

Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society

Volume 22

2004

The Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society
126 Albert Street
London NW1 7NE

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Subscription Rates

The *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* is published annually. Subscription for 2005 is £15.00 (including postage and packing), or £20.00 overseas, payable to the 'Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society' by cheque or credit card. Those wishing to become members of the Society and to receive details of the annual lecture programme, should apply for details to the Executive Secretary of the Society (see application form on page 99 of this publication) or consult the Society's website: www.aias.org.uk.

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Dr., 16th Flr, Chicago, IL 60606, E-mail: atlas@atla.com; website: www.atla.com.

On the cover: an 18th-century map of the Holy Land, by Eman. Bowen.

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126 Albert Street, London NW1 7NE
ISSN Series 0266 2442

Typeset, printed and bound in Great Britain by
J. W. Arrowsmith Ltd., Bristol

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City Foundation Legends in the Decapolis

ACHIM LICHTENBERGER

Louis Robert deserves the distinction of having collected in tireless and knowledgeable fashion the most disparate and remote evidence for the purpose of reconstructing local traditions of cities in the Greek East during the Imperial period.¹ In addition to epigraphic and archaeological sources, Robert above all took into account literary texts and local civic coinage to reach a better understanding of local traditions. During the Roman Imperial period, civic coins ('Greek Imperials') in particular served to cultivate local traditions – traditions that have left virtually no signs or hardly any imprint on the literary record as it has been handed down to us. Thus, coins represent a next to inexhaustible wealth of information regarding the history of individual *poleis*. Indeed, these historical city traditions can only be reconstructed by combining the most diverse groups of evidence.

The historical traditions of cities are frequently linked to the founding of cities. Research on such traditions assumes an especially exciting dimension, when the function of the traditions is put into question. Most of the local traditions are depicted extensively on coins from the Antonine period. However, this does not necessarily mean that the traditions originated in that period. Instead, it is significant that from a functional perspective at this time they were considered so important ('identity fostering') that they absolutely had to be represented on coins. This can be correlated chronologically with the speeches in praise of the city featured during the so-called Second Sophistics, a phenomenon which was promoted by orators during the second and third centuries AD and became widespread in the East of the *imperium Romanum*. On the one hand, these speeches emphasized and praised the Greek origins (*eugeneia*) – sometimes only assumed – of the city, and on the other, certain cultural or topographical aspects such as an advantageous environmental setting.²

While the cities were drained of political power by Rome in the Imperial period, at the same time they experienced the *pax Romana*, an era of economic prosperity, which afforded local elites an opportunity to compete with each other. A symptom and at the same time a promoter of this development was the Panhellenion founded by Hadrian and based in Athens. To be accepted into the prestigious Panhellenion, the cities of the East had to prove their *eugeneia*. Although to our knowledge no city in Syria ever belonged to the Panhellenion, this institution contributed to a general climate in which *eugeneia* was regarded as important for cities in the East.³

Until now, the examination of the Greek Imperials was largely confined to the cities of Asia Minor, and research on the topic of foundation legends has hardly

been touched upon in the Near East.⁴ This can be attributed, among other things, to the fact that there are clearly better sources available for Asia Minor. Despite these gaps it is possible to find some examples of local foundation legends from cities of the Syrian Decapolis. Although in ancient thought it is not possible to distinguish between mythological and historical traditions, we shall concentrate on examples with a myth as a background. Thus traditions that refer to foundations made by Alexander the Great, Hellenistic kings or Romans, which also existed in the Decapolis,⁵ will not be discussed in the following.

Scythopolis, Gadara and the 'Caesarea Cup'

The Decapolis was a group of cities, situated in present-day northern Jordan, Israel and southern Syria. Their administrative organization attached to the Roman province of Syria goes back to the time when Pompey conquered the Near East in 64/63 BC.⁶ From the second century AD onwards they were incorporated into the Roman provinces of Syria, Syria-Palaestina and Arabia. The cities were planned on the model of the Greek *polis*.

