Tombstones bearing Hebrew inscriptions in Aden

Inscriptions on tombstones provide us with information about the family and society of the deceased. Through a reading of these inscriptions the individual is no longer anonymous. In addition to names, grave inscriptions often contain information on an individual’s status and profession, offering us insights into the life of a community which include different classes and professions. The information emphasised in grave inscriptions reveals the values of a society and its traditions. This study investigates the corpus of Hebrew inscriptions on tombstones in Aden.

**Keywords:** Hebrew, epigraphy, Aden, calendrics, Judaism

**Introduction**

Graveyards and tombstones provide us with an insight into the life of people who are no longer alive. Tombstones tell us the name and age of the deceased person, and about when and where the deceased person lived. Sometimes the name of the deceased person gives an indication of family origins. The style of the characters, the order of the words, and sentences in the inscription tell us of the funeral traditions and the culture of this specific community. The size of the tombstone, its shape, and the style of its decoration reflect the social status of the person it was made for. The shape of the stone and the way it was cut tell us about the manual skills of the masons.

**Jewish cemeteries in Aden**

Four Jewish cemeteries are known to have existed in the Aden area. Two of them were ancient and were closed to funerals before the nineteenth century. The third one was in the centre of the city in the ‘Crater’ area, so-called by the British (Fig. 1). This cemetery was still in use at the time of British occupation. The Ma’alâ cemetery is the new cemetery. In addition to these cemeteries there is a memorial tomb in the Holkat-Bay area (1).

The common Hebrew words for cemetery are: bet-gebarot, the house of the burials, bet-’almim or bet-’olam, the everlasting house and bet-ha-hayyim, the house of the living (2). Among the Jews of Aden and in Yemen the word for cemetery is me’arâ (pl. me’arot) which means cave. In Aden the ancient cemetery was called me’arâ yešanâ, old cave (3). The ancient cemeteries were situated on the cliffs surrounding the Crater. The cemeteries had been abandoned for many generations by the time the British arrived. The cemetery in the Crater was situated near the Jewish quarter (Fig. 2) and was in use for many generations. There were many tombstones with Hebrew inscriptions scattered all over the area. Despite their relocation to a new quarter the Jews continued to use the Crater cemetery until approximately 1860. After the Crater cemetery was closed to burials, the British Administration granted the family of Menahem Messa, then head of the Aden Jewish community, special permission (Fig. 3) to continue to use the cemetery in the Crater for their family members until the middle of the twentieth century (4).

The cemetery at Ma’alâ was used by the Jewish community of Aden from 1860 until 1967, when the Jewish community was dissolved. Today there are hundreds of graves with tombstones of different
shapes and sizes at this cemetery. The earliest date of burial found in the Ma‘alā cemetery was from the year 1863 CE (תָוָי, רֶש, לַמֶד, גיֵימל) (5). The latest date was from 1967 CE (תָוָי, סיֵינ, קיֵפ, זיֵיאין) (5).

An overview of the discoveries of epitaphs under British rule
During building works under the British Administration, hundreds of Hebrew epitaphs were discovered and collected, but not all of them were
Fig. 2.
documented. The discovered tablets were often taken and kept by private individuals, and many of those slabs were consequently lost. Seven tablets were transferred to the British Museum (6).

Slabs were also discovered in the Crater outside the border of the Jewish cemetery. The slabs discovered outside the cemetery were similar to the tombstones in the cemetery, suggesting that the cemetery had originally been larger and that this area had probably once belonged to the cemetery.

A fire which broke out in the Crater in 1852 resulted in significant renovation work in the city. The reconstruction work was carried out under the supervision of Brigadier Playfair. Houses of mud and stone replaced the straw huts destroyed by the fire. During the digging further discoveries of Hebrew epitaphs were made. Many of the stones discovered were badly damaged, and some of the inscriptions were so corroded that their texts were illegible.

Hebrew epitaphs were also discovered during reconstruction work at the water reservoir which was located on the hill, in the area called the 'Tanks' (7). The discovery of Hebrew epitaphs in the Tanks area suggests that there had been a cemetery earlier which, in turn, implies that there must have been a Jewish settlement nearby. Hebrew epitaphs were also discovered during the reconstruction works in the 'Aden Pass' (8). They were set deeply into the walls and secured with mortar. Slabs were also found in the caves in this area (9).

The calendars used by the Jews of southern Arabia

Until the middle of the twentieth century the Jews of southern Arabia used four different calendars. Whereas three of the calendars were common, the fourth was rarely used. All four dating systems are present in the inscriptions. The Seleucid calendar is related to the rule of the Seleucid dynasty and is called šētārōt in Hebrew, the Calendar of the Contracts or the Era of the Documents (10). The calendar begins with the first day of the month of ṭišrē of the year 312 (or 311) BC (11). La-yeširā is the Calendar Beginning with the Biblical Creation of the World. The CE calendar was often used after the British occupation began (12). In two epitaphs the dates are stated in relation to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Among the Jews of southern Arabia, the Calendar Beginning with the Dates of the Destruction of the Temples was rarely used to give an indication of time (13).

In the calendars of la-šētārōt and la-yeširā the date is expressed by Hebrew letters. The numerical value of the letter is implied: ʿalep = 1, bêt = 2, yod = 10, qof = 100, taw = 400, taw + taw + reš = 1000. In the Hebrew epitaphs from Aden the Hebrew letters are also used to indicate the day of the week or the day of the month. In some inscriptions the letters expressing the date are integrated into words which form the sentences of the text. In those cases these letters perform dual functions. The letters that are related to the date are marked above the words by a bold font, by a dot or by special symbols to differentiate them from the other letters. The CE date is expressed numerically.
To convert dates into the CE calendar it is necessary to subtract 312 years from the Contracts Calendar, and 3761 years from the Creation Calendar (14).

