

The Synagogue Inscription from Kursi*

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Excavations in late 2015 at Kursi Beach, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee near the foothills of the Golan Heights, uncovered a large marble slab with a Hebrew inscription dating back at least 1,600 years. No similar artifact has ever before been found in Israel, and it confirms for the first time that the ancient settlement at the site was Jewish or Judeo-Christian. Dr. Haim Cohen and Prof. Michal Artzy, from the Hatter Laboratory at the Leon Recanati Institute for Maritime Studies at the University of Haifa, led the excavation in cooperation with the Israel Antiquities Authority and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority's Kursi Beach site. The inscription reads as follows:

... ידכרון לטב ולברכה
דמן טיבריה
... ניה ברה די אתנדבון]...
... קדישה] מרמריה לאיקרה דאתרה
... [מה יתן חלקה]מלכה דעל] ומן פעלהון
... [א]נ]א[ו]ביה וסייע ית[...]ובמצוות
... [עלמה] אתרה קדישה מלך]...
ויסי יתה ויברך יתה אמן

* The discovery of a unique synagogue inscription at Kursi in 2015 has generated great interest among scholars and laypeople alike, not least since it confirms the existence of a Jewish community in an area otherwise known since the fifth century as a Christian pilgrimage site housing Galilee's largest Byzantine monastic complex. There has been some speculation with regard to the reading of the inscription, which has made publication of an authoritative interpretation by experts in the field a desideratum. While the stone itself is currently in the Israel Museum for cleaning and restoration, *JMJS* is pleased to offer its readers a first reading and interpretation of the inscription co-authored by epigraphist Haggai Misgav (Hebrew University) and the excavators of the site, Michal Artzy and Haim Cohen. ~*The Editors*

Will be remembered to good memory and blessing
from Tiberias?

. . .]nia his son who contributed . . .

Marble for the honor of (this) holy [place]

from their property. [King of the w]orld will give (their) part[. . .]

And commandments . . . and will help them . . .

In this land (?) of holy place. King [of world . . .]

And will heal him and bless him . . .

The words “from Tiberias” are inscribed between the first and second lines, probably because the writer forgot to write them in the right place, i.e. after the name of the donor, who came from Tiberias on the other side of the Sea of Galilee.



The marble tablet (approximately 120x60 cm) was found on the synagogue's floor surrounded by a simple one-color *opus sectile*. It is a unique find, as no other such marble tablets have been found in ancient synagogues.

The inscription is a dedication and commemoration of a donor or donors of money (or work?) to the synagogue. "Marble" is mentioned here as a part of the donation. This corresponds to finds in many other synagogues, where inscriptions mention architectural elements such as pillars, gates, and so on. Since the synagogue has not been excavated fully, we do not know yet whether there were other places where marble was incorporated in the building.

The excavation is only in its beginning, and a mosaic floor was discovered next to the tablet. Besides this detail, the inscription contains all the usual elements of dedication inscriptions: a blessing, the names of the donors, and a short prayer for their wealth and health.