Most of the information concerning the foundation legends of the cities of the Decapolis come from Nysa-Scythopolis. The inconclusive etymology of the city's name, Scythopolis ('city of the Scythes'), already led in antiquity to varied speculations concerning its origin. The notion that the city was founded by Iphigenia after she fled from Scythia, as Malalas reports in the sixth century AD, may represent a Byzantine aetiology for the name which only tenuously reflected the real circumstances of the cultural setting of the city in Byzantine times.⁷ More importantly and far more widespread, is another tradition already transmitted by Pliny. This tradition states that Dionysus buried his wet nurse Nysa at that location and that the town subsequently received its name from her and from Scythians who had settled there: *Scythopolim, antea Nysam, a Libero Patre sepulta nutrice ibi Scythis deductis* ('Scythopolis, formerly Nysa, after Father Liber's nurse, whom he buried there, where a colony of Scythians are settled.')⁸ In this way, Pliny intended to explain the names of both Nysa and Scythopolis, whereas the explanation of the latter is largely unintelligible for us in the brief passage handed down by Pliny. The derivation of the name Nysa, however, is given additional support from other sources, such as in an inscription from Scythopolis dated to the time of Marcus Aurelius, which mentions that Dionysus was honoured there as *ktistes*.⁹

However, K. J. Rigsby has convincingly demonstrated that the name Nysa (as well as the region's well-attested names of Antiochia and Seleukia¹⁰) was a Seleucid dynastic name which at the time of the founding of the city had nothing to do with a local cult of Dionysus.¹¹ Thus the Dionysus-Nysa tradition (based on the city name) could only have emerged after a Seleucid woman gave her name to the city. She was later replaced in Pliny's own time by the wet nurse of Dionysus. A similar case is known from Nikaia in Bithynia, which was named in the Hellenistic period after the wife of Lysimachus, whose name during the Imperial period, at any rate, was traced back to one of the nymphs.¹²

During the Roman Imperial period, the Nysa tradition associated with the wet nurse was a theme depicted on the coinage of Scythopolis. Thus, the birth of Dionysus from the thigh of Zeus and his being handed over to the wet nurse Nysa is a subject portrayed on coins since the time of Septimius Severus (Fig. 1).¹³ The enthroned Kourotrophos Nysa is then represented along with the boy Dionysus from the time of Caracalla (Fig. 2).¹⁴ Apparently, the Dionysus-Nysa tradition was so dominant in this period that it not only edged out the Seleucid princess Nysa from memory (at least in official memory), but also another *ktistes* of Scythopolis, Gabinius, who was promoted on Late Hellenistic coins as the one who gave his name to the city.¹⁵ This neglect of Gabinius occurred despite the fact that other Decapolis cities precisely at this time began to highlight their Roman benefactors or (re-) founders (Pompey, Philippus, Gabinius) in the images that they cultivated for themselves.¹⁶ In Scythopolis, however, the Dionysus-*ktistes* tradition dominated the coinage in the second and third centuries AD and it may also be found on another coin type of the city.



Fig. 1. Coin of Scythopolis. Obv.: Bust of Gordian III. Rev.: Nysa on left standing opposite Zeus, from whose thigh emerges the infant Dionysus (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Münzkabinett) [12.89gr; 23/24mm].

This coin type appears at the time of Commodus and shows Dionysus fighting two opponents (Fig. 3).¹⁷ The interpretation of this coin type is subject to discussion. Eckhel saw the small figure to the right of Dionysus as Priapus.¹⁸ Hill explains the scene as Dionysus threatening a primitive idol,¹⁹ and Seyrig even saw the small figure as the boy Dionysus in front of whom perhaps a Scythian Corybant was performing a dance.²⁰ Jonas recognized the raw meat-eating Dionysus,²¹ and Gitler interpreted the scene as a representation of the Anthesteria.²² But all of these explanations seem improbable. The most convincing interpretation of the coin type is that it is a combat scene in which Dionysus pulls back the head of



Fig. 2. Coin of Scythopolis. Obv.: Bust of Gordian III. Rev.: Seated Nysa suckling the infant Dionysus (Meshorer 1985, 42 No. 110a) [14.60gr; 24/26mm].



