

Reflections on the So-called “Lost Tomb of Jesus”

Question One: Has the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth been found in the Talpiot Tomb?

As stated during the 1.5 hour press conference in the New York Public Library, I have serious doubts that the bone box of Jesus of Nazareth has been discovered.

Here are my reflections on the ossuary (bone box) that seems to have these letters: “Yeshua (?) bar Yoseph [Aramaic = Jesus, son of Joseph]”:

- 1) The scribbling is not an inscription, it is a sloppy graffiti.
- 2) The name “Jesus” before “son of Joseph” is the most difficult name to read among all the names in the tomb.
- 3) All archaeologists and historians know that the names “Jesus” and “Joseph” are two of the most common names in first-century Jerusalem.
- 4) The ossuary is remarkably ordinary without any ornamentation; this may indicate that the remains placed inside belonged to someone rather common.
- 5) After Jesus’ crucifixion as a common criminal, some priests wanted to stop (even kill) those who were claiming that Jesus was the Son of God because God had raised him from the dead. They could have produced the bones of Jesus rather easily and thus thwarted those who claimed that God had raised Jesus from the dead.
- 6) The so-called “Jesus tomb” is not far from the place where Caiaphas’s ossuary was recovered. The “Jesus tomb” is decorated and elegant and would have been clearly visible before 70 CE when Roman soldiers destroyed the area. The priests who sought to stop the Palestinian Jesus Movement would have known about this tomb, regardless of who was placed inside.
- 7) The authors of the Gospels report that Jesus was placed in a tomb prepared for the family of Joseph of Arimathea; there is no New Testament evidence that Jesus’ family had a tomb.

Jesus did not place his own bones in an ossuary. If any one did so, it would have been his followers. They proclaimed him as The Messiah, the Son of God. They would not have put him in a very common ossuary with a sloppy graffiti. My judgment is that this ossuary does not belong to Jesus from Nazareth. Again, the names “Jesus” and “Joseph” are extremely common in the first century. Two weeks ago I studied an ossuary with the names “Jesus, the son of Joseph.” It is an ossuary found by Professor Sukenik in a warehouse in Jerusalem. No one knows its provenance. No one thought that the bones in that ossuary can be identified.

Question Two: Has Jesus’ family tomb been found?

I have stated that a good case has been made for the possibility that the tomb of Jesus’ “clan” may have been discovered. By “clan” I mean “extended family group”. This possibility needs to be researched and debated in a scholarly symposium. If Jesus’ clan had a tomb, it would postdate 30, which was the date of the crucifixion.

There is nothing that archaeology can provide that can be damaging to Christian faith. Archaeology cannot form faith; it can only inform faith.

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