Discoveries of Hebrew epitaphs by travellers
Jacob Saphir was the first to copy Hebrew inscriptions in Aden’s ancient cemeteries and to publish ten of them. Looking for physical evidence supporting the legends of the Jews’ arrival in southern Arabia in biblical times, Saphir felt that he had made an important discovery (15). In his opinion the ages of the inscriptions which he had copied corresponded to the time referred to in the legends. The earlier dates among the inscriptions copied by Saphir fell between the first and the sixty-first year of the Contracts Calendar. Saphir believed that these dates related to the third century BC (16). He also documented other epitaphs from the end of the first millennium CE and from the beginning of the second millennium CE. He noted that there were inscriptions written in different styles, despite the fact that those inscriptions gave closed dates and the epitaphs were found side by side in the same area. Saphir discovered a group of epitaphs from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE, which belonged to one family clan of Halfon, Bündar and Madmûn. According to Ben-Zvi and Goitein, Madmûn in Hebrew means Šemâryâ (17). Saphir’s discoveries indicated that the cemetery was used by the community for many generations throughout the centuries and that individuals could own part of the cemetery for use by their families (18).

As a member of an Austrian scientific delegation, Heinrich David Müller travelled to southern Arabia at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1889 Müller brought to Vienna approximately 100 squeezes of Hebrew inscriptions. Among these was a group of inscriptions from Aden’s Jewish cemeteries. Most of them date to the years between 20 and 54 in the Calendar of the Contracts (19).

Izhak Ben-Zvi travelled to Aden in January, 1950 (20). He visited the ancient cemeteries, the local state archaeological museum and a private museum, belonging to Mr. Kaiky Muncherjee, an Indian merchant residing in Aden. Ben-Zvi claimed that there were hundreds of sepulchral slabs in the ancient cemeteries. The deeper he entered into the ancient cemetery the earlier were the dates on the epitaphs. He mentioned that many people had epitaphs in their homes and added that it would be difficult to estimate how many slabs with Hebrew inscriptions there were in total. All the inscriptions he examined were dated in relation to the Seleucid Era. For the first time, photographs of four of them were published (21).

In 1951 Father A. Jamme rediscovered thirteen tombstones bearing Hebrew inscriptions in the courtyard of the Archaeological Museum of Aden. Jamme heard from J. J. Gunn, then director of the museum, that the tombstones had been found one hundred years earlier in the Crater. Jamme made latex squeezes of the inscriptions and passed them on to Eli Subar for publication (22).

Problems estimating the ages of the Hebrew epitaphs
Saphir’s publication of the first inscriptions provoked intense discussion among scholars. The contents of the inscriptions and their possible ages sparked controversy about their age and the subject of the first arrival of the Jews in southern Arabia (23). Saphir’s opponents thought that he had misinterpreted the dates; they believed that the dates given in inscriptions must have been incomplete, as masons might have contracted the dates—called p’q (perat qatan)—and engraved only the decade and the current year of the date (24).

According to Joseph Halévy, who visited Aden and Yemen in 1869–70, the earliest inscription was related to 1816 of the Contracts Calendar, which is 1504 CE. Halévy’s opinion was not only based on the analysis of his records from Aden, but also on his examination of the four slabs at the British Museum (25). The dispute between Saphir and Halévy ended when it turned out they were each referring to different slabs from different cemeteries (26). Saphir had felt offended and hurt because he was accused of falsifying the inscriptions and dismissed the accusation by saying: ‘Who would invent so many names, dates and other details to falsify hundreds of inscriptions, and from where would one get so many old stones for this?’ (27) Saphir’s opponents also claimed that some expressions, forms of eulogy and abbreviations in the text of the epitaphs were modern and were not attested in Europe before the tenth and thirteenth centuries CE: examples such as (רנמ) (tav, mem, kap), tehab menūḥătah or tehe menūḥătō kabôd (Isaiah 11:10 and 58:8), may her or his rest be in honour; and (הנ) (reš, yod, tav),
ruḥ ha-Šem taniḥênnû (Isaiah 63, 14), may the Spirit of the Lord lead him (Fig. 4-6). Saphir provided many examples of the use of such abbreviations in biblical times and in the Talmudic Era. Harkavy also mentioned that the expression תמק (tav, mem, kap) was in use in the Crimea in the first and the second centuries CE (28). On tombstones from the third century discovered at Beit Seʾarim the expression (זזעיל) (zayin, sade, lamed), zeker šaddiq li-heraḵâ (Proverbs 10:7), blessed be in memory the righteous, was used. Furthermore Saphir pointed out that the use of the name of the month instead of its number was a tradition among the ancient Babylonian Jewish Diaspora (29). He emphasised that in the inscriptions from the first century of the Seleucid Era, which his opponents considered to belong to a considerably later time, there were no rabbinical expressions, such as mōrenû, our teacher,

Fig. 4.
Epitaph of Ahron, son of Yešūʾā, from the year 32 of the Contracts calendar (courtesy David Birnbaum, director of the S. Birnbaum Z’L archive).

Fig. 5.
Epitaph of Hasya, daughter of Šemaryā, from the year 5472 (1712 CE) of the Creations calendar (courtesy D. Birnbaum).

rabbī or geʾōnenû (30). Saphir was unexpectedly supported by Dr. Rabbi Eliʾezer Mordechei Halevi from London who examined the Hebrew epitaphs in the British Museum. Dr. Halevi wrote a letter to Yehiʾel Brill, the editor of the newspaper ha-Libanon which was published with the title: ‘Let us admit that Jacob (Saphir) is saying the truth’ (Fig. 7). His opinion was that the dates given on the epitaphs were not contracted and should be read as written and as interpreted by Saphir (31).

The study of tombstone inscriptions from Aden provides us with more than just a possible time horizon for the presence of the Jews in southern Arabia. The letter forms used in the inscriptions are an important asset for Hebrew palaeography. A number of inscriptions use some of the oldest known styles of Hebrew characters. Furthermore, a few epitaphs from the same cemetery and seemingly from the same period exhibit styles of letters that are either inconsistent or completely different (32).