Fig. 3. Coin of Scythopolis. Obv.: Bust of Commodus. Rev.: Dionysus fighting two figures (Meshorer 1985, 41 No. 107) [32.83gr; 35/36mm].

one of his charging opponents and is about to attack him with his thyrsus. At the same time, Dionysus' panther is rushing toward a second opponent, a motif which is well known from the Greek Dionysus iconography.²³ Meshorer and Barkay have also interpreted this scene as a combat scene; Barkay thought of a gigantomachy.²⁴

The question then arises whether the limits of interpretation have been reached, or whether it is still not impossible to formulate an interpretation with specific reference to the city. To come right to the point, we believe it probably is. Indeed, it is conceivable that the type represents the city's historical tradition which had as its subject a battle scene, preceding the foundation of the city. Moreover, it is highly plausible that Lycurgus was the opponent of Dionysus.

Both Pliny and the inscription already mentioned substantiate that Dionysus was revered as the *ktistes* of Scythopolis. Legends concerning the founding of a city quite often have as their theme the fight of the eventual founder against a monster-like opponent, who inhabited the place prior to the foundation. Underlying this topos, is probably the idea of the civilizing force which accompanies the act itself of founding a city.²⁵ Both Dionysus and Heracles were founders and fighters of monsters *par excellence*.²⁶ When considering the pattern of myth concerning the founding of Thebes by Cadmus, a figure who first had to battle a dragon, it is possible to find many examples of battles against monsters prior to the foundation of a city or before, for example, the founding of a sanctuary.²⁷

Unfortunately, we are hardly well informed regarding which battle involving Dionysus held special significance for the inhabitants of Scythopolis. The fifth-century AD author Nonnos, who possessed a good knowledge of eastern local traditions,²⁸ localizes the battle between Dionysus and Lycurgus in Nysa in Arabia. According to him, Lycurgus is king of the Arabs. P. Chuvin made the probable connection, given the reference to Mount Carmel in the text (*Nonn. Dion.* 20,298), that with Nysa, our Nysa-Scythopolis was actually intended.²⁹ Thus, either the myth transmitted by Nonnos, or another comparable one, might have been associated with Scythopolis. This idea becomes all the more plausible considering that the myth of the battle between Dionysus and Lycurgus reached Syria early on and Arabia was a region where Lycurgus was identified with a local god.³⁰

Moreover, with the founding of Damascus, the fight between Dionysus and Lycurgus was brought in connection with a variation of this myth in which the giant Askos battled Dionysus.³¹ After all, Lycurgus distinguished himself as a pursuer of the wet nurses of Dionysus,³² so that also here there is a possible connection to Scythopolis, which was the site of the worship of Nysa, the wet nurse of Dionysus. The Lycurgus myth could have been linked to Scythopolis, since Lycurgus – as the pursuer of the wet nurse – could have murdered Nysa. This act could have been the precursor to that which Pliny reports, namely, that Nysa was buried by Dionysus.³³ On this point, however, we are beginning to cross the safe limits of interpretation surrounding this coin type, since it ultimately cannot be brought into line with the Lycurgus myth. Indeed, it is not possible to identify Lycurgus – who is usually shown armed with a double axe – with certainty as one of the figures on the coin type.³⁴ Furthermore, no situation is attested within the Lycurgus myth where Dionysus dominates in direct confrontation with Lycurgus. On the contrary, Dionysus is the weaker of the two and, thoroughly frightened, flees to Thetis. Therefore, it appears likely that we are dealing with an unknown local variation of the myth.

