

THE **JESUS**
FAMILY TOMB
EXAMINED
DID JESUS RISE PHYSICALLY?



FOREWORD BY DARRELL L. BOCK
AUTHOR OF THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER
BREAKING THE DA VINCI CODE



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READING YOU LOUD AND CLEAR.

THE JESUS FAMILY TOMB *EXAMINED*

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WHAT LEADERS ARE SAYING

Book editor

Have Jesus' bones actually been found? If so, then the biblical teaching that Jesus rose bodily from the grave is false. This in turn means that the Bible is unreliable because it states repeatedly that He rose from the dead. What's more, it means Jesus is a liar because He said He would rise from the dead after three days. Did He rise "spiritually" rather than bodily? This notion too runs counter to the testimony of Scripture.

López discusses these issues thoroughly and argues in detail for the authenticity of the biblical record that affirms Jesus' physical resurrection. López carefully and painstakingly debunks the foolish idea that some bones found outside Jerusalem are those of Jesus and His alleged family. This scholarly, thoroughly researched work, written in an easy-to-read style, stands as a strong defense of the physical resurrection of Jesus, a cornerstone truth of Christianity.

—Roy B. Zuck, Th.D.

Editor of Dallas Seminary's
theological journal *Bibliotheca Sacra*
and Senior Professor Emeritus of Bible Exposition
Dallas Theological Seminary

The sensational reporting of the alleged "Jesus tomb" at Talpiot in Israel has, in this work by René López, run up against the stubborn facts of careful research that seriously undermine both the premises and conclusions of the superficial journalism that has till now dominated the discussion. Point by point, López makes the case for the traditional view of the resurrection of Jesus Christ by citing the best of both ancient and modern scholarship. For believers and unbelievers alike, *The Jesus Family Tomb Examined* sets the issue in stark and clear terms that leave no doubt as to the historical legitimacy of the time-honored tradition.

—Eugene H. Merrill, PhD

Distinguished Professor of Old Testament Studies
Dallas Theological Seminary

Jesus gets Prime Time attention today, but unfortunately the Jesus presented is a no frills Jesus who demands neither adoration nor allegiance. Here is a book that sets the record straight by pointing out that the best scholarship leads us back to a Jesus who claimed to be God and had the evidence to prove it. In these pages we are shown why we can have confidence in the New Testament documents where we find a Jesus who can save us; a Jesus who is worthy of our worship and trust.

—Erwin W. Lutzer, LL.D.
Moody Church, Chicago Ill.

Sometimes the information which comes out of crypts can be, for lack of a better word—‘cryptic.’ But the supposed revelations that have come out of the Talpiot tomb in the past year have been trumpeted as proof positive that Jesus’ bones have been moldering in the grave for low these 2,000 years. With meticulous detective and scholarly work René López demonstrates in detail that the answer to the question Who is buried in the Talpiot tomb? is—NOT Jesus and his family. He shows at length that the location and the character of the tomb and also the evidence from inside the tomb itself positively rules out such a conclusion. This detailed scholarly book should put the final nail in the coffin of “the Talpiot tomb theory.” This “cold case” has been solved, and it doesn’t involve Jesus or his family. Highly recommended.

—Ben Witherington, III, Ph.D.
Amos Professor of NT
Asbury Theological Seminary
Doctoral faculty
St. Andrews University, Scotland

With the recent frontal attack upon the credibility of Christianity from both atheists and religionists, it is essential that the church have skilled and scholarly apologists who are able to make a defense for the hope that is in us. This book is a carefully crafted defense of the integrity of the Christian scriptures and the resurrection of Christ our Savior. For those who are troubled by the recent rash of books and television documentaries that have the “appearance of knowledge” as

they deny the truth and trustworthiness of the biblical record, let not your heart be troubled. Read and be comforted & convinced.

—Fred Chay, Ph.D., Assistant
Professor of Theology &
Director of Doctoral Studies
Phoenix Seminary

This intriguing book investigates a range of sources (such as ancient languages, Gnostic texts and ossuary inscriptions) to soundly critique the artificial and tendentious approach of Cameron's Jesus Tomb. Those who enjoy reading mysteries will enjoy this book's exposure of the *real* conspiracy involved in Cameron's "documentary."

—Craig S. Keener, Ph.D.,
Author of countless books, and
Professor of New Testament
Palmer Seminary

When discussing our warfare with Satan and all his nefarious schemes to demean and defame the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul exhorts three times "Stand firm" (Ephesians 6:11-14).

Last year the obnoxious attack came via the movie *The Da Vinci Code* which 2003 book brought out dozens of books in previous years, both pro and con. But when the dust had settled and many millions of dollars wasted, it proved to be "much ado about nothing."

Now, this past year it is The Jesus Family Tomb and the denial of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ—the very heart of the "good news" that is on the block.

At this juncture we can be very thankful for seasoned scholars, such as René López, who has carefully, thoroughly, and systematically answered the attack in the Spirit of Christ. I heartily commend his work to you. It will require some diligence but, I assure you, you will be better and stronger for it.

—Earl D. Radmacher, Th.D.
President Emeritus
Western Seminary

In *The Jesus Family Tomb Examined*, René López presents the most detailed treatment yet of the Talpiot Tomb discovery. For those who want to study the unabridged edition of the archaeological find itself, the subsequent sensational announcement that this was probably the burial tomb of Jesus' family, and the backlash of recent scholars, including their plethora of reasons for firmly rejecting this conclusion, I would strongly recommend López's fine volume.

—Gary R. Habermas
Distinguished Research Professor
Liberty University

Much discussion surrounding the person of Jesus in the media is fictional rather than factual. The Hollywood docudrama, "The Lost Tomb of Jesus," which aired last year around Easter kept the trend going. Many were flabbergasted by hearing that the alleged Jesus family tomb was discovered. Therefore, Jesus did not rise physically, because they now possessed the bone box and even some DNA residue where Jesus once rested. René López's work skillfully dismantles point by point the arguments made by these advocates and shows cogently how Jesus' tomb continues to remain empty, because He rose physically. I wholeheartedly recommend this work.

