

## Evidence Real and Imagined: Thinking Clearly About the “Jesus Family Tomb”

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On March 4, 2007, the Discovery Channel aired “The Lost Tomb of Jesus,” a riveting documentary produced by James Cameron, best known for the Oscar-winning motion picture *Titanic*, and directed by Simcha Jacobovici. The documentary complemented the launch of the publicity campaign for a book on the subject by Jacobovici, co-authored with Charles Pellegrino, entitled *The Jesus Family Tomb* (Harper San Francisco). The two-hour special focused on the 1980 discovery of what appears to be a family tomb located in East Talpiot, Jerusalem. The tomb housed ten ossuaries (bone boxes), several of which bore inscribed names intimately associated with Christianity, including Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Jacobovici claims that one of ossuaries should be identified as that of Mary Magdalene, whose inclusion in the family tomb of Jesus proves that she and Jesus were married. For Jacobovici and his associates, the find constitutes proof that Jesus had not risen from the dead as the New Testament describes.<sup>1</sup>

Not surprisingly, the documentary of Cameron and Jacobovici has caused quite a stir. If their interpretation is correct, the Talpiot tomb discovery is arguably the most important archaeological find of the last two thousand years and effectively invalidates Christianity as western civilization has known it during those two millennia. But are they right? Does the world now have proof that traditional Christianity has been little more than a historical contrivance? In what follows we will describe the data, the claims derived from them, and their analysis by Jacobovici and his colleagues, demonstrating that both the book and the documentary obscure or omit critical interpretive issues for accurately assessing the data, and frequently build their case through speculation about data that does not exist. As Carl Sagan once said, “Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary proof.” The case for the Jesus family tomb falls far short of that standard.

### **Archaeological Considerations**

#### *The Discovery and Its “Non-Disclosure”*

The Talpiot tomb in question was first unearthed on March 28, 1980, as the result of a construction project. The Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) promptly recorded the tomb as IAA-80, and its ten ossuaries were catalogued with the numbers 500-509. The tomb did not receive a systematic excavation. In circumstances where a construction project uncovers a tomb, the assigned archaeological team has the responsibility of salvaging what it can and making sure the remains of the dead are re-interred in a manner acceptable to orthodox Jewish law. The job of recording and retrieval had to be done quickly.

In just over a week the “Tomb of the Ten Ossuaries” was recorded and emptied. The tomb was sketched and mapped by Shimon Gibson, under the supervision of a Jerusalem district archaeologist named Amos Kloner and his boss, Yosef Gat.<sup>2</sup> The tomb could have held as many as thirty-five people, seventeen of them within the ten ossuaries, eighteen outside the ossuaries.<sup>3</sup> This estimate is not based on a physical accounting of skeletons in the tomb, but on calculations extrapolated by Dr. Kloner based on his previous work in burial caves and ossuaries.<sup>4</sup>

Of the ten ossuaries, six were inscribed. One of the uninscribed ossuaries was badly damaged. The six inscriptions bear witness to seven individuals by means of eight names: Jesus (“Jesus, son of Joseph”), Joseph, Mary (there are two), Judah, Yose (Joses to a Greek speaker), and Matthew. The bones were re-interred according to Orthodox Jewish law in a common grave at a different location shown in the documentary. A year later the site was completely buried under a housing development.

One of the questions that immediately surfaces is, “Why didn’t anyone think this was earth-shattering news before now?” In his book, Jacobovici answers this question with a mildly conspiratorial air. He repeatedly casts Amos Kloner as a man struggling against the knowledge that he had stumbled into salvaging the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth but who bravely decided to suppress that truth. He is described as breathing “inner signs of relief” more than once, especially whenever some part of the tomb or an inscription could be construed as being an obstruction to an identification of the discovery with Jesus of Nazareth. Jacobovici wrote of Kloner, “Though he would privately admit to being impressed by the inscriptions on the ossuaries, his attitude toward the words from the tomb would officially remain total indifference, if not contemptible denial.”<sup>5</sup> Additionally, “Kloner is the kind of guy who knows many facts but is loathe to connect the dots for fear that they might make a picture. He doesn’t like pictures. He likes dots.” Gibson fares somewhat less favorably, coming across as a professional more interested in keeping his job than the saying what he thought (“he did not want to begin and end his career with the bones of Jesus”).<sup>6</sup>

Kloner is still alive and is a professor at Bar Ilan University in Israel. One could surmise that the book launch and documentary offered him an opportunity for vindication of his private thoughts and a global spotlight. He has done anything but take those opportunities, telling the Jerusalem Post that the documentary’s claims were “nonsense,” and that, “There is no likelihood that Jesus and his relatives had a family tomb . . . They were a Galilee family with no ties in Jerusalem. The Talpiot tomb belonged to a middle-class family from the 1st century CE.”<sup>7</sup>

In reality, there are two primary obstacles to acceptance of Jacobovici’s thesis for Kloner and a panoply of other scholars: the commonality of the names and the identification of one of the ossuaries as that of Mary Magdalene. The hesitance is not driven by a willful suppression of self-evident truth, but by the desire for coherent, factual evidence..