A variation of this sort is not unlikely. The myth of the founding of Damascus, for example, in which the giant Askos also fights against Dionysus, establishes that Dionysus did meet opponents other than Lycurgus in such local traditions. This could explain the second figure on the coin type from Scythopolis. At the same time, the local myth from Damascus demonstrates that it was possible to insert non-canonical local episodes into the well-known Greek myth. Thus, the representation of the Lycurgus myth on the coin type from Scythopolis is conceivable. A myth such as this could supply an aetiology for at least one of the two city names (Nysa).



Fig. 4. 'Cup of Caesarea' in the Louvre, Paris. The foundation myth of Straton's Tower (later, Caesarea).

Thus this coin type with Dionysus fighting opponents probably portrays Dionysus before the founding of the city. It fits into an Antonine-Severan visual programme of the city of Scythopolis, which has as its theme the mythologized history of the city of Scythopolis. The coin type has to be seen alongside the representation of the birth of Dionysus and the coin type showing the boy being raised by the wet nurse.

Perhaps the most well-known piece of evidence representing the foundation of a city in the Near East is the 'Caesarea Cup' in Paris, which has been dated to the fourth century AD (Figs. 4–5).³⁵ It obviously depicts an otherwise unknown foundation myth. While the cup unfortunately is not completely understood in every detail,³⁶ it does also display the motif of a battle against a savage lion, a monster-like creature taking place before Straton could proceed to establish Straton's Tower, later known as Caesarea (Fig. 5).

Another representation of a battle between a god and a monster-like creature is found on coins of Gadara from the time of Elagabalus (Fig. 6).³⁷ On these coins, the city god Heracles is depicted fighting a serpent. The representation of the serpent draws upon Hydra iconography, but because the monster has only three heads and Heracles is depicted in cuirass and with a thunderbolt and a dog, the Hydra myth is clearly not intended. In this case, where Heracles is probably the local Heracles-Melqart, it is not possible to elaborate further on the coin type as the textual traditions for Gadara are not as good as those for Scythopolis.³⁸ Nevertheless, it is possible to assume that the coin type which hitherto has not been convincingly interpreted, represents a battle scene which preceded Heracles founding a city (probably Gadara).



Fig. 5. Detail from the 'Cup of Caesarea' in the Louvre, Paris. Straton leaving ship and fighting a lion.



Fig. 6. Coin of Gadara. Obv.: Bust of Elagabalus. Rev.: Heracles-Melqart fighting a snake-monster (Spijkerman 1978, 150–151, No. 80) [10.24gr; 24/26mm].

Further evidence for foundation legends of cities of the Decapolis: Hippos and Pella

At this point it is necessary to touch upon some additional evidence for comparable city foundation legends among the cities of the Decapolis. Since there are only fragmentary sources at our disposal, only a piecemeal reconstruction of these legends is possible.



Fig. 7. Coin of Hippos. Obv.: Bust of Tyche. Rev.: Horse (Meshorer 1985, 74 No. 197) [6.46gr; 17/18mm].

With regard to Hippos: since the first century BC a horse was represented on coins as the city symbol (Fig. 7).³⁹ From the time of Marcus Aurelius, the horse is superseded by the mythical winged horse Pegasus, which then comes to almost entirely dominate the coinage from the time of Elagabalus (Fig. 8).⁴⁰ This development might have occurred parallel to a mythologizing of the city history, and an aetiology of the city name might have brought Pegasus somehow in connection with the naming and, thus, the founding of the city. A similar case is known from Cilician Tarsus.⁴¹ Such a 'do-it-yourself mythology' could become a 'shameless hijacking of well-known myths'⁴² by cities which, similar to the Syrian cities, had no Greek past of its own.



Fig. 8. Coin of Hippos. Obv.: Bust of Elagabalus. Rev.: Pegasus (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Münzkabinett) [16.82gr; 26/28mm].