—Josh D. McDowell
International Author and Speaker

Too often around Easter evangelical Christians are confronted with presentations of Jesus' bodily resurrection that call into question the historical evidence on which one's Easter faith rests. René López has taken on one such challenge in response to the so-called *The Jesus Family Tomb*. His reasoned examination of this tomb along with his defense of Jesus bodily resurrection is a formidable apologetic in support of this indispensable foundation of Christianity.

—James F. Davis, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of New Testament
Capital Bible Seminary

Someone once said that there is no such thing as bad publicity. With all the fanfare for a major motion picture destined to be a “winner,” the “facts” concerning this family tomb do not stand up to close scrutiny. In his usual diligent and clear style, López unearths and sheds light on what some have called “the incredible archaeological discovery in Israel that will change history as it shocks the world.” He has delivered the goods to dismantle the hype while at the same time affirming the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is a must read for anyone interested in the facts surrounding the Family Tomb of Jesus and the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

—Stephen R. Lewis, Ph.D.
President
Rocky Mountain Bible
College & Seminary

René López gives the Jesus family tomb theory the thorough debunking it so richly deserves. He points out countless errors and lapses in logic on the part Simcha Jacobovici and his associates, who have foisted on a naive public and gullible media a highly implausible scenario. Critical scholars and laity alike are appalled by this travesty. *The Jesus Family Tomb Examined* will go a long way toward setting the record straight.

—Craig A. Evans, Ph.D.
Payzant Distinguished Professor
of New Testament at Acadia Divinity College
and author of *Fabricating Jesus:
How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels*

López painstakingly unearths the facts of the investigation in both *The Jesus Family Tomb* book and *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* documentary. He carefully contrasts conversations with scholars and what was actually reported to demonstrate hidden agendas and obvious assumptions in both the book and the documentary. Clearly and forcefully written, and with ample documentation, *The Jesus Family*

Tomb Examined provides much needed answers to the escalating attacks on the Christ of the Gospels.

—Roger Felipe, D.Min.
Director of the Master of Arts and Religion
and Florida Programs
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

In 2007, Jacobovici and Pellegrino claimed that Jesus' family tomb had been found. One may have thought that the matter would have gone away after a nearly unanimous scholarly community agreed that the two were seriously mistaken. However, their proposal found new life when it became the subject of discussion at the *Princeton Symposium on Judaism and Christian Origins*. In this volume, René López provides an encyclopedic refutation of the Jesus Family Tomb hypothesis and gives it the dishonorable burial it deserves!

—Michael Licona
Author, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*
and *Paul Meets Muhammad*
Director of Apologetics Evangelism,
North American Mission Board,
Southern Baptist Convention

This book is by far the most accurate and detailed response to the Talpiot Tomb I have read to date. A must read for anyone interested in the facts behind the hype!

—Dillon Burroughs,
Author, *What's the Big Deal about Jesus?*
and Staff Writer of Ankerberg
Theological Research Institute

Tired of the new docudramas attacking the historicity of Jesus and Christianity? René López's book, *The Jesus Family Tomb Examined*, is both fair and thorough. The light of truth and fact is shown into the darkness of doubts and unsubstantiated innuendoes. This book will help you navigate your way through the rapids of the multiple cultural

perceptions that keep arising against Christ and His cause.

—Mark L. Bailey, Ph.D.

President

Dallas Theological Seminary

René A. López has written a timely and thorough refutation of recent sensational theories that allege that the family tomb of Jesus has been found, with inscribed ossuaries which prove that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, had a son named Judas, and was not resurrected. His book also clearly and convincingly sets forth reasons for the historic Christian belief in Christ's resurrection.

—Edwin M. Yamauchi, Ph.D.

Professor of History Emeritus,

Miami University

René López, my dear friend and co-pastor in the work of God, has taken a complicated issue and accomplished two things simultaneously. He has satisfied the most erudite scholar who desires satisfactory proof as concerns the Jesus Tomb, and yet, he has also arranged and illustrated his material as to put it in reach of the person in the pew. René has “hit back-to-back home runs” with his masterpiece commentary on Romans (Romans Unlocked) and now with The Jesus Family Tomb Examined. May God use it greatly for His glory!

—Robert Vacendak

Senior Pastor

Ridge Pointe Fellowship

Dallas, TX

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to the Lord (Jesus), for His grace in allowing me the time and health necessary to complete this project, to my loving wife (Marialis) for her continual sacrificial support, and to my son (Daniel Ariel) who is a gift from above.

FOREWORD

I have been involved in the Talpiot tomb controversy since very early on. The Discovery Channel asked me to preview the special on the tomb and give them my feedback before it went public. I did. I was very frank about the problems I saw. They graciously worked to put together the Ted Koppel Special that aired after the special to allow the discussion on the special's claims to begin. Few channels would have been as open as to allow such a critique of something they helped air. That special signaled that there were real and important issues tied to the history of Christianity that needed attention. It began the discussion and reaction to the claims that followed.

However, the controversy has not entirely died. This January Princeton Theological Seminary sponsored a symposium in Jerusalem on the issue of first century burials in Judaism. The tomb issue was a part of that discussion. Reports from magazines like *TIME* claimed that scholars were taking a fresh look at the Talpiot claims, reassessing the largely negative reception that initial claims received. Since then the scholars present at the Symposium, including its chairperson James Charlesworth, have challenged this take on the meeting. (For the discussion the Symposium generated, see the blog, <http://www.primetimejesus.com>, and search the many entries with the keyword, Jesus Tomb). The question is, what evidence is there for and against these claims?

This work by René A. López covers the issues these claims raise from every angle: archeological, historical, and theological. René has gone through the many discussions these claims have generated, giving them a close look. He is well equipped to guide one through the myriad of questions these claims have raised. This is the book to get on the Jesus Tomb claims. In it, you will be able to assess what the discussion is about. I commend the book with enthusiasm. I think you will “discover” a great deal in the process.

