

Two Excellent Articles:

Has the Tomb Been Discovered? & Deconstructing The Second Coming of Simcha and the BAR Crowd

1) Has the Tomb of Jesus Been Discovered?

Jodi Magness

In the new documentary film, *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* (which appeared on the Discovery Channel on March 4th), director Simcha Jacobovici and producer James Cameron claim to have identified the tomb of Jesus and his family in the Jerusalem suburb of Talpiot. The tomb itself is not a new discovery; it was excavated in 1980 and published by Amos Kloner, an Israeli archaeologist. What is new is the sensational claim that this is the tomb of Jesus and his family. Although Jacobovici and Cameron are not scholars, their claim is supported by a handful of archaeologists and religious studies specialists. On the other hand, many archaeologists (including Kloner) and scholars of early Judaism and Christianity reject their claim. Having seen the film, I agree with Kloner and the others; the Talpiot tomb is not—indeed, cannot—be the tomb of Jesus and his family.

I would first point out that by making this announcement in the popular media, Jacobovici, Cameron, and the others involved have chosen to circumvent the usual academic process. Archaeology is a scientific discipline. New discoveries and interpretations typically are presented in scientific venues such as professional meetings or are published in peer-reviewed journals, where they can be considered and discussed by other specialists. By first making the announcement in the popular media, those involved have precluded legitimate and vital academic discourse. It is impossible to explain the many flaws of their claim in a one-minute segment on TV or the radio, or in two or three sentences in the newspaper, as I have been asked to do repeatedly since the announcement was made. The history and archaeology of Jerusalem in the first century are far too complex to be boiled down to a short sound bite, yet that is precisely what has happened here. This is a travesty to professional archaeologists and scholars of early Judaism and Christianity, and it is a disservice to the public.

Now let us consider the claim itself. We have no contemporary accounts of the death and burial of Jesus. Our closest sources (in time) are the canonical Gospels, specifically the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke), which are thought to have been composed about 30-50 years after Jesus' death. Although the canonical Gospels may not be accurate in every detail, most scholars agree they contain some historical information. The claim that the Talpiot tomb is the tomb of Jesus and his family contradicts the canonical Gospel accounts and means that we must reject our earliest

traditions about Jesus. Those who identify the Talpiot tomb as the tomb of Jesus support their claim by citing later, non-canonical traditions such as the Gospel of Philip.

The Gospel of Mark (15:42-46) describes the death and burial of Jesus: “When the evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council [in a similar account, the Gospel of Matthew describes Joseph as a wealthy man], who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ...he [Pilate] granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.”

How did the Jews of Jerusalem bury their dead in the time of Jesus? The Gospel accounts describe Jesus as having been laid to rest in a rock-cut tomb. Rock-cut tombs consisted of one or more burial chambers hewn into the bedrock slopes surrounding the city of Jerusalem. Burial chambers were lined by single rows of burial niches (called *loculi*), with each niche cut into the walls about the length of a person’s body. Each rock-cut tomb belonged to a family and was used by the members of a family over the course of several generations. When a member of the family died, his/her body was wrapped in a shroud and placed in a *loculus*. The opening to the *loculus* was sealed with a stone slab, and the entrance to the rock-cut tomb was also sealed with a stone. Eventually, over the course of generations, the *loculi* became filled with burials. When it became necessary to make space for new burials, the earlier remains (consisting of bones and burial gifts) were cleared out of the *loculi* and placed in small boxes (*ossuaries*). Sometimes the relatives scribbled the name(s) of the deceased on the outside of the *ossuary* when they placed the remains in the box.

The Gospel accounts provide an accurate description of Joseph of Arimathea burying Jesus’ body in a *loculus* in his family’s rock-cut tomb. Because rock-cut tombs had to be cut by hand out of bedrock, only the upper classes (wealthy Jews like Joseph) could afford them. The poorer classes of Jewish society—the majority of the population—buried their dead in simple, individual trench graves dug into the ground, similar to the way we bury our dead today. This involved digging a rectangular trench in the ground, placing the deceased (wrapped in a shroud) at the bottom, and filling the trench back in with earth. Usually a crude headstone was set up at one end of the grave. *Ossuaries* are associated only with rock-cut tombs; bodies interred in trench graves were not dug back up for deposition in an *ossuary*.

