of authority.⁴⁸ During this time period, some Rabbis were understood to be interpreters of biblical text and often established their own schools of thought.⁴⁹

Another example from Puteoli, dating from the first century CE, bears similarities to the C. Julius Justus plaque from Ostia:

Ti[berius] Claudius / Philippus / dia viu et / Gerusiarches / maceriam duxit⁵⁰

Based on the honorific title of gerusiarch, like C. Julius Justus, T. Claudius Philippus is likely a Jewish freedman or the descendant of a freedman. Jewish gerusiarchs are also recorded at Antioch, Apamea, and Rome.⁵¹

⁴⁶ David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe Vol. II: Italy, Spain and Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 55. Cf. Giordano and Kahn, *The Jews in Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae and the Cities of Campania Felix*, Wilhelmina F. Jashemski trans. (Rome: Bardi Editore, 2001), 23: “Here rests in peace Venus, daughter of Rabbi Abundans, who lived more or less 17 years. Laid to rest on 12th June.” Some scholars argue that this funerary inscription comes from Salerno or Naples, but many agree that its original provenance is Puteoli.

⁴⁷ Noy, 55.

⁴⁸ Before becoming a title of authority, the term rabbi was a title of respect, roughly equivalent to “sir”; see Hayim Lapin, “Rabbi” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* vol. 5, David Noel Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 600-601.

⁴⁹ Famous Rabbis of the first century, who were linked to teaching and adjudication, included Rabbi Gamaliel and Rabbi Shammai. Rabbi Shammai, for example, established his own school of thought, the House of Shammai.

⁵⁰ Noy, 41. Cf. Giordano and Kahn, 21. “Tiberius Claudius Philippus, life-officer and gerusiarch, built the wall” (the “wall” is probably metonymy for his tomb).

⁵¹ Noy, 41.

The clear evidence for a Jewish community at Ostia, Rome, and Puteoli drastically diverges from the evidence for a Jewish community at Pompeii. Here, no place of Jewish religious worship has been found and no Jewish religious symbols (e.g. menorah) have been found. While it could be argued that the Jews of Pompeii engaged in private household worship, it is an argument from silence, and at the present moment, it is an unprovable hypothesis since (as the analysis below will indicate) there is no other data, literary or otherwise, to support this claim.

More so, no Jewish tombs have been found. The *necropoleis* at Pompeii are all located outside of the city walls and strung along the major roads to the city. The two largest cemeteries are located outside of the Nocera Gate and the Herculaneum Gate. Smaller cemeteries are located outside the Vesuvius Gate, the Nola Gate, the Marina Gate, and the Stabia Gate.⁵² The tombs in the largest cemeteries were primarily reserved for the families of the most prominent magisterial citizens and socially ambitious freedmen. The tombs in the smaller cemeteries housed less wealthy Pompeians. From all the *necropoleis* there are approximately 380 names known from funerary inscriptions; half of these appear on *columellae* (burial stele), the other half appear in epitaphs.⁵³ None of the known names are Semitic, and none are considered to be Jewish. This, however, is not necessarily an indication that there were not Jews in the city, as the absence of evidence is not conclusively the evidence of absence. For Jewish slaves, it is likely that their death (and commemoration) would have fallen into obscurity. Some slaves of wealthy

⁵² Sarah Cormack, "The Tombs at Pompeii," in *The World of Pompeii*, John J. Dobbins and Peder W. Foss, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 585. The smaller cemeteries have not been as extensively studied as the larger necropoleis.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 599.

Pompeians were memorialized in collective tombs constructed by their masters, but most slaves did not have the financial resources to provide funerary markers.⁵⁴

While the totality of the perimeter outside of Pompeii, and consequently the totality of the *necropoleis*, has not been fully excavated, there are presently only two proposed slave cemeteries. Outside the Herculaneum Gate and the Nocera Gate a collection of nearly 500 funerary “herm-stelae” (*columellae*) were found, possibly attesting to slave memorials.⁵⁵ The herm-stelae are flat stone, schematic silhouettes of human heads with no features. Some of these are inscribed with Roman names, others bear a single Greek name, but the majority (nearly two-thirds) have no inscription. The presence of markers with a single name suggest that these stelae mark slave graves. But, again, there is no corroborating evidence on the stelae to indicate any Jewish slave burials.

Known Jewish communities, as in the cases of Rome, Ostia, and Puteoli, have left behind clear evidence. No evidence for such an organized community exists in Pompeii, although many other religious groups have left evidence of their presence, such as the imperial cult, the cults of Isis, Bacchus, Sabazius, and the Capitoline triad, to name a few.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Michele George, “The Lives of Slaves,” in *The World of Pompeii*, John J. Dobbins and Peder W. Foss, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 545.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 545.

⁵⁶ In Pompeii the imperial cult is evidenced by the Temple of Fortuna Augusta, a shrine to the emperor at the back of the *macellum*, and a building on the east side of the Forum; the frescoes in the Villa of Mysteries “evoke some aspects of the cult of Bacchus”; a house (II.i.12) not far from the amphitheater yielded objects connected to the worship of Sabazius; and the Temple of Isis is one of the best preserved buildings in the city (See Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius*, 299-308).

III. Who is a Jew?: Criteria and Methodology

As we have seen, no evidence for an established Jewish community exists in Pompeii like we see elsewhere in the Empire. Much of the epigraphic evidence I will discuss hinges on the identification of individuals named in the inscriptions as Jews. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the problems scholars encounter when attempting to determine religious identity and define Jewishness in antiquity.

Issues of Jewish identity are widely debated in current scholarship on culture, history, and religion. Scholars attempt to determine how ethnic or religious identities were formed and how individuals understood themselves in relation to or in conflict with different group identities.⁵⁷ The basic methodological question about Jewish identity centers on whether a Jewish individual should be identified based on ethnic and national or on religious and ideological dimensions. The definition is also contingent on how scholars understand and translate the Greek Ἰουδαίος or the Latin *Iudaeus*: as Jew (generally indicating varying degrees of religiosity) or Judaeans (indicating a geographical place of origin).⁵⁸

The blanket topic of Jewish identity is admittedly broad. When discussing Judaism, a range of Judaisms could apply (Palestinian, Galilean, Hellenistic, rabbinic, Diasporic, and so on). Since nuances abound in the scope of first century Judaism, my goal here is not to establish a rigid definition of who is a Jew and who is not. Instead, it is my intention to highlight the diversity of first century Judaism to demonstrate that attempting to identify a Jewish individual based, for instance, on epigraphic data is a complex endeavor. Many of the studies that have been

⁵⁷ Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz, and Stephanie Gripentrog, "Preface," in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, J. Frey, D. Schwartz, and S. Gripentrog, eds. (Boston: Brill, 2007), vii.

⁵⁸ Steve Mason comments that by consciously calling the Jews of antiquity Judaeans, we are required to "locate ourselves in that other time, but that seems to be no bad thing for historians"; see Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* Vol. 38 No. 4 (2007), 504.

undertaken concerning the Jewish epigraphic evidence at Pompeii have assumed that the Jews of the first century were *purely* Jewish – staunch monotheists, originating from Judaea, and endowed with Semitic names. As a result of this assumption, many people have considered Jewishness as easily defined and recognizable. However, this is not the case.

My fundamental consideration concerning Jewish identity in Pompeii is: How do we identify and categorize Ἰουδαῖοι as they existed in antiquity? Is there a distinction between what the ancient Greeks and Romans would have understood when hearing the word Ἰουδαίος as opposed to what we in modernity understand the term “Jew” to signify? And have modern notions of Jewishness been anachronistically imposed on the ancients?

Personal assumptions play a major role in defining Jewishness. Daniel Langton mentions that modern scholars have a tendency to essentialize phenomena as Jewish to conform to “an assumed essence of a normative Jewishness.”⁵⁹ This practice simultaneously conflates notions of religious practice with national affiliation. The problem with the term “Jew” is that it has become such a monolithic entity that it “fails to take into account the many varieties of thought and social expression” associated with Jewish individuals.⁶⁰ It does not distinguish adherents of Judaism from people of Jewish descent. Yet, it is clear that not all Jews adhere to Judaism and not all adherents of Judaism are ethnically Jewish. The usage of the term Jew is, thus, quite complicated. The untranslated term Ἰουδαίος, on the other hand, is a much more “sterile” term, “free of contamination by contemporary associations.”⁶¹ Daniel Schwartz explains that while the term can either mean “Jew” or “Judaean,” every “standard work” on the Second Temple period

⁵⁹ Daniel R. Langton, *The Apostle Paul in the Jewish Imagination: A Study in Modern Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9.

⁶⁰ E.W. Danker (rev. & ed.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, 2000), 478.

⁶¹ Daniel R. Schwartz, “‘Judean’ or ‘Jew’? How Should We Translate *Ioudaios* in Josephus?” in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, J. Frey, D. Schwartz, and S. Gripentrog, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 5.

informs us that words which contained some form of the word Ἰουδαία (Judaea) were used in a proper and restricted sense: as geographical indicators referring to the region around Jerusalem and/or to the regions of Palestine. Consequently, according to Schwartz, people called Ἰουδαῖοι were clearly linked with a region of land.⁶² But does an association with a specific religious practice stem from the root meaning of the term? If we follow Daniel Schwartz, then not necessarily.

If Ἰουδαίος is essentially a geographic reference, it indicates nothing explicitly about one's religious practice. In this way, the inherent allusion to a location in the term is much less nebulous than attempting to pin down a religion with diverse belief and practice. But as Steve Mason contends, there seems to be no evidence at all for someone we, in the modern age, would classify as a non-Jew being called a Ἰουδαίος – that is, someone from Judaea but not practicing Judaism.⁶³ Shaye Cohen asserts that although the term Ἰουδαίος was used in antiquity to denote people from a geographic location, there was not any reason to think (in the ancient mind) that any “ethnic-geographic Judaeans were not also Jews [in respect to their religion].”⁶⁴ If Cohen is correct, religious affiliation could also be marked by the term. This is evident, for instance, in 2 Maccabees. 2 Maccabees employs the term Ἰουδαίος to define a person by relation to religious practice, rather than location.⁶⁵ Similarly, Mason holds that the term Ἰουδαίος contained an innate notion of religious practice, or at least practices that differed from normative Greco-

⁶² D. Schwartz, 8: Josephus provides a “quite explicit and prestigious piece of evidence for the claim that Ἰουδαίος denotes a person by reference to his or her geographical origin” in *Against Apion* 1.177 ff. and *Jewish Antiquities* 18.196.

⁶³ Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* Vol. 38 No. 4 (2007), 489-510.

⁶⁴ Shaye D. Cohen, “ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΣ ΤΟ ΓΕΝΟΣ and Related Expressions in Josephus,” in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Essays in Memory of Morton Smith*, F. Parente and J. Sievers, eds. (Leiden, 1994), 25.

⁶⁵ 2 Maccabees 9.17: “and in addition to all this he also would become a Jew (Ἰουδαῖον ἔσεσθαι) and would visit every inhabited place to proclaim the power of God.”

Roman society. He argues that in antiquity the term Ἰουδαίος was not used to signify a religion nor was it a definitive geographic marker, but an ἔθνος, “a people comparable and contrastable with other peoples,” such as Spartans or Cretans.⁶⁶ Likewise, Daniel Boyarin argues that in antiquity Jews perceived themselves in terms of shared descent and kinship as well as in terms of shared religion and culture.⁶⁷

Considering that for modern scholars the ambiguity of the term “Jew” derives from the question of the relationship between ethnicity and religion, when these factors do not correspond, confusion ensues. Namely, how should adherents of Judaism who are not ethnically Jewish be classified? Similarly, how should those of Jewish birth who are not adherents of Judaism be classified? When trying to untangle these elements for individuals in antiquity, attempting to define Jewish identity is further complicated. Therefore, it is critical to understand that there were different ways of being Jewish in antiquity – the lines between Jewish and polytheistic cultural practices were often quite blurry. For instance, in his argument on the subject of Jewish identity after the destruction of the Second Temple, Seth Schwartz presents evidence of Jews who behaved in a “pagan” manner (i.e. people with Jewish names making pagan dedications in Scythopolis).⁶⁸ Schwartz explains that the Jewish population included “people who compartmentalized (e.g. they refrained from eating pork and circumcised their sons but participated without hesitation in public festivals).”⁶⁹ Can these people be classified as Jewish?

⁶⁶ Mason, 489-490. Mason explains that Greek curiosity resulted in an ethnographic enterprise, which labeled the various groups that inhabited the earth as peoples or nations (ἔθνη, *nationes*). Subsequent writers used the term ἔθνος as “an exceptionally robust taxonomy for classifying the social phenomena they saw around them” (483).

⁶⁷ Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 2-8. Similarly, D.K. Buell argues that having a distinct religion was a normal part of having a distinct culture; see Buell, “Rethinking the Relevance of Race for Early Christian Self-Definition,” *Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 94 (2001), 458-460.

⁶⁸ Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BCE to 640 BCE* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 175-176.

Isabella Sandwell argues that in contrast to our modern perceptions, ancient people “might not have chosen to see religious interaction as interaction between two mutually opposed and strongly bounded entities. Instead, they might have played up the similarities across religious boundaries, emphasized areas of compromise and allowed people to switch easily between religious allegiances.”⁷⁰ In attempting to identify Jews in antiquity Fergus Millar cautions that scholars should not adopt an “either/or” attitude, noting that Jews may have “appropriated pagan material culture within a Jewish context . . . that defies homogeneity.”⁷¹

In other words, Jews could be Jews within a polytheistic context. Being Jewish and being Roman were not mutually exclusive identities; religious activity and interaction did not require a fixed identity. Religious identity is often “the site of syncretism,” a “mixed and undifferentiated state that exists prior to attempts to create pure traditions and identities.”⁷² Consequently, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the identity of an ethnic Jew who has abandoned Judaism or that of a religiously devout Jew acting within Graeco-Roman cultural paradigms. The integration of Jews into polytheistic society is well reflected in the Diaspora where “Jews responded in a variety of ways to their setting but were often successful in retaining their own sense of identity” as evidenced by worship spaces, funerary customs, or distinctly Jewish symbols contained within broader Roman culture.⁷³ Considering that in Diaspora communities Jewish individuals were quite often living and participating in polytheistic culture to varying degrees, it is an ambiguous venture to attempt to determine Jewish identity based solely, for

⁷⁰ Sandwell, 4.

⁷¹ Fergus Millar, “Roman Imperialism, Jewish Self-Definition, and Rabbinic Society: Belayche’s *IUDEA-PALAESTINA*, Schwartz’s *IMPERIALISM AND JEWISH SOCIETY*, and Boyarin’s *BORDER LINES* Reconsidered,” *American Journal of Scientific Research* 31 (2007), 348.

⁷² Sandwell, 245.

⁷³ James Carleton Paget, *Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 404.

instance, on onomastic inscriptions which cannot, alone, attest to religiosity or national affiliation.

We cannot assume that an individual Ἰουδαίος would necessarily have taken part (only) in Jewish religious practices or would have (only) associated with other Ἰουδαῖοι. When reconstructing the past, we must acknowledge that “ancient conditions, terminology, and categories were different from our own.”⁷⁴ In some instances, there is no great harm in using familiar terms and categories which can explain the historical situation, but this is not the case when a paucity of evidence, as in Pompeii, does not reveal any Jewish religious practice nor, to be more exact, confirm the presence of Judaeans. In such a case, distinctions must be made and definitions must be given. Valid, logical, precise, verifiable, and falsifiable criteria must be employed and repeatable by all researchers.

Therefore, given the various degrees of cultural assimilation, in the absence of explicit evidence it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish between Jewish, pagan, or even Christian inscriptions. Due to this dilemma, few epigraphers have delineated a comprehensive set of criteria for designating inscriptions as Jewish. Those who have attempted to impose criteria, as Ross Kraemer observes, have done little more than provide a list of characteristics based on “unsubstantiated assumptions” about Jews.⁷⁵ In 1909 Johannes Oehler listed five criteria for identifying a Jewish inscription. At least one or more criteria must appear in the inscription: 1) the term *Iudaeus/a* or Ἰουδαῖος/α; 2) the seven-branched candelabra; 3) the word shalom; 4) the phrase εἰς θεός (God is one); 5) the phrase θάρσι, οὐδείς ἀθάνατος (courage, no one is

⁷⁴ Mason, 511. To support this, Mason comments that Hellas is not modern Greece; the *Germani* mentioned by Tacitus are not Germans; Czar is not the same as *Caesar*; and prince is not the same as *princeps*. The ancient words mean something very different from the modern ones. In the same way Ἰουδαῖος does not correspond to our modern word “Jew.”

⁷⁵ Ross S. Kraemer, “Jewish Tuna and Christian Fish: Identifying Religious Affiliation in Epigraphic Sources,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 84 no. 2 (April 1991), 142.

immortal).⁷⁶ In 1987 Larry H. Kant offered six criteria for classifying an inscription as Jewish. Following Oehler, at least one or more criteria must appear in the inscription: 1) symbols (menorah, shofar, etc.); 2) self-identification (expressed in the use of the term ‘Jew’); 3) Jewish names; 4) reference to Jewish religious customs; 5) Presence in a Jewish catacomb or cemetery; 6) mention of a synagogue or synagogue office.⁷⁷ David Noy has proposed five criteria for identifying a Jewish inscription. Again, one or more criteria must be located in the inscription: 1) the use of Hebrew or Aramaic; 2) the use of specifically Jewish symbols; 3) the use of Jewish terminology; 4) the use of distinctively Jewish names where there are no indications that the inscription is Christian or pagan; 5) provenance from a Jewish catacomb.⁷⁸ Most recently, Walter Ameling has listed five criteria: 1) the identification of persons as *Ioudaioi*; 2) mention of Jewish *realia*, such as feasts, scriptures or synagogues; 3) provenance from unquestionably Jewish buildings or exclusively Jewish catacombs; 4) occurrence of Jewish symbols; 5) the use of Hebrew.⁷⁹ Some of the criteria are more decisive than others, such as provenance from a Jewish catacomb, or even a synagogue. Yet the identification of a Jewish location does not conclusively assuage potential methodological issues. Employing a single criterion is a slippery practice that can often lead to a suspect conclusion. Pieter van der Horst wisely cautions that a criterion “should never be used in isolation but always in combination” with other criteria.⁸⁰ However, van der Horst’s advice has rarely been employed.

⁷⁶ Johannes Oehler, “Epigraphische Beiträge zur Geschichte des Judentums,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 53 (1909), 292-302.