—Darrell L. Bock

Research Professor of New Testament Studies
Dallas Theological Seminary

Acknowledgment

Acknowledging the people that help an author of a book arrive at the finish line is like giving an acceptance speech at the Oscars—you do not want to leave out anyone. Many thanks go out to the reviewers of the manuscript. Especially I want to acknowledge those who gave me advice in making this book the best it could be: Eugene H. Merrill, Ben Witherington III, Craig S. Keener, Gary R. Habermas, Craig A. Evans, Roger Felipe, and Edwin M. Yamauchi. These scholars gave me valuable suggestions that saved me from errors. My publisher agent Lee Fredrickson, at 21stCentury Press, deserves recognition in seeing the importance and taking on to the task to publish this work. Working with Michael Makidon (typesetter) was also a delight since he is hardworking, professional and a friend. Finally, without the immense contribution of the following two scholars and friends, Darrell L. Bock and Roy B. Zuck (both of Dallas Theological Seminary), this book would have never reached its final form, and in the time that it was done. First, Dr. Bock served as the guide for the project. His suggestions for making this manuscript succinct and focus so that I may hit my target made me look like a professional marksman. Second, Dr. Zuck served as the editor whose advice and editing skills are worth gold and made this manuscript more polished. Whatever error may remain is totally my responsibility. Both, Dr. Bock and Dr. Zuck, made themselves available to me whenever I needed them, which words cannot express my appreciation and indebtedness to them. Of course, I cannot end without acknowledging my better half, Marialis, who sacrificed time with me in order for me to complete the book. She saw the importance of the work and was willing to sacrifice time with me for the greater good of others.

Abbreviations

Hebrew Bible

Gen.	Genesis
Exod.	Exodus
Lev.	Leviticus
Deut.	Deuteronomy
Josh.	Joshua
Judg.	Judges
Ruth	Ruth
1 Sam.	1 Samuel
2 Sam.	2 Samuel
1 Kgs.	1 Kings
2 Kgs.	2 Kings
1 Chr.	1 Chronicles
2 Chr.	2 Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh.	Nehemiah
Esth.	Esther
Job	Job
Ps. (<i>pl.</i> Pss.)	Psalms
Prov.	Proverbs
Eccl. (<i>or</i> Qol)	Ecclesiastes
Song.	Song of Songs
Isa.	Isaiah
Jer.	Jeremiah
Ezek.	Ezekiel
Dan.	Daniel
Hos.	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Obad.	Obadiah
Jon.	Jonah
Mic.	Micah
Nah.	Nahum
Hab.	Habakkuk
Zeph.	Zephaniah
Hag.	Haggai
Zech.	Zechariah
Mal.	Malachi

Other Jewish and Writings

Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books

Tob.	Tobit
Jdt.	Judith
Add. Esth.	Additions Esther
Wis.	Wisdom
Sir	Sirach
	(Ecclesiasticus)
Bar.	Baruch
Let. Jer.	Letter of Jeremiah
Azar/Song Thr.	Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews
Sus.	Susanna
Bel.	Bel and the Dragon
1 Macc.	1 Maccabees
2 Macc.	2 Maccabees
1 Esd.	1 Esdras
Pr. Man.	Prayer of Manasseh
Manasseh	
Add. Ps.	Psalm 151
3 Macc.	1 Maccabees
2 Esd.	2 Esdras
4 Macc.	1 Maccabees

For further Jewish writings see the *Pseudepigrapha* 2 vols. Also, for more Jewish writings see the Rabbinic Tractates (Babylonian Talmud, Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud, Mishnah and Tosefta) and Josephus and Philo.

New Testament

Matt.	Matthew
Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
John	John
Acts	Acts
Rom.	Romans
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians
Gal.	Galatians
Eph.	Ephesians
Phil.	Philippians
1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians
2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians
1 Tim.	1 Timothy
2 Tim.	2 Timothy
Titus	Titus
Philem.	Philemon
Heb.	Hebrews
Jas.	James
1 Pet.	1 Peter
2 Pet.	2 Peter
1 John	1 John
2 John	2 John
3 John	3 John
Jude	Jude
Rev.	Revelation

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PREFACE

Has Jesus' family tomb been found? How do we respond to evidence showing that at least five or perhaps six out of ten ossuaries in a tomb discovered in 1980 have a cluster of names that belonged to Jesus' relatives? Why has there not been more news or discussion about the Talpiot¹ tomb discovery in Jerusalem since 1980? Could there be a cover-up plot since such a discovery may destroy Israel's tourist economy if the Christian community realizes that Jesus' family tomb emerged and that this disproves the Resurrection? Could one of the ossuaries discovered in the tomb be that of Mary Magdalene? If so, could recent DNA tests disprove motherly kinship between the *Jesus son of Joseph* ossuary and another containing the name of *Mariamne*—believed by some to be Mary Magdalene—prove that these two individuals were married? That is, since family tombs normally contain relatives' bones why would a woman appear in a family tomb not having the same mother as that of the *Jesus* ossuary if they were not married? Could the “missing” tenth ossuary be the controversial *James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus* sarcophagus? Does the cluster of names in the same tomb mean that this is Jesus of Nazareth's family tomb? Can we really trust the Bible's account that Jesus rose from the dead? And if it can be trusted, should passages on Jesus' resurrection be understood as spiritual rather than physical? Does it make any difference if Jesus rose spiritually rather than physically?

While at my computer on February 27, 2007 I received an interesting and startling email. It read, “Good day, and look at this news. Tomb could be of Jesus, wife and son.” Then the web address followed. Someone at my church wanted to know my reaction and

explanation of the news that was all over the Internet, cable television, and in numerous newspapers. This email came only a day after (February 26, 2007) a major press release given by two well-known figures in the film industry claimed to have possibly discovered the lost family tomb of Jesus of Nazareth. This documentary of “The Lost Tomb of Jesus” produced by Oscar-winning James Cameron and directed by Emmy-winning Simcha Jacobovici was aired—not only nationally but worldwide—on the Discovery Channel on Sunday, March 4, 2007, at 9:00 pm ET/PT; and it drew millions of viewers. Also related to the documentary a (now best selling) book by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino entitled *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery, the Investigation, and the Evidence That Could Change History* was published by HarperSanFrancisco on March 1, 2007.²

On that Sunday night I saw the documentary and the hour-long follow-up panel discussion of scholars that was hosted by Ted Koppel. I also read the book related to the documentary. At first blush the documentary appears to be very convincing, especially since it combines archaeological, theological, scientific, and mathematical analysis of the evidence. Coupled with cinematography effects that engage the emotions, this made an impressive, convincing, and entertaining presentation. All the questions above were directly or indirectly mentioned or alluded to at one point in the documentary or the book. However, as impressive as the documentary may seem, far too many issues remain unclear and unrevealed. Non-Christians should not believe the documentary and book too quickly, nor should Christians flippantly dismiss the claims either. Thus part of the task in the following pages is to examine if anything has been left out of their coverage of the tomb.