Now let us reconsider the Gospel accounts. Jesus was crucified on Friday. This is consistent with what we know about Jesus’ background, as the Romans generally reserved crucifixion for the poorer classes, who they regarded as common criminals. Why did Joseph of Arimathea request Pilate’s permission to bury Jesus? Jewish law requires burial within 24 hours of death. However, burials are prohibited on the

Sabbath (sundown Friday to sundown Saturday). According to the Gospel accounts, Jesus died on the eve of the Sabbath (late Friday afternoon), just before sundown. For Jesus to be buried in accordance with Jewish law, he had to be buried before the Sabbath started; otherwise, it would have been necessary to wait until Saturday night, thereby exceeding the 24-hour time limit.

Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy follower of Jesus, was concerned to ensure that Jesus was buried in accordance with Jewish law. Jesus came from a poor family that presumably could not afford a rock-cut tomb. Under ordinary circumstances he would have been buried in a trench grave. However, there was no time to dig a trench grave before the beginning of the Sabbath. Therefore, as the Gospels tell us, Joseph hastened to go to Pilate and requested permission to take Jesus' body. He laid it in a loculus in his own rock-cut tomb, something that was exceptional (due to the circumstances), as rock-cut tombs were family tombs.

When the women entered the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea on Sunday morning, the loculus where Jesus' body had been laid was empty. The theological explanation for this is that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. However, once Jesus had been buried in accordance with Jewish law, there was no prohibition against removing the body from the tomb after the end of the Sabbath and reburying it. It is therefore possible that followers or family members removed Jesus' body from Joseph's tomb after the Sabbath ended and buried it in a trench grave, as it would have been unusual (to say the least) to leave a non-relative in a family tomb. Whatever explanation one prefers, the fact that Jesus' body did not remain in Joseph's tomb means that his bones could not have been collected in an ossuary, at least not if we follow the Gospel accounts.

Although the Gospel accounts of the death and burial of Jesus might not be completely accurate from an historical point of view, they are consistent with our literary and archaeological information about how the Jews of Jerusalem buried their dead in the time of Jesus. The Gospels also show familiarity with Jewish law, conveying Joseph's concern to bury Jesus before the Sabbath. They make it clear that Joseph was not trying to "honor" Jesus by burying him in a rock-cut tomb (a modern, anachronistic concept, since there was no shame associated with burial in trench graves, which was the accepted practice). Instead Joseph wanted to ensure that Jesus was buried within 24 hours, in accordance with Jewish law.

Jesus' family, being poor, presumably could not afford a rock-cut tomb, as even the more "modest" ones were costly. And had Jesus' family owned a rock-cut tomb, it would have been located in their hometown of Nazareth, not in Jerusalem. For example, when Simon, the last of the Maccabean brothers and one of the Hasmonean rulers, built a large tomb or mausoleum for his family, he constructed it in their hometown of Modiin. In fact, the Gospel accounts clearly indicate that Jesus' family did not own a rock-cut tomb in Jerusalem—for if they had, there would have been no need for Joseph of Arimathea to take Jesus' body and place it in his own family's rock-cut tomb! If Jesus' family did not own a rock-cut tomb, it means they also had no ossuaries.

A number of scholars, including Kloner, have pointed out that the names on the ossuaries in the Talpiot tomb are extremely common among the Jewish population of Jerusalem in the first century. But beyond this there is a bigger problem. Being a Jew in the time of Jesus was not, strictly speaking, a religion, as it is today. Instead, Jews in the time of Jesus were Judeans—that is, people from the district of Judea, the area around Jerusalem. Judeans worshiped the national god of Judea (the God of Israel) and lived according to his laws. Other ancient peoples had their own national deities. During the two centuries before Christ, the Hasmonean kings (a Jewish dynasty descended from the Maccabees) had established an independent Jewish kingdom in Judea (this kingdom was eventually taken over by the Romans). The Hasmonean kings conducted a campaign of expansion, conquering neighboring peoples whom they forcibly converted to Judaism. Under the Hasmoneans, Galilee (to the north of Judea) and Idumaea (to the south) were Judaized, which means their non-Jewish populations began to worship the God of Israel and live according to his laws.

L. Y. Rahmani, an Israeli archaeologist who compiled a catalogue of all of the ossuaries in the collections of the state of Israel, observed that “In Jerusalem’s tombs, the deceased’s place of origin was noted when someone from outside Jerusalem was interred in a local tomb.” On ossuaries in rock-cut tombs that belonged to Judean families, it was customary to indicate the ancestry or lineage of the deceased by naming the father, as, for example, Judah son of John (Yohanan); Honya son of Alexa; and Martha daughter of Hananya. But in rock-cut tombs owned by non-Judean families (or which contained the remains of relatives from outside Judea), it was customary to indicate the deceased’s place of origin, as, for example, Simon of Ptolemais; Papias the Bethshanite (of Beth Shean); and Gaios son of Artemon from Berenike. Our historical and literary sources (such as the Gospels, Flavius Josephus, etc.) often make the same distinctions between Judeans and non-Judeans (for example, Galileans, Idumaeans, Saul of Tarsus, Simon of Cyrene, and so on). If the Talpiot tomb is indeed the tomb of Jesus and his family, we would expect at least some of the ossuary inscriptions to reflect their Galilean origins, by reading, for example, Jesus [son of Joseph] of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene), Mary of Magdala, and so on. However, the inscriptions provide no indication that this is the tomb of a Galilean family and instead point to a Judean family.