Almost eighty years after Saphir’s publication of the inscriptions from Aden, Birnbaum undertook a palaeographic study of sixty-two Hebrew inscriptions from Aden (33). He attempted to ascertain the age of the inscriptions in accordance with the theory of the development of the Hebrew alphabet. Birnbaum concluded that although the epitaphs were written in a unique, local style, most of them could not have been written earlier than the fourteenth century CE. According to his theory the way the letter dalet was written did not appear before the fifteenth century and the way the letter qoph was
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Fig. 7.
written—open on two sides—did not appear before the end of the seventeenth century or the beginning of the eighteenth century (34). Birnbaum believed that the dates in the inscriptions were contracted and the letters, which were supposed to have indicated the millennium, were omitted. Birnbaum argued that it could not be a coincidence that the dates were short in so many inscriptions. The masons must have intentionally omitted part of the date (35). As a result, Birnbaum added 2000 years to the date of the inscription of Masta’s slab (Fig. 8) from the British Museum and also to the inscriptions copied by Saphir.

Fifteen years after Ben-Zvi’s publication, Shmu’el Yavne’elli told him that while visiting Aden in 1911 he had also copied a few Hebrew inscriptions from the ancient cemetery. Yavne’elli was familiar with Saphir’s publications (36). Ben-Zvi published fourteen inscriptions from Yavne’elli’s collection of thirty-two. At the same time as Ben-Zvi obtained Yavne’elli’s notes, Ben-Zvi received photographs of Hebrew epitaphs from Aden from Mori Salem. These he published with Yavne’elli’s notes and issued another edition of his previous publication. Ben-Zvi was now convinced that the dates were contracted and revisited his theory on the age of the inscriptions in a new palaeographic study. In the revised article, in place of the letter ‘aleph he added the letter bet (2000 years) to the dates given. On one of the inscriptions from Mori Salem, the location of the letters of the date was changed. At the beginning there should be taw and not gimel. Alterations in the letters of the date was not unusual among Yemeni Jews (37). The inscriptions from Mori Salem from the years 26 and 32 according to the Contracts Calendar, were dated 1715 CE and 1721 CE, respectively (38). Eli Subar followed the same reasoning as Ben-Zvi, adding the letter bet to the given dates and estimating the ages of the inscriptions accordingly.

While the letter indicating the millennium in a Contracts date could be (א), ‘aleph or (ב), bet (one or two), the letter indicating the century could be any letter from: (א), ‘aleph to (ט), tet (one to nine). The date in an inscription could be anything over the last two thousand years. Let us assume, for instance, that the letter one, indicating hundreds and/or thousands, was omitted. The date mentioned in one of the inscriptions as the first year of the Contracts Calendar (311 or 312 BC), could be, for instance, the year 101, 1001 or 1101 in Contracts Calendar terms, which would mean 210 BC, 690 CE, or 790 CE, respectively. However, if the omitted millennium letter was two, then the dates for the first year of the Contracts Calendar could be, for instance, the year 2001, which brings us to 1690 CE (39).

The theory that the masons consciously left out the letters indicating the millennium is not applicable in all cases. We read a full date in inscription No. 132703 in the British Museum (א ב ר ק ה) (‘aleph, taw, resh, kap, he) which is 1313 CE (Fig. 9). Moreover, in the Ben-Zvi publications there were four inscriptions giving full dates. Inscription No. 3 has the date (א ב ר) (‘aleph, resh,
he) which gives 1205 according to the Contracts, or 894 CE. Inscription No. 4 gives the date of (ךלך, התו, יב, ה) which is 1475 (1000 + 400 + 70 + 5) according to the Contracts, or 1163 CE (Fig. 10). Inscription No. 132705 from the British Museum gives the date of (ךלך, התו, רס,.mem, ה) which is 1333 CE. Inscription No. 6 gives the date of (ךלך, התו, רס, samek, ה) which is 1665 according to the Contracts, or 1353 CE. Inscription No. 9 gives the date (ךלך) (ךלך, התו, יב), 1470 according to the Contracts, or 1158 CE (Fig. 11).

The inscriptions published by Saphir, Ben-Zvi and Subar include a number of names from the same family clan of Halfon, Madmûn and Bûndar, who lived in Aden between the eleventh and thirteenth century (40). Ben-Zvi published an epitaph with a date which was given relative to the Destruction of the Temple: ‘From the time the Temple was destroyed and until her death seven hundred and sixty four years passed and her age is seventeen’ (Fig. 12) (41).

Common terms and abbreviations used in the inscriptions
Covering the dead with a stone slab and writing an inscription on it with information about the deceased has been a tradition among Jews since...
the Talmudic Era (42). There are no rules stipulating what the tablet should include. In some epitaphs the details are given in a different order: the date of death, the verb and the name (43). It is thought that the order in which the information is given in the epitaph does not indicate the period in which the epitaph was written. Differences in style and content of epitaphs reflect differences in local cultural traditions and sometimes indicate the origin of the family. The text and the style can provide us with information about the community. From what was emphasised about the quality of the dead we learn about the values of society and how people lived as a collective (44). Furthermore, we find inscriptions with eulogies of different lengths. However, it is still possible to speak of a number of patterns which are common to many inscriptions.

Most of the texts include a verb, giving the date of departure from life, the name of the deceased, the name of the father of the deceased and the date of death. There are a few epitaphs (Fig. 6), mentioning not only the father of the dead but also his grandfather (45). In some epitaphs the details are given in a different order: first the date of death, then the verb and the name (46). One inscription by Ben-Zvi, the epitaph of Halfon ben Bündar (47), was undated. However, information from other sources can be used in dating this inscription. Because this name is mentioned and documented in many fragments in the Cairo Genizah, the epitaph can be placed in the twelfth century.

Very often the verb appears in the first section. It is normally an expression of the departure from life: ne’ēsa le-bêt ‘olâm or ne’esēpā le-bêt ‘olamāh (Figs 4, 5, 8, 13, 14, 17), he or she was gathered to the eternal home or God’s world (48). Also attested are the expressions nipter, he or she departed (Figs 9, 12, 24), nahat, she came to rest and nahat napsō, his soul came to rest (Fig. 10) or tānūhī, rest (Figs 15, 16, 18) (49).