Unfortunately many people are too quickly dismissing the arguments made by the documentary and the book. Many do so because of lack of interest in studying. Others do so because they are trusting well-known scholars for their beliefs without themselves knowing how to answer questions about the subject. The position of being dependent on others is all too commonly found in religiously naïve people, some of whom tragically met their demise in Jim Jones’s Guyana

tragedy, David Koresh Branch Davidian tragedy, and other religious movements. Of course, not everyone who refuses to be informed of biblical issues ends this way but some may in fact misunderstand the truth and miss discovering the greatest experience of life, and lose the chance to grow in knowledge, become mature, and attain freedom. The fact is that knowledge of the truth can bring about freedom and life. Hence whether one believes or disbelieves that the Scriptures are inspired of God, the Bible has prudent advice to the wise. As Hosea 4:6 records: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Though this was true for the Jewish people of old, this fact remains true today. Proverbs places a strong emphasis on gaining a detailed knowledge before deciding a matter:

Every prudent man acts with knowledge,
But a fool lays open his folly (13:16).

A fool has no delight in understanding,
But in expressing his own heart (18:2).

He who answers a matter before he hears it,
It is folly and shame to him (18:13).

James R. White correctly notes the impact the documentary and book have had: “This work is far more significant in its claims and its promoters far more savvy with the media.”³ Therefore we do a great disservice to ourselves to ignore the seriousness of these issues by not knowing all the facts and answers to questions posed by the documentary and book that seek to interpret the very foundation of Christianity, *the resurrection of Jesus Christ*.

While various scholars have spoken and written on websites to answer people’s questions on this subject, along with various books that have already surfaced, a work is needed to treat in one volume all the issues in a balanced manner. I simplify many of the subjects discussed in this volume to help nonexperts understand without sacrificing content. Hence the motto used by Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona is adopted here: “Everything should be as simple as possible, but not simpler.”⁴ Though this book is written to laypeople,

the overall aim is to attract the nonreligious, informed scholars by providing at times (only when needed) in the body of the book technical information, but relegating most of this information to endnotes.

What about the nature of Jesus' resurrection? Do extrabiblical and biblical material validate a spiritual or a physical resurrection of Jesus? "People who believe in a physical Resurrection would not be affected by the discovery of Jesus bone box. In Gnostic Gospels, Jesus appears before the apostles as a sort of holy ghost—here again, gone again.... With respect to his Ascension to heaven, the New Testament also does not tell us that its chroniclers believed that Jesus, when he ascended, needed to take his entire body with him. So if you believe in a physical Ascension, the ossuary is a problem. But if you believe in a spiritual one, it becomes an object of veneration."⁵ In this view the authors promote the possibility that the bulk of Christians could be wrong about their interpretation of a physical resurrection. But could that be correct? That is, could interpreting Jesus' resurrection as spiritual instead of physical be the correct way to understand Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 15:44, 46: "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.... However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual." Is spiritual instead of physical resurrection the normal and common Jewish and Judeo-Christian interpretation of the Resurrection, or have evangelicals and Roman Catholics gotten it wrong? Does the Jesus' family tomb make the spiritual resurrection of Jesus a viable and non-threatening interpretation?

It is unwise to opine conclusively on a matter before hearing all the evidence. My aim in writing this book is to examine the facts to see if what the documentary and the book claim is all there is to discover and to inspect what is the historic understanding of Jesus' resurrection (whether spiritual or physical) and thereby to surface data necessary for arriving at a sound conclusion on the issue.

— Chapter 1 —

INTRODUCTION: “JESUS’ BONES HAVE BEEN DISCOVERED!”

The East Talpiot Tomb Discovery

Does the Talpiot tomb discovery mean that Jesus did not rise from the dead? What does this mean for Christians who have believed that Jesus rose bodily from the dead? Is His resurrection a false rumor after all?

On March 1980 the entrance to a burial cave was exposed on Dov Gruner Street in the Jerusalem neighborhood of East Talpiot. A salvage excavation was undertaken by the late Yosef Gat of the Department of Antiquities and Museums.¹ A preconstruction site was being prepared that would soon be the home of apartments of a newly built suburb called Talpiot about three miles east of Jerusalem. About eleven o’clock on Friday, March 28, 1980, the Solel Boneh Construction Company, led by chief engineer Efraim Shochat, began clearing away the rubble with a bulldozer after having dynamited a section.² Suddenly after clearing the area the entire front south side of a door to a tomb lay bare for all to see (see Figures 1, 2, 3).³

Interestingly, “Many of Shochat’s colleagues, striving to avoid expensive construction delays, were in the habit of averting their eyes from interesting new cavities in the ground and occasionally sacrificed

a tomb, especially if it happened to be small and appeared to consist of, say, only one or two ossuaries.... [But] what one of his bulldozers almost fell into was anything but small."⁴ Yet bound by biblical law not to desecrate the burial place of the dead, Shochat, an Orthodox Jew, stopped the construction project until the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums ([hereafter IDAM] that was later renamed Israel Antiquities Authority [hereafter IAA]) sent a team of archaeologists early Sunday.

On that very Friday a young eleven-year-old boy named Ouriel ran home and excitedly told his mother of the newly discovered find and begged her to come see it. Rivka Maoz, the boy's mother, was a newcomer to Israel and an emigrant from France, who was also an archaeological student. After inspecting the tomb's façade she called the IAA. Because it was Friday and the Sabbath was just hours away and many of the department's offices were closing, no excavation took place until Sunday in accord with the IAA's suggestion.