The identification of the Talpiot tomb as the tomb of Jesus and his family is based on a string of problematic and unsubstantiated claims, including adding an otherwise unattested Matthew (Matya) to the family of Jesus; identifying an otherwise unknown son of Jesus named Judah; and identifying the Mariamne named on one of the ossuaries in the tomb as Mary Magdalene by interpreting the word Mara (which follows the name Mariamne) as the Aramaic term for “master” (arguing that Mariamne was a teacher and leader). To account for the fact that Mary/Mariamne’s name is written in Greek, the filmmakers transform the small Jewish town of Migdal/Magdala/Tarichaea on the Sea of Galilee (Mary’s hometown) into “an important trading center” where Greek was spoken. Instead, as in other Jewish towns of this period, generally only the upper classes knew Greek, whereas poorer Jews spoke Aramaic as their everyday language.

Taken individually, each of these points weakens the case for the identification of the Talpiot tomb as the tomb of Jesus and his family. Collectively these points are devastating, since the statistical analyses presented in the film are based on certain assumptions made about these names.

The identification of the Talpiot tomb as the tomb of Jesus and his family contradicts the canonical Gospel accounts of the death and burial of Jesus and the earliest Christian traditions about Jesus. The claim is also inconsistent with all of the available information—historical and archaeological—about how Jews in the time of Jesus buried their dead, and specifically the evidence we have about poor, non-Judean families such as that of Jesus. It is a sensationalistic claim without any scientific basis or support.

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Viewers Guide to Understanding the Talpiot Tomb ‘documentary’ to be aired on the Discovery Channel

Deconstructing The Second Coming of Simcha and the BAR Crowd

Cast of Characters- Short Bios

- A. Cameron, award winning film maker who for some unknown reason decided to make a film on the world of Biblical Archaeology- Producer
- B. Simcha J. Canadian film maker who produced the documentary on the James son of Joseph, brother of Jesus ossuary which was deemed to be a forgery by the Israel Antiquities Authority and other experts. The criminal trial is still in progress and SJ testified in Dec. 22, 2005 on behalf of the defense. He is producing and directing a series entitled *The Naked Archaeologist’* in which he stars. He is not an archaeologist nor does he have any creditability within the profession.

- C. The *Biblical Archaeology Review* crowd hereafter referred to as the BAR crowd. This is a collection of individuals who have been deeply involved with BAR, mainly textual scholars who pose from time to time, when convenient, as archaeologists. Several appear prominently both in the Hebrew and English version of the film.
- D. The films 'experts' several of whom hold academic positions with proven track records in every field except Biblical Archaeology. Most experts however have no creditability within the profession. Charles Pellegrino is an example of this. His past books are *The Ghosts of Atlantis*, *Ghosts of Vesuvius*, *Rtn to Sodom and Gomorrah*, and *Unearthing Atlantis*. The first two deal with psychic phenomena while the last two deal with mythical places. He co-authored the book as well as appears from time to time in the film.
- E. Experts II, those individuals and colleagues who appear in the film, totally unaware of the premise of the documentary, all of whom I have contacted are totally opposed to the evidence as presented, out of context as well as edited in such a way as to give the false impression that they are in agreement with the film. What is of utmost importance is that virtually no Israeli archaeologist, with the exception of one supporter, appears in the documentary. Seems we are more difficult to fool.
- F. The Others- a host of individuals connected to the profession whom have been not only been supportive but have supplied much of the information for the viewers guide. To them, I am indebted.

THE FILM

The Hype Hyped upon the unsuspecting public as a documentary with a budget of over 4 million dollars (may be Canadian) produced over a period of 4 years.

The Reality One of the main reasons that the film took so long to produce is that many individuals and organizations here in Israel refused to participate as well as a boycott of the director for his unstinting support of the James Ossuary which is believed by nearly all to have been forged.

Secondly, the film is not a documentary in the strict sense of the word as many scenes and sets are totally reconstructed even though Cameron et al try to present it as such.