⁷⁷ Larry H. Kant, “Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II* Vol. 20, No. 2 (1987), 671-713.

⁷⁸ Noy, ix.

⁷⁹ Walter Ameling, “Preface,” *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*: Vol. II, *Asia Minor*; Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, Walter Ameling, ed. (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2004).

⁸⁰ van der Horst, *Jews and Christians in Their Graeco-Roman Context*, 73.

The practice of creating normative lists of criteria for Jewish identification has produced two critical assumptions in modern scholarship: 1) that Jews in antiquity were *always* somehow recognizable as Jews; and 2) that Jews, Christians and pagans were mutually exclusive categories.⁸¹ Considering these assumptions, the classification of inscriptions as Jewish has been predominately based on positive indicators of Jewishness (e.g. a menorah) and the absence of negative indicators (e.g. the presence of a “pagan” formulaic phrase, such as *dis manibus*). Both positive and negative indicators are derived from the normative assumptions made by scholars about Jews living in antiquity. And although some criteria found in these lists may be useful tools for identifying inscriptions as Jewish, the process of creating such lists is, by and large, dispensable; identifying inscriptions is not so black and white.

In order to avoid any assumptive guesswork, I, following the methodology proposed by Ross Kramer, assert that it is necessary to work “deductively” – to proceed from the known to the unknown in classifying any inscription as Jewish or non-Jewish.⁸² To do this, we need to reconsider the Jewishness of the inscriptions designated as Jewish. We also need to ask how grounded the criteria have been for categorizing Jewish inscriptions and assess our assumptions about Jewish social identity in antiquity.⁸³ It is one thing to postulate that that an individual was a Ἰουδαίος (in the ancient sense), but it is another to assume anything about the person’s religious practice. And, as Kraemer reminds us, we need to be mindful of the fluidity of social relations and religion in the ancient world.⁸⁴ In antiquity there was diversity among Jews and varying degrees of adherence to Judaism. Accordingly, there is no hard and fast categorization or easy

⁸¹ Kraemer, “Jewish Tuna and Christian Fish,” 142.

⁸² Ibid., 142. Kramer assesses the problematic situation scholars face when attempting to differentiate the religious identity of Jewish, Christian, and pagan individuals.

⁸³ Ibid., 161.

⁸⁴ Ross S. Kraemer, “On the Meaning of the Term ‘Jew’ in Greco-Roman Inscriptions,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 82 no.1 (January 1989), 36.

method that can be used to designate inscriptions as Jewish. In fact, many inscriptions made by Jews likely do not contain any specifically Jewish elements and, consequently, we will never know that they were Jewish.

IV. The Jewish Epigraphic Evidence from Pompeii

4.1 Methods and Limitations

The range of historical issues that inscriptions illuminate is very broad. As such, the variety of methods for approaching epigraphic data is extremely diverse and often dependent on the methodology utilized in a specific field. Accordingly, there is not a single or correct way to approach epigraphic evidence. Consequently, in order to gain any useful information from epigraphic data well-directed questions must be asked and analytical tools suitable to the task must be employed and “applied with care.”⁸⁵ In the case of the inscriptions at Pompeii, we need to simply ask: what makes an inscription Jewish? Is it written by a Jew? Does it point to the existence of a Jewish individual? Does it indicate Jewish religious practice? Previous scholarship has often jumbled these questions, confusing the different layers. For me, in order to identify an inscription as Jewish, the inscription must point to the existence of a Jewish person or persons (through text or symbol), either through self-identification or through third-party identification.

In attempting to determine the Jewishness of the inscriptions at Pompeii, the tools of a historian, archaeologist, prosopographer, and philologist must be combined. Additionally, in assessing the inscriptions from Pompeii, a broader knowledge of similar inscriptions from different locations in the same period is necessary in order to recognize conventional and distinctive features.⁸⁶

The analysis of the epigraphic data is complicated by the poor condition of many of the surviving inscriptions. In many cases words and letters are faded, abraded or missing. The process of restoring inscriptions is “normally a precarious venture” since this cannot always be

⁸⁵ Bodel, 4-5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

executed with complete certainty.⁸⁷ When it is possible to render translations of inscriptions, they are only interpretative approximations, which cannot fully capture the nuances of the text outside of its original context. Additionally, many inscriptions are no longer extant and only preserved by the sketches and transcriptions of eighteenth and nineteenth century excavators. Because there are no original texts to compare the copies with, it is impossible to determine the accuracy of these inscriptions (and, in most cases, there is no photograph). Early excavation records are also very suspect due to poor archaeological method.

The earliest excavations at Pompeii (1748-1815) were not scientific in nature, but a means for building collections of antiquities.⁸⁸ During this time, excavation records were kept exclusively for “bureaucratic and administrative purposes.”⁸⁹ Only artifacts of artistic beauty were recorded in excavation journals, but without mention of find location. Other more mundane artifacts were either discarded or destroyed. Consequently, it is likely that many artifacts that contained inscriptions (such as amphorae or wall decorations), which seemed banal to excavators, have been lost to posterity. The records of finds in excavation journals remained scant and incomplete through the late 1800’s.⁹⁰ In the early 1900’s the first technical drawings emerged (as opposed to artistic drawings) as a systematic way to document the excavations. Photography also became the primary means of recording the excavation process.

The condition of the so-called Jewish inscriptions is varied: some are no longer visible and documented only in transcriptions in the *CIL*; others are damaged or severely faded; and

⁸⁷ Christopher A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 4-5.

⁸⁸ Objects that caught the eye of excavators were carted off to the Portici Museum (the Bourbon royal palace).

⁸⁹ Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei. <http://www.pompeisites.org/>.

⁹⁰ The first major collection of engravings and drawings were published between 1824-1838 in Charles Mazoi’s *Les ruines de Pompei*. In 1851 Alfred Nicholas Normand produced the first complete set of photographs of Pompeii. The graphic documentation of Mazoi and Normand are often the only surviving evidence of objects or works that have long since deteriorated.

others, generally incised inscriptions, remain *in situ*. From the thousands of inscriptions found at Pompeii, only a handful – anywhere from three to more than twenty depending on who is asked – suggest a Jewish presence in the city. When working with such a small data set, it is often difficult to fit inscriptions into a distinct historical context as the content is often vague or uncertain. When assessing these few inscriptions, scholars have easily fallen into the trap of what Willem Jongman has termed, “the positivist fallacy.” This is the scholarly conviction that archaeological remains are unproblematic and representative of a pristine picture of the past.⁹¹ As a result of this conviction, the evidence at Pompeii has been generalized and overread, leading to the presumption that a religious community of Jews existed in Pompeii.

To remedy this issue, I will use three tenets delineated by David Hackett Fischer for factual verification relevant to this study. First, he states that there must be a “satisfactory relationship between the *factum probandum* (proposition to be proved) and the *factum probans* (the material offered as proof).” In other words, the evidence must be relevant to the hypothesis, eradicating guesswork, assumption, and contrived connections; the historian must “get the right facts right.” Second, he advocates that “evidence must always be affirmative.” The non-existence of an item or group cannot be established by the absence of evidence. On the contrary, affirmative evidence must be offered that the item or group could not or did not exist. Third, he proffers the notion that all inferences derived from empirical evidence are “probabilistic.” It is not enough, he writes, for historians to demonstrate a possibility of any given case, but to determine the probability of that case. According to Fischer, failing to follow these precepts takes a “heavy toll” on historiography.⁹²

⁹¹ Willem M. Jongman, “The Loss of Innocence: Pompeian Economy and Society between Past and Present,” *The World of Pompeii*, John J. Dobbins and Pedar W. Foss, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 504.

⁹² Fischer, 62-63.

It is imperative that these methodological tenets remain at the forefront of this investigation. In this way, there is a systematic structure for logical historical analysis, so as to not approach this methodologically problematic study with hesitation or determinism. It is my intent to approach the epigraphic evidence at Pompeii with a degree of rigor, rooted in Fischer's tenets, absent from previous studies.

There is no uniformly agreed upon corpus of Jewish inscriptions from Pompeii since scholars employ varying criteria for designating an inscription as Jewish. J.B. Frey (1936, first edition), for instance, recognizes six inscriptions as Jewish, David Noy (1993) identifies three, and Giordano and Kahn (2001, second edition) catalog twenty-plus inscriptions. My exploration of the epigraphic data will touch on those enumerated by Giordano and Kahn, since they generate the most exhaustive list of evidence for a Jewish community. Even though there is no consensus on the identification of the inscriptions, there is general agreement that the material remains date to no later than 79 CE when Pompeii was destroyed. However, in one specific case, I call this assumption into question.

In what follows each inscription is evaluated according to its archaeological, social, and philological context. I separate the epigraphic evidence into two distinct groups: graffiti and amphorae inscriptions. The graffiti category is further divided into two subcategories: onomastic inscriptions and miscellaneous inscriptions.⁹³ An analysis of this evidence reveals why it is unreasonable to conclude that a permanent, organized Jewish community existed in Pompeii.

I begin with an examination of solitary onomastic inscriptions lacking any other written context within which to orient the name. Then, I consider onomastic inscriptions that appear within a broader written context, such as electoral notices. Next, I address miscellaneous

⁹³ A map of the find locations of all the Jewish (and Christian) inscriptions can be found in the appendix (fig. 1). Additionally, images and transcriptions of some of the inscriptions (when available) are included in the appendix.

inscriptions, which include possible biblical allusions and sales receipts. I end my analysis with the investigation of inscribed amphorae, which have been regarded as the product of a Jewish Pompeian wine merchant or as holding kosher contents.

4.2 Onomastic Inscriptions

Applied onomastics seeks to determine the geographical distribution of names, then makes conclusions based on someone's name that he/she probably came from a certain geographical location.⁹⁴ In Pompeii, the "Jewish" onomastic inscriptions all contain names which are decidedly Semitic in origin. Considering this, many scholars have concluded that the names *must* be linked to Jewish people. However, the presence of a Semitic name alone does not necessarily indicate a Jewish individual, much less the presence of a cohesive Jewish community. Many graffiti are "spontaneous and unauthorized,"⁹⁵ therefore, it is difficult, if not impossible, to connect a disembodied name with the cultural context into which it fits and ultimately draw a conclusion. Additionally, as will be made evident, "there are very few names (if any) which can be demonstrated to have been used only by Jews."⁹⁶ That is, Semitic names may have been used by Jews/Judaeans, but could also have been used by persons from another eastern Mediterranean province occupied by the Romans. However, before continuing, it is important to mention a significant observation concerning the onomastic inscriptions: no names of Semitic origin have been found in the oldest inscriptions from Pompeii. The inscriptions containing such names date from the final years of the city, which may indicate that these inscriptions are representative of prisoners of war from the First Jewish Revolt.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Ollie Salomies, "Names and Identities: Onomastics and Prosopography," *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient History from Inscriptions*, John Bodel, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 77.

⁹⁵ Rex E. Wallace, *An Introduction to Wall Inscriptions from Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 2005), x.

⁹⁶ van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 17.

⁹⁷ Giordano and Kahn, 54.

A name can often be the most telling aspect of an inscription. For instance, information about class structure can be gleaned through the configuration of a name. The name of an elite Roman male citizen was composed of three parts: the *praenomen*, *nomen*, and *cognomen* (also known as the *tria nomina*).⁹⁸ The *praenomen* was typically abbreviated with one letter; the *nomen* indicated the family name or clan name; and the *cognomen* augmented the *nomen* as a distinctive family name or nickname. The names of Roman women, on the other hand, only consisted of a *nomen*. Often appearing after the names for both men and women was a filiation, indicating the father of a freeborn person or the master of a freed person.⁹⁹ Contrary to the formal structure of a Roman name, the name of a slave was generally characterized by a single name (that is, a name lacking a *cognomen*).¹⁰⁰ Slave names were also usually easily distinguished from Roman names.¹⁰¹ However, after being freed, a slave would often appropriate his master's *praenomen* and *nomen*, using his own name as his *cognomen*.¹⁰²

4.2.1 A. COSS LIBAN (bronze seal)

Many of the inscriptions bearing names presumed to be Semitic contain only the name itself with no other information with which to orient it. For instance, within the House of Sallust (VI.ii.4), a bronze seal was found inscribed with the name A. Coss Liban (fig. 2).¹⁰³ According to August Mau, the House of Sallust was turned into a hotel and restaurant in the early part of the

⁹⁸ This is not a fixed rule. For instance, prominent plebians often had two names.

⁹⁹ Salomies, 84.

¹⁰⁰ Joanne Berry, *The Complete Pompeii* (New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., 2007), 91.

¹⁰¹ Alison E. Cooley and M.G.L. Cooley, *Pompeii: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 241.

¹⁰² Roman slaves often took their master's *nomen* in the genitive (i.e. *Caesaris*: "property of Caesar"). Slaves could often be distinguished by names which showed their national origin (i.e. *Britannicus*: "from Britannia"). When a slave changed masters he often modified his former master's name to an adjectival form ending in -anus (i.e. *Cissus Maecenatianus*: "the former slave of Maecenas"); see Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery* Vol. 1 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1997), 455.

¹⁰³ *CIL* X, 8058. Also see Matteo della Corte, *Case ed Abitanti di Pompei* (Naples: Fausto Fiorentino, 1965), 38.

Roman Empire.¹⁰⁴ Based on this supposition, Giordano and Kahn argue that A. Coss Liban was a freedman and “very probably the proprietor or the manager” of the hotel connected to the house. “Liban,” they claim, is the latinized version of an originally Semitic name, “Libanus,” originating from the identically named mountain between Palestine and Syria.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, they suggest that the *nomen* “Cossius” confirms the eastern nature of the man, noting that Cossius might refer to the Cossiei people from Susiana as described by Pliny in *Natural History* 6.31. Or, they suggest, Cossius could be derived from the geographical area of Cush, which had frequent contact with Jews as evidenced in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 10:6; Isaiah 18:1; and Esther 1:1).¹⁰⁶

Giordano and Kahn’s reasoning for the Semitic nature of this name is purely conjectural; the connections to geographical locations are especially tenuous. Contrary to their conclusion about the name Cossius, Tal Ilan documents that it is derived strictly from the Roman *gentilicium*

¹⁰⁴ Mau supposes this adaptation based on two archaeological observations, namely, that a shop connected to the left of the house opened to both the street and the atrium and that a shop on the right of the house likewise opened to the street and also the fauces, atrium, and side room; see Mau *Pompeii: It’s Life and Art*, 281.

¹⁰⁵ H.J. Leon records that the only other attestations of the name Libanus appear in two eighteenth century Vatican manuscripts. The manuscripts record a partial inscription, originally made on stone. However, the date of the inscription, the provenance of the stone, and the date of copy into the manuscript are all unknown. J.B. Frey has suggested that the inscription may contain a reference to a Roman synagogue. The inscription reads: ἔνθα κίτε Ἀλεξάν[δρα] / θυγάτηρ τοῦ Ἀλεξάν[δρου] / ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως Ἀρκ[ῆς Λι]β / άνου ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἢ κύ[μησι]ς / αὐτῆς ἔζησε ἐτῶν [. . .] / μην(ῶν) ὄ ἡμερ(ῶν) θ̄ . Frey provides an alternative reading to line three: ἀπὸ τῆς συναγ Ἀρκ[ῆς Λι]β. For Frey, this reading provides a basis for a synagogue of Arca of Libanus at Rome (Frey understands Libanus to mean Lebanon). Frey argues that since this was the birth place of the Emperor Alexander Severus (r. 222-235 CE), many of its inhabitants, including Jews, were attracted to Rome and subsequently moved there. Frey further asserts that Alexander Severus probably built the synagogue. As a result, he claims that the father and daughter in the inscription are the namesakes of their patron. More so, he asserts that this synagogue is the same synagogue that was known as the Synagogue of Severus in the Middle Ages. However, as Leon notes, Frey’s view does not hold up under scrutiny. First, the names Alexander and Alexandra were very common. Second, and most importantly, the word synagogue does not actually exist in the inscription, it is only his reconstruction. Leon also notes that the appearance of συναγ would be unusual since the word συναγωγὴ has not been found abbreviated in any extant manuscript. Also, since the lambda and iota of “Libanus” are missing, there can be no hard and fast conclusion that “Libanus” is the missing word. Accordingly, the Jewishness of those referred to in the inscription cannot be verified; see J.B. Frey *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum: Jewish Inscriptions from the 3rd Century BC to the 7th Century AD, Vol. 1: Europe* (New York: KTAV Publishing House Inc., 1975), 365-366; and Leon, 163-165, 338. Along this same line Giordano and Kahn categorize the name Libanos, which appears three times in the Villa of Mysteries, as the vestiges of a Jewish servant (43).

¹⁰⁶ Giordano and Kahn, 42.

Cosius.¹⁰⁷ If this is the case, the name could not possibly have roots in the Cossiei people of Susiana, thus negating the “confirmation” of its Eastern origin. Similarly, Heikki Solin categorizes the name Libanus (Latin)/Libanos (Greek) as Greek in origin, noting that the name describes either freed persons and slaves or people of uncertain social standing, but is not an indicator of Jewishness.¹⁰⁸ To be fair, however, many Jews did have Latin names. This is evidenced by the names of rabbis (Drusus, Marinus, Valens, Romanus, Justus and Titus) in Mishnaic and Talmudic literature.¹⁰⁹ But there is nothing specific in this name or its provenance to conclude that A. Coss. Liban was Jewish.

4.3 Onomastic Inscriptions with Context

Onomastic inscriptions which are contained within additional text yield more information about the cultural or social context of the individuals. From these types of inscriptions, more so than solitary onomastic inscriptions, details about the individual can be gauged through, among other things, employment details.

4.3.1 JONAS (graffiti)

Giordano and Kahn record that the name Jonas or Jonah (Ionas) appears three times in Pompeii: once in isolation and in two other instances embedded in text (figs. 3-5).¹¹⁰ Each of the inscriptions appears in the same location, on the wall of a tavern, between the 7th and 8th doors on the Stabian Way. Aside from Giordano and Kahn, no other recent scholarship mentions these inscriptions as possibly referring to Jews. In my estimation, this is simply because Giordano and

¹⁰⁷ Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity, Part III: The Western Diaspora 330 BCE - 650 CE* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 19. Ilan notes that this name often has spelling variations as a result of being transliterated back and forth between Latin and Greek. It may appear with double or single consonants and frequent interchanges between an ‘ius’ and ‘us’ suffix.

