Introduction to "The Hebrew Inscriptions from Sardis"

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Five of these inscriptions on stone in Hebrew were excavated in the Roman synagogue at Sardis, sixty miles northeast of Izmir in Turkey, during the excavation seasons of 1962 and 1963; the sixth is a stray find from near the Temple of Artemis. Other Hebrew inscriptions or joining fragments may well lurk in the piles of hundreds of marble revetment pieces stored in the depots outside of the north wall of the synagogue.

As with the inscriptions in the article by John H. Kroll, "The Greek Inscriptions from the Sardis Synagogue" (*HTR* 94:1, January 2001), the editorial committee of the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis intends to include these Hebrew inscriptions in the final report on the synagogue and its contents. However, because the completion of that volume may still be several years in the future, it seems desirable to publish Professor Cross's article on the Hebrew inscriptions without further delay.

Indeed, as Professor Cross remarks, the Hebrew inscriptions from the synagogue are "few and fragmentary" when compared to the wealth of Greek inscriptions recovered from the site. The majority of the Greek texts record the names of donors whose gifts provided the opulent interior decorations of the synagogue, including sections of tesselated mosaic pavement and colorful mosaic wall panels. The Greek inscriptions indicate that such gifts were customarily offered in fulfillment of the donor's vow. Two of the Hebrew fragments seem to contain the word "vow"; another pair of fragments preserves the names of individuals, perhaps donors. The contexts of discovery of these inscriptions and the significance of their presence in this large and richly decorated synagogue of a wealthy and largely Hellenized Jewish community remain to be explained.

As the fortunate individual who was privileged to excavate these texts in 1962 and 1963, I am very grateful to Professor Helmut Koester, former editor of *Harvard Theological Review*, and Professor François Bovon, the current editor; to the past and present managing editors, Marianne P. Bonz and Margaret Studier; and to the publications committee of the Sardis excavations for undertaking and facilitating their publication.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816001041013 Published online by Cambridge University Press