Unfortunately on Saturday morning before the archaeologists' arrival on Sunday, Rivka's son ran home again to alert his mother of the boys playing with skulls in front of the tomb. Immediately Rivka

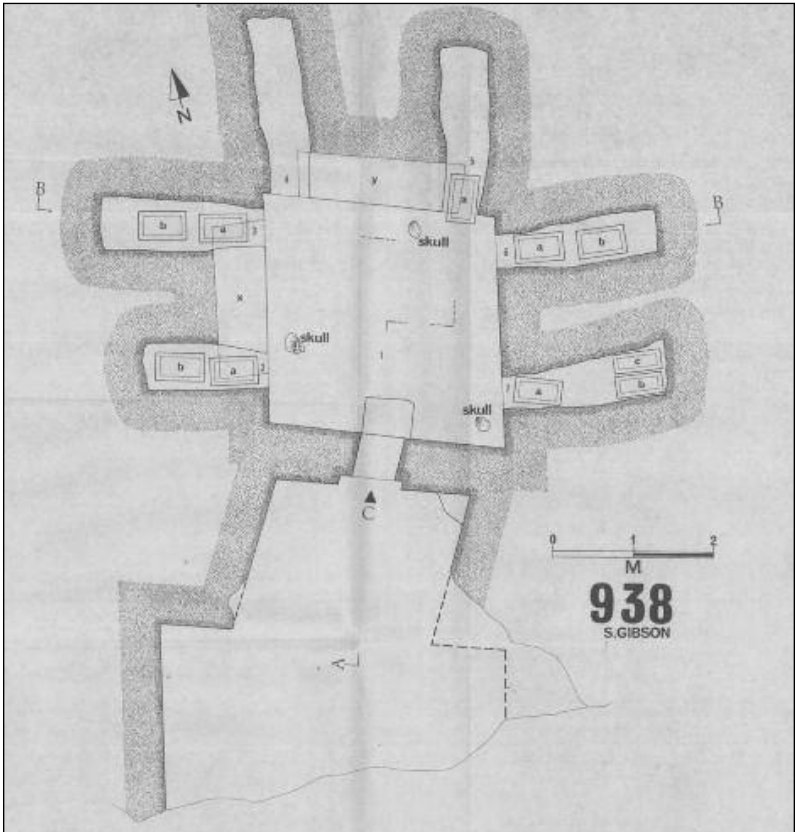


Figure 1. The Tomb Facade

and her husband arrived at the tomb shouting at the boys who were playing kickball with skulls. Some fractured skulls and broken jaws were then collected in a plastic bag by the Rivka Maoz's family and later given to the IAA.

Considering the evidence of the Talpiot tomb, this event becomes vitally important, since the remains within the tomb were disturbed. Hence no one knows for sure exactly how much of the evidence remained intact when the archaeologists arrived on Sunday.

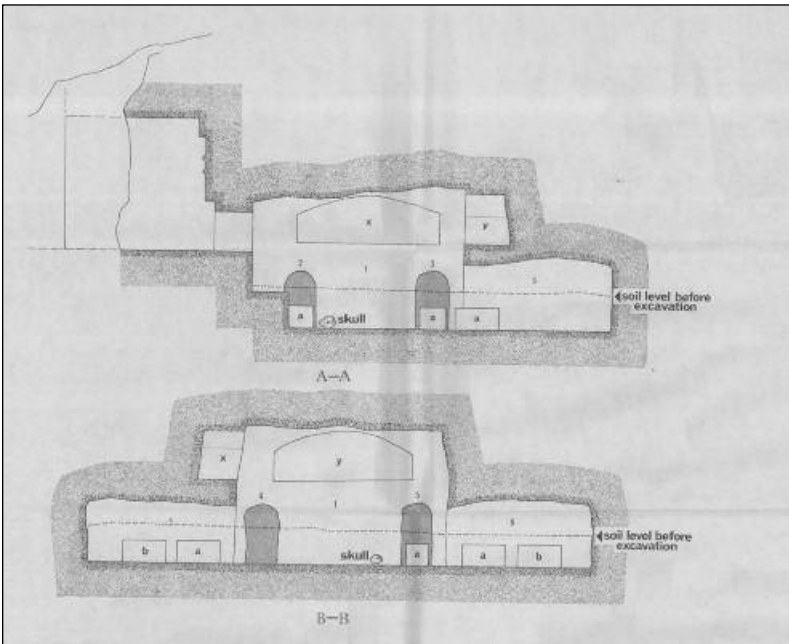
On Sunday morning Eliot Braun drove the late Joseph (also spelled *Yosef*) Gat. Later Amos Kloner and Shimon Gibson, who was to sketch the tomb and map out the contents of its chambers, arrived at the tomb, whose façade is decorated as part of an inverted V carved



Figures 2. Inside the Tomb Chamber

above a door with a circle in the middle (see Figures 1 and 3). According to Gibson’s drawing of the tomb there were about six *kokhim* (plural for *kokh* meaning “niche”), or narrow carved chambers in a tomb, that stored the ten bone boxes in question (see Figures 2).⁵

Kloner wrote, “Entrances to six *kokhim* ... are located in the eastern, northern, and western walls, two in each wall. ... The interiors of the *kokhim* are roughly carved in comparison to the walls of the tomb. They have slightly inset facades, a common first century CE feature. ... Ten ossuaries were found within the *kokhim*, some of them broken. The bones within these ossuaries were in an advanced stage of disintegration. Two ossuary lids were recovered from the 0.5 m deep soil fill center of the room, where they had been discarded in antiquity.... Disturbed bones, probably swept off the *arcosolia* [resting places made of a bench with an arch over it], were found on the floor of the room. These included skull [three of them] and limb fragments and vertebrae. Only broken and powdered bones remained on the shelves of the *arcosolia*”⁶ (see Figures 2 and 3).



Figures 3. Other Angles of the Tomb Chamber

Many books, documentaries, and articles have recounted the discovery of the Talpiot tomb.⁷ The facts of the discovery first appeared in 1981 in the journal *Hadashot Arkheologiyot*,⁸ a publication of the IAA. In 1994, Levy Yitzhak Rahmani published a book by the IAA titled, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel*, which included findings of numerous ossuaries (ornamented and inscribed ones) along with nine of the ten ossuaries of the Talpiot tomb (80.500–508).⁹ Kloner's article in 1996 refers to the 1981 article by Joseph Gat and also Rahmani's catalogue. Thus after Gat's article in 1981, two other publications and a documentary appeared in 1996. An article titled "The Tomb That Dare Not Speak Its Name" was published in the British newspaper, *The Sunday Times*, on March 31, 1996 (see Figure 4).¹⁰

A week later a BBC special documentary titled "The Body in Question" aired on a British television series *Heart of the Matter*. On April 1, 1996, headlines in *The Irish Times* read, "Holy Family Tomb Find Discounted," and on April 3, 1996, a caption in the *USA Today* newspaper read, "Coffin in Israel Is Not That of Jesus' Family, Experts Say."