Other expressions include nistalle, she left or nithbaqqes mi-le-ma’la, he was asked from (heaven) above. An expression which very often follows is: nisdaq dinō w-yisār po’dō, His (God’s) sentence is right and His deed is correct, or nilqēh me’al ‘amō or nilqēhā me’al ‘amāh, he or she was taken from her or his nation (Figs 19, 20, 25).

After the statement about departure from life there follows the name of the deceased. Interestingly, the Hebrew form was mostly used for male names, while the Arabic form was most often used for female names. If the deceased was a woman, then her father’s name was given, but not that of her husband (50).

Male names: Ahron (Fig. 4) (51), Abraham (Figs 10, 13, 18) (52), Barhan, Bündar (Fig. 10) (53), David (Fig. 8) (54), ‘Ezra (55), Hoter (56), Halfon (Fig. 11) (57), Hanūn, Hayyūm (58), Kessar (59), Madmūn (Figs 11, 23) (60), Menahem (Figs 21, 25), Mordekay, Moše or Mūsā (Fig. 16) (61), ‘Oded (62) or Me’ōdād (Fig. 17, 20) (63), Perah (Fig. 9) (64), Pinhas (65), Salôm or Salem (Fig. 15) (66), Se’ādeyā or Said
(Fig. 20), Sassôn (67), Šelomoh (Fig. 13), Šemaryā (68), Šemūʾel (69), Šilōh (70), Šimʿon (71), Tōb (72) or Tōbi (Fig. 21), Yaʿaqōb (5) (73), Yasīm (74), Yehoʿāš (75), Yešūʿā (Figs 4, 6, 14) (76), Yeḥezqel (77), Yisraʾel (78), Yisḥaq or Izaak (Fig. 19) (79), Yosep or Jōsep, Zeḵarya (Fig. 22) (80).

Female names: 'Imana (81), Baʾyti (82), Galyā (83), Gezā (84), Gîyarā or Gûwarā or Goharā (85), Halati (86), Hamame (87), Hannah or Hanun (Fig. 15), Hasinā (88), Hasya (Fig. 5), Hoglâ (Numbers 26:33) (89), Kedayā, Leʾā (Fig. 12), Lūlū or Lūlwe (90), Malkā or Malūk (91), Maṣṭā (Fig. 8) or Maṣṭah (92), Mazal, Melahi (93), Myyam (Fig. 10) (94), Qazal (95), Rahel, Raʾvā (96), Ribeqā (Fig. 14), Sarā (97), Sarir, Sarūr or Surūr (Fig. 17) (98), Sip̄orā, Sedaqā.

The terms for describing the Place of Rest are: qezer, the tomb, or bêt ʿolām, the eternal place (Fig. 23) (99). After the place of rest follow the expressions: hetqo ʿim saddiqim wa-ḥasidim, with the righteous and the pious is his portion (Figs 10, 11, 18, 23, 24), or miṣka ʿim saddiqim, he is resting with the righteous. This appears also in abbreviation (h ʿayin, s ʿade, waw, het) (100). Other terms include be-Gān ʿEden ʿim saddiqê ʿEl, in the Garden of Eden (paradise) with the righteous, and niṣmatô ʿEden Gān, may his soul be in paradise, or the abbreviation (nun, ʿayin, gimel), his soul in the Garden of Eden (Figs 4, 5, 6, 12, 15, 17, 20). A variant of the same expression is be-ʿEden Gān Elōhim. Eden means garden of God (Ezekiel 28:13) (101). The expression: (nun, yod) ʿafar, dust (To dust you shall return, Genesis 3:19) is very rare (Fig. 18).

Words were often chosen from the Bible or the Talmud for describing the personal qualities of the
deceased. Men or women are often described as humble, pious, honourable or God-fearing, e.g.  

\[ \text{ha-} \text{‘ıˆsˇ ha-tob } \text{he-} \text{hasid } \text{ha-yere’ } \text{samayım}, \]  

the good man, the pious, the God-fearing (Genesis 17:6) (102). In addition to these common expressions other words are used, such as

\[ \text{saddiq be-kol } \text{ma’asayw}, \]  
pious in all his deeds. And \[ \text{ha-zaqen}, \]  
the aged man or \[ \text{ha-yasar}, \]  
the righteous or \[ \text{he-} \text{’anıuw}, \]  
the humble (Numbers 13:3), or \[ \text{ha-nahon}, \]  
the reasonable man, \[ \text{he hakam}, \]  
the wise man, \[ \text{ha-me’üssar}, \]  
the happy one, and also \[ \text{ha-mekabat } \text{or ha-nikbad}, \]  
the respectful man and \[ \text{ha-mellummad}, \]  
the learned man (Figs 4, 5, 8, 15-17, 20-21) (103).

In an epitaph for a woman, her father rather than her husband is mentioned (104):

\[ \text{ha-} \text{‘ıśsˇa } \text{ha-yesı˘}_ \text{u-sı˘enı˘’a } \text{ha-sadeqet}, \]  
the humble, the pious woman, or \[ \text{ha-} \text{‘ıśsˇa } \text{ha-kesserı˘ } \text{ha-hasıuwı˘ } \text{ha-sadeqet, } \text{ha-tı˘hırı˘, } \text{ha-tı˘mmı˘}, \]  
the perfect woman, the pure one (Figs 5, 8, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 25).

The social status of the dead is also mentioned. If he was a prominent individual a few characteristic notes on him or his title were mentioned: \[ \text{neqi}˘dını˘, \]  
our chieftain (as in Fig. 23) (105), or if he belonged to the \[ \text{kı̄hanı̄m}, \]  
the priestly families (Figs 13, 14). Sometimes the profession of the dead is also mentioned, e.g. \[ \text{ha-dayyan}, \]  
the judge, \[ \text{ha-tı̄ptar } \text{and } \text{ha-sı̄ııper}, \]  
the scribe (Fig. 15, 16) (106).