*The Ossuary That Got Away*

Both sides of the debate over the Talpiot tomb agree that ten ossuaries were removed from the tomb.<sup>8</sup> Kloner's 1996 report lists ten ossuaries, and Kloner has confirmed that number in subsequent interviews. However, when Shimon Gibson, accompanied by professor James Tabor of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, visited the IAA in 2005 to further study the ossuaries, they were told there were only nine. The official IAA inventory sheet actually listed only nine. In the wake of the debate Tabor has claimed that Rahmani's *Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries*, an invaluable reference work published in 1994, also only lists nine, but this is only partially correct.<sup>9</sup> At any rate, Tabor and Jacobovici have claimed that one of the ossuaries is missing, one that was initially described in the salvage effort as "plain," meaning it had no inscription.

Why is a missing, uninscribed ossuary of importance? Because Jacobovici suggests that the ossuary *was* inscribed, and that the missing ossuary is none other than the James ossuary that became the subject of public hoopla in 2003. The reader will recall that ossuary bore the inscription "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." If that ossuary came from the Talpiot tomb, it would place yet another Jesus family member in the Talpiot tomb, tightening the case that the tomb does indeed belong to Jesus of Nazareth.

What Jacobovici is asking us to believe on this point, is that Amos Kloner, Yosef Gat, and Shimon Gibson *all overlooked this inscription* on this ossuary while carefully noting all the others. Notice his clever wording in his book: "One [of the ossuaries], IAA 80/509, would become a mystery in its own right: it vanished before it could be photographed or properly scrutinized for insignias, decorations, or inscribed names, but not before it had been catalogued."<sup>10</sup> His insinuation is palpable—the ossuary that got away likely had an inscription on it that was missed. Kloner emphatically denies this speculation, noting that the IAA often put plain ossuaries in the courtyard behind the Rockefeller Museum where artifacts were housed: "Nothing has disappeared. The 10th ossuary was on my list. The measurements were not the same [as the James ossuary]. It was plain [without an inscription]. We had no room under our roofs for all the ossuaries, so unmarked ones were sometimes kept in the courtyard."<sup>11</sup>

Kloner's statements do not end the matter, though. Tabor rightly points out that another plain ossuary found in the tomb (IAA 80/506) was housed in the Rockefeller with the inscribed ossuaries, and there is a photo and description in its files. And Jacobovici is correct that there was no picture taken of the missing ossuary, since Tabor and Gibson could find no pictorial record of that ossuary in the IAA files.<sup>12</sup>

We are left, then, with either a truly missing ossuary which was perhaps stolen, or an ossuary that someone apparently picked up out of the courtyard among the rest of the plain ones and deposited *somewhere* under IAA auspices, but apart from the rest of the Talpiot ossuaries. Jacobovici assumes the ossuary was probably stolen, only to wind up in the hands of Oded Golan as the James ossuary Golan unveiled to the world in 2003. Defending that scenario forces Jacobovici to argue that the missing ossuary was inscribed, and that all the experts who actually handled it before it went missing somehow didn't notice a fairly long and clear inscription.<sup>13</sup> The reason he must argue this position is that if the missing ossuary was originally uninscribed the inscription on it is a

fake, since it could only have been added after its disappearance. And in that event, it is no help to Jacobovici, since the Jesus family name it bears is not authentic.

Needless to say, the idea that Kloner, Gat, and Gibson all overlooked a James inscription on the missing ossuary is highly unlikely. The idea of a link between that ossuary and the so-called James ossuary has been tested by science. Specifically, tests have been conducted to determine whether the patina (a chemical film encrustation) on the ossuaries in the Talpiot tomb match the patina on the James ossuary. The results of that analysis are summarized in a companion article by Dr. Randy Ingermanson.