In the same year (1996) James D. Tabor posted on a web-board named Orion Center at Hebrew University the discussion of the Jesus Family Tomb. Many scholars, including Dale M. Cannon, Kevin D. Johnson, and Niels Peter Lemche, said the tomb was not that of Jesus and His family.¹¹ The Talpiot ossuaries were again the subject of discussion in a section of John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed's book, *Excavating Jesus*, published in



Figure 4. The Sunday Times 1996 Talpiot Tomb

2003. They concluded that finding Jesus' name along with other biblical names associated with Him is only "coincidental."¹² A paper titled "The Jesus Ossuary: A Critical Examination" was also presented in 2003 by Michael S. Heiser, professor at Grace College in Indiana, at the Near East Archaeological Society, where he dismissed any possibility that Jesus and His family were entombed in Talpiot.

Thus from the evidence it becomes difficult to imply or prove that Israeli authorities and Christians conspired to keep the Talpiot tomb a secret. Such a conspiracy is suggested in the book *The Jesus Family Tomb* (hereafter *JFT*) and *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* (hereafter *LTJ*) Discovery Channel documentary.¹³ However, the onrush of publications soon after the discovery hardly supports the idea of an attempted cover-up.

The Allegations: Summary of the Arguments

Before summarizing the allegations made by the book and the documentary, we need to know the identity of the four people most responsible for this project. *Ad hominem*¹⁴ attacks are not beneficial or appropriate. Instead, knowing parts of their resume can help disclose their worldview and allow the reader to recognize the predispositions that may influence the conclusions drawn by the book and the documentary.

James Cameron is one of the most successful Hollywood directors, producers, and screenwriters of all times. He has produced and directed such blockbusters as *The Terminator* (1984), *Aliens* (which he wrote and directed and for which he was nominated for seven academy awards in 1986), *The Abyss* (1989), *Terminator 2* (1991), *True Lies* (1984), and *Titanic* (being the highest grossing picture ever made, with \$600 million domestically and \$1 billion abroad and winning eleven Oscar awards in 1997).¹⁵ Cameron financed the *LTJ* and coached Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino in the making of the documentary.¹⁶ Viewing the *LTJ* documentary one can easily spot Cameron's cinematographic talent that engages the emotions and lends a sort of realism to the story.

As a youngster Cameron went to church and as an adult he

accepted the theory of evolution.¹⁷ In 2003 he released a documentary titled *Volcanoes of the Deep Sea* that suggested that life perhaps originated from the depths of the ocean. On April 16, 2006, he released another documentary titled *The Exodus Decoded*, which again betrayed his antisupernatural bias by suggesting in the film that the plagues of the Exodus resulted not from miracles but from natural phenomena.¹⁸

Simcha Jacobovici is an Emmy-award-winning documentary filmmaker who was involved with Cameron in the making of *The Exodus Decoded*. Jacobovici received a master's degree in international relations from the University of Toronto. He speaks four languages: English, Hebrew, French, and Romanian.¹⁹ Along with Cameron, he was the director and major promoter behind the *LITJ* documentary and he and Charles Pellegrino wrote the *JFT* book. As an Orthodox Jew, he is not a biblicist nor does he subscribe to any major Christian tenets.

Charles R. Pellegrino is a writer and a documentary filmmaker. He wrote *Darwin's Universe: Origins and Crises in the History of Life* (1983) and *Return to Sodom and Gomorrah* (1995). The HarperCollins biographical sketch of him says this: "Pellegrino has been known to work simultaneously in entomology, forensic physics, paleo-genetics, preliminary design of advanced rocket systems, astro-biology, and marine archaeology. The author of eighteen books of fiction and nonfiction, including *Unearthing Atlantis*, *Dust*, *Ghosts of the Titanic*, and the New York Times bestseller *Her Name, Titanic*, he is the scientist whose dinosaur-cloning recipe inspired Michael Crichton's bestselling novel *Jurassic Park*."²⁰ He received a Ph.D. in paleobiology from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Pellegrino describes himself as an agnostic, and so he assumes an anti-supernatural bias.²¹

James D. Tabor is the only legitimate theologian of the team, has an interest in archaeology, and is a trained biblical scholar who received a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. He serves on the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He is also well known as the author of the controversial book *The Jesus Dynasty*

(2006) and for his discovery (with renowned Jerusalem archaeologist Shimon Gibson) in 2005 of an ancient cave associated with the ministry of John the Baptist. Other books to his credit are *Things Unutterable* (1986) and *A Noble Death* (1992). He also holds an anti-supernatural view of miracles.²²

Seeing the worldviews of these four men, it is not surprising that they deny Jesus' physical resurrection and ascension.²³

Many efforts have been made by theologians throughout history and by contemporary writers to discredit Christianity similar to the arguments followed in the *JFT* book and *LTJ* documentary.²⁴ Here are the basic allegations being made that will be examined throughout the book.

Chapter 2 will investigate each of the six ossuaries inscriptions: Jesus son of Joseph, Mariame and Mara, Judah son of Jesus, Jose, Maria, and Matia (*Matya*). Since one of the ossuaries contains the inscription "Jesus son of Joseph" and since five ossuaries have inscriptions with biblical names associated with Jesus, each inscription needs to be evaluated to see whether there is more information than what the book and documentary disclosed. If the book and documentary are correct, it is surprising to find a tomb with such a cluster of names.

Chapter 3 will explain one of the key components to the book and the documentary by investigating the details surrounding the allegation that the Talpiot "Mariamne e Mara" inscription is that of Mary Magdalene. If it is, why does she appear in a tomb with an ossuary inscribed "Jesus son of Joseph" along with other names associated with the family of Jesus of Nazareth? What about other sources that seemingly suggest a marital relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene? This is one of the more forceful arguments in the book and the documentary. Are these sources referring to the biblical Mary Magdalene or not?

Chapter 4 will describe the possibilities that exist for Jesus having secretly given birth to a son. The *JFT* book alleges that Judas is

Thomas (known as Judas Thomas) who seems to be the “beloved disciple” mentioned in John’s Gospel. Evidence for a possible son of Jesus will be examined.

Chapter 5 will briefly explain the reason various languages appear in one family tomb. Why is there more than one language in the Talpiot tomb?