Thirdly and perhaps more important, this is basically a re-make of the 1996 story by Ray Bruce, a British film maker, somewhat re-written, to present the views of the author of *The Jesus Dynasty* who figures prominently in the film. This author, though well known for his support of the BAR position on the James Ossuary, is not an archaeologist in any sense of the word, which may account for many of the short comings in the film. Textual scholars posing as biblical archaeologists, several which appear in the film and on the Discovery panel discussion are one of the biggest problems within the profession which has, according one noted scholar, has set back trust and creditability in the profession, decades. In fact, in one scene with SJ walking past the ossuaries stored in the Israel Antiquities Authority he acts as if he has suddenly has this epiphany, he, with

absolutely no archaeological training, suddenly discovers the names of what for him then becomes the Jesus family. The truth is, that a journalist told him about the tomb long before.

THE “EXPERTS” A QUESTION OF CREDITABILITY

DNA. The DNA expert from Canada spent a few months in Israel before leaving for Canada a few years ago. He in fact, worked with our Science and Archaeology Group @ the Hebrew University. According to Dr. Mark Spigelman, our DNA specialist in the group he received a message from the Canadian expert concerning the question of extracting DNA from the James Ossuary apparently at the behest of SJ. Dr. Spigelman personally told him at that time that it was foolish for him to get involved for several reasons, not to mention that the object he wished to run a test on was believed to be a forgery. Secondly, the export of all biological material which is sampled and taken abroad must according to IL law have an export license which we knew quite well would never be given. Thirdly, the film which I viewed showed several ‘experts’ scraping material from the ossuary, under the worst possible conditions. Lastly, and here is where the main problem occurs, when human remains are placed in the ossuary, they have been decomposed and are just skeletal material. The film tries to give the false impression that they were sampling human tissue which had decomposed in the ossuary whereas it had been long gone before the skeletal material was ever placed there. Final analysis- high probability that the DNA is of anybody who came into contact with the ossuary the past 30 off years, including mine. To say that as one test showed male and one showed female and then jumping to the conclusion that they were married is totally absurd as most of the adult woman in the tomb would have married in, but married to whom? While preparing this report I found the following statement from their DNA expert which is revealing in that Simcha and the BAR Crowd constantly make a ‘big deal’ out of their so called scientific evidence. Seems that their ‘experts’ may in retrospect have been used in a manner not to their liking. According to their DNA expert in yesterdays on line SciAmer, he states the following :

“The only conclusions we made was that these two sets were not maternally related. To me it sounds like absolutely nothing.” ScientificAmerican.com March 2, 07.

Absolutely nothing, Simcha presented it a bit differently as if this was the smoking gun, hard science which proved their agenda !!

PATINA- This is a natural geological process which occurs over time. The forensic people involved in this segment have no experience whatsoever with local materials, in fact, one of the specialists’ forte is in automobile crashes of which I’m sure he is very capable. There was one Israeli involved in this, behind the scenes, who was asked to sample patinas for the show, sometime earlier, he pronounced a metal sheeting found at Qumran which he authenticated as ancient for a NOVA documentary. Within 12 months, the 2,000 year old object was found to have been painted with Barium-Titanium paint, patented in the 1920’s to prevent oxidization. Watching this pseudo-science analysis reminds one more of a train wreck than a car crash.

STATISTICS- Whereas their attempt as probability looks impressive, a 600 to 1 chance this it is the 'Family' it falls flat when one realizes that the info. given to the statistician was that of a nuclear family of ca 10 people whereas the truth of the matter is that the family of 10 is an extended family of maybe 50 or more comprising 4-5 generations, as a result it simply cannot be computed. They knew this and I have the feeling that this info. was not divulged to the mathematician. In fact, I published in 1992 a tomb with 15 ossuaries, 88 people and one name. The one person, one ossuary scenario is how the layperson views it whereas in the article I published in 'Atiqot XXII, three of the ossuaries had the remains of a minimum of 6 people. There has been an enormous amount of discussion on the web dealing with the probabilities of this being the family, which I suggest the viewer read, all of which totally dismiss the statistics as of no value whatsoever.

THE NAMES For those of us familiar with ossuaries and ossuary inscriptions this is, despite all their hype, totally unconvincing as all the names were very common. The ratios of names for that period are as follows: Joseph/Jose 8.3 %, Judah 6.2 %, Jesus **XX** Matthew 2.4% and Mariam/Mary a whopping 21.4%. S. Pfann has written an impt. Blog on this showing that 75% of the names occurring on Jewish ossuaries during this period are from a pool of but 16 names.

The important thing to remember here is that individuals outside of Judea, buried in Judea were named according to their place of origin, whereas in Judea this was not necessary. Had the names been Jesus of Nazareth, Mary of Nazareth, Joseph of Nazareth etc I would have been totally convinced that this may be the family tomb, but as none of the names have place of origin, they are all Judeans.