### *Who Had Been There Before?*

It is important to point out that the Talpiot tomb was not undisturbed. One need only read Amos Kloner's report to establish this:

“Ten ossuaries were found within the *khokim*, 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 in the center of the room, where they had been discarded in antiquity. On the floor of the room and in the fill a few Early Roman (Herodian) sherds were found. . . Disturbed bones, probably swept off the arcosolia, were found on the floor of the room. These included skull and limb fragments and vertebrae. Only broken and powdered bones remained on the shelves of the arcosolia.”<sup>14</sup>

The suggestion here is not that any of the ossuaries were planted in the Talpiot tomb. It seems quite likely that the tomb had been undisturbed since the first century. However, the fact that bones were swept off the shelves intended for their final resting place and shattered on the floor, and ossuary lids were not found on their respective ossuaries indicates that, at some point in antiquity, the tomb had been disturbed. Although an abundance of bones was not found outside the ossuaries, Kloner's estimate that there could have been as many as thirty-five people buried in the tomb has more in its favor than just the mathematics. This in turn becomes germane when considering the tomb names (see below).

### *The Tomb Entrance Façade*



Those who viewed the documentary will recall that much was made of the “symbol” adorning the façade of the Talpiot tomb.

This image recurs again and again in the film, as though it were some mystical Judeo-Christian symbol. Rahmani's catalogue actually has a number of

examples of ossuary lids with this “chevron with circle” design (e.g., nos. 251, 408, 473, 596, 597).

In the case of these ossuaries, the gabled chevrons served as handgrips to raise the lid. Here is an example:

In light of the frequent use of this design for ossuary lids, it is quite conceivable that the tomb façade itself was designed in such a way to resemble an ossuary lid, implying that the tomb itself was one huge ossuary.<sup>15</sup>



Dr. R. Kirk Kilpatrick has suggested another possibility. Citing the “symbol” on some Herodian coins (below), Kilpatrick notes that, “Often on tomb facades there were decorative connections related to the temple . . . Such an architectural feature points to temple worship; and this means that those buried in the tomb on [the Discovery Channel] ‘documentary’ were more likely observant Jews.”<sup>16</sup>



Jacobovici, however, prefers to see the design of the tomb façade as an astrological symbol, or the Templar/Masonic “all-seeing-eye.” We are therefore asked to allow a symbol used over a millennium after the time of Jesus to interpret the symbol on this first century tomb. To call this anachronistic would be kind.

Perhaps an illustration will help show the absurdity of this approach. It is well known that the swastika is a very ancient symbol, perhaps 3,000 years old as it dates back at least to the Vedic (ancient India) culture and its religions. It was apparently a solar symbol denoting the continuing cycle of creation—but that’s probably just ancient propaganda. In reality, the swastika shows us the people of ancient India relished violent, brutal genocide of other races.

I hope the point is clear. The occurrence of a symbol in one era does not mean the meaning of the symbol is transferable to its meaning in another era—especially working *backward* in time. We may not be able to agree or to determine what the Talpiot façade

designs means, or if it meant anything at all. But we won't get the answer by appealing to a similar design's use 1,000 years later. This is anything but sound scholarly methodology.

### **The Talpiot Ossuary Names**

It almost goes without saying that the most compelling element of the case for the Jesus family tomb is the names inscribed on the six ossuaries. Had only the name "Jesus" been found on an ossuary in the tomb, there would have been no book, no documentary, and no debate, for a number of "Jesus ossuaries" have been found.<sup>17</sup> Taking these other Jesus ossuaries while also noting the presence of another "Jesus, son of Joseph" ossuary (and there is another, described below) would have been sufficient ammunition to kill the Jesus tomb theory on the spot. But the Talpiot tomb is different since the Talpiot Jesus ossuary was found among ossuaries with the names of several people associated with Jesus in the New Testament. The assemblage of names in one tomb, it is argued, makes it statistically very likely that this is the family tomb of Jesus of Nazareth (more on the statistics below). Unfortunately for Jacobovici, the inscribed names also present the most problems and incongruities for his theory.

#### *Critical Thinking, Please*

Diving into field like Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and epigraphy can be a little overwhelming for someone new to those disciplines, so let's start simply.