Chapter 6 will investigate why the book and the documentary chose only to test one DNA from the “Mariamne e Mara” ossuary with that of the “Jesus son of Joseph” ossuary. Do other options better answer the DNA testing reported in the book and the documentary?

Chapter 7 will discuss how the allegation based on statistics is seemingly impressive, since it is difficult to find such a cluster of names associated with that of Jesus of Nazareth. But there is simply much more information to examine than what appeared in the book and the documentary.

Chapter 8 will briefly examine the validity of the allegation of equating the tenth ossuary at Talpiot with the famous James ossuary. What does the testimony of a respected scholar, Amos Kloner, say about such allegations since he was there and helped document the discovery? Could there be a conspiracy to hide some evidence?

Chapter 9 will conclude part one of the book by examining other significant details. For example, could Jesus’ family tomb really be located in Talpoit? What about the x that is next to the “Jesus son of Joseph” inscription? Could that be the symbolic Christian cross? What about the secrecy of the Knights Templar concealing Jesus’ death? Does not Dan Brown’s book *The Da Vinci Code* already mention this in his novel? Is such a view historically credible? Could the chevron sign above the Talpiot tomb be a unique Christian symbol? What evidence do we possess that the Nazarene and Ebionite groups were the real Christians or did the early church condemn them as heretics?

Positive answers to most of these questions were given in the *JFT* book and the *LTJ* documentary as evidence that the Talpiot tomb was that of Jesus of Nazareth.

The book's second part will examine the evidence for Jesus' physical resurrection.

Chapter 10 will examine whether the Bible is an accurate historical document that can be trusted. Since Christians depend on the Bible as evidence that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, can the Scriptures be trusted? And how does it compare to other historical documents? Is the "physical resurrection" historically accepted? What do the Hebrew Scriptures, Jewish sources, and Christian tradition believe about physical resurrection? Was physical resurrection the common belief, or a minority view of some?

Chapter 11 will examine the Bible to see if physical resurrections have occurred in the past. If they did, logically something occurring in the past could be expected to recur again in the future. But if not, the burden of proof lies on the one pointing to an empty tomb. Key Old Testament and New Testament passages referring possibly to physical resurrection (excluding those regarding Jesus' resurrection and 1 Corinthians 15) are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 12 will show how incredible are the odds of some prophecies coming true, and will examine whether some of them advocating resurrection have come true. Another element to investigate is whether Jesus' resurrection was ever prophesied, or if it was an invention of the church.

Chapter 13 will investigate arguments made by some that suggest Jesus did not rise from the dead because He did not die. Various individuals claim the swoon theory that Jesus merely fainted on the cross and was revived. What is so important about the empty tomb and the Resurrection? This chapter will mention these arguments along with assessing the viability of whether Jesus rose bodily.

Chapter 14 investigates Jesus' resurrection appearances in the Gospels in order to see whether He rose spiritually or physically. The most debated passage, 1 Corinthians 15:35–49, regarding whether Paul and the disciples believed that Christians will receive a physical body at resurrection will also be examined.

Chapter 15 will examine various details that validate the Resurrection: Does science contradict the Resurrection? Logical arguments that validate the resurrection of Jesus are these: (1) enemies indirectly affirmed the Resurrection; (2) Rome and the seal of the tomb seem to argue for it; (3) who removed the stone and the body? (4) Saul went from being a Christian persecutor to Paul the Christian propagator; (5) and the existence of the church and changed lives indicate the Resurrection's affect on people throughout history.

Chapter 16 will briefly cover current news about the Talpiot Tomb and suggest how one should respond to the allegations of *The Jesus Family Tomb* book and *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* documentary.

First-Century Burial Practices

Jewish law demanded that after a person was executed, he was to be buried that day (Deut. 21:23). Some may wonder why Jesus' body was then placed in a tomb cut from a rock and not buried underground. First-century burial practice answers this. Jews practiced a "secondary" form of burial using ossuaries.

Since the book and documentary claim that the ossuary of Jesus of Nazareth has been found, a brief discussion is necessary to inform readers of the customary second-burial practice of gathering bones (known as *ossilegium*) in an ossuary after decomposition.

Because Jewish burial practices existed in the Greco-Roman culture, this does not mean they always adopted similar customs. Greeks and Romans commonly practiced cremation,²⁵ but the Jewish people first buried their dead in ditches and then after the flesh decayed they transferred the bones to ossuaries.²⁶ These ossuaries were then placed in a family tomb. "Jews practicing *ossilegium* endeavored to retain within the

family tomb, the entire skeleton of each deceased separately once the flesh had completely decomposed.”²⁷ Jews believed that decomposition of the body that usually lasted a year was necessary in order to achieve a “sinless state” of perfection before physical resurrection took place, which many deemed to be a “painful process.”²⁸

Though ossuary practice reflects Jewish belief in a future physical resurrection, one must be cautious in assuming that everyone employed this custom for the same reason. The Sadducees had ossuaries, but unlike the Pharisees they did not believe in the physical resurrection of the dead. Crossan and Reed point out that the Sadducees may have “adopted the common burial practice” of the day “among the wealthy Jerusalemites and did so in grand style.” Thus they are correct in deducing, “We conclude that belief or theology alone cannot explain the phenomenon of ossuaries. Ossuaries *may* reflect a common belief in the resurrection, a heightened sense of individualism, or a subconscious desire to maintain identity and be protected in death, but their use was made possible by the Herodian-initiated Temple economy in Jerusalem and a well-trained stonemasons guild. And their distribution was not common but more upper class.”²⁹

Rahmani notes another important fact about the *ossilegium* practice of the Jews that should not be confused with that of their neighbors. The remains of non-Jewish family members buried in a tomb were moved aside to make room for other burials. In later practice remains were gathered into “depositories” under the floor chamber in tombs.³⁰ In the Hellenistic period a “communal charnel” (lit., “a common place for flesh”) became the designated place to use for previous remains. Superstition seems the reason behind earlier *ossilegium* burial remains being left in the tomb, since it was thought this “assured the deceased of the benefit of food, drink, clothing and security, which the family clan was obligated to provide even to the most humble of its members.”³¹ Perhaps this type of spiritism practice may be what Jewish Law condemned (Lev. 19:26; 20:27; Deut. 18:11–14). On the other hand, Jews collected the bones of relatives and placed them in separate ossuaries. Apparently such a practice was based on the belief that the individual bones had to be kept ready for a future physical

resurrection.³² Thus the practice of *ossilegium* in Judaism argues for the common belief of physical resurrection, not a spiritual resurrection. While second burial practice was common in Jerusalem, often ossuaries contained the bones of more than one person.³³ Frequently many bones in burial chambers were pushed to the sides that were not stored in ossuaries,³⁴ perhaps because they could not afford bone boxes. Hence many Jewish families did not practice *ossilegium* because they could not afford it.