¹⁰⁸ Heikki Solin, *Die griechischen Personennamen in Rom*, vol. 1. (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2003), 692-693.

¹⁰⁹ Benzion C. Kaganoff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Names and their History* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), 44.

¹¹⁰ Giordano and Kahn, 47.

Kahn overread the evidence and perpetuate an outdated assumption.¹¹¹ The entries for these inscriptions in the *CIL* record the name as Ionis.¹¹² Solin, examining evidence from Rome, categorizes Ionis as a specifically Greek feminine name.¹¹³ Consequently, the Ionis graffiti from Pompeii could likewise refer to a female, rather than a male. The two Ionis inscriptions which appear with additional text seem to reinforce this notion. The graffiti read: *Ionis cu[m] filiito / hic / fillat* (Ionis fellates with Philetus(?) here), and *Ionis Fiilat* (Ionis fellates). Thus, Ionis was probably a Greek female prostitute, likely a slave, who worked in or around the tavern. The graffiti were possibly written by a client – a common practice in erotic graffiti at Pompeii. Since both the context and etymology of Ionis seems to signal a Greek female, the name appearing on the tavern wall has nothing to do with Jonas or Jonah. As a result, the Jewishness of the name can be dismissed.¹¹⁴

4.3.2 MARIA (graffiti and *dipinti*)

The name Maria appears three different times throughout Pompeii. The first appearance of the name comes from the peristyle of a textile shop in the home of M. Terentius Eudoxus (VI.xiii.5), also known as the House of the Tragic Poet, on the Via della Fortuna. A graffito on the portico detailing the tasks of some of the laborers relates the work done by a woman named

¹¹¹ Giordano and Kahn get their information from A.W. VanBuren, who asserts that Ionis (as the inscriptions are recorded in the *CIL*) should be read as IONAS since the difference between an ‘I’ and an ‘A’ in the Latin script was negligible; a single line; see A.W. VanBuren, “Epigraphical Salvage from Pompeii,” *The American Journal of Philology*, vol. 47, no. 2 (1926), 178.

¹¹² *CIL* IV, 2402, 2403, and 2406. The editor notes, however, that the ‘I’ in 2406 could be an ‘A’, but is difficult to read. However, based on the intelligible reading of Ionis in the two other inscriptions, 2406 is likely referring to the same person. Additionally, the *CIL* records that all the inscriptions are written in the same hand.

¹¹³ Solin, *Die griechischen Personennamen in Rom* vol. 1, 626-627.

¹¹⁴ The latter two Ionis graffiti are very similar to another graffito that Giordano and Kahn link to a Jewish individual. They proffer that Libanis is a Jewish man servant (53-54). However, nearly identical to the Ionis graffito the Libanis inscription (*CIL* IV, 2028) reads: *Libanis / fel(l)at / a(ssibus) II*. Just as Giordano and Kahn mistake Ionis for the masculine Jonas, so too they mistake Libanis, a female, for the masculine Libanos/us. In this case, as indicated by the Ionis graffiti, Libanis is likely a female prostitute of Greek origin selling her services for two *asses*, copper coins (cf. Heikki Solin’s assessment of the origins of the name Libanus in the discussion of A. Coss Liban above and my assessment of the “Maria” inscription from the House of the Four Styles below).

Maria.¹¹⁵ The inscription reads: *Maria Pii Stamiin*.¹¹⁶ While the full meaning of the inscription remains unclear, it seems to indicate that Maria was a laborer who worked with wool, since *stamiin* refers to a loom or thread. Frey, intent to clarify any ambiguity about her profession, reads the second word differently: he claims that *Pii* is actually *Pensi* (wool given to be spun).¹¹⁷ Frey's reading emphasizes that Maria was a wool worker. Based on his interpretation, he further conjectures that since she worked in a textile shop, she was a slave. Frey supports this claim by noting that names of other laborers also appeared on the wall, which he suggests indicates a large-scale textile operation in the house. Walter Moeller details that the names on this wall consisted of seven male weavers and eleven female spinners: Vebius (or Vesbius) Tamudianus, Felix, Ephesus, Xanthus, Successus, Faustus, Florus, Vitalis, Florentina, Amarylis, Ianuaria, Heraclea, Lelage, Damalis, Servola, Baptis, Doris, and Maria.¹¹⁸

In addition to the name Maria, Matteo della Corte points out another name from the wall as distinctly Jewish: Vesbius Tamudianus.¹¹⁹ He asserts that the "ethnic name" Tamudianus reflects a Jewish person from the town of Tamud (or Thamud), located in the northern region of Arabia Felix, which he considered, at some point, to have been joined to Israel.¹²⁰ Considering

¹¹⁵ Giordano and Kahn, 49.

¹¹⁶ *CIL* IV, 1507. Noy tentatively translates it as: "Maria (works at?) the warp of the wool-work (?)" (295).

¹¹⁷ J. B. Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum: Jewish Inscriptions from the 3rd Century BC to the 7th Century AD, Vol. I Europe* (New York: KTAV Publishing House Inc., 1975), 416: like Noy, he asserts that *stamiin* should be understood to mean "the warp of the loom."

¹¹⁸ Walter O. Moeller, *The Wool Trade of Ancient Pompeii* (Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1976), 40.

¹¹⁹ *CIL* IV, 1493.

¹²⁰ Matteo della Corte, *Casa dei abitanti in Pompei* (Rome, 1954), 98. The location of Tamud is near modern day Al-Hijr (Madain Saleh) on the coast of the Arabian Gulf. The oldest mention of Tamud comes from an inscription by the king of Assyria, Sargon II: "Upon a trust (-inspiring oracle given by) my lord Ashur, I crushed the tribes of Tamud, Ibadidi, Marsimanu, and Haiapa, the Arabs who live, far away, in the desert . . ."; see A. Leo Oppenheim, "Sargon II (721-705 BCE): The Fall of Samaria," in *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, James B. Pritchard, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 266. The people of Tamud are also mentioned by Ptolemy (Θαμυδιται) and Pliny (*Tamudaei*) in their geographical descriptions of Arabia; see Ptolemy 6.7.4 and Pliny, *Natural History* 6.32.157. Tamud is also made famous in the Qur'an as the city that was destroyed by a terrible sound from heaven after the city's inhabitants slaughtered the camel of the prophet Saleh (7.73-78); see Philip Hitti, *A History of the Arabs* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), 30.

the presence of Tamudianus, whom he considered a Jew, della Corte surmised that Maria also had to be a Jew, coming from the same place. Giordano and Kahn argue that della Corte's geographical connection is tenuous. They disagree that Israel, even at its greatest expansion, was ever joined to Tamud, asserting that the people of Tamud were of Arabian, not Judaeian descent. As a result, in their view, Tamudianus could not be Jewish. They do not, however, disaffirm the Jewishness of Maria.¹²¹ Both della Corte and Giordano and Kahn's conclusions seem to be overreaching. In antiquity Tamud was situated on a caravan trade route between the Arabian Peninsula, the Mediterranean, and Asia, thus bearing witness to a variety of cultures and people.¹²² Accordingly, it is not out of the question that a group of Jews could have lived in Tamud (as they did in other cities throughout the Arabian peninsula) and somehow ended up in Pompeii. But in the case of Tamudianus, there are no clues given about his religious affiliation. We also cannot connect him with Maria in any context outside of the textile shop.

David Noy questions both Frey's reading of the inscription and the assumption that Maria was a Jew. He notes that the addenda to the *CIL* explain that *Pii* should be read as *P.III* (an abbreviation followed by a Roman numeral). The significance of this rendering is unclear. Noy also repudiates the notion that Maria is a Hebrew name. Instead, he recognizes it to be the feminine version of the Latin name Marius.¹²³ August Mau, however, dismisses this idea, stating that while the Marian family "was well represented at Pompeii, the Roman name Maria could not have been given to a slave" because such an act would diminish the reputation of the family.¹²⁴

The second mention of a Maria was found near the door on the outer wall of the *Thermopolium* of Asellina (IX.xi.2). A *dipinto* written in red ink endorsed a political candidate:

¹²¹ Giordano and Kahn, 52.

¹²² "Al-Hijr Archaeological Site," www.unesco.org/en/list/1293

¹²³ Noy, 295.

¹²⁴ Mau, 18.

Cn(aeum) Helvium Sabinam / aed(ilem) d(ignum) r(e) p(ublica) o(ro) v(os) f(aciatis). Maria rogat (fig. 6).¹²⁵ Similar electoral notices featuring the names Aegle and Zmyrina also appeared near this *dipinto*. To the left of the door: *Cn(aeum) Halvium Sabinum / aed(ilem) d(ignum) r(ei) p(ublicae) o(ro) v(os) f(aciatis). Aegle rogat*;¹²⁶ on the other side of the door: *C(aium) Lollium Fuscum Iivir(um) v(iis) a(edibus) s(acris) p(ublicis) p(rocurandis) Asellinas rogant nec sine Zmyrina*;¹²⁷ and below this *dipinto*: *C(aium) Iulium Polybium Iivir(um) i(ure) d(icundo) [Zmyrina] rog(at)*.¹²⁸ Della Corte assumes that the women mentioned in these election notices were servants of Asellina, the owner of the *thermopolium*.¹²⁹ Their status as slaves is based on two assumptions: the foreign origins of their names¹³⁰; and the supposition that since their names appear on an election notice outside the *thermopolium*, they were servants inside. Giordano and Kahn note that Aegle is a Greek name, Zmyrina is an Asian name and Maria a Semitic name. Thus, they suggest that these women were captured, exported from their homeland and enslaved.¹³¹ However, Maria is the only name of the group thought to represent a Jew.

The final appearance of the name Maria comes from an inscription in the House of the Four Styles (I.viii.7). To the right of the rear door, etched into the plaster, the inscription reads: *III III / Maria II s(emissem)*.¹³² Antonio Varone links this graffito to prostitution – he considers

¹²⁵ *CIL* IV, 7866. Noy translates it as: “I ask you to make Cn. Helvius Sabinus aedile. (He is) worthy of the community. Maria makes the request” (296).

¹²⁶ *CIL* IV, 7862. “I beg you to elect Cn. Helvius Sabinus aedile, worthy of public office. Aegle asks for this.”

¹²⁷ *CIL* IV, 7863. “Asellina, not without Zmyrina, asks [you to elect] Gaius Lollius Fuscus duovir for the purpose of attending to the public roads to the sacred temples.”

¹²⁸ *CIL* IV, 7864. “[Zmyrina] asks [you to elect] Gaius Iulius Polybium duovir for the purpose of administering justice.”

¹²⁹ Matteo della Corte, *Case ed Abitanti di Pompei* (Naples: Fausto Fiorentino, 1965), 308.

John DeFelice notes that in opposition to the foreign names, Asellina is a form of an old Roman name (see DeFelice, “Inns and Taverns,” in *The World of Pompeii*, J. Dobbins and Pedar W. Foss, eds., (New York: Routledge, 2007), 481).

¹³⁰ Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius*, 191.

¹³¹ Giordano and Kahn, 52. Also see Frey, 416.

¹³² *CIL* IV, 8224. “Maria (preforms services for) two and a half (*asses*).”

Maria to be a prostitute, selling her amorous services for two and a half *asses* (copper coins).¹³³ Varone claims that prostitutes were often slaves and records that “those of the lowest category” would work for little money.¹³⁴ In this case, two and a half *asses* roughly corresponds to a little more than the daily cost of a ration of bread, or a jug of good wine, or two-thirds of a pound of lard, or one half pound of oil.¹³⁵ The notion that Maria was a prostitute-slave is supported by Thomas McGinn, who notes that her price was “weighted toward the lower end of the scale,” as opposed to other women who were asking sixteen *asses* (one *denarius*), eight *asses*, or even six *asses*.¹³⁶ Neither scholar mentions the possible foreign origin of her name, but the assumption is implicit considering her status as a slave. McGinn states that “most prostitutes were slaves, ex-slaves, or at minimum lived in social conditions close to slavery.”¹³⁷ Taking into account only her low asking price, Maria could have been a prostitute, or domestic slave, offering her services in the house.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, it remains unclear if Maria wrote this inscription as a sort of informal advertisement or if it was recorded by her patron.

Giordano and Kahn base their reading of this inscription on the analysis of della Corte, who simply asserts, based on the foreign origin of her name, that Maria was a household slave. However, contrary to the *CIL*, Giordano and Kahn render this inscription as: *Maria es*.¹³⁹ They assume the Jewishness of her name based on its Semitic origin and suppose that she was a

¹³³ Antonio Varone, *Erotica Pompeiana: Love Inscriptions on the Walls of Pompeii*, Ria P. Berg, trans. (Rome: L’erma di Bretschneider, 2002), 150.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹³⁶ Thomas McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 42.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 296.

¹³⁸ McGinn states that prostitutes in the Roman world were mobile; “not only did clients travel to prostitutes, but prostitutes to clients” (27).

¹³⁹ Giordano and Kahn, 54. “You are Maria.” (cf. Matteo della Corte, *Notizie degli Scavi* (1946), 123).

servant inside the house simply because her name appears there. They, however, make no mention of prostitution.

The name Maria, mentioned in these inscriptions, has generally been understood to be the Latin or Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Mary or Miriam (Moses' sister, Gen. 15:20). In the Septuagint, the name Maria appears once (as a translation of Miriam in Num. 12:1). It also appears in the Vulgate, though this Latin translation of the biblical text postdates the destruction of Pompeii. But despite its appearance in the LXX, Tal Ilan argues, like Noy, that it is probably the feminine form of the Latin name Marius.¹⁴⁰ Ilan also asserts that if Maria is not the feminine version of Marius, it is also not an exclusively Jewish name; it is Eastern in origin but does not have exclusive ties to Jews.¹⁴¹ She conversely notes, however, that Jewish women did have this name and that Jews in the Diaspora seem to have had a preference for names that sounded like similar Greek or Latin names.¹⁴² Accordingly, it is extremely difficult to identify a Jewish individual based solely on a name. The identification of Maria as unequivocally Jewish is a conclusion that many scholars have drawn simply because the name translates to a common Hebrew name or because it sounds similar to a Hebrew name. Again, in these three cases, the evidence is ambiguous and the methodology is questionable.

It is telling, however, that two of the three "Maria" inscriptions were found in manufacturing and eating establishments, surrounded by conspicuously foreign names. Inns and taverns (*thermopolia*) were frequently staffed with foreigners and these employees "were

¹⁴⁰ Ilan, 181.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 51. Ilan lists a number of women from Egypt (Antinoopolis), Hieropolis, Cyrenaica, and Asia with this name who are not considered Jewish or whose Jewishness is questionable (179-184).

¹⁴² Ibid., 51.

considered little better than slaves as far as social status was concerned.”¹⁴³ Accordingly, the appearance of foreign names (conjectured to be slaves) on the walls of such establishments was not an unusual or surprising occurrence. Additionally, the labor of slaves in commercial and manufacturing enterprises was essential to the ancient economy and many shops in Pompeii functioned entirely on servile labor.¹⁴⁴ Accordingly, the most that we can surmise from these inscriptions is that the names which they contain may be vestiges of slave laborers.

4.3.3 MARTHA (incised on a wall)

Apart from the three Maria inscriptions, another example of a supposed Jewish name linked to slavery was found in the latrine of the house of A. Rusticus Verus, also known as The House of the Centenary (IX.viii.6): *Marthae hoc Trichilinium / est nam in trichilino / cacat* (fig. 7).¹⁴⁵ The name Martha is also thought to appear elsewhere in the house: the *CIL* records the spelling of the second occurrence as *Marhie*.¹⁴⁶ Both J.B. Frey and David Noy presume that this name should be read as “Martha.”¹⁴⁷ But despite the assumed connection between the two names, it is unclear if the inscriptions are referring to the same person.

Giordano and Kahn assume that Martha is a Jew based on her name, which, they assert, is derived from the Aramaic name Maráh, meaning “lady.”¹⁴⁸ Similarly, J.B. Frey, although noting that the name is attested in Nabatean inscriptions and in Palmyra (and hence is not necessarily Jewish), classifies it as Jewish, noting that the name more often than not designates the Jews of

¹⁴³ John DeFelice, “Inns and Taverns,” in *The World of Pompeii*, J. Dobbins and Pedar W. Foss, eds., (New York: Routledge, 2007), 480. For further clarification of this perspective see Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.150; Petronius, *Satyricon* 95-98; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 1.8.

¹⁴⁴ George, 541.

¹⁴⁵ *CIL* IV, 5244. “This is Martha’s dining room. For she shits in the dining room.”

¹⁴⁶ *CIL* IV, 3763.

¹⁴⁷ See Noy, 297; Frey, 417.

¹⁴⁸ Giordano and Kahn, 52.

Palestine.¹⁴⁹ David Noy, pointing out that Frey’s analysis alone provides reasonable doubt about the Jewishness of the inscription, classifies it as spuriously Jewish. He concludes that the name is of Eastern origin, but cannot be confined to Jews.¹⁵⁰ Tal Ilan reinforces this opinion, arguing that it has traditionally been mistaken for a Jewish name and has resulted in false identification of Jewish persons.¹⁵¹ She further insists that the name is so biblical-like that it is “difficult to remember that it is common Semitic rather than Hebrew-biblical.”¹⁵² While the Jewishness of Martha is questionable, the foreign origin of her name suggests that she was a domestic servant inside the house.

Her servile status is also based on the context in which her name appears. Since the inscription was written on the wall of a latrine, Giordano and Kahn are convinced that Martha is the “butt of a jest,” being mocked for her low social status.¹⁵³ Cooley and Cooley support this assertion, classifying the inscription as “toilet humor.”¹⁵⁴ They point out that the latrine where the inscription appears is found in the purported slave quarters of the house. Accordingly, one slave may have been poking fun at another. Following Cooley’s observation, the writing itself may attest to the social status of the writer (and perhaps Martha) since the writer misspells “trichilinium” (*triclinium*). The misspelling may be the result of a low level of education or the result of Latin as second language. In the latter scenario the appearance of “ch” in the inscription may be an interpretation of a Greek *chi* – a native Greek speaker might spell the hard “K” sound with “ch,” representing the letter *chi*. Or the “ch” may simply indicate over-aspiration – an issue

¹⁴⁹ Frey, 417: “Mais il faut ajouter qu’ il désigne plus souvent encore des Juives de Palestine.” He does not provide any statistics to support this assertion.

¹⁵⁰ Noy, 297.

¹⁵¹ Ilan, 686.