The problems presented below must not be overlooked or minimized, for the Jesus tomb theory is only compelling if two items are true: (1) that the Jesus of the tomb's Jesus ossuary was in fact Jesus of Nazareth, and (2) the names of the people in the tomb are related to the Jesus of this tomb in the same way that people with those names were related to the Jesus of the New Testament. Both these items are inextricably linked. We can only embrace the Jesus tomb theory if its Jesus figure was Jesus of Nazareth, and that in turn can really only be established if the other people in the tomb are the people who knew Jesus of Nazareth. Hence the Jesus figure of the tomb only takes on the identity of Jesus of Nazareth if it can be established if the other people in the tomb were related to the Jesus figure they way the New Testament describes. The inscriptions must match the New Testament record to get Jesus in the tomb, so to speak. If they do not, there is no case.

This means that from the outset the reader must make a basic decision before embracing or rejecting Jacobovici's theory. You must decide if you are going to make your decision to embrace or reject on the basis of data that *actually exists* or data that is *speculated to have once existed*. The former is real; the latter is the domain of the imagination. This decision is fundamental to processing the inscriptions in the Talpiot tomb in terms of what we can really know and what we imagine might be knowable.

First, we know we have six ossuaries with inscriptions, listed below in English characters to represent the inscribed letters, followed by a translation and a few notes. Where there

is a disputed translation in the debate over Jacobovici's theory, we have inserted a question mark for now):

- *Mariamenu [e] Mara* (“Mary, who is ?”) – This ossuary is the one thought to have held the bones of Mary Magdalene, who is further thought to be the wife of Jesus.
- *Yhwah br Yshw'* (“Judah/Jude, son of Jesus”) – This ossuary is thought to contain the remains of a son of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.
- *Mtyh* (“Matiyahu” or, more familiar to us, “Matthew”) – This ossuary is thought to either be the remains of the disciple Matthew or, in keeping with the family associations in the tomb, some other relative of Jesus.
- *Yshw' br Yhwsp* (“Jesus, son of Joseph”) – This is presumed to be the ossuary of Jesus of Nazareth in which his bones were placed, proving he did not rise from the dead.
- *Ywsh* (“Joseph/Jose”) – This ossuary allegedly contains the bones of one of Jesus' brothers, who, according to Mark 6:3, was known by this abbreviated form of the name of Joseph.
- *Mryh* (“Mary”) – This ossuary contained the bones of Mary, the mother of Jesus, the wife of Joseph.

Notice that only two of the names have what is called a patronymic—a descriptive phrase denoting family affiliation or ancestry (“Jude, *son of Jesus*”; “Jesus, *son of Joseph*”).<sup>18</sup> What this means is that, *in terms of data that actually exists*, the Talpiot tomb tells us *only* that we have a Jesus who was the son of a Joseph, and a Jude who was the son of a Jesus. That isn't much information, but Jacobovici and his associates know how the mind works. Since millions around the world are familiar with the names of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and Mary Magdalene—whether because of biblical literacy or *The DaVinci Code*—they know that when a person hears those names presented together, the mind will immediately cluster them in a manner associated with the New Testament. The mind therefore “defaults” to the supposition that these people are related in the way the New Testament describes, and so they must be the actual New Testament characters. But that isn't what the data from the tomb tells us—it's where the mind goes subconsciously. The presentation of the data by Jacobovici works in part because of this mental reflex. But are we going to embrace or reject his idea because it *sounds* true, or because of the data that actually exists?

Consider the data for a moment. It speaks to two family relationships. Now here's what we *don't* know, based on the information that is actually found in the tomb, not on where our mind wanders:

- There is no data that allows us to know if any of the other people in the Talpiot tomb are related. It is *assumed* that the Talpiot tomb is a family tomb, but we do not actually know that. It's probably a fair guess, but it doesn't lend any clarity to the situation.