THOSE UNUSUAL SYMBOLS This is where the media hype goes totally out of control, seems the BAR Crowd had been reading too much Da Vinci Code. If there is anything which suggests deliberate manipulation of the data it is here. For example, in the film, one of the main 'experts' suddenly discovers on camera the fact that a inverted V is scratched on an ossuary as if it has some deep hidden mystical meaning. Had the 'expert' read the catalogue of LY Rahmani (pg.19) on ossuaries, he would have seen that 40 % of ossuaries have markings ! In fact, this deliberate attempt to fool the public reaches a new height when SJ goes to the Jewish tombs of Dominus Flavit and proclaims that those ossuaries with X's scratched on the lid and body are ancient Judeo-Christian symbols. Scholars have known decades ago that those X's and cross like markings on ossuaries mean one thing and one thing only, the sliding lid goes on this way! Reverse the lid and it will not fit. Duh...so much for Judeo-Christian symbols, a fact that all of them should have known, particularly the BAR crowd, seems it didn't go well with their agenda.

Throughout the film as well as the marketing circus, one sees prominently on the façade of the tomb, the dot within the triangle, minus the base as if this is some mystical Judeo-Christian symbol. Had they simply taken the time to scan photos in the catalogue of Jewish ossuaries by LY Rahmani, they would have seen that many ossuaries with triangular lids have decorative elements or functional elements serving as handgrips to raise the lid, which resemble the tomb façade. Thusly, the façade motif could easily be

seen in and of itself to resemble a ossuary lid with the tomb itself serving as an ossuary. A black and white photo of one of the ossuaries in the catalogue is reproduced for viewers here on the web site.

Alternatively, the circular object within the triangle can be interpreted as either a patera or a unfinished wreath, both which appear on a number of ossuaries as well tomb facades such as the Tomb of 'Absalom'.

THE SECOND TOMB There appears in the film a very long segment whereby Simcha and Co. attempt to lower a camera into a plastic pipe which for religious reasons has been inserted into the tomb. When they finally succeed with the help of a plumber (sic) they are able to film the tomb and its contents. They attempt to pass onto the public a Jewish tomb undisturbed for 2,000 which they have discovered whereas the tomb was known to the archaeologists. In fact, Prof. Amos Kloner was in the process of removing the ossuaries when the ultra-orthodox arrived on site and forced its closure. Kloner however was able to remove one of these ossuaries before the arrival of the ultra-orthodox.

THE 'MISSING OSSUARY' The film makers try to fool the public into believing that as ten ossuaries were discovered in the tomb and only nine were published by Kloner that the tenth ossuary was the controversial James son of Joseph, brother of Jesus ossuary which was declared to be a forgery by a panel of experts. The attempt to deceive the public can be clearly seen here in terms of an 'agenda'. Two members of the *BAR Crowd* who appear prominently in the film had earlier declared that the ossuary had originally come from a robbed tomb which they had cleared a few years ago in Silwan and not purchased by the collector decades earlier as he claimed. They clearly had attempted to draw media attention to their robbed tomb in Silwan and when the media attention flagged they now suddenly claim that they were mistaken and the ossuary no longer comes from Silwan but from the Talpiot 'Jesus Family tomb excavated in 1980 by the Israel Antiquities Authority! Well, last week ago a small problem suddenly arose when Oded Golan the owner of the ossuary in question, who is on trial for forging objects, produced a photograph of the ossuary with a time stamp 1976, four years before the Talpiot tomb was accidentally discovered. Moreover, they maintained that the missing ossuary, their James son of Joseph brother of Jesus ossuary was of the same identical dimensions as the 'missing' ossuary from Talpiot. Sounds convincing until an enterprising skeptic checked the dimensions of the two and found that one is actually centimeters longer than the other.

THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER The truth of the matter is that the missing ossuary was never missing, never stolen from the IAA, nor stolen from the Talpiot tomb. Plain ossuaries which bore no inscription, nor any ornaments were automatically placed in an inner courtyard in the Rockefeller Museum during my tenure at curator (1972-1997). Due to a lack of storage space this was standard operating procedure, the ossuary was given a registration number, measured and simply stored in the inner courtyard with perhaps an additional 50-100 plain ossuaries. This was personally explained to Tabor by me so as to avoid any problems of a conspiracy theory in which the plain ossuary would figure. Unfortunately, it did not fit their agenda so they artificially created a story in which a

plain white ossuary, suddenly morphed into a ossuary with two rosettes on the front, traces of red paint, bearing the inscription on the back 'James son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.