The date of his or her departure from life was usually indicated after the place of rest: the day of the week, the week of the month and the year, for instance, Thursday night, the 6th of \[ \text{Marı̄ı̄swan}, \]  
the year (\[ \text{Taw, pe, dalet} \]) (1484 CE (107). If the deceased person passed away on a Saturday, the weekly portion of the Torah was written. If the person passed away on a Friday evening the day of
death was indicated as ‘ereḥ šabbat. The age of the deceased is very rarely mentioned in the epitaphs (Fig. 24) (108).

In a few epitaphs there are three words or their abbreviation (three letters) in the first line: barīk dayyān ‘emet, BDH (bêt, dalet, he), blessed be the true Judge (109). Another expression is: ha-sīr tamīm po‘alō, or HTP (he, taw, pe). Sur is a synonym for God. When both appeared, the first row BDH (in abbreviation) often appeared first. Other abbreviations would be placed near the name of the deceased.
while some appeared at the beginning of the inscription, and some at the end: RYT (res, yod, taw) (110) and TMK (taw, mem, kap) (Figs 4-6, 8, 11, 15, 19, 21) (111).

Another group of abbreviations included ZL (zayin, lamed), zakûr la-tôb and zîkînô li-berakâ, he will be remembered well, or his memory will be blessed (Psalms 11:6; Proverbs 10:7) (112), and ZLT (zayin, lamed, taw), zîkî li-tehîyâh, his memory will stay alive (113). Other abbreviations used are ZSL (zayin, sâde, lamed) (114), and ZQL (zayin, qop, lamed), zeke qaddôš li-berakâ, the holy will be blessed in memory (Figs 6, 17, 21) (115). The expression KGQ (kap, gimel, qop), Qêbôd Gêdûllat Qedûšatô, the Honour of the Great Holiness, also of His Mighty Holiness (Psalms 145:3; 1 Chronicles 17:19, 29:11) appeared in the twelfth-century inscriptions (116).

Two standard closing expressions, either a sentence or a contraction, appear in the last line: (taw, nun, sade, bêt, he), têhe nišmâtô or têhe nišmâtah šerûrâ bi-serôr ha-hâyîm, may his soul be bound up in the bundle of (everlasting) life (1 Samuel 25:29) (117), which may also be interpreted as, may the spirit of the Lord place him with the living ones. Sometimes this expression appears together with: 'îm sâddîqîm va-hâsidîm, with the righteous and the pious (Figs 11, 15, 23, 24) (118).

Conclusions
Approximately 200 Hebrew epitaphs have been discovered in Aden during the last 150 years and some of these have been studied by more than one scholar. Approximately seventy epitaphs predate the nineteenth century.
The inconsistencies in the structure of the texts and the dating systems used has been a source of confusion. In a few inscriptions documented by Saphir, Ben-Zvi, Yavne’elli and Mori Salem the word li-šetårôt was attached to the date. Surprisingly, inscriptions in which the dates consist of more than two letters do not contain the word li-šetårôt. There are also different versions of the same expression. In a few inscriptions the expressions are given in full, while in the others they are in a contracted form. If the dates are interpreted as they are written, then some of the inscriptions may be nearly two thousand years old. However, if we accept the hypothesis that letters, indicating thousands or hundreds, were omitted, then the age of the epitaphs is reduced dramatically. Adding one thousand or two thousand years to the given date puts the age of the epitaphs to between the eighth and the eighteenth centuries CE. One inscription does not fit into this pattern: this is the one in which the date is given according to the destruction of the Temples. The person mentioned in that inscription died in the ninth century CE.

Sometimes information from other sources is helpful for determining the age of certain inscriptions. Inscription No. 9 in Ben-Zvi’s publication gives no date but it carries the family name, which is known to us from the Genizah archive. The names Halfon, Madmûn and Bûndar are documented in many fragments and can be dated to the twelfth or thirteenth century. Hence, Birnbaum dated the epitaph from the 29th year of the Contracts Calendar (British Museum No. 132702) to the eighteenth century. The available historical evidence at this point is not sufficient to ascertain the relationship of the woman Mašta’ with the family which lived in the seventeenth century in Yemen.

The suggestion that certain expressions, abbreviations and elegies were not in use before the tenth and the thirteenth centuries may also be debated, as European traditions may not provide an accurate timescale for the customs of oriental Jewry, which is known to have preserved ancient Jewish rites and traditions directly from Palestine and Babylon. As shown by Saphir and Harkavy, some of the same abbreviations and expressions used in the Aden inscriptions are attested in Talmudic times.

The data currently available do not allow us to accept the letter omission theory. Today, after almost 150 years of debate, scholars continue to disagree on how to date the inscriptions. Any decision on whether the letters for thousands or hundreds were omitted will be inconclusive and arbitrary and will lead to inconsistencies. Neither one nor two thousand, if assumed to have been omitted for the thousands, offers a uniform solution suitable to all dates and conforming with all the other facts. Further research with modern methods may solve the problem of the age of the Hebrew epitaphs from Aden, and the conclusion Birnbaum drew from his analysis will probably be the subject of renewed debate.

Studying inscriptions on tombstones may help us to improve our knowledge of the history of the country of the deceased. The Hebrew epitaphs from Aden provide precious historical evidence and unique confirmation of the Jewish contribution to the history and culture of southern Arabia through the ages.
References

1. This is the common grave of the eighty-seven Jews who were killed in the pogrom between 2nd and 5th December 1947, on which see Ahroni R. The Jews of Aden — A community that was. Tel Aviv: Afikim, 1991: Chapter 13 (in Hebrew); Tobi J. West of Aden. Natanya: Association for Society and Culture, 1994: 98–109.

