APPENDIX

DIS MANIBUS IN JEWISH INSCRIPTIONS FROM ROME

The inclusion of the pagan formula DM or DMS (Dis Manibus Sacrum, “to the gods of the underworld”) in Jewish inscriptions has long baffled scholars. The excavator of the Jewish Monteverde catacomb, N. Müller, for example, discovered several inscriptions carrying this formula, but he did not know how to interpret it.¹ Several years later, J. B. Frey discovered many more inscriptions carrying the DM formula. He believed that most of them were not Jewish at all.² Frey also argued that the few Jewish inscriptions displaying the DM formula were likely to have originated in pagan workshops: he believed that the Jewish inscriptions in question were carved into stones that were “ready made” in that they already carried the DM formula.³ Entering the Vigna Randanini catacomb in search of further Jewish inscriptions, Frey finally also observed that the DM formula never appeared in Jewish graffiti or painted inscriptions. For that reason he concluded, correctly, that the DM formula did not belong to the standard repertoire of epigraphic formulae used in Jewish funerary inscriptions from Rome.⁴

More recently, E. R. Goodenough proposed that Jews may have understood the DM formula as an abbreviation for Deo Magno or Deo Magno Sacrum, rather than for Dis Manibus.⁵ Goodenough also observed that the appearance of DM in inscriptions does not provide sufficient grounds to consider such inscriptions a priori as pagan rather than as Jewish.⁶ Still more recently, other scholars have tried to

¹ Müller 1912, 87.
³ CIJ 287, 464, 524, and 531. CIJ, cxix. Other scholars have followed Frey, see Goodenough 1953-68, vol. 2, 139; van der Horst 1991, 43.
explain the appearance of the DM formula in Jewish inscriptions, but the question has not yet been settled definitively.\(^7\)

Characteristic of most recent discussions of the DM formula in Jewish inscriptions is that scholars pay little or no attention to the precise archaeological context in which inscriptions carrying this formula have been found. It is true that excavation reports are usually not very helpful in this respect. Yet on one particular point, such reports provide important information. They indicate that in some cases inscriptions that carry the DM formula ended up in the Jewish catacombs only because they were reused there as filler to close up graves.

One such DM inscription was discovered in situ in 1906 by Müller, who noted that the inscription had been turned upside down so that the inscribed side was no longer visible at the time it served to seal off a Jewish grave.\(^8\) By studying the way in which they had been deposited, Müller established that two other DM inscriptions he discovered in the Jewish Monteverde catacomb were nothing but reused materials.\(^9\) Reuse is also certain in case of another inscription, which has been preserved in the collection of Jewish inscriptions now on display at the Musei Vaticani.\(^10\) One side of this elegantly-carved inscription has nothing Jewish about it. It is written in Latin and carries, among other formulae, the abbreviation DMS. The other side of this marble plate carries a somewhat less elegantly-carved Jewish funerary inscription in Greek, but it lacks the DM formula. That the DMS inscription was reused by Jews rather than vice versa seems likely because the person who was responsible for the Greek (Jewish) side of the inscription took into account that one of the corners of the inscription had been broken off (perhaps this happened when the DMS inscription was removed for reuse as a Jewish inscription). In addition, fragments of stucco can still be seen on the DMS side of the inscription. This means that the DMS side of the inscription was turned towards the inside of the grave of the person commemorated in the Jewish-Greek, or visible, side of the inscription.

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\(^8\) *CIJ* 34* and Müller and Bees 1919, 93 no. 104.

\(^9\) *CIJ* 17* and 19*, see Müller 1886, 52-53. On the question of whether the hypogeum on the Via Appia Pignatelli is Jewish, see Vismara 1986.

\(^10\) *CIJ* 36* (recto) and *CIJ* 148 (verso).