In the case of Pella: according to Stephanus of Byzantium (*s.v.* Pella), Pella was originally called Boutis. For this strange tradition, there are two possible explanations which are not in contradiction to each other:

- a) Since Stephanus mentions at the same point in the text that Macedonian Pella was called Bounomos, the name Boutis could allude to an exclusive connection with the Macedonian city. This seems probable, because Stephanus is the only author with regard to the Macedonian city who attests to a former toponym within the word field of *bous* ('ox'). Remarkably, Stephanus also relates a structurally similar tradition (*s.v.* Gadara), that in Macedonia there existed an otherwise completely unknown village named Gadara, a toponym, that on the other hand is well attested in the Semitic world.⁴³ In that case, there could be a similar allusion linking the Syrian city with an invented Macedonian site. Stephanus possibly hands down fragments of foundation myths.
- b) Chuvin supposes that Boutis could refer to an animal that could have accompanied and brought a future founder to the place where he would establish the city.⁴⁴ This too is a favourite motif in Greek foundation legends⁴⁵ and is also found on the 'Caesarea Cup' (the bull between two lions) (Fig. 5) and possibly on the coins of Gadara (on the right side of Heracles) (Fig. 6). The name 'Boutis' thus might refer to an animal prominent in an otherwise lost foundation myth of Pella.

The Second Sophistics in the Decapolis

It is obvious, that during the Antonine-Severan period, foundation legends were a well-discussed theme in the images cultivated by the Decapolis cities.

The legends, especially those featuring Greek gods, constitute the building blocks of a Greek past. Indeed, the cities present themselves as being influenced by Greek culture also in the area of the urban landscape and occasionally even on inscriptions where they describe themselves as '*polis Hellenis*'.⁴⁶ Josephus also perceived the cities in this way,⁴⁷ and the patronage received from Hellenistic, and later from Roman, rulers and officials during the second and first centuries BC may signal this Hellenizing legacy. In a narrower historical context, this orientation toward Greek culture may be attributed to the climate surrounding the Second Sophistics mentioned at the beginning.

Sophists, who were responsible for praising the city as part of their *encomia*, frequently travelled among the cities of the East and gave speeches which addressed topics desired by their local audiences. Occasionally, Sophists would also extol their native cities or rather begin their careers there. With Kerykos of Gerasa and Apsines of Gadara, Sophists are documented for the Decapolis.⁴⁸ We know little about the Sophists other than their names. The legends presented here, however, allow us to focus and understand the topics that would have engaged their interest.

Acknowledgements

A version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research in Toronto, November 2002. My thanks are due to K. Gay, Tübingen, for the translation of the article into English and to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for providing me with a travel grant.