2. This name is used for the place for the dead (Talmud Yerushalmi, Bera

3. The Jews of Yemen pronounced it ‘ha-mé’ôrô’. It is known that in the past the Jews buried their dead in caves, but they continued to use the word me’arâ to mean cemetery in later times, when they buried their dead in open graveyards. Abraham Tabib describes his childhood experience in the late nineteenth century when he discovered many skeletons wrapped in Torah scrolls in a deep cave near Sa’da. See Tabib A. The Diaspora of Yemen. Tel Aviv: Omanut, 28: 1931: 17 (in Hebrew); cf. Saphir-Halevi J. Beit ‘Eden. Ha-Libanon 3/4: 1866: 62 (in Hebrew; the title was written Ha-Libanon, even though Ha-Lebanon is correct) and Saphir J. Eben Saphir, II/2. Lyck: Mekitzer Nirdamim, 1866: 9. The names Saphir-Halevi and Saphir refer to the same person. He published in the newspaper under the name Saphir-Halevi, and in the revised account which was published in two volumes his name appears as Saphir.

4. This family enjoyed special status under British administration. They were the main suppliers of food and water to the British army. Members of this family served as heads of the Jewish community throughout the entire period of British rule. Permission to continue using the cemetery was considered confirmation of the family’s title to the land, as we see in the Memorandum from 1934 (Fig. 3) signed by Sir Keith Stewart, IO, vol. R/20, Minutes 305, slip no. 7; see also in IO, vol. 1417, slip 1, file 63/3, slip M; cf. Saphir-Halevi, Beit ‘Eden 1: 45; Almaliah A. A journey of Yom-Tov Semach to Yemen (1911). In: Yesha’ya’hu & Zadok, eds. Sebut Tenam. Tel Aviv: Mi-Teman le-Zion, 1945: 294 (in Hebrew); Mahalal-Ha’adani R. Between Aden and Yemen. Tel Aviv: ‘Am ‘Oved, 1947: 261 (in Hebrew); Klein-Franke A. The Jews of ‘Aden in the 19th century. Pe’amim: 1981: 54 (in Hebrew); Ahroni, The Jews of Aden: 67, 87; Tobi, West of Aden: 59; Goldsmith D & Messa U. Aden — A profile of a Jewish community, 1839–1967. Tel Aviv: Catalogue of the exhibition in the synagogue ‘Qol Yehudah’, 1995: 26 (in Hebrew).


6. Levy MA. Jüdische Grabsteine aus Aden. ZDMG 21: 1867: 156; Osander E. Zur himjarischen Sprach—und Altertumskunde (Aus dem Nachlass herausgegeben von Prof. Dr. MA. Levy). ZDMG 19–20: Saphir, Eben Saphir 1/2: 11. The seven Hebrew epitaphs from Aden at the British Museum were presented at different times by different people. Four were presented in 1847 by H. Hopley White. Two more were presented in 1886 by Thomas Hordsworth Newman. The seventh inscription (which mentions the woman Masta’, with the date as year 29 of the Contracts Calendar, BM card No. 132702) was discussed and published in the British Museum Guide of 1890: 96, 98 and in the Guide of 1908: 31. The slabs were also published by Chwolson and by Haibi, who also published three photographs from the British Museum collection. See Chwolson D. Corpus Inscriptionum Hebraicarum, 2nd ed. Hildesheim: Olms, 1974: 131; Levy, Jüdische Grabsteine: 156; Haibi A. The Jews of Arabia and Islam. Jerusalem: Sha’er, 1992: 30, 35–39 (in Hebrew). I would like to thank Dr. Julian Reade and Mrs. Sarah Collins of the Department of the Ancient Near East at the British Museum who were very helpful to me when studying the files and who gave me permission to photograph the epitaphs. I would also like to thank Mrs. M. Hewlet-Jones who helped me locate the Jewish cemetery in the ‘Crater’ and provided me with recent photographs of tombstones; my thanks also to Anya Ackerman who assisted me in my research in Yemen and London.
7. At that time the relationship between the British Government and the local tribes was unstable. Fresh water and vegetable supply depended on the co-operation of the sultan of Lahej. To free themselves from the dependency on these unreliable relationships, the British decided in 1846 to clean and repair the ancient water reservoir, called ‘Tanks’. The security that the British provided and the fresh supply of food and water encouraged merchants from the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean to establish agencies in Aden, and the port turned into a flourishing harbour. See Playfair, A History: 6, 8; Hunter, An Account: 129; Saphir, Eben Saphir, I: 8; Schechtman, The Jews of Aden: 217; Ha’adani, Between Aden and Yemen, I: 432; Abir M. Jewish communities in the Arabian Peninsula between the end of the 18th and the middle of the 19th centuries. Seferoth 10: 1966: 639; Gavin, Aden under British rule: 60; Klein-Franke, The Jews: 44, 55.

8. The narrow natural pass through a canyon connected the city to the seaside and the port. The police used to check people and vehicles moving from the port to the city and guards observed the traffic from the bridge over the pass. Today this pass no longer exists. The bridge was demolished and the narrow pass was enlarged for the construction of a multilane motorway.

9. Neither near the ‘ Tanks’ nor the ‘Pass’ had the Jews of Aden heard of any Jewish settlement in the area. However, according to local legend, there were Jewish settlements on the tops of the surrounding hills and cliffs. Those settlements were probably dismantled during the first Ottoman occupation (1515–1638). See Sasson DS. The history of the Jews in Yemen. Ha-Sopeh le-Hokmat Yisrael (Quartalis Hebrew) 15: 1931: 5–6 (in Hebrew); Ha’adani, Between Aden and Yemen, I: 89; Kafih J. The San’a’ Community in Yemen. Maharanaim 119: 1968: 38 (in Hebrew; both Kafih and Qafih were used in the translations of the author’s work); Tabib, The Diaspora: 3; Qorah, A Storm of Yemen. Jerusalem: Greidi, 1954: 3 (in Hebrew); Tobi Y. Studies in the Scroll of Yemen. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986: 27, 34, 64–65.