Significantly another issue to consider is whether Jesus and His family—being relatively poor—could afford to be buried in the rich Talpiot tomb. Wealthy families were the only ones able to afford elaborately ornamented ossuaries.³⁵ However, even plain nonornamented ossuaries, having only inscriptions or special protection formulas for the deceased, does not indicate poverty or a lack of care since many plain ossuaries have been found in rich tombs in Jerusalem. In fact Rahmani suggests, “Ethical and religious considerations may have dictated the choice of a simple ossuary.”³⁶

How did poor families like Jesus’ family bury their own? Jodi Magness says normally the poorer classes of Jewish families buried their dead in simple individual trenches dug into the ground, much like today. The body would be buried in a “shroud” and then placed directly into the “rectangular” hole. Afterward the “trench” was filled with dirt and sometimes a small rough tombstone would be placed at one end.³⁷

While Joseph of Arimathea was rich and buried Jesus in a wealthy tomb (Matt. 27:57–59; Isa. 53:9), no evidence exists to suggest that all of Jesus’ family, including His father Joseph who died years earlier, were also buried in the same tomb. To support this notion one would have to posit the theory that Joseph of Arimathea donated a family tomb. If such a theory were true, surely the Bible or church tradition would have mentioned this charity. However, no such evidence exists.

Although *ossilegium* practice was thought to exist from about 40 B.C. to A.D. 70, this is debatable. Rahmani argues that ossuary practice—using hard limestone and chip-carved soft limestone materials—was introduced in Jerusalem around 20-15 B.C. to A.D. 70.³⁸

Noting this, however, he sees ossuary practice continuing to at least until A.D. 135, but using more materials like clay, hard limestone, soft limestone, and the combination of hard and soft limestone on the same ossuary.³⁹ Others like Evans and Meyers believe that in a general sense *ossilegium* practice as a brand new custom did not appear abruptly around 40 B.C. and ended in A.D. 70, contrary to what the *JFT* book presents.⁴⁰ Evans points out that rabbinic tradition and archaeological evidence both attest to the continual use of ossuaries.⁴¹ Also there is strong evidence that *ossilegium* practice was followed in Alexandria, Egypt; Carthage, Africa; and Spain.⁴² Evans concludes by postulating the best reason for the increase in the use of specific kinds of ossuaries from 40 B.C. to A.D. 70:

The most plausible explanation for the dramatic increase in the number of ossuaries put into use in the Herodian period is that it had to do with Herod's extensive building projects in and around Jerusalem, especially those concerned with the Temple Mount and the new Sanctuary.... It is in this chronological coincidence between Herod's massive building program, which employed thousands of stone-cutters and which ran from his reign, beginning in the 30s B.C.E., and extended to 64 C.E., and the appearance of thousands of ossuaries, carved from the same stone (limestone) from which almost all of the Temple Mount buildings were fashioned, that we find the answer to our question. The number of ossuaries, made of limestone, increased dramatically during the one century of temple-related building in Jerusalem, not because of a shift in the theology, or foreign influence, but because of the great number of stones-cutters, quarries, and rejected blocks of limestone. The increase of the city's population and its urban and suburban sprawl also encouraged greater density in burial sites. Simply put, more dead relatives can be interred in the family vault if they are placed in ossuaries than if they are left in niches or in full-sized sarcophagi.⁴³

After thoroughly researching this topic Rahmani concludes. "There does not seem to be any direct link between these [later] Christian [burial] practices and the Jewish custom of *ossilegium*."⁴⁴ Hence to say that the Talpiot tomb was that of Jesus of Nazareth and His family, along with a cross on the bone-box that was supposedly a Christian symbol, as the *JFT* book claims, is anachronistic and misconstrues a customary belief system of one group and applies it to another. Perhaps Jewish Christians practiced *ossilegium* for different theological reasons than that of their unbelieving predecessors, similar to Paul's correct reason for offering sacrifices in Acts 21:26 contrary to the Judaizers' reasons for observing the Law (Galatians). That is, from the biblical evidence Jewish Christians believed that final *perfection* or a *sinless state* came through faith alone in Christ alone now (John 1:12; 2:23; 3:16; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 11:25–27; 20:30–31; Rom. 3:21–4:25; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5), which guaranteed a perfect physical body later (1 Cor. 15; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 22). Therefore decomposition of the body was not necessary to achieve this state before physical resurrection took place.

From the available evidence we cannot be sure why Jewish Christians practiced *ossilegium*, or if the custom was even copied. But if the practice was copied (and there is little reason to suspect otherwise since Jewish Christians often kept many of their Jewish practices), one thing is obvious from a cursory view of the evidence presented: Jews practiced *ossilegium* partly because they believed in a future *physical* resurrection, not a *spiritual* resurrection.

Furthermore, if the practice was in place longer than expected, then the pool of potential graves grows, and the likelihood that one can specify that a given tomb is from the first century (much less that of Jesus of Nazareth) becomes more difficult.

Conclusion

Looking at the history of the Talpiot tomb discovery, two things become clear. Since the tomb was disturbed before the IAA arrived, the evidence was compromised. This becomes important when postulating theories that in themselves are tenuous. Further evidence of a

plethora of information documenting the tomb's history and contents must also put to rest any charge alleging conspiracy since from the beginning all the findings were public knowledge that surfaced throughout twenty-eight years.

Some facts about the men behind the allegations were also documented to help the reader identify predispositions that might influence conclusions drawn by the book and the documentary. An account of the arguments was summarized in order to point out the allegations that support the Jesus family tomb discovery.

By understanding some facts about second burial Jewish practice in the first century A.D., the reader can better determine whether some of the book's claims about the possibility of Jewish Christians believing in a spiritual instead of a physical resurrection is correct.