Notes

- 1 Robert 1940–65; 1975; 1977.
- 2 Bowersock 1969; Weiss 1984: 179–195; Strubbe 1984–86: 253–304; Anderson 1993; Scheer 1993; Lindner 1994; Schmitz 1997. See also Geiger 1990: 141–150; 1994.
- 3 On the Panhellenion: Oliver 1970: 92–138; Romeo 2002: 675–684.
- 4 Both Chuvin (1988; 1991) and Leschhorn (1991) have dealt with city foundation legends in the Near East.
- 5 On this Lichtenberger 2003: 315–320.
- 6 On the Decapolis: Bietenhard 1977: 220–261; Isaac 1981: 67–74; Lichtenberger 2003: 6–20.
- 7 Malalas 139 f.
- 8 Pliny, *NH*, 5.16.74.
- 9 Di Segni 1997: 139–161; Di Segni, Foerster and Tsafirir 1999: 59–75.
- 10 Kindler 1978: 51–55.
- 11 Rigsby 1980: 238–242.
- 12 Robert 1977: 12–16; Merkelbach 1987: 10, 16–25, 34–41.
- 13 Hill 1965: 77, No. 11; Rosenberger 1977: 32, No. 27, 34; 39–40, No. 38, 63; Spijkerman 1978: 194–195, No. 23; 200–205, Nos. 40–41, 57; Meshorer 1985: 42, No. 112; Barkay 2003: 210, No. 39; 216–217, No. 59; 218, No. 65; 229, No. 93.
- 14 Hill 1965: 76–77, Nos. 6–10; Rosenberger 1977: 34–37, Nos. 38, 41–42, 46, 54–58; Spijkerman 1978: 198–207, Nos. 32, 46–48, 58; Meshorer 1985: 42, No. 110; Barkay 2003: 214, No. 50; 217, No. 60; 219, No. 66; 222, No. 74; 224, Nos. 79–84.
- 15 Cf. Barkay 1994/99: 54–62.
- 16 On this aspect, see: Lichtenberger 2003: 346–348.
- 17 Seyrig 1962: 210; Hill 1965: 77, Nos. 12–13; Rosenberger 1977: 34–37, Nos. 43–45, 59–61; Spijkerman 1978: 194–207, Nos. 21, 42–45, 59; Meshorer 1985: 41, No. 107; Barkay 2003: 203–204, No. 19, 207, No. 29, 211, No. 41, 218 No. 62, 221 No. 72, 222–223 No. 75, 226–228 Nos. 85–91.
- 18 J. Eckhel, 1828. *Doctrina numorum veterum*, III. Vienna. 439.
- 19 Hill 1965: XXXVI.
- 20 Seyrig 1962: 210.
- 21 Jonas 1960: 1–8.
- 22 Gitler 1991: 23–33.
- 23 Cf. Gasparri, 1986. *LIMC* III: 474–476 Nos. 613, 617, 623, 628, 632, *s.v.* Dionysos.
- 24 Meshorer 1985: 41, No. 107: 'Dionysos waving thyrsos at fleeing figures'; Barkay 1993: 372; 2003: 118–121.
- 25 Fontenrose 1959: 465.
- 26 For Heracles as the fighter of monsters and the bringer of culture: Fontenrose 1959: 321–364; Lacroix 1974; Burkert 1992. On the civilizing aspect of Dionysus: Bruhl 1953: 134, 136; and on his travels which predestined him for local myths: Bowersock 1990: 41–42.
- 27 For battles against monsters which preceded the foundation of a city: Vian 1963: 101–102. See also Burkert 1992: 115–127, and Fontenrose 1959.
- 28 Robert 1975; Bowersock 1990: 41–53; Chuvin 1991; 1994: 167–176.

- 29 Chuvin 1991: 258–264. On the countless other localizations of the mythical Nysa: Stein *et al.* (1937) *RE* 17 (1937) 162–165 s.v. Nysa.
- 30 Sourdel 1952: 81–84; Knauf 1990: 176–180.
- 31 Steph. Byz. s.v. Damaskos; Etym. m. s.v. Damaskos. In addition K. Tümpel, *RE* 4 (1896) 1701, s.v. Askos.
- 32 T. Heinze, *Der Neue Pauly* 7 (1999) 578, s.v. Lykurgos.
- 33 In contrast: Chuvin 1991: 263.
- 34 On the Lycurgus iconography: Farnoux, *LIMC* VI (1992) 309–319, s.v. Lykurgos I.
- 35 Will 1983: 15, 19–20.
- 36 Also on the ‘Caesarea Cup’: Finkielsztejn 1986: 419–428.
- 37 Meshorer 1976: 64, No. 89; 1985: 83, No. 226; Spijkerman 1978, 150–151 No. 80.
- 38 On this: Lichtenberger 2003: 89–95.
- 39 Spijkerman 1978: 170–171 No. 2; Meshorer 1985: 74 Nos. 197–198.
- 40 The first representations of Pegasus on coins from Hippos are known from the time of Titus (Spijkerman 1978: 170–171, No. 3) and alongside the horse under Domitian (Spijkerman 1978: 170 f., No. 5). From the time of Marcus Aurelius onwards, only Pegasus is depicted on coinage (Spijkerman 1978: 172–179, Nos. 12, 20, 26, 28, 35–39).
- 41 Scheer 1993: 284–286.
- 42 Hollis 1994: 153.
- 43 Mershen and Knauf 1988: 128–145.
- 44 Chuvin 1988: 106.
- 45 For such animals: Strosetzki 1954: 47 ff.; Vian 1963: 76–93; Gierth 1971: 87 ff.; Leschhorn 1991: 445–446.
- 46 Foerster and Tsafirir 1986/87: 53–58.
- 47 *AntJ* 17,320.
- 48 On Apsines, Bowie, *Brill's New Pauly* 1 (2002) 914, s.v. Apsines. On Kerykos, Steph. Byz. s.v. Gerasa. See also Geiger 1994.