11. The term ‘Contracts’ for dating was not in use in the beginning of the Seleucid Era. It was in use in the Greek calendar and was called le-ninigyan ha-Yoewanim. In Jewish history the beginning of this calendar is related to the beginning of the joint rule of the High Priest and King Shimon the Hasmonian. This date is also related to the year in which Alexander the Great entered Jerusalem. The month of Tisre was originally the seventh month of the year, while the month of Nissan was the first month (Exodus 12, Nehemiah 8). See Saphir-Halevi, Beit ‘Eden 3/8: 124; Saphir J. Eben Saphir II/2. Magenza (Mainz): Mekitzei Nirdamim, 1874: 22–27 (in Hebrew); Goitein, The Age: 83; Wright, W. ed. Facsimiles of Manuscripts and Inscriptions. London: Clowes, 1875–1883: XXIX. On the custom of using numbers instead of names for indicating the month of the year, see Händler GH. Lexikon der Abbreviaturen. In: Dahman GH. ed. Aramäisch-Neu Hebräisches Wörterbuch: Targum, Talmud u. Midrasch. Frankfurt/M: Kaufmann, 1901: 3; Levy J. Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midrashim (2nd ed.), 4 vols. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963. On the history of the development of the Jewish calendar, see Mahler, Handbuch: 137–149, 195, 402 and his article Kalender in the Jüdisches Lexikon 1929: 554, 558–561; Basnizki L. Der jüdische Kalender, Entstehung und Aufbau. Königstein: Jüdische Verlag-Athenäum, 1986. The date of death was very important because the deceased was remembered by his relatives each year on that day. Among European Jewry it is known as ‘Yorzeit’. See Muneles O, ed. Epitaphs from the Ancient Jewish cemetery of Prague (2nd ed.). Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1988: 25.

12. The regulation which was published by Rabbi Shirrah Gaon and later repeated by David Ben-Zimra (in Egypt) in the sixteenth century, stipulating that the Calendar of Creation should be used instead of the Calendar of the Contracts, was known to be effective only in Egypt. Cf. Mahler, Handbuch: 155. According to Saphir, by the time of his arrival to Aden (1859), the Jews had been using the calendar of the Common Era for approximately 200 years. Saphir, Eben Saphir II/2: 9–10; Chajes HP. Jüdische und jüdisch-indische Grabinschriften aus Aden. Vienna: Sitzungsberichte der Philosophisch-Historischen Klasse der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 147/3: 1903–1904: 15; Goitein, The Age: 81–84; Ben-Zvi I. Sepulchral Tablets from the Cemetery of Aden. In: Shazar Z & Benayahu M, eds. Meḥarīm u-Meqorot—Studies and Documents. Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1966: 416.

13. Yemeni Jews used to mention in their prayers each year on the 9th of the month of Ab the date of the destruction of the Temples of Judea. In 2004 the prayer was as follows: ‘we remember today the day of the destruction of the Temple, which our leader Ezra had built one thousand nine hundred and thirty four years ago, and to the First Temple and the expulsion we count here today two thousand five hundred and ninety years.’ Sasson DS. The Scroll of Yemen. Ha-sophe le-hokmat Yisrael (Quartalis Hebrew): 7: 1923: 1 (in Hebrew); Qorah, A Storm: 3; Chajes, Jüdische 21–23. The use of the destruction of the Temple in dates on epitaphs was also discovered at Beith Še’arim. See Naveh J. On Sherd and Papyrus: Aramaic and Hebrew inscriptions from the Second Temple, Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992: 204–205 (in Hebrew) and in Brindisi, see Chwolson, Corpus: 119, 163, 176, 267, and Bernheimer C. Palaeografia Ebraica.

TOMBSTONES BEARING HEBREW INSCRIPTIONS IN ADEN
A. KLEIN-FRANKE


15. While waiting in Aden for a ship to take him to India, he surveyed the city and travelled to the interior of Yemen. His description of the life of the Jewish communities was a real revelation for many in the Jewish world. He published the account of his journey in a series of articles in the Hebrew newspaper *Ha-Libanan* and subsequently in a two-volume book in which he also included Hebrew inscriptions from tombstones he had examined in Aden. See Saphir, *Elen Saphir* 1/2: 88–89 and II/2: Kafih J. The contacts of the Jews of Yemen with Jewish Centers. In: Yehuda Teman: 6, 27, 57; Tobi, *Studies*: 27, 57.


20. The purpose of his journey was to visit the Yemeni Jews in the refugee camp in Hashed, 15 miles north of Aden. He spent four days in Aden. Ben-Zvi, Hidden in the sand: 200.

21. The photographs were taken by Dr. Jacob Finkerfeld, who accompanied Ben-Zvi on his journey to Aden. From his Notebook in Ginza’h Ha-Medina (the archive of the State of Israel), file 1898, 4/pe. See also Ben-Zvi, Hidden in the sand: 198–201 and Ben-Zvi, Sepulchral Tablets: 411. Other photographs of epitaphs from Aden were published by Halibi and in the catalogue of Goldsmith & Messa. See Halibi, *The jewry*: 35–39; Goldsmith & Messa, *Aden*: 3. Dani Goldsmith mentioned to me that there are many photographs of Hebrew epitaphs by the Jews of Aden.

22. Subar, *Medieval Jewish Tombstones*: 301. Father Jamme was in Aden as a member of the archaeological expedition to Aden and Yemen headed by Wendell Phillips, which excavated at Marib and in Wadi Baihan.


25. According to Chwolson, *Corpus*: 131; Dr. Samuel Birch, Keeper of the British Museum, asked Halévy to examine the four Hebrew epitaphs from Yemen.


33. Birnbaum studied the seven epitaphs in the British Museum and obtained fifty-five photographs from J. J. Gunn, Director of the Antiquities Department of the Government of Aden. I owe many thanks to the Birnbaum family and especially to the director of the Birnbaum archive, Mr. David Birnbaum, for providing me with copies of the photographs and allowing me to use them for my publications.


35. Birnbaum, The Hebrew Script: 246. Levy was also convinced of the contracted letters in the date. He mentioned F.W. Madden as the father of this idea. Madden examined the slabs from Aden in the British Museum.