¹⁵² Ibid., 51. “Many biblical names are also Semitic names, and were often borne by Semites who were not Jews. Many non-Jews used these names, and it is often difficult to identify a person as Jewish merely by his/her name.”

¹⁵³ Giordano and Kahn, 52

¹⁵⁴ Cooley and Cooley, 78.

associated with Latin speakers from the provinces.¹⁵⁵ While the misspelling of *triclinium* in the graffito may point to a person of low social status, it at best suggests a servile and/or foreign affiliation for Martha, but not necessarily a Jewish connection. But because misspellings are so common in inscriptions, singling out a single cause for spelling anomalies is a difficult task.

4.3.4 FABIUS EUPOR (*dipinto*)

Amid an abundance of election notices painted in red on the walls between shops, one located on the wall of an unnamed shop (VI.xvii.8) allegedly names a rich Jewish wine merchant, financier, and politician – who also happened to be the head of a Pompeian synagogue of freedmen.¹⁵⁶ The full *dipinto* reads: *Cuspium Pansam aed(ilem) Fabius Eupor princeps libertinorum rogat.*¹⁵⁷ The notion that a synagogue of freedmen existed in Pompeii is the result of G.B. De Rossi's assessment of this inscription.¹⁵⁸ His analysis, which “became almost an accepted dogma,”¹⁵⁹ was followed by some scholars, including Giordano and Kahn. They argue that the title *princeps libertinorum* marks Fabius Eupor as “the chief of the *libertini*” (freedmen Jews). The name Eupor, they continue, was the title of the “*archisynagogus*” of the Jewish community at Pompeii. As a result of this high ranking position in the city, it is evident, they

¹⁵⁵ In Poem 84 Catullus makes fun of a man who over-aspirates when he speaks: *Chommoda dicebat, si quando commoda vellet / dicere, et insidias Arrius hinsidias / et tum mirifice sperabat se esse locutum / cum quantum poterat dixerat hinsidias / Credo, sic mater, sic liber auunculus eius / Sic maternus avus dixerat atque avia / Hoc misso in Syriam requierant omnibus aures / audibant eadem haec leniter et leviter / nec sibi postilla metuebant talia verba / cum subito affertur nuntius horribilis / Ionios fluctus, postquam illuc Arrius isset / iam non Ionios esse sed Hionios* (Arrius, if he wanted to say ‘advantages’ used to say ‘hadvantages,’ and for ‘ambush’ ‘hambush;’ and he thought he had spoken marvelously well, whenever he said ‘hambush’ with as much emphasis as possible. So, no doubt, his mother had said, so his uncle the freedman, so his grandfather and grandmother on the mother’s side. When he was sent into Syria, all our ears had a holiday; they heard the same syllables pronounced quietly and lightly, and had no fear of such words for the future. When on a sudden dreadful message arrives, that the Ionians waves, ever since Arrius went there, are henceforth not ‘Ionian,’ but ‘Hionian’). Similarly, in *Commentaria Grammatica* Publius Nigidius (as quoted by Aulus Gellius) discusses mistaken aspiration: *Rusticus fit sermo, inquit, si adspires perperam* (speech becomes rustic if the aspirates are misplaced).

¹⁵⁶ Giordano and Kahn, 48-49.

¹⁵⁷ *CIL* IV, 117: “Fabius Eupor, leader of the freedmen, asks [you to elect] Cuspius Pansa as aedile.”

¹⁵⁸ G.B. De Rossi, “Dei Giudei Libertini e dei Cristiani in Pompeii,” *Bull. di Arch. Cristiana* 2 (1864), 69-72.

¹⁵⁹ Michael Saul Ginsburg, “Princeps Libertinorum,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* vol. 65 (1934), 199.

contend, that this electoral inscription was a means to incite his co-religionists to support the candidate Cuspius Pansa.¹⁶⁰ This argument is based on Acts 6:9 which states that Jews from Rome and “other compatriots from Alexandria and Cyrene maintained a synagogue of the freedmen” in Jerusalem after being manumitted by their masters.¹⁶¹ This assessment, however, is problematic.

In response to the notion that Fabius Eupor was the head of a synagogue, Frey notes that his name was also found on a wine amphora.¹⁶² As a result of this discovery, Frey postulates that Fabius Eupor was simply a wine merchant, not the leader of a synagogue, who used the facade of his own shop (or that of a friend) to promote a political candidate. Furthermore, he continues, there is no evidence that the *libertini* were Jews. Frey, therefore, classifies this inscription as “probably pagan.”¹⁶³ This, likewise, is the position assumed by Michael Saul Ginsberg. He asserts that the expression *princeps libertinorum* did not refer to the head of the Jewish community at Pompeii, but to the patron of a *collegium* of freedmen (*libertini*), a union based on social standing rather than profession.¹⁶⁴ Fabius Eupor, then, whose name is typical for a freedman, was the sponsor of the union of *libertini*. Ginsburg also avers that the title of *princeps* was bestowed on Eupor as an expression of gratitude by his fellow freedmen.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Giordano and Kahn, 48-49.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 49. Acts 6:9: “Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen as it was called (τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς Λιβερτίνων), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen.” Giordano and Kahn claim that these freedmen were the descendants of the Jews who were captured by Pompey and sold into slavery in the first century BCE. After gaining their liberty, their descendants returned to Jerusalem and established their own synagogue.

¹⁶² *CIL* IV, 5535: *M(arci) Fabi Eupori / Cnidium*. See Frey, 560.

¹⁶³ The third section of the Appendix to the *CIJ* treats inscriptions which have been considered Jewish, but which Frey considers not to be Jewish. These inscriptions are classified as “probably pagan.” This classification simply means that the inscriptions only fit into a Greco-Roman context (not a Jewish or Christian context), although that context may not necessarily be religious.

¹⁶⁴ Ginsburg, 205.

¹⁶⁵ Ginsburg observes that the title of *princeps* was used by other unions of freedmen for their patron and should be understood to mean “outstanding person” (206).

The only reason that Giordano and Kahn classify Fabius Eupor as a Jew is because he was a freedman; since some freedmen had a synagogue in Jerusalem, according to the book of Acts, they posit a similar scenario in Pompeii. But there were many freedmen who formed various associations (*collegia*) in the Roman world. In Pompeii, for instance, there were at least 28 occupational unions and two religious unions.¹⁶⁶ These associations often endorsed political candidates in electoral notices; the prevalence of these notices is a testament of the prominence of *collegia* in Pompeian political life. This notice is not unique in and of itself, and it does not provide any reason to assume that these freedmen were Jewish.

4.3.5 IESUS (graffito)

According to Giordano and Kahn, an inscription from the House of the Gladiators (V.v.3) was signed by a Jew named Jesus. The graffito reads: *Edictum M(arci) ati primi / si qui(s) muria(m) / bona(m) volet / petat a L(uscio) Asicio / [...]bus mu[...] / scito muriola es / Iesu* (fig. 8).¹⁶⁷ The House of the Gladiators was a converted house with a large central peristyle surrounded by rooms. It appears to have been a training center for gladiators prior to the establishment of the official barracks in the mid-first century CE.¹⁶⁸ The copious amount of graffiti found around the peristyle provides a clear picture of the variety of gladiators who performed in Pompeii. Accordingly, one would expect this graffito to relate a similar type of information.

Giordano and Kahn suggest that Jesus is the author of this graffito and that he intended to take the gladiator Lucius Asicius to task “by comparing him to a poor little fish, and not an

¹⁶⁶ Cooley and Cooley, 174. *CIL* IV, 1146 and 1011 record the two religious *collegia*: *Veneri* (worshippers of Venus) and the *Isiaci* (worshippers of Isis).

¹⁶⁷ *CIL* IV, 4287: “The edict of Marcus Atius Primus, whoever wants to enjoy delicious fish sauce, seek it from Lucius Asicius, [. . .] I know you are a little fish.” The inscription and the name are written by the same hand.

¹⁶⁸ Cooley and Cooley, 65.

invincible champion as the people wanted.”¹⁶⁹ But the mention of a little fish (*muriola*) in the inscription may not be an insult, rather a reference to a type of gladiator who wore a fish emblem on his helmet (this variety of gladiator was called a *murmillio*).¹⁷⁰ Jesus’ role in authoring the graffito is also in question. The inscription is clearly designed to be a parody of a legal edict, but it appears to be the proclamation of someone named Marcus, not Jesus. Jesus appears to simply be a scribe. Since there are not any clues in the inscription as to who Jesus is, and since there is no Jewish content present, any identification of *Iesu[s]* as a Jew would be strictly onomastic.

Tal Ilan records that the name Joshua (Jesus or Ἰησοῦς in Greek) is a biblical name.¹⁷¹ Curiously, no other analysts, except Giordano and Kahn and della Corte, mention this inscription as possibly Jewish. If anything can be ascertained about the person who signed this graffito, it is only that he was associated with gladiatorial games in some way. Was he a gladiator? Was he a trainer? Was he a slave? Answers to these questions cannot be determined. However, from his name alone, which is clearly Semitic and biblical in origin, the probability that he was a Jew is higher than in cases where commonplace Semitic names appear, such as Martha, or where names of questionable origin appear, as with A. Cossius Liban, for example. Additionally, because he signed the graffito with a single (foreign) name, it can be surmised that he was of low social status.

4.4 Miscellaneous Inscriptions

4.4.1 GIINIISIS (graffiti)

¹⁶⁹ Giordano and Kahn, 45. Cf. Robert I. Curtis, “A Slur on Lucius Asicius, the Pompeian Gladiator,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* Vol. 110 (1980): 51-61.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁷¹ Ilan, 103. Ilan does not record any Latin derivation of the name.

Along with the Iesu graffito, the House of the Gladiators (V.v.3) yields two more inscriptions that have been linked to Jews: *iipistii / miigistii / giiniisis* (fig. 9) and *giiniisis*.¹⁷² These graffiti were found on two separate columns in the peristyle of the house.¹⁷³ According to della Corte a total of 143 inscriptions (*CIL* IV 4280-4423) were found on the columns of the peristyle.¹⁷⁴ As mentioned in the discussion of Iesu above, the vast majority of inscriptions found in the House of the Gladiators relay information about gladiators: their names, types of gladiator (*essedarius, traex, murmillo, retiarius, eques*), number of fights and victories, purported popularity, and places of origin.¹⁷⁵ These two inscriptions, however, have often been classified as containing subject matter “not related to gladiators.”¹⁷⁶ Giordano and Kahn argue that these two graffiti are references to the biblical book of Genesis, indicating that the person who wrote these inscriptions was Jewish.¹⁷⁷ They, however, do not offer a translation of *CIL* IV 4300: *iipistii / miigistii / giiniisis*.

Giordano and Kahn admit that *Giiniisis* could be understood as the *nomen* or *cognomen* of *Genesisius*, but insist that it should be understood as a reference to the Hebrew Bible.¹⁷⁸ Heikki Solin, however, classifies *Genesis* as a Greek name. He lists six occurrences of the name, all of which appear to be referring to slaves or freedmen.¹⁷⁹ If *Genesis* was the name of a gladiator, it

¹⁷² *CIL* IV 4300 and 4321: translations are unclear.

¹⁷³ There were a total of nine columns located in the peristyle; these inscriptions were found on columns two and three, respectively.

¹⁷⁴ Matteo della Corte, *Case ed Abitanti di Pompei* (Naples: Fausto Fiorentino, 1965), 139-141.

¹⁷⁵ Cooley and Cooley, 65-66.

¹⁷⁶ Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, “Mittheilungen des Kaiserlich Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts Roemische Abtheilung,” *Bullettino Dell’Imperiale Instituto Archeologico Germanico, Sezione Romana* Vol. 5 (Munich: Münchner Verlag und Graphische Kunstanstalten, 1890).

¹⁷⁷ Giordano and Kahn, 103.

¹⁷⁸ Giordano and Kahn, 103.

¹⁷⁹ Solin, *Die griechischen Personennamen in Rom* Vol. 3, 1288: *Aburiae Genesisi*; [...]*ntia Genesisi*; *Genesisim Vener (iam)*; *Sosia Genesisi*; *Claudiaei Genesisini*; *Aeliae Genesisi*.

would make sense considering that many gladiators were slaves purchased by local businessmen or freedmen trying to earn money.¹⁸⁰

The inscription containing the solitary word, “Giiniisis,” like others found in this context, is the easier of the two inscriptions to explain as a simple name tag. The other inscription is more complicated. The second word, “miigistii,” is probably a Latin transliteration (likely of the vocative form) of the Greek superlative μέγιστος. The first word also appears to be vocative if it is a noun or adjective. However, there is no satisfactory word (or name) that satisfies this form. The first word could also be an imperative, perhaps of the verb ἐπίσταμαι (ἐπίστη). But even this option does not produce any coherent meaning.

As a result of the ambiguity of the inscriptions, particularly *CIL* IV 4300, it is not possible to classify either inscription as Jewish. If Giiniisis is a name, these inscriptions would be firmly set into a Greek context, likely referring to a Greek slave or freedman. Indeed, the context seems to lend itself to this interpretation. However, other possibilities cannot be ruled out. If Giiniisis is not a name, it is unclear what the word is intended to refer to. It could be some derivative of the verb γίγνομαι (to become), denoting a place of origin/birth or, perhaps, a gladiator entering into a new state of being (i.e. becoming great).

4.4.2 THE HEBREW INSCRIPTION (incised on a wall)

The hall next to the cryptoporticus of the House of the Lucretii Cari (I.vi.2-4) contains an inscription thought to be written in Hebrew – the only Hebrew inscription found in Pompeii (figs. 10-11).¹⁸¹ When it was discovered in 1931 by della Corte, it was hardly legible due the crabbed script, and some of it had entirely disappeared, having been partially covered with

¹⁸⁰ See Alan Barker, *The Gladiator: The Secret History of Rome's Warrior Slaves* (United Kingdom: Random House, 2000).

¹⁸¹ *CIL* IV, 8010.

plaster. Consequently, difficulty in interpreting the script has not allowed for a satisfactory translation.

Mose Ginsburgher made the initial interpretation of the inscription, believing it to read: “Kar . . . Jesua Shadani (ham) sons of Lenanath have sold to Vergaz [something that is] above the bath.”¹⁸² Ginsburgher’s interpretation suggests that the inscription serves as some type of sales receipt. His interpretation was supported by della Corte, who thought that the inscription concerned the sale of property above the Forum Baths.¹⁸³ Cooley and Cooley likewise accept his interpretation as “the record of the sale of something by three men to a fourth,” but nuance the translation: “Sold by Kar[...], Jesus, Shadani(ham?) son(?) of Lenanath, to Vergaz . . . what is beneath the baths.”¹⁸⁴ Giordano and Kahn, however, claim to only be able to translate two words: *lamerhaz* (for the bath) and *Yeshua*. Consequently, since they lack a viable and complete translation they do not venture to guess what the inscription means. But they do unequivocally understand the script to be Hebrew, and thus evidence of a Jewish community in Pompeii. Like Giordano and Kahn, J.B. Frey classifies the inscription as Jewish because it is written in “Semitic characters,” but he is uncertain of the language of the script.¹⁸⁵

Contrary to the above interpretations, David Noy does not consider this inscription to be Jewish. He doubts that it is written in Hebrew and considers it to be completely undecipherable. No one, he explains, has produced an intelligible reading and, therefore, the assumption that the inscription is written in Hebrew cannot be substantiated.¹⁸⁶ In agreement with Noy, both Antonio Ferrua and Solin argue that the alphabet is completely uncertain, therefore making the meaning

¹⁸² Mose Ginsburgher quoted by Giordano and Kahn, 46.

¹⁸³ Matteo della Corte, “Fabius Eupor, princeps libertinorum e gli elementi giudaici in Pompei,” *Atti dell’Accademia Pontaniana* Vol. 3 (1949-50), 347ff.

¹⁸⁴ Cooley and Cooley, 109.

¹⁸⁵ Frey, 414-415.

¹⁸⁶ Noy, 294.

also completely uncertain.¹⁸⁷ If Noy, Ferrua, and Solin are correct, this inscription relates nothing about the presence of Jews in Pompeii.

However, even if we were to assume that the inscription is written in Hebrew and relates the sale of something, its poor condition does not allow for a complete reading of who was involved and what was sold; it does, however, set the inscription in a distinctively Jewish context. But it is hard to distinguish if the individuals involved were simply traveling businessmen or property holders in Pompeii. Since Pompeii was a port town on the Bay of Naples, it should not be surprising to find evidence of multi-ethnic business or trade transactions.¹⁸⁸ Accordingly, the sale of *something* beneath the baths could indicate Jewish ownership of property or something as simple as a business deal involving Jewish merchants passing through town.

4.4.3 POINIUM CHEREM (incised on a wall)

This inscription was found in 1961 in the plaster of the vestibule of the House of the Cherem (I.xi.14) and does not appear in the *CIL*. The plaster on which it was written had seemingly been laid for repairs following the earthquake of 62 CE. The inscription consists of two words: “POINIUM” and “CHEREM” (figs. 12-13). The first word is written in larger letters than the second, which is located to its right, followed by two pentagrams.

The meaning of the inscription is unclear. M. Guarducci suggested to Giordano and Kahn that *poinium* was a latinized form of ποιμνίον (sheep).¹⁸⁹ Giordano and Kahn quickly imbued this reading with biblical symbolism to mean “flock.” This, they claim, aligns with symbolism

¹⁸⁷ Antonio Ferrua, “Addenda et corrigenda al Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum,” *Epigraphica* III (1941), 43; Heikki Solin, “Juden und Syrer in der römischen Welt,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* Vol. 29, No. 2. Wolfgang Hasse, ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter: 1983), 725.

¹⁸⁸ J. Berry, 88.

¹⁸⁹ Giordano and Kahn, 101.

prominent in the Hebrew Bible (and the New Testament) where the people of Israel are described as God's flock.¹⁹⁰ However, they also offer another suggestion: that *poinium* is a Latin form (similar to the Latin *poena*) of the Greek word, ποινή (retribution). They assert that it was written in reference to the "last dramatic moments of the city."¹⁹¹ In a similar fashion, they argue that *cherem* is a transliteration from the Hebrew root, *hrm*, and could mean "condemned to destruction."¹⁹² They state that it was written "in a spirit of revenge by a Jew against the city which had seen the suffering of his slavery. He in the ruinous spread of ashes and of fire saw manifest the sentence of God on the people of the oppressors."¹⁹³ Accordingly, in their reading, *cherem* matches well with *poinium*. When read as a cohesive unit, the inscription means: "Retribution! Condemned to destruction!" Since they understand *cherem* to be a transliteration of Hebrew, they accept the inscription as Jewish. Their certainty is compounded by the appearance of two pentagrams next to the inscription. These, they claim, are stars of Solomon, considered to be "protective emblems" and "related in some way to that inextinguishable vein of Messianic hope."¹⁹⁴ They further assert that these stars were a symbol of longing to return to Jerusalem and "to a time so much longed for by the distant progeny."¹⁹⁵

David Noy agrees with Giordano and Kahn's reading, but notes two additional possibilities for the meaning of *cherem*: "offering" or "vineyard."¹⁹⁶ The Hebrew word for vineyard, כֶּרֶם, occurs a total of ninety-two times in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Genesis 9:20 and as

¹⁹⁰ Hebrew Bible: Isaiah 49:9; Jeremiah 23:3; Ezekiel 43:2; Psalms 78:52, 80:2, 95:7; Micah 2:12. New Testament: Matthew 18:2; Luke 15:3-7; John 10:1-10.

¹⁹¹ Giordano and Kahn, 103.

¹⁹² Ibid., 93.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 96.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 100.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 101. Giordano and Kahn suggest that these stars are related to a verse from Numbers: "A star shall be born from Jacob and a scepter will be raised from Israel" (24:17).

¹⁹⁶ Noy, 58-59.

an allegory for the people of Israel in Isaiah 5:7). The Hebrew word מְרִיב, which can mean either offering or doomed to destruction, appears a total of twenty-nine times in the Hebrew Bible. Noy states that it occurs as “offering” eight times (e.g. Ezekiel 44:29), but appears most often in the sense of “doomed to destruction.”¹⁹⁷ Consequently, he finds the latter the more likely choice. He does, however, question Giordano and Kahn’s interpretation of the Jewishness of the pentagrams, noting that the five-pointed star was a common non-Jewish apotropaic symbol.

Giordano and Kahn’s interpretation of this inscription is overstated. If they hold *poinium* to mean flock, their connection to the Hebrew Bible is extremely tenuous, based solely on a thematic connection. But they seem to prefer the conclusion that *poinium* is equivalent to the Latin *poena* and Greek ποιινή since it aligns nicely with their interpretation of *cherem*. This reasoning is more convincing, yet they ignore all other possible interpretations of the word. Solin, for instance, lists at least three Greek names that are a close match to *poinium*: Ποιμενίς, Poemenius, and Poemenia.¹⁹⁸ Peter Fraser and Elaine Matthews likewise offer another name found in Crete, Ποίμνη.¹⁹⁹

Giordano and Kahn’s analysis of *cherem* is even less concrete, based largely on uncertain philological connections: 1) that *cherem* is a Hebrew transliteration; and 2) that the Hebrew root, *hrm*, corresponds to the term *cherem*. As with *poinium*, they ignore any other possible interpretations of *cherem*. Fraser and Matthews, again, give an example of a similar Greek name from Samos: Χαρμ was found as an abbreviation of the name Χαρμμηῆς.²⁰⁰ The letters “ch,” then, are as likely to be a transliteration of a Greek letter *chi* as of the Hebrew letters *het* or *kaf*.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 58-59. Cf. Abraham Even-Shoshan, ed., *A New Concordance of the Old Testament* (Jerusalem: Kiryat-Sefer, 1997).

¹⁹⁸ Solin, *Die griechischen Personennamen in Rom* Vol. 2, 1109.

¹⁹⁹ Peter Marshall Fraser and Elaine Matthews, *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 375.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 480.

Moreover, Giordano and Kahn never address why half of the inscription would appear in transliterated Hebrew and the other half in transliterated Greek.

Given that *poinium* and *cherem* bear similarities to attested Greek names, and that the pentagram was a common non-Jewish symbol, there is not compelling reason to construe this inscription as Jewish.

4.4.4 SODOM GOMORA (graffito)

Another graffito possibly attesting to the destruction of the city was found scratched with charcoal onto a wall in the *triclinium* of an unnamed house (IX.i.26) bordering the Via dell'Abbondanza (fig. 14). The Latin graffito, a clear reference to Genesis 19:24, reads: "Sodom [a] / Gomor[ra]." ²⁰¹ Cooley and Cooley hold that the mention the two cities destroyed by God for their immorality was a criticism of Pompeii's morality (or lack thereof). They further suggest that it was written on the wall by someone with direct or indirect knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, likely a Jew, prior to the destruction of the city. ²⁰² Correspondingly, both Noy and Giordano and Kahn attribute this graffito, like the *poinium cherem* inscription, to a Jew writing at the time of Vesuvius' eruption, comparing the destruction of Pompeii to that of the biblical cities. ²⁰³ Frey asserts that this graffito indicates that the "presence of Jews is certain." ²⁰⁴

But how likely is it that in the midst of a violent volcanic eruption, where even breathing was an arduous task amid the raining ash and blasts of poisonous gasses, someone would pause in their flight from the city and provide a commentary on the present situation? Both Hershel Shanks and Mary Beard think that this is an unlikely scenario and argue that the graffito post-

²⁰¹ *CIL* IV, 4976.

²⁰² Cooley and Cooley, 109.

²⁰³ Noy asserts that "an allusion to Sodom and Gomorrah would most naturally be written at the time of the eruption of Vesuvius, comparing their destruction to Pompeii's" (58). Giordano and Kahn claim that it was written "during the catastrophe as a terrible sentence of condemnation" (75).

²⁰⁴ Frey, 418.

dates the eruption. Beard considers that these words could be the “gloomy observation of some later looter” who re-entered the city.²⁰⁵ Shanks likewise acknowledges that the site was subject to looting after the eruption and thus credits the graffito to someone who re-entered the house after its destruction. He posits that this individual “having walked through the desolation of the city, looked about and saw nothing but destruction where once there had been buildings and beautifully frescoed walls. Disconsolate and aghast, he picked up a piece of charcoal and scratched on the wall.”²⁰⁶ The scenario described by Beard and Shanks is, perhaps, a more likely possibility. Scholars agree that many Pompeians returned to the city following the eruption to salvage their possessions.²⁰⁷ The tops of many buildings, having been covered with 12-16 feet of ash, were still visible, allowing residents (and looters) to easily locate buildings.²⁰⁸ The people who returned to the site dug tunnels down from the surface and tunneled from house to house and room to room, breaking through intervening walls. The stratification of volcanic debris facilitated this process: the small, loose pieces of pumice stone in the lower strata were easily dug through, while the compact ash of the upper strata provided a relatively sturdy roof for the passageways. As a result, only infrequently was a house discovered that had been left undisturbed.²⁰⁹

In addition to the questionable date of the graffito, Paul Berry calls into question its Jewish authorship. He asserts that if this graffito was written by a Jewish individual he would have expected it to be written in Hebrew or Aramaic lettering, mirroring the language of Jewish

²⁰⁵ Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius*, 25.

²⁰⁶ H. Shanks, “The Destruction of Pompeii: God’s Revenge?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* vol. 36, no. 4 (July/August 2010): 65.

²⁰⁷ Amedeo Maiuri, “Pompei - Relazione sui lavori di scavo dal marzo 1924 al marzo 1926.” *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità*, Series 6, No. 3 (1927), 63; Caroline E. Dexter, *The Casa di Cecilio Giocondo in Pompeii* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1975), 165, 248; Penelope M. Allison, *Pompeian Households: An Analysis of Material Culture* (Los Angeles: The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2004), 23.

²⁰⁸ Allison, 23. Cf. Mau, 25.

²⁰⁹ Mau, 25.

scriptures and Palestinian vernacular.²¹⁰ Instead, since the words appear in Latin, he asserts that it was written by a Christian reflecting *ex eventu* on the destruction of the city.²¹¹ However, while it is true that a graffito written in Hebrew or Aramaic would put the inscription into a definitively Jewish context, Berry's assessment fails to take into account Hellenized Jews who used the Septuagint as their primary text. The use of Greek in a specifically Jewish context should not be surprising since, for example, 68-70% of Jewish inscriptions from Rome were written in Greek.²¹² Thus, the transliteration from Greek to Latin would not be abnormal.

While it is clear that the graffito was written by someone with knowledge of Genesis 19:24, it is unclear if it was written by a Jew, a Christian, or someone with sympathies to Judaism or Christianity – a “god-fearer.” Anyone, regardless of religious affiliation, who heard this story had the opportunity to scribble these words. But since historical analysis centers on degrees of probability, it is most likely that the graffito was written by a Jew or Christian. We do not know, however, where this person came from. Was he/she a resident of the city, a tourist, or a traveller? It is also unclear whether the graffito was intended to be a commentary on the moral depravity of the city or its destruction. All we know is that someone appears to have made a connection between the city and story. Was this a simple observation, a moral judgement, or something else? Since it is likely that the graffito could post-date the eruption, and may not even have been written by a resident, it does not reveal anything about the population of the city in 79.

4.5 Inscriptions on amphorae

²¹⁰ Paul Berry, *The Christian Inscription at Pompeii* (United Kingdom: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd., 1995), 10.

²¹¹ P. Berry, 9. He claims that in addition to the reference from Genesis, the graffito also mirrors Luke 17:29: “but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulphur from heaven and destroyed all of them.” The composition of the Gospel of Luke, however, post-dates the destruction of Pompeii and cannot be used as evidence for a Christian community in the city.

²¹² White, 42. Cf. Leon, 76-77; van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 22. Leon originally surmised that 76% of Jewish inscriptions in Rome were written in Greek, but this number has subsequently been revised. Van der Horst holds that 68% are Greek, 18% Semitic, 12% Latin, and 2% bilingual.

4.5.1 M. VALERIUS ABINNERICUS

The name M. Valerius Abinnericus has been found on ten wine amphorae written as either M. Valeri Abinnerici or M. Valeri Abennerici (fig. 15).²¹³ In three other instances, the name appears without a *nomen* or *praenomen* as Abinnerici or Abinnericus.²¹⁴ The inscriptions appear within the same general context, however, some variation of the wording occurs. Typically the inscriptions appear as follows: *Cornelia / lun. vet. / a IIII r / x IIII s / M. Valeri. Abinnerici*.²¹⁵ In addition to the amphorae of Abinnericus, other amphorae were found in the same location bearing different inscriptions, for example: *Frut T. Claud. III. L. Vitellio. III. cos.*²¹⁶ The amphorae were found in a large garden (VI.v.7), created by joining the facades of two houses and transforming their interior arrangements.²¹⁷ The garden was surrounded by shops and eateries.

Giordano and Kahn classify M. Valerius Abinnericus as a Jew based on his name, which they hold to be a Latin derivative of the Hebrew name Abner. They assert that he was a freedman, a merchant, and a local producer of wine.²¹⁸ In contrast to Giordano and Kahn, other scholars do not view Abinnericus as the Latinized form of Abner. Frey, for instance, notes that the name Abinnericus is mentioned in Josephus (*Antiquities* XX.2.1) and has been understood to

²¹³ *CIL* IV, 5611-5619, and 5630.

²¹⁴ *CIL* IV, 5620, 5764, and 5765.

²¹⁵ According to William Henry Davenport Adams, the name Cornelia (or Cordelia or Cordula as interpreted by others) indicates the purchaser of the amphorae, sold from the hypogeum of M. Valerius Abinnericus. The abbreviated phrase *lun. vet.* stands for the variety of wine, “Old Moon.” The line *a IIII r* expands to: *annorum quattuor rubrum. a IIII* indicates the time the wine has been bottled, and the *r* indicates the color of the wine, rubrum (red). *x IIII s* may refer to the price paid for the wine or the quantity purchased; see William Henry Davenport Adams, *The Buried Cities of Campania, or Pompeii and Herculaneum* (New York: T. Nelson and Sons, 1873), 262. Other wines appearing on the Abinnericus amphorae are *lix. vet* and *lyme. vet.* The *lyme. vet.* is thought to derive from the Greek λιμήν (port) and thus roughly corresponds to the modern “Old Port” wine; see E.P. Evans, “Pompeianarum Antiquitatum Historia,” *The North American Review* vol. 106, no. 219 (April, 1868), 438.

²¹⁶ Adams, 262. The inscription on this amphora indicates that the contents were bottled in the fourth year of the consulate of Tiberius Claudius, and the third of Lucius Vitellius (i.e. 47 CE). Other inscriptions include: *coum. garantum* (flavored wine from the island of Cos); *kor. opt* (the very best of Corfu).

²¹⁷ Astrid V. Schoonhoven, *Metrology and Meaning in Pompeii: The Urban Arrangement of Regio VI* (Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2006), 54.

²¹⁸ Giordano and Kahn, 44.

denote Jewish origins. However, the Ἀβεννήριγος mentioned in Josephus was not a Jew, but a prince of Charakene near the Tigris.²¹⁹ For Frey this observation casts enough doubt on the Jewish origin of the name to firmly conclude that the Abinnericus from Pompeii was not a Jew – Frey goes as far as to classify the amphorae inscriptions as “probably pagan.”

There is nothing in this inscription that indicates that M. Valerius Abinnericus was a Jew. Due to the foreign origin of his name, he could, as Giordano and Kahn assert, be a freedperson. Consequently, the notion that he owned a wine shop at Pompeii could be an accurate assumption. This would make the location where the amphorae were found in the garden a storage place for various wines. But as Mau suggests, it is also possible that Abinnericus was the producer of wines exported to Pompeii, and not a Pompeian merchant.²²⁰ This explanation would account for the presence of other wines, in addition to those produced by Abinnericus, in the same location. Whatever role Abinnericus assumed in the wine trade, neither the amphorae inscriptions, nor his name, provide any information concerning his religious affiliation.

4.5.2 ΤΥ / ΙΛΙΙΧ / Ἰουδαϊκοῦ

In the *caupona* of L. Vetutius Placidus (I.viii.8-9) two amphorae were found which clearly contain the word “Jewish” or “Judaean” describing either the origin of the contents of the amphorae or the producer. The *CIL* records the inscriptions as ΤΥ / ΙΛΙΙΧ / Ἰουδαϊκοῦ and ΤΡΥ / ΑΕΣ / Ἰουδαϊκός.²²¹

J.B. Frey, Cooley and Cooley, and Giordano and Kahn provide an alternative reading for the first inscription: *Tu Felix Youdaikou*.²²² By reading *iliix* as *Felix*, they are able to translate the

²¹⁹ Frey, 561.

²²⁰ Mau, 18.

²²¹ *CIL* IV, 6990 and 9757.

²²² Frey, 415; Cooley and Cooley, 109; Giordano and Kahn, 42.

inscription as: “Felix slave of Ioudaikos” (Judaicus). This interpretation establishes Ioudaikos as a person, rather than a location, and, considering his name, it also establishes him as a Judean. Their reading, however, fails to account for the first line of the inscription, ΤΥ. Additionally, it presumes that the inscriber decided to write one word, Felix, in Latin and the rest in Greek. If *illix* was intended to be a name, it would follow that the inscriber would have written the Greek name, Φηλιξ, in synchrony with the rest of the text. However, in spite of the lacunae in their assessment, Giordano and Kahn imagine that Ioudaikos was a producer and merchant of wine in Pompeii, who was wealthy enough to own slaves. Felix, they continue, was his vine-dresser.²²³

This explication is challenged by Antonio Ferrua, who disputes the suppositions that *illix* should be read as *Felix* and that Ἰουδαϊκοῦ refers to a Jewish individual.²²⁴ Ferrua argues that the first line of the inscription, ΤΥ, indicates the contents of the amphora, τρύγινον, a black pigment made from wine lees or new wine. The second line, an ill-formed Roman numeral, provides the liquid measure (or possibly price) of the contents of the amphora. The third line indicates the place of the origin of the wine as Judean or from Judea. This claim is corroborated by Antonio Varone who notes that other wine amphorae bear similar formulaic inscriptions which indicate the place of origin on the vessel.²²⁵ Additionally, a second amphora with matching text – but with lines one and two reversed – was found in the House of Erastus (VI.xvi.10).²²⁶ This find lends credence to the accuracy of Ferrua’s interpretation. In other words, the inscriber did not make a mistake on the amphorae found in the *caupona* and intentionally wrote *illix*, not *Felix*.

²²³ Giordano and Kahn, 42.

²²⁴ Antonio Ferrua, “Addenda et corrigenda al Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum,” *Epigraphica* II (1941), 30-46.

²²⁵ Varone lists two similar Greek inscriptions from Pompeii, as well as two similar Latin ones: *CIL* IV, 6448, 9790, 2557, 2559; see Antonio Varone, “Recensione a: A. Baldi, ‘L’anatema e la croce. Ebrei e Cristiani in Pompei,’” *Rivista Di Studi Pompeiani*, Antonella Romualdi, ed. (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 1988), 277.

²²⁶ *CIL* IV, 6990.

The inscription TPY / AES / Ἰουδαίικος, similar to that of the previous amphora, describes the contents of the jug and its place of origin. Della Corte proposes that TPY is another abbreviation for τρύγινον, the black pigment made from wine lees, and that Ἰουδαίικος describes the origin of the wine as imported from Judea. The second line, however, is vexing. It seemingly contains two Greek letters and one Latin letter. Della Corte negotiates this difference by pointing to another amphora found at Pompeii with the letters *les*,²²⁷ and suggests that the three letters represent the merchant's initials.²²⁸ Varone, tweaking this argument, understands the second line to be the initials of three names.²²⁹ In a similar fashion, David Noy explains the second line by reading it as a continuation of the first. He claims that it is “more likely” that the combination of lines one and two represent the name, Trules(?), of the producer or shipper.²³⁰ Although none of these explanations is entirely satisfying, Varone's seems the most likely since diversity in the language could arise from the presence of three people instead of just one. But this is questionable because, presumably, only one person was responsible for writing the inscription. Consequently, the second line remains an enigma.

Along with the aforementioned scholars, David Noy deems the inscriptions on these amphorae as evidence of a Jewish presence in Pompeii. However, he does not make this classification because he thinks the inscriptions refer to a Jewish individual named Ioudiakos. He does so because he thinks that the importation of wine from Judea “strongly suggests a demand for it among Jews” in Pompeii.²³¹ This is a tenuous claim. Wine from all around the Mediterranean has been found at Pompeii. For instance, in the House of Amarantus (I.ix.11-12),

²²⁷ *CIL* IV, 9758.