- The data does not inform us who among the named occupants of the tomb were immediate or distant relatives. We have only two sonship patronyms, but that isn't as helpful as it has been *assumed*.
- The data does not allow us to know if the people in the ossuaries were adults or children. As we will note when we discuss the "Mariamenou" ossuary, the Greek form in which this name is written is a term of endearment that could be given to an adult or a child. There is nothing else inscribed on any of the ossuaries that tells us anything more about the age of the occupants.
- There is no data that allows us to know if the two Jesus names on the ossuaries are one and the same. That is, we don't know if Joseph, Jesus, and Jude are grandfather, father, and son. Those relationships are *assumed* by Jacobovici, and so amount only to speculation. There is nothing on any of the ossuaries that nails this down for us. These three individuals could be unrelated in terms of immediate family, but still belong in the family tomb because they are more distantly related to the immediate family members in the tomb.
- There is no data that allows us to know what the relationships between the thirty-five or so people in the tomb were, other than the two ossuaries with patronymics. For example:
  - It is *assumed* by Jacobovici that the Mary (Mryh) in the tomb is the mother of Jesus, but there is no actual data for that. That Mary may have been the sister of the tomb's Jesus, or an aunt, or a grandmother. For all we know, given the disturbed nature of the tomb, the skeleton of the mother of the Talpiot ossuary could have been dumped on the floor and her ossuary taken. As Gibson's sketch shows, the tomb certainly had room for more ossuaries than were found. We just don't know.
  - It is also *assumed* that the Mary of the Mariamenou ossuary, considered to be Mary Magdalene, was married to the Talpiot Jesus. Positing such a relationship is based purely on speculation, not on what the ossuaries actually tell us.
  - We have no way of knowing from the data that actually exists if either Mary was married to the Joseph in the tomb who was the father of Jesus. One would expect to read, as other ossuaries from this period do, "Mary, the wife of Jesus" or something similar if this was the case. That data does not exist. The Mary (Mryh) of the tomb could have been the wife of any of the men mentioned—if she was an adult, which we cannot know either.
  - There is no data that tells us if the Matthew of the tomb was *not* related to the Talpiot Jesus. If they were related, this could not be the family tomb of Jesus of Nazareth, since the biblical Matthew was not related to Jesus.

The general point to be made by these observations is important. If we have no data with which to match the family relationships that existed between the people who bore these names in the New Testament and the named individuals in the Talpiot tomb, we cannot make an *evidenced-based* claim that this is the Jesus Family tomb. That conclusion cannot be drawn from the existing data; it must be supplied by means of the imagination.



## *Studying Chicken Scratch*

Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions. As it relates to the biblical world, its practitioners must be familiar with the evolution of how letters were written (paleography); how words were spelled (orthography); and how the languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek (to name a few) “worked” to convey meaning (grammar) in various periods of history. Since most who read this article will not be epigraphers, there might be a tendency to think the objections that follow are just nit-picky and lack significance. This would be as much an error in judgment as it would for us to conclude that it doesn’t really affect anything in the business if Accounting just rounds off the numbers in the spreadsheet, or if that screw isn’t as tight as it could be, or if the meat was cooked a few minutes less than the directions called for, or it’s just a *tiny* crack in the Space Shuttle O-ring. There are times when precision matters—and this is one of them.

### “Jesus, son of Joseph”

Let’s first take a look at the Jesus inscription. Most who have entered the debate have assumed that “Jesus” is the correct reading. There has been a notable exception. Dr. Stephen Pfann, a scholar who regularly does work in paleography and epigraphy, has wondered if the name on the ossuary could be “Hanun,”<sup>19</sup> and Dr. Craig Evans, who said candidly, “I can make out the last two words (“son of Jehosef [or Joseph]”), but I can’t see Yeshua` in the scribbles at the beginning (i.e., at the right) of the inscription.”<sup>20</sup>

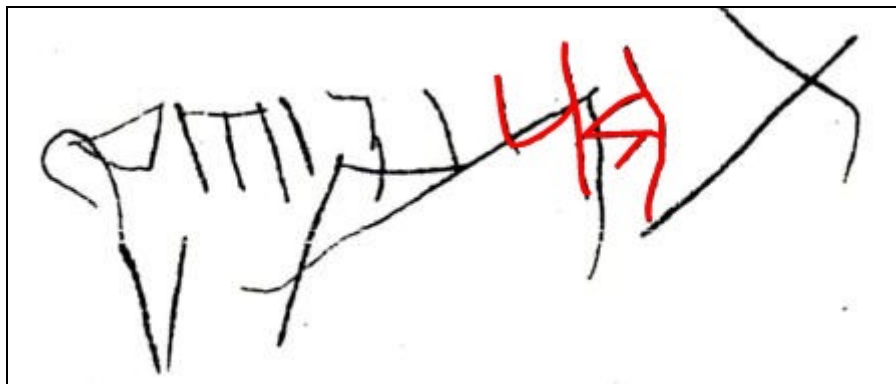
This point is well taken, and is one I made three years ago in a paper read for the Near Eastern Archaeological Society at their annual meeting. Many readers have no doubt never even seen the inscription and so cannot appreciate this hesitancy. Before we walk through the elements of the inscription, though, you need to know a little about the normal context for the use and inscribing of ossuaries. Typically, after someone died at this period of history in Israel, the body was placed in some sort of tomb and then left there for as long as a year. After decomposition, relatives or friends would gather the bones of the deceased and place them in an