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Abbreviations

LIMC	Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae
RE	Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft
INJ	Israel Numismatic Journal
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
BEFAR	Bibliothèque des Ecoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome
SCI	Scripta Classica Israelica
RB	Revue biblique
SchwNumRu	Schweizerische numismatische Rundschau
ZPE	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
ZDPV	Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
TAPhA	Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association
JSav	Journal des savants
HSCP	Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
BAH	Bibliothèque archéologique et historique
AncSoc	Ancient Society
WürzbJb	Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft

The 'James Ossuary on Trial': a Short Rejoinder

ANDRÉ LEMAIRE

I was surprised to read Emile Puech's contribution entitled 'James the Just, or Just James? The "James Ossuary" on Trial' in a recent issue of the *Bulletin* (*BAIAS* 21 [2003]: 45–53), which is an updated version of articles he had previously published in the magazine *Minerva* (14/1 [2003]: 3–4) and *Minerva-Online* (Jan/Feb. 2003), in *The Polish Journal of Biblical Research* (*PJBR* 2/1, Dec. [2002]: 7–21), as well as in *Verbum Vitae* (3 [2003]: 269–276). I was also surprised by the comments made by Shimon Gibson in his 'Editorial' which reported on unfounded rumours made by Orit Peleg and Rafi Lewis, which have, following an investigation, turned out to be nothing more than a misunderstanding of what Oded Golan, the owner of the James Ossuary, told them. I would also like to add that Gil Chaya, who is also mentioned in the Editorial, has written to me saying that he never saw or heard about the James Ossuary 'before it became the subject of international news'.

Unfortunately, the *Final Report of the Examining Committee for the Yehoash Inscription and James Ossuary* prepared by Uzi Dahari and others for the Israel Antiquities Authority, which was published on the internet at www.bibleinterp.com/articles/final_reports, also contains a confusion between two very different inscriptions, as well as unfounded rumours, contradictions, prejudices and premature generalizations, as I have shown in my detailed 'Critical Evaluation of the IAA Committee Reports Regarding the Ossuary Inscription' that appeared in *PJBR* (2/2, Oct. [2003]: 29–60) and in a more popular fashion in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (*BAR*) (29/6 [2003]: 50–59, 67, 70). I do not intend to repeat here my detailed arguments and invite those interested to read my scientific assessment of the Committee's report mentioned above.

As for Puech's paper in *BAIAS* 2003, I have already answered his earlier French version in *PJBR* 2002 (see above) in the same journal (*PJBR* 2/2 [2003]: 81–87). I expect that readers have understood that Puech's main argument is that the Aramaic 'ah and the Greek *adelphos* should be interpreted not as meaning 'brother' but 'cousin', following the interpretation by St. Jerome which has often been repeated in Catholic tradition. However, even Catholic scholars would qualify this interpretation as 'venerable' and one that should not be followed nowadays, especially since it lacks a serious philological basis, as has been demonstrated, for example, by François Refoulé, former Director of the Jerusalem École Biblique, in