²²⁸ Matteo della Corte, “Pompei. Scoperte epigrafiche,” *Notizie degli Scavi* (1946), 98-99.

²²⁹ Varone, “Recensione a: A. Baldi, ‘L’anatema e la croce. Ebrei e Cristiani in Pompei,’” 277.

²³⁰ Noy, 59-60.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

which was also used as a wine shop, two tiers of amphorae were found. While the amphorae mostly contained wine from the region of Campania, some contained wine from Crete, Greece, and Gaza.²³² Likewise, other wine amphorae have been found in the city from Sicily, Turkey, North Africa, Gaul, and Spain.²³³ Does this mean that there were large contingents of each of these foreign groups demanding wine from their homeland? Probably not. Pompeii was simply a dynamic trade city, strategically situated on the Bay of Naples and at the mouth of the Sarno River. The wine trade was one of many thriving industries in the city. As such, it is unlikely that wine from Judea was *only* in demand because of the desires of an exclusively Jewish market.

The evidence points to Ioudaikos designating the origin of the wine, not an individual. Consequently, the amphorae cannot be used as evidence for a Pompeian Jewish wine producer/merchant, nor that a Jewish community existed within the city. The only certainty that can be deduced from these amphorae is that Pompeii had contact with Judea through trade.

4.5.3 MURIA CASTA or CASTIMONIALIA / GARUM CASTUM or CASTIMONIALE

In the shop of Umbricius Scaurus (VII.xvi.13-16) several amphorae reported to contain “kosher” fish sauce have been found.²³⁴ These amphorae have fueled speculation that this Roman delicacy was specially made to cater to the dietary needs of the Jewish population of Pompeii. The amphorae are variously labeled: *gar[um] cast[um]* or *mur[ia] cast[a]* (figs.16-17).²³⁵ In his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder specifically mentions a kosher variety of fish sauce made for

²³² Cooley and Cooley, 162.

²³³ Paul Zanker, *Pompeii: Public and Private Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 32; Thomas Pellechia, *Wine: The 8,000 Year-Old Story of the Wine Trade* (New York: Avalon Publishing Group, 2006), 49-50.

²³⁴ Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius*, 24.

²³⁵ *CIL* IV, 2609 and 2569. *Garum* was made from small, ungutted fish, fish intestines, gills, and marine invertebrates. The fish parts were mixed with large amounts of salt, sealed in earthenware, and left in the sun for 1-3 months. The contents were liquified and sieved, leaving a salty and spicy clear liquid used for seasoning meats, vegetables, and fruits. The quality of the *garum* was dependent on the variety of fish. *Muria* was similar to *garum*, but of lower quality. It was typically used for preserving meats, olives, and vegetables, rather than as a seasoning; see Hannah Cotton, Omri Lerna, and Yuval Goren, “Fish sauces from Herodian Masada,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* Vol. 9 (1996), 230-232.

Jews: “But another kind [of fish sauce] is dedicated to superstitions of purity and Jewish rites, which is made from fish lacking scales.”²³⁶ From Pliny’s description, many scholars have reached the conclusion that these amphorae bear witness to a Jewish community, interpreting the word *castum* as a reference to the kosher status of the sauce.²³⁷ But despite the seemingly simple interpretation that the *garum castum* at Pompeii was manufactured for Jews, there is, by and large, no consensus among scholars regarding the intended recipients of the fish sauce.

A more accurate translation of the Latin word *castum* or *castimoniale* is “pure” as opposed to “kosher.” More specifically, the terms refer to bodily purity, abstinence, or chastity. Considering the more literal translation, scholars have argued that the *garum castum* could have been made for the followers of mystery religions (Pliny’s use of the term *superstitioni* implies rites outside of mainstream Graeco-Roman religion), such as the cults of Isis, Apis and Magna Mater (Cybele), who observed dietary restrictions.²³⁸ As Robert Curtis points out, the ancient sources are not very forthcoming with details about the rituals of mystery cults, and the information we do have comes primarily from hostile sources.²³⁹ Accordingly, it is difficult to accurately assess rituals of fasting and abstinence, but it is clear that they abstained from certain foods for limited periods of time, usually during festivals.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ Pliny The Elder, *The Natural History*, 31.44: *Aliud vero (garum) castimoniarum superstitioni etiam sacrisque Iudaeis dictatum, quod fit e piscibus squama carentibus.*

²³⁷ Mau, 17; Cooley and Cooley, 109; Giordano and Kahn, 72; Beard, 24.

²³⁸ Frey, 561. Also see Cotton, Lerna, and Goren’s discussion of an amphorae found at Masada (Masada II, no. 826) labeled as “*garum castum*.” They conclude that “[such labels on amphorae] might not have been intended specifically for Jews, but for the people who practiced abstinence in general” (236). In *De jejuniis* 2, Tertullian attests that followers of Apis, Isis, and Cybele prepared themselves for their celebrations by abstaining from some foods. Likewise, in *Opus agriculturae* 3.25, Palladius mentions “*liquamen castimoniale*” as a condiment given to members of cults observing abstinence. In *Metamorphoses* 2.19, 28, 30, Apuleius mentions practicing *inaninam castimoniam*, which consisted of abstaining from food that comes from animals.

²³⁹ Robert Curtis, “Letter from Robert Curtis to Hershel Shanks: *Garum Castum* and the Jews” *Biblical Archaeology Review*. <http://www.bib-arch.org/scholars-study/the-garum-debate.asp>.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

The only fish sauce that would have been acceptable to Jews would have been made from fish *with* scales; scaleless fish and invertebrates were forbidden according to Jewish law.²⁴¹ Pliny, then, as Curtis indicates, errs in his description of kosher fish sauce.²⁴² If Pliny's description of the contents of the pure fish sauce is accurate, it could not have been intended for Jews. I estimate that Pliny's description is correct, for it is nearly impossible, as Cotton, Lernau and Goren assert, "to opt out of the difficulty by adding *non* before *caerentibus* in his description, since the next sentence expands on *squama caerentibus*": "this *alex* (a form of fish sauce) has come to be made from oysters, sea urchins, sea anemones, and mullet's liver, and salt to be corrupted in numberless ways so as to suit all palates."²⁴³ Considering Pliny's elaboration on his description, it does not appear that the fish sauce he is referring to was meant for Jews. This is not to say, however, that there was not a variety of "kosher" *garum*. Cotton, Lernau, and Goren mention that bones of kosher fish, namely herring and anchovy, were found in unlabeled amphorae at Masada. This, they contend, could be evidence of a kosher variety of *garum*. While the possibility of kosher fish sauce remains, Pliny is not talking about it here. As Frey rightly indicates, the mere labeling of the sauce as *casta*, *castum*, or *castimoniale* without further specification would not meet Jewish exigencies.²⁴⁴ Pliny's error, then, is not in his description of the contents of "pure" *garum*, but in his list of those who consume it.

It is clear that the *garum* at Pompeii was labeled for a particular clientele, but exactly *who* is open to interpretation. Since the exact content of the amphorae from Pompeii is uncertain there is doubt that the labels of *castum* or *castimoniale* refer specifically to kosher *garum*. Moreover,

²⁴¹ Cotton, Lernau, and Goren, 236. Also see Lev. 11:9-11; Deut. 14:9-10.

²⁴² Curtis, "Letter from Robert Curtis to Hershel Shanks: *Garum Castum* and the Jews."

²⁴³ Hannah, Lernau, and Goren, 236. *Sic alex pervenit ad ostreas, echinos, urticas maris, mullorum iocinera, innumerisque generibus ad saporis gulae coepit sal tabescere.*

²⁴⁴ J.B. Frey, "Les juifs à Pompéi," *Revue Biblique* vol. 42 (1933), 372-74.

as Frey observes, *garum* was one of the primary exports of Pompeii.²⁴⁵ As such, it is uncertain if the amphorae were intended to be distributed in Pompeii, or be exported.²⁴⁶ In consideration of the equivocal nature of the evidence, citing these amphorae as verification of a Jewish community is ambiguous at best.

4.6 Summary

From the many inscriptions discussed in this paper, I suggest that only three possess a high enough degree of probability to be classified as relating to Jews or Judaism: 1) since Tal Ilan firmly establishes the name *Iesu[s]* as a biblical name, it probably points to a Jewish individual; 2) the Hebrew inscription (if it is, in fact, Hebrew) indicates that someone was familiar with a language specifically linked to the ἔθνος from Judaea; 3) the Sodom[a] / Gomor[ra] graffito reveals that someone knew the story from the Hebrew Bible. While there is equal probability that it could have come from a Christian, or even post-date the eruption, it nevertheless may signal that someone, perhaps a Jew, in the city knew the narrative from Genesis.

The remaining inscriptions can be divided into two categories: those which are completely ambiguous and those which I dismiss as Jewish. In the former category, I place the three Marias, Martha, Giiniisis, *Poinium Cherem*, *Mur[ia] Cast[a]* or *Gar[um] Cast[um]*, and TY / ILIIX / Ἰουδαϊκου. The inscriptions in this category either do not yield any definitive clues about the individuals they refer to (the Marias and Martha) or yield uncertain or unclear

²⁴⁵ Although Frey does not provide any further information on the exportation of *garum* from Pompeii, Mary Beard claims that various amphorae inscriptions allude to many different shops selling and factories producing *garum* – all connected to Umbricius Scaurus, the owner of a Pompeian *garum* shop who distinguished his products as *liquaminis flos optimus* (premium best fish sauce) and *liquaminis floris flos* (absolutely the best fish sauce). The amphorae variously refer to the manufacturing establishments of “Aulus Umbricius Abascantus” and “Aulus Umbricius Agathopus” to name a few. To Beard, this indicates that the slaves of Umbricius Scaurus were running a number of *garum* outlets. Since the majority of trades and shops in Pompeii were small-scale, the large-scale *garum* operation in Pompeii is impressive, and likely signals a staple of the Pompeian economy which brought in more profit through trade; see Mary Beard, “*Pompeii: The Life of a Roman Town* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2008), 186.

²⁴⁶ Frey, 561.

translations (Giiniisis, *Poinium Cherem, Gar[um] Cast[um]*, ΤΥ / ΙΛΙΙΧ / Ἰουδαϊκού). In the latter category, I place A. Cossius Liban, Ionis, and M. Valerius Abinnericus. The inscriptions in this category do not seem to present any plausible ties to Jews or Judaism.

At best, the inscriptions from Pompeii indicate that Jewish individuals had a transitory presence in the city in the capacity of slaves or traveling merchants. Yet there is no individual identified in the inscriptions (either by self-identification or a third-party) who can be considered as irrefutably Jewish. As such, the inscriptions do *not* supply evidence for a Jewish community in the city. Conventional Semitic names, uncertain biblical references, commonplace apotropaic symbols, and a broad clientele for “pure” *garum*, do not provide evidence for any Jewish religiosity or worship. So while these inscriptions have traditionally been read as evidence of a Jewish community at Pompeii, they seem to be evidence of “contact between cultures rather than actual presence.”²⁴⁷ It is important to note, however, that none of the inscriptions addressed in this study decisively confirm or deny the existence of a Jewish community in Pompeii. The possibility remains that a Jewish community did exist in the city, but to make that conclusion from this small corpus of ambiguous evidence would be overreaching.

²⁴⁷ Estelle Lazer, “Victims of the Cataclysm,” in *The World of Pompeii*, John J. Dobbins and Pedar W. Foss, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 613.

V. Reflections and Conclusions

In addition to the epigraphic data, there are two additional components relating to the hypothetical Jewish community in Pompeii that warrant some reflection. One of these components is not epigraphic in nature, but a wall painting allegedly depicting the story of the judgement of Solomon. The painting has traditionally been seen as evidence for the existence of anti-Jewish sentiment in Pompeii, which, in turn, would seemingly attest to a strong Jewish presence in the city. The second component is the notion that the Pompeian Jewish community served as the foundation for an early Christian community. This hypothesis is based, in large part, on the supposition that the composition of the population of Pompeii mirrored that of Puteoli (based on Acts 28.13-14) due to its proximity. The suggestion of an early Christian community has been further reinforced by some questionable interpretations of epigraphic data. Before making any final concluding remarks, I assess the implications of both of these components for this study.

5.1 The Judgement of Solomon

A wall painting from the House of the Physician (VIII.v.24) dubbed “The Judgement of Solomon” (fig. 18) has been thought to depict the famous scene from 1 Kings 3:16-28.²⁴⁸ In the painting a man is standing over a baby with a cleaver ready to split the child in half while a woman pleads to a panel of judges. Following its excavation in 1882, archaeologists immediately associated the painting with the biblical narrative. But the painting differs from the biblical story in one unique aspect: all the characters are pygmies, with oversized bodies and heads, and spindly arms and legs. Early excavators and some subsequent scholars assumed that the

²⁴⁸ In the story of the Judgement of Solomon, King Solomon must judge between two women both claiming to be the birth mother of an infant. He threatens to divide the baby between them by slicing it in half, but one woman breaks down and pleads for the baby’s life. Solomon thus knows that she is the real mother because she was willing to give the baby up to spare its life.

rendering of characters as pygmies indicated a parody of the biblical story since the painting contains “all the essential narrative elements in the biblical story without omissions or adumbrations.”²⁴⁹ The pygmy parody was understood to be a representation of anti-Jewish feelings on behalf of the owner of the house towards Jews in the city, and was thus taken as evidence for a Jewish community. Yet Joanne Berry deems the painting unconvincing evidence for a Jewish community in Pompeii, but notes the remarkable similarities between the painting and the biblical story.²⁵⁰ In a similar way, Mary Beard surmises that the painting depicts either the biblical scene or “some story on very much the same lines.”²⁵¹

Mordechai Cogan suggests that the story about the judgement of a wise king was an old folktale adopted by the author(s) of the Hebrew Bible to demonstrate the wisdom of Solomon.²⁵² Both Hugo Gressmann and Ernst Würthwein assert that the tale originated in India, where many parallel tales are attested (e.g. “Vikramodaya”), and eventually made its way through the Mediterranean world into classical parallels.²⁵³ William Hansen provides two examples of such classical parallels, which indicate that while the story’s central narrative remained intact, adaptations were being made to the characters and setting. He first points to the Roman tale of Ascyltos, Encolpius and Giton. This story, as related by Petronius in *Satirica*, follows the general plot line of the judgement of Solomon, but contains different characters: two males vying for the same lover. The tale opens with Encolpius deciding to sleep with his lover, Giton. In the middle

²⁴⁹ T. Feder, “Solomon, Socrates, and Aristotle: In Earliest Biblical Painting, Greek Philosophers Admire King’s Wisdom,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* Vol. 34 No. 5 (September/October 2008). Feder also insists that the painting contains the pygmy caricatures of the Greek philosophers, Socrates and Aristotle. He contends that the placement of the philosophers in the biblical scene was a way of “associating the wisdom of Solomon with that of the Greek Philosophers.”

²⁵⁰ J. Berry, 88.

²⁵¹ Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius*, 130.

²⁵² Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 196.

²⁵³ Hugo Gressmann, “Das salomonische Urteil,” *Deutsche Rundschau* 33 (1907); Ernst Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1977).

of the night after they fall asleep, unbeknownst to Encolpius, Giton is taken away by a jealous Ascyltos, who also desires him as a lover. In the morning Encolpius wakes up to find Giton missing and discovers him with Ascyltos. Needless to say, Encolpius is enraged. To settle the argument of who should be Giton's lover, Ascyltos suggests that they divide Giton in half with a sword. As Encolpius is about to slice him, Giton pronounces that he chooses Ascyltos, thus ending the story. Hansen's second example involves a famous episode in the life of King Bokchoris (or Bocchoris) of Egypt, a pharaoh of the twenty-fourth dynasty, "whom classical authors in the first centuries mention as a man of great wisdom and whose judicial decisions were still current in their day."²⁵⁴ The poet/magician Pancrates²⁵⁵ details a proclamation of the king as he judged between two mothers disputing possession of a child. He relates that the king also had to judge between two beggars disputing possession of the same cloak, and three men disputing the right to a basket full of food. Gressmann, Würthwein, and Hansen's parallels, particularly the story of King Bokchoris and the two mothers, cast reasonable doubt on the biblical content of the painting.

In addition to the dubious content, the pygmy motif and the origin of the painting also call into question its purported Jewishness. The motif of pygmies in art was very popular in Pompeii. The "Judgement of Solomon" was located within a series of six wall paintings adorning the peristyle in the garden of the House of the Physician, two of which were also devoted to the activities of pygmies. These two paintings depict scenes from the Nile, one showing pygmies interacting with hippos, crocodiles, and ibises, and the other showing pygmies having a

²⁵⁴ W.H. Hansen, *Ariadne's Thread: A Guide to International Tales found in Classical Literature*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 232.

²⁵⁵ Pancrates (second century BCE) was from Heliopolis, south-east of Alexandria. Pancrates records the judgements of the king in the first book of his *Bocchoreidion*. This book is now lost, but portions of it are preserved in the writings of Athenaeus. Prior to Pancrates' telling of the stories, the fables about King Bokchoris (r.725-720 BCE) seemed to be in circulation, at least orally, for quite sometime (see G. Maspero and A.H. Sayce, eds., *The History of Egypt* Vol. 7 (Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 374).

banquet.²⁵⁶ In addition to the pygmies from the House of the Physician, the House of Menander contained a floor mosaic of pygmies boating down the Nile.²⁵⁷ Other scenes containing pygmies, crocodiles, and date palms were found in the aptly named House of the Pygmies.²⁵⁸ Due to the prevalence of pygmy motifs in Pompeian art, the depiction of pygmies in “The Judgement of Solomon” is not extraordinary.

Additionally, because the “Judgement of Solomon” shares content similar to the other paintings on the wall in the House of the Physician, it seems likely that the series of paintings would all be related thematically. That is, there would not be a random biblical (anti-Jewish) scene amidst Egyptian-themed paintings. The painting of the judgement scene, then, is *prima facie* representing Egyptian content. And since there is an Egyptian story about the judgement of a wise king deciding the possession of a child, there is a high probability that the story of Bokchoris is the narrative depicted in the painting.

Many works of art from Pompeii are also reproductions of lost originals; “The Judgement of Solomon” may follow in this tradition.²⁵⁹ Feder asserts that the painting was commissioned by a non-Jew due to the traditions prohibiting the depiction of human forms. But, of course, there is no guarantee that Roman Jews strictly adhered to this tradition.²⁶⁰ However, it is not likely that a Jew would commission a painting where a biblical scene is enacted by pygmies. Accordingly,

²⁵⁶ Giordano and Kahn, 58. The remaining three scenes of the series thematically connect to the first three as they depict Nilotic elements. Giordano and Kahn, however, suggest that a scene depicting a pygmy standing on the back of a Hippo, striking another animal, while another pygmy pulls a third pygmy out of the mouth of the Hippo is a “probable” retelling of the story of Jonah and the whale (61).