36. Yavne’elli reported to Ben-Zvi that, when visiting the ancient cemetery, he did not copy the inscriptions discussed by Saphir, but he recorded the dates of the epitaphs that Saphir had copied, described their locations and noted their positions in relation to the inscriptions copied by Saphir. He added that some of the slabs, although standing close to each other, were dated many years apart, with dates stretching over centuries. Yavne’elli also told Ben-Zvi that the cemetery had been looked after by the family of the president of the Jewish community, Menahem Messa, see Ben-Zvi, Sepulchral Tablets: 414–415.

37. Ben-Zvi, Sepulchral Tablets: 417, inscription No. 27. Mori Salem, a former Aden resident, handed over the photographs to the archaeologist Prof. Yevin, who forwarded them to Ben-Zvi for publication. For another example from the year 1881 of changing the location of the letters of the date from tav, reš, mem, bêt, to bêt, tav, mem, reš, see Nini Y. Yemen and Zion–The Jews of Yemen 1800–1900. Jerusalem: Hassifriyah ha-Zionit, 1982: 180 (in Hebrew).


40. Ben-Zvi, Hidden in the sand: 199; Subar, Medieval Jewish Tombstones: 305, inscriptions I-VII; Goitein, Yemenite Jewry: 55. The text in the epitaphs resembled the biblical style. See Muneles, Epitaphs: 38.

41. The date refers to the second Temple, which was destroyed in 70 CE. This means that the girl passed away in 834 CE. See Ben-Zvi, Sepulchral Tablets: 417. This is the oldest Hebrew epitaph with full date discovered in Aden, whereas in Europe, the earliest Hebrew epitaph is from the sixth century. See Chwolson, Corpus: 267; Muneles, Epitaphs: 24.


43. Muneles, Epitaphs: 37.


45. Chajes, Jüdische: 12–17, inscriptions A4–A16. In Birnbaum’s list there are twenty-two inscriptions from the period between 1517 and 1859 using the Contracts Calendar, in which three generations are mentioned. See Birnbaum, The Hebrew Script: 250. Muneles, Epitaphs: 23; Hüttenmeister
47. Ben-Zvi, Hidden in the sand: 199.

49. The word is an Aramaic form. The Hebrew form would be *lu*lú, *lu*lú representing the name of God: the name Yod and the He. To avoid using these letters when they are placed next to each other, it was common to say *Yesú* in place of Yehosúa. This name was popular among the Jews of Aden until the middle of the twentieth century. Saphir, *Eben Saphir II*: 10, inscriptions 9, Ben-Zvi, Sepulchral Tablets: 417, inscription 26; Subar, Medieval Jewish Tombstones: 305, inscription VI.
51. Subar, Medieval Jewish Tombstones: 305–306, inscriptions IV, V, VII.
52. Ben-Zvi, Sepulchral Tablets: 417, inscription 27.
57. Subar, Medieval Jewish Tombstones: 305–306, inscriptions IV, V, VII.
64. British Museum, Slab No. 132703; Chwolson, *Corpus Eben Saphir II*: 10, inscription 1.
73. British Museum slab no. 132703; Chwolson, *Corpus Eben Saphir II*: 10, inscription 1.
74. The Jews of Aden avoided pronouncing names bearing the two letters representing the name of God: the *Yod* and the *He*. To avoid using these letters when they are placed next to each other, it was common to say *Yešú* instead *Yehosúa*. This name was popular among the Jews of Aden until the middle of the twentieth century. Saphir, *Eben Saphir II*: 10, inscription 9; Ben-Zvi, Sepulchral Tablets: 417, inscription 26; Subar, Medieval Jewish Tombstones: 305, inscription VI.
78. British Museum slab No. 47-4-23-1; Chwolson, *Corpus Eben Saphir II*: 10, inscription 2.
80. Subar, Medieval Jewish Tombstones: 306, inscription VIII.
refers to the second inscription (No. 3932 in his collection) from the year 1705 and bearing the name Maštä. This time the word ended with h not with a. According to Chajes, *jüdische: 8, inscription A16, Maštä’ is the feminine form of Moses. However Maštä’ is also the name of a village near Ta’izz. There was a well-known Jewish family by this name in the south of Yemen. The Maštä’ family lived in San’a’ and Ta’izz in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The most important Yemeni Jewish poet, Salem Şabezzi (fl. seventeenth century), belonged to the Maštä’ family on his mother’s side. See also Levy, *Jüdische Grabsteine: 157. The meaning of the word Maštä’ in the Yemeni tradition is ma-šata’, which refers to what was given to a newborn male or female baby. See Goitein, *The age: 83; Sasson, *The history: 7, 19.


99. According to Zunz, *Zur Geschichte: 390, the slab which covered the grave was called nefes in the second century, which means soul. See also Subar, *Medieval Jewish Tombstones: 302, inscriptions V, IX.

100. This term appeared in full words, see Ben-Zvi, *Hidden in the sand: 199, inscriptions 7, 8; see also Ben-Zvi, *Sepulchral Tablets: 414, inscription 9; Subar, *Medieval Jewish Tombstones: 302, 304, 305, inscriptions II, IV; see also Harkavy, *Altjüdische: 138.


105. This is an honorific title for a leader and an educated person. Subar translates it as ‘prince’, Subar, *Medieval Jewish Tombstones: 303, 305, inscriptions IV, V, VII.


113. Ben-Zvi, *Sepulchral Tablets: 414, inscriptions 10, 12. The name of the dead was added in the formula. According to Zunz, *Zur Geschichte: 324, 308, it is important to the living peoples to memorialise the righteous ones who passed away. This abbreviation was not used before the twelfth or thirteenth century, see Muneles, *Epitaphs: 31.

114. According to Zunz, *Zur Geschichte: 327–328, this expression together with the word hasid or qaddoš appeared for the first time in the eighteenth century. However, we find this expression already in the third century in an inscription on epitaphs from Beit Še’arim, see Nav-e, *On Sherid: 200, and according to Muneles, *Epitaphs: 30, the use of this expression spread during the thirteenth century.