²⁵⁷ Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius*, 162.

²⁵⁸ W.F. Jashemski and Frederick G. Meyer, eds., *The Natural History of Pompeii* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 140.

²⁵⁹ The Alexander Mosaic found in the House of the Faun, for instance, is thought to be a copy of a painting by Apelles or of an earlier fresco by Philoxenos of Eretria. The latter is mentioned by Pliny in *Natural History* 35.110: “. . . and Philoxenus of Eretria, who painted for King Cassander a picture representing one of the battles between Alexander and Darius.”

²⁶⁰ Feder’s argument for the enforcement of the Jewish tradition is weak; the wall paintings from the Dura Europos synagogue (dating to the first and second centuries CE) are evidence of the lax adherence to these laws.

this painting was probably commissioned by a gentile Roman and is a copy of an Alexandrian original²⁶¹ designed to match both the theme of Alexandrian art displayed in the house and the popularity of Egyptian scenes in Pompeii. One piece of evidence to illustrate that “The Judgement of Solomon” was derived from an Alexandrian original is the dress of the soldiers. Graham Sumner argues that the military garb worn by the soldiers is Ptolemaic rather than Roman, indicating Alexandrian origin and influence.²⁶² More so, as Giordano and Kahn correctly point out, the commercial relationship between Italy and Alexandria in the first century CE was extremely active, therefore Egyptian motifs and artwork were readily accessible to Roman patrons.²⁶³

However, most scholars agree that the paintings in Pompeii were often derived from “pattern books” that artists would carry around to show their patrons.²⁶⁴ If this applies to the “Judgement,” then it is difficult to determine the origin of the content of the painting or the intent of the original artist (i.e. did he harbor any anti-Semitic feelings?). Yet, since the painting is firmly situated within the context of other Egyptian-themed paintings, it seems that the “Judgement” scene should be construed along the same thematic line.

Considering the presence of stories similar to the judgement of Solomon circulating in the first century, the popularity of pygmy motifs in Pompeii, and Italy’s connection to Alexandria, it seems unlikely that the painting from the House of the Physician represents a biblical story. Consequently, it does not provide any evidence for a Jewish community in Pompeii.

²⁶¹ The notion of the “Judgement of Solomon” being derived from an Alexandrian original is also supported by Alastair M. Small, “Urban, Suburban and Rural Religion in the Roman Period,” *The World of Pompeii*, John J. Dobbins and Pedar W. Foss, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 195.

²⁶² G. Sumner, *Roman Military Clothing (1): 100 BC - AD 200* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2002), 20.

²⁶³ Giordano and Kahn, 59.

²⁶⁴ John R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 156.

5.2 An early Christian community?

The amorphous corpus of Jewish inscriptions from Pompeii was born in the Victorian era as a scholarly reaction to the desire to find evidence of Judeo-Christian religious practice throughout the Mediterranean, and to make the evidence at Pompeii congruent with other known (Italian) Jewish communities, such as Puteoli, Ostia, and Rome. The notion of a Christian community in Pompeii grew out of and simultaneously reinforced the notion of a Jewish community by positing that there were both Jews and Jewish-Christians living in the city. Conversely, evidence for a Christian community in Pompeii has been taken as indirect evidence for a Jewish community in the city.

But like the putative Jewish community, the idea that an early Christian community existed in Pompeii rests on a very shaky foundation – established on the premise that a Jewish community could be found in the city. Giordano and Kahn proclaim that in Pompeii “the new faith [Christianity] sank its first roots into the bosom of a Jewish circle now oriented toward the *impulsore Chresto*.”²⁶⁵ However, as we have seen, the proposition that a Jewish community existed within the city is extremely tenuous. Nevertheless, the idea of a Christian community has been perpetuated primarily due the content of Acts 28.13-14 and a perceived relationship between Pompeii and Puteoli, since these cities were approximately 28 miles apart. Paul Berry asserts that “few historians have doubted the existence of a Christian community living in Puteoli at the time of Paul’s arrival” and that “a social web appeared to attach the cities [of Pompeii and Puteoli] together.”²⁶⁶ However, in order to accept Berry’s premise that a Christian group existed

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 67.

²⁶⁶ P. Berry, 8. Berry observes that Paul stayed in Puteoli for four days, but the author of Acts does not delineate his activities there. Based on Acts 14.23 (“And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe”) and 1 Cor. 7.17 (“However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches”), Berry surmises that Paul may have ordained Christian ministers who then ministered to neighboring towns like Pompeii.

in Puteoli, we have to presume that ἀδελφους appears in Acts as a reference to “Christians,” not “Jews” (Acts 28.14). And while it is not unreasonable to posit a common lifestyle (e.g. business and trade, economy, and social structure) between Campanian cities, it is overreaching to assume an identical population.

The premise of a Christian community also owes its propagation to the novel, *The Last Days of Pompeii* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, published in 1834, which inserts a Christian narrative into Pompeii.²⁶⁷ The novel, one of the most popular books of its time – reprinted in at least fifteen editions – expressed Victorian concerns about morality, sin, and religion; the novel suggests that Pompeii was destroyed as a punishment for its paganism and immorality. Bulwer-Lytton contrasts the idolatrous and gluttonous pagans of Pompeii with virtuous early Christians, who fight to expose the ills of Roman depravity. The protagonists, Glaucus and Ione, after nearly being defeated by the Egyptian sorcerer, Arbaces, escape from the corrupt city and later convert to Christianity. The book had a remarkable influence on the “exposition and reconstruction of

²⁶⁷ Also see Emily Sarah Holt, *The Slave Girl of Pompeii* (London, 1887); Eduard Alberti, *Marcus Charinus, der junge Christ in Pompeji. Eine Erzählung aus dem Römischen Alterthum für die Jugend* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1872); Woldemar Kaden, “In der Morgenröthe,” in *Pompejanische Novellen und andere* (Stuttgart, 1892), 1-228; Gustav Adolf Müller, *Das sterbende Pompeji. Ein Roman aus Pompejis letzten Tagen* (Leipzig, 1910). In these novels Christianity serves as the remedy to deplorable Roman decadence. These books “provide a valuable insight into the ideas existing around Pompeii in the nineteenth century” (see Eric M. Moormann, “Christians and Jews at Pompeii in Late Nineteenth-Century Fiction” in *Pompeii in the Public Imagination from its Rediscovery to Today*, Shelley Hales and Joanna Paul, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 184).

ancient city life in Pompeii.”²⁶⁸ Yet there have only been three pieces of epigraphic evidence which have been tenuously linked to a Christian population at Pompeii. The first inscription reads, *Rex es* (“You are king”) and was found on a wall of a house located near the amphitheatre in 1957.²⁶⁹ The second, the famous *Rotas-Sator* square, was found twice: once on a column in the Palaestra (II.7) and, once on the wall of the peristyle in the House of Paquius Proculus (I.vii.1).²⁷⁰ The third is an inscription possibly containing the word *Christiani*.²⁷¹ It was found in the atrium of the House of the Christian Inscription (VII.xi.11), thought to be an inn.

The first of these inscriptions has largely been dismissed in modern scholarship due to a lack of any evidence linking it to Christianity – the word *rex* was previously thought to be an allusion to Jesus, but this cannot be proven.²⁷² Interpretations of the *Rotas-Sator* square (fig. 19) oscillate between a Jewish, pagan, and Christian identification. There is no compelling evidence to suggest that it belongs exclusively to any one of these groups. Many scholars have attributed

²⁶⁸ Stephen Harrison, “Bulwer-Lytton’s ‘The Last Days of Pompeii’: Re-creating the City,” in *Pompeii in the Public Imagination from its Rediscovery to Today*, Shelley Hales and Joanna Paul, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 76. The anachronistic imposition of Christian narratives into the archaeology of Roman cities also affected the neighboring town of Herculaneum. Here, one of the most famous (and erroneous) examples of Christian evidence was found. In the House of the Bicentenary, excavated in 1938, a purported Christian chapel was discovered. This idea was propagated because of a cruciform pattern found in plasterwork of a wall. In the excavation photograph, the room was staged to appear as a shrine – a carbonized piece of furniture was moved directly under the “cross.” As a result, scholars posited that “the cross on the wall was snatched away as a prized possession when the Christian occupant fled before the rising mud and lava engulfed the stricken town”; see Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 327. However, this notion has recently been dismissed. Instead, the cruciform pattern has been reinterpreted as “the trace left by the support brackets for a cupboard”; see Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Herculaneum: Past and Future* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2011), 313; cf. J. Berry, 201. Additionally, John Dominic Crossan notes that the appearance of a cross in Herculaneum is highly unlikely because “the cross did not become a widely used symbol until the fourth century”; see John Dominic Crossan, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus’s Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 320.

²⁶⁹ *CIL* IV, 10193.

²⁷⁰ *CIL* IV, 8623. In “Urban, Suburban and Rural Religion,” Small records the literal meaning of the “magic square” as, “the Sower Arepo holds the wheels of the plough with care,” 204.

²⁷¹ *CIL* IV, 679.

²⁷² Paul Berry insists on a Christian identification for this inscription due to a “possible relationship” between the inscription and the Vulgate. Specifically, he cites Matthew 27.11; Mark 15.2; Luke 23.3: *Tu es rex Iudaeorum?* and John 18.33: *Ergo rex es tu?* Although the composition of the Vulgate post-dates the destruction of Pompeii, Berry wonders if there was “a Bible in Latin, whether transported in the form of bound papyrus sheaves or in vellum folios, in circulation within a single generation of the time of Christ” (11-12). This proposition is highly unlikely.

the square to Jews due to their ancient reputations as “superstitious charlatans and dabblers in magic . . . notorious for their use of magic talismans, amulets, spells and riddles.”²⁷³ Yet, others, such as Charles Frank, F. Grosser, S. Agrell, and A. Small, have said that it is a Christian cryptogram which reads *Pater Noster* in a cruciform pattern, flanked by an “A” and “O” (Alpha and Omega). Mary Beard disagrees with the Christian identification of the square, and asserts that it is an example of a common Roman word game, which was prevalent throughout the empire²⁷⁴ – the square has also been found in Dura Europos and on Hadrian’s Wall in Roman Britain. Jerome Carcopino likewise dismisses the notion that the square indicates that Christians were living in Pompeii – he argues that the square is not a product of any of the inhabitants living in the city in 79. He claims that the *Rotas-Sator* cryptogram was not created until the end of the second century CE and, therefore, could not have been written by any Pompeians whether Christian, Jewish or otherwise. Additionally, Carcopino notes that the Book of Revelation, where Jesus refers to himself as the Alpha and Omega, was not written until around 90 CE, post-dating the eruption by eleven years. Accordingly, he contends that the magic square was written on Pompeian walls by looters or treasure hunters after the eruption.²⁷⁵

The inscription possibly containing the word *Christiani* is a more complicated matter (fig. 20). The graffito, written with charcoal on stucco, was discovered in 1862 by Alfred Kiessling and has yielded various transcriptions and readings of its content.²⁷⁶ If, in fact, this inscription does contain the word “Christians,” it would be the earliest appearance of the word.

²⁷³ Duncan Fishwick, “On the Origins of the Rotas-Sator Square,” *The Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 57, No. 1, (1964), 47.

²⁷⁴ Mary Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius*, 302.

²⁷⁵ Jerome Carcopino, “Le Christianisme secret du ‘carré magique,’” *Museum Helveticum* Vol. 5 (1948), 16-59. Revelation 22:13: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

²⁷⁶ The charcoal faded from the stucco only two years after its discovery. Consequently, any modern examination of the text is impossible.

According to Kiessling, the inscription contained two prominent, partially translatable lines amid other illegible lines. He originally transcribed the two partially legible lines as: *pg vi gaudi Christiani / sicu so oriis*.²⁷⁷ He later emended the transcription of the first line to: *igni gaude Christiane*.²⁷⁸ As a result of this rendering, Karl Zangmeister, the editor of the first part of the *CIL IV*, suggested that the inscription was related to the Neronian persecution of Christians. In another assessment of the wall, after it had been cleaned for a second time, Giulio Minervi discovered three more lines and determined that the correct ending for the word “Christian” was *os* (*Christianos*). In another effort, Giuseppe Fiorelli transcribed the lines discovered by Minervi as a price listing for wine aged for five years: *vina varia aetatis v*.²⁷⁹ Other scholars postulated that *vina* should be read as *Maria*, indicating a Jewish-Christian possibly linked to the house. Because the house in which the inscription was found was thought to be an inn, della Corte suggested that the house was, in fact, a Christian hotel.²⁸⁰

Yet some recent scholars, including Mary Beard, have entirely dismissed the presence of the word “Christians” in the inscription as “almost certainly a figment of pious imagination.”²⁸¹ Because the graffito has long faded, there is no way to assess the accuracy of the transcriptions of the early excavators. However, based on the ever-morphing renditions of this graffito, it is clear that the content of this inscription has never been fully established. There has never been consensus in the wording nor translation of the text, and the letters composing the word “Christians” have been continuously debated. Accordingly, in an inscription where the majority

²⁷⁷ Alfred Kiessling, *Bullettino Dell Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* (1862). In contrast, M. Guarducci renders this line as *Bovios audi(t) Christianos* (“Bovius listens to Christians”) (see M. Guarducci, “La piu antica iscrizione col nome dei Cristiani,” *Römische Quartalschrift* Vol. 57 (1962), 116-125).

²⁷⁸ “To the fire with joy, O Christian.”

²⁷⁹ Giuseppe Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi di Pompeii del 1861 al 1872* (Naples, 1873). Cf. Paul Berry, 26.

²⁸⁰ Matteo della Corte, *Case ed Abianti di Pompei* (Rome, 1954), 169.

²⁸¹ Mary Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius*, 302.

of the lines are described as “illegible” or “partially legible,” how can we be certain that a single word, the most important word in the inscription, was transcribed correctly? It seems most fortuitous that the word “Christians” turned out to be the only legible word in the whole graffito. When something seems too good to be true, it probably is. In agreement with Mary Beard, the presence of the word “Christians” seems like the product of wishful thinking. But if, the word “Christians” truly does appear in this inscription, it only means that Christians were known in Pompeii, not that they lived and worshipped there.²⁸²

It is not implausible, however, to think that some Christians could have been in Pompeii, but, as in the case of a Jewish community, there is only inconclusive data. Thereby, any notion of community is unsupported. Evidence of Christian communities in this period is extremely rare;²⁸³ this is likely an indication that Christianity was just beginning to spread, or, to some degree, was indistinguishable from Judaism and/or polytheism in the majority of material remains. Therefore, while many scholars have advanced the argument that “there is no doubt that there were Christians in Pompeii before the eruption,”²⁸⁴ this conclusion is demonstrably equivocal.

5.3 Final Remarks

Poor methodology has been the fundamental problem in assessing the evidence at Pompeii. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu best sums up the problematic situation of scholarly assumption, “when you [the historian or anthropologist] are working within the pre-constructed, reality offers itself to you. The given gives itself.”²⁸⁵ Bourdieu argues that the position of historians, as external observers of society, leads them to objectify and simplify a society because

²⁸² Mau, 18.

²⁸³ J. Berry, 201.

²⁸⁴ Small, 195.

²⁸⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, “Thinking about Limits,” *Theory, Culture and Society* Vol. 9 (1992), 37-49.

they do not implicitly understand how that society functioned. They seek to identify explanations, rules and structures that will give them an easy-to-read map of that society.²⁸⁶ As a result, it is easier to imagine that in every instance individuals are following the rules of their religious allegiance that we, in modern scholarship, have set for them. For example, if the name “Martha” is found scribbled on a wall, because it appears in the New Testament, it is easier to assume her Jewish ethnic background and, consequently, her allegiance to Judaism than to posit, for instance, that Martha was not Jewish, but a heavily Romanized freedwoman from an Eastern Roman province. Martha fits nicely into the preconceived category of Jewishness – because she has a Semitic name she must be Jewish. In this model, if there is an aspect, no matter how obscure, in which an individual can be defined as a Jew, then they (and other people similar to them) can always be said to be Jewish. The assumption then follows that because there was a Jewish community in Rome, Ostia, and Puteoli (among other cities), with a similar chronology – remains dating from the first century CE – there had to necessarily be a similar community in Pompeii.

This mode of thinking has been the basis for positing a Jewish community at Pompeii and has sustained the notion through the centuries even though the evidence does not make this clear. A correlation has continuously been sought between perceived individual religious identity and a social organization for that identity (i.e. a purported Jewish person belonging to a Jewish community).²⁸⁷ But in many instances this correlation simply does not exist and on other occasions it is simply fabricated or a product of wishful thinking.

A reassessment and re-contextualization of these inscriptions is a necessary step to writing a more accurate history, not only of Pompeii, but of broader Diaspora Judaism. We have

²⁸⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 27.

²⁸⁷ Sandwell, 31.

plenty of evidence for the lives of Jews elsewhere in the Roman Empire; we know quite a bit about their involvement in society and their organization in communities. We know that Diaspora communities did not embody a single homogenous identity into which every Jewish individual could fit; clear binary categories of “pagan” and “Jew” did not always exist. Indeed, in antiquity, many Jewish individuals were typified by some form of cultural hybridity. Yet in confirmed Diaspora communities, we are able to detect how Jews – as an ἔθνος – sought self-preservation through cultural differentiation and created a life of their own interacting with and reacting to their Graeco-Roman neighbors. The lack of evidence for a large Jewish presence (and any related religious activity) in Pompeii should be taken seriously to indicate that, perhaps, there were not many Jews there.

In 1989 Ernst Badian coined the phrase “history from square brackets” to describe the invention of historical fiction by historians in reading what is *not* present in the square brackets of an obscure or fragmentary text.²⁸⁸ The cloaking of speculation in the guise of fact is a practice that can easily root itself into scholarly debate. Such conjecture has become embedded in the discussion of the presence of a Jewish community in Pompeii. The implications of this conjecture extend far and wide. The European scholars of the 19th and early 20th centuries – most of whom were Christian – were particularly interested in finding evidence of a Judaeo-Christian presence in the ruins of Pompeii. This desire caused them to overread the evidence and jump to premature conclusions. These conjectures, largely the product of “feelings of superiority [of nineteenth century Christians] towards Judaism,” served as a means to assert that early Christianity was a prolific and powerful entity, even in its earliest and formative years.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Ernst Badian, “History from ‘Square Brackets,’” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* Vol. 79 (1989), 59-70.

²⁸⁹ Eric M. Moormann, “Christians and Jews at Pompeii in Late Nineteenth-Century Fiction” in *Pompeii in the Public Imagination from its Rediscovery to Today*, Shelley Hales and Joanna Paul, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 183.

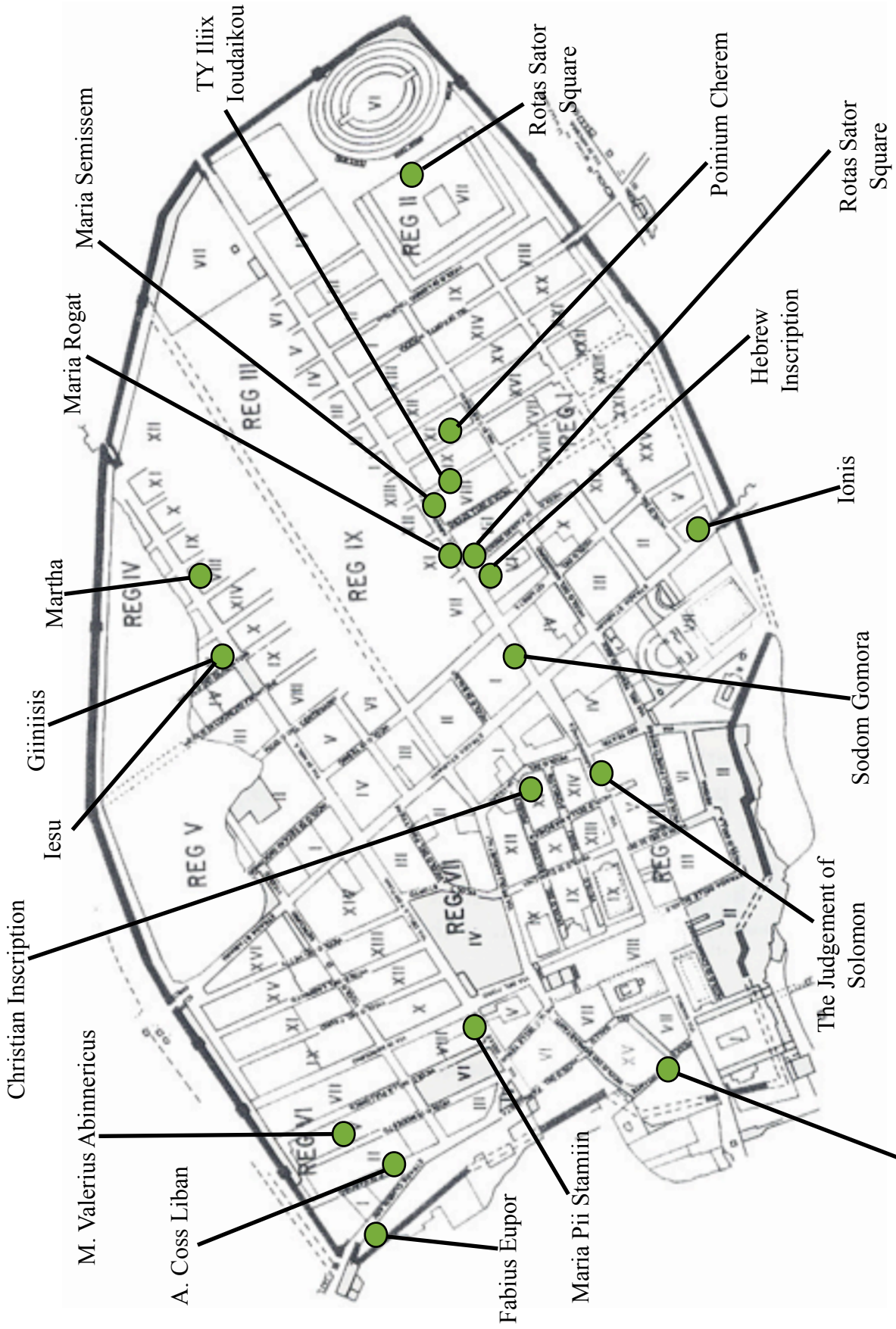
The events that took place in the first century (the earthquake of 62 CE, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, and the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE) provided fodder for the imaginations of writers like Bulwer-Lytton, and seemingly many early excavators as well. Several of these individuals based their analyses of the data on imagination rather than historical method and testable evidences – names which are commonplace Semitic appellations were immediately labeled as Jewish, even though they lacked a Jewish religious or social context; the meanings of Latin words, such as *cast[um]*, were embellished and misrepresented; and inscriptions, such as the Sodom and Gomorra graffito, were cast into dramatic narratives of biblical proportions rather than being considered outside of this narrow context. Once these interpretations were injected into the scholarly and public spheres, they became accepted dogma and were repeated generation after generation, encountering very little resistance. But after re-examining and re-contextualizing the evidence, there is no basis to admit a clear presence for either a Jewish religious community or a Christian outgrowth at Pompeii.

In the absence of clear evidence, any conclusion can be drawn. We can grant the possibility of a Jewish community in Pompeii, but with an abundance of nebulous epigraphic data and a lack of definitive physical manifestations of community – such as funerary inscriptions, known worship spaces, or corroborating literary documents – we cannot definitively make this assertion. More so, there is nothing in the material record that even hints at Jewish religious practice. As a result, at this point in time, there is no conclusive evidence for permanent Jewish inhabitants in Pompeii. There is simply not enough information in the physical record to speculate further than the evidence allows. The *possibility* of an individual presence for Jews, either involved in business transactions or servitude, is the only practical conclusion that can be made based on the extant evidence.

The contents of the epigraphic remains at Pompeii, whether in fragmentary condition or ambiguous in nature, attempt to tell a story about life in the first century CE. But the precise nature of that story is up for debate. If conclusive evidence cannot be found, and a hypothesis cannot be proven, we must accept uncertainty. We, as scholars, cannot idealize the inscriptions nor force them to speak, otherwise we run the risk of creating the type of fictitious history Ernst Badian warned against, the type of history derived from square brackets.

APPENDIX:
Photos and Images of the Inscriptions from Pompeii

Figure 1: Map of Jewish and Christian Inscriptions from Pompeii



Map from J.P. Descoeudres, *Pompeii Revisited: The Life and Death of a Roman Town* (Sydney: 1994).

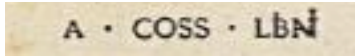


Figure 2: *CIL* X, 8058
“A. Coss Liban”

Only the inscription appears in the *CIL*. The bronze seal on which it was written does not appear.
Image from the *CIL* IV

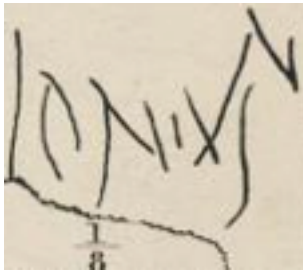


Figure 3: *CIL* IV, 2406
“Ionis”
Image from the *CIL*

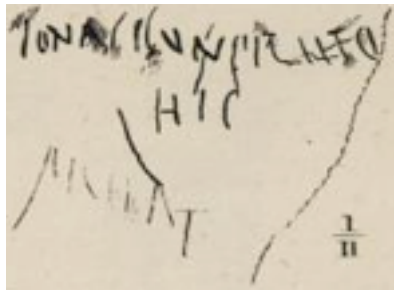


Figure 4: *CIL* IV, 2402
“Ionis cu[m] Filletto hic
filat”

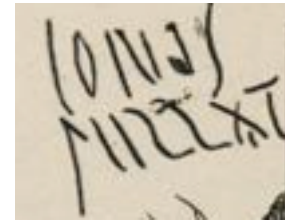


Figure 5: *CIL* IV, 2403
“Ionis filat”
Image from the *CIL* IV



Figure 6: *CIL* IV, 7866
“I ask you to make Cn. Helvius Sabinus aedile. (He is) worthy of the community. Maria makes the request.”



Figure 7: *CIL* IV, 5244

“This is Martha’s dining room, for she shits in the dining room”

The picture on the left is a sign in the latrine that illustrates the graffito. The graffito is shown in the picture on the right.

Photos from www.pomepiiiinpictures.com

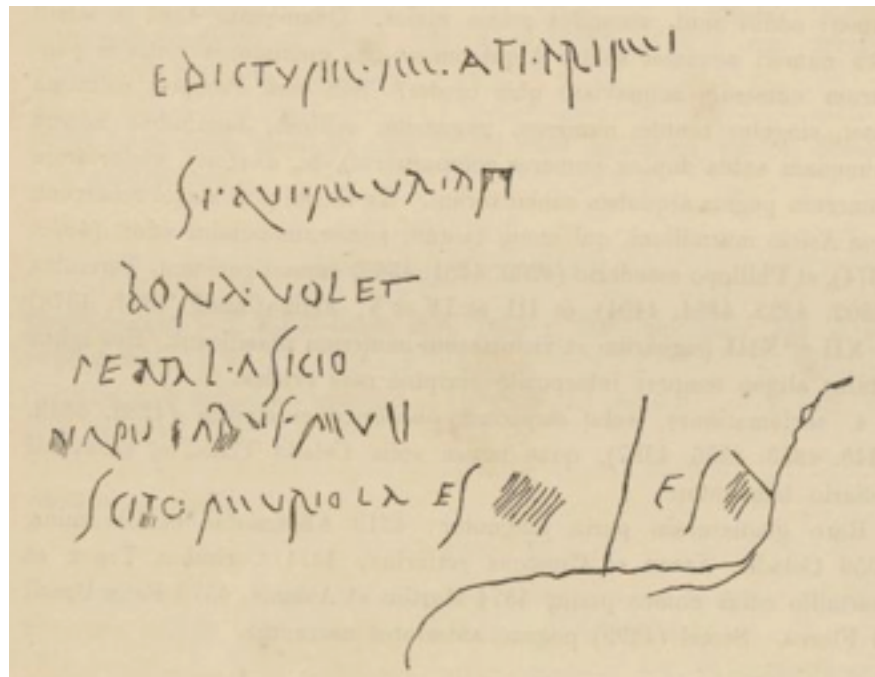


Figure 8: *CIL* IV, 4287

Inscription signed by Iesu, “The edict of Marcus Atius Primus, whoever wants to enjoy delicious fish sauce, seek it from Lucius Asicius, [. . .] I know you are a little fish.”

Image from the *CIL* IV.

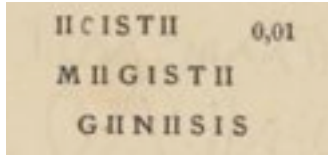


Figure 9: *CIL* IV, 4300
 Unknown translation
 Image from the *CIL* IV

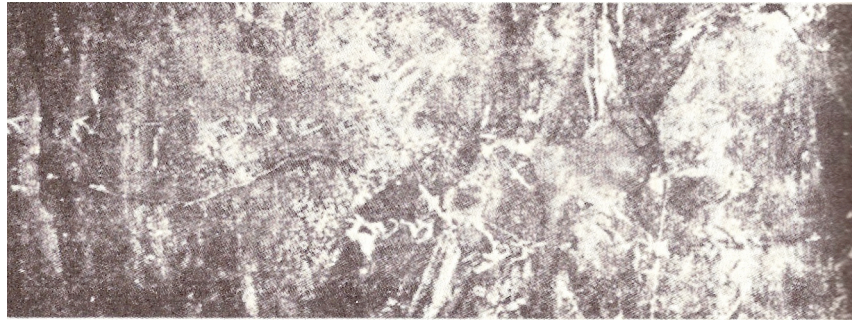


Figure 10: *CIL* IV, 8010
 Hebrew script? Unknown translation.
 A photograph of the inscription *in situ*.
 Photograph from the *CIJ*

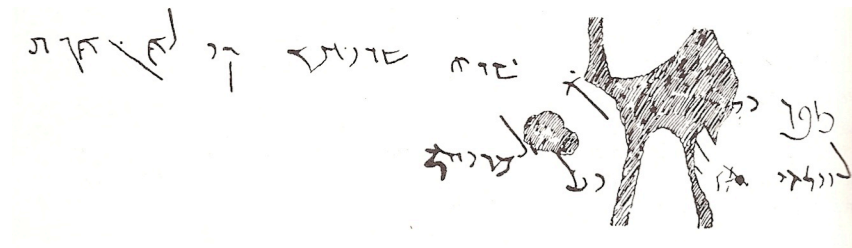
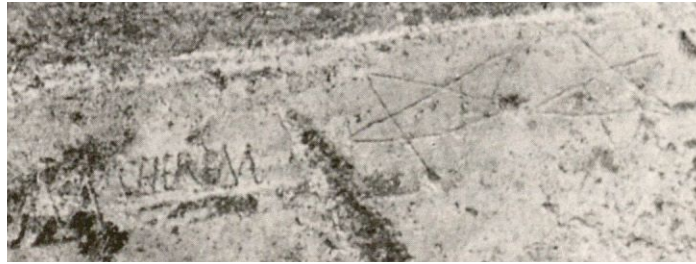


Figure 11: *CIL* IV, 8010
 Hebrew script? Unknown translation.
 A sketch of the inscription.
 Image from the *CIJ*.



Figures 12 and 13 Poinium Cherem and pentagrams.
 Images from Giordano and Kahn, *The Jews of Pompeii,
 Herculaneum, Stabiae and the Cities of Campania Felix.*

Ⲛⲟⲃⲟⲗⲗⲟ
 Ⲙⲟⲙⲟⲗⲗⲟ

Figure 14: *CIL* IV, 4976
 “Sodom[a] and Gomor[ra]”
 Image from the *CIL*.

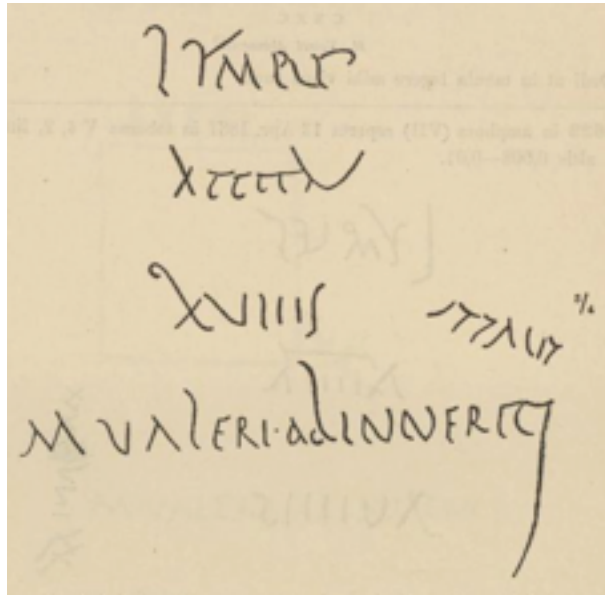


Figure 15: *CIL* IV, 5619
 Inscription on a wine amphora of M. Valerius Abinnericus.
 Inscription as it appears in the *CIL*.

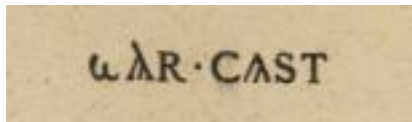


Figure 16: *CIL* IV, 2659
 “Gar[um] Cast[um]”
 Image from the *CIL*.
 A photo of the amphora does not appear.



Figure 17: The variety of amphorae which contained the *garum castum* or *muria casta* as indicated in the *CIL*.
 Image from the *CIL*.



Figure 18: "The Judgement of Solomon."
Image from Theodore Feder, "Solomon, Socrates, and Aristotle," *Biblical Archaeology Review* Vol. 34 No. 5 (September/October 2008)



Figure 19: *CIL* IV, 8623
The Rotas-Sator Square
Image from Giordano and Kahn, *The Jews of Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae and the Cities of Campania Felix*.

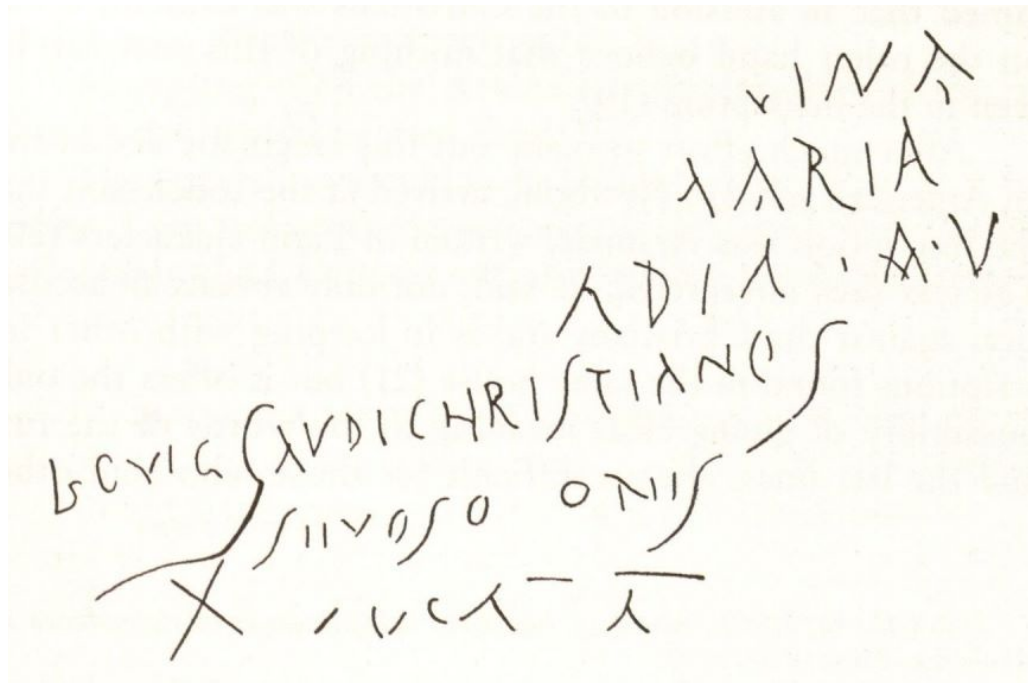


Figure 20: *CIL* IV, 679
 The "Christian" inscription
 Unknown translation

Image from Giordano and Kahn, *The Jews of Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae and the Cities of Campania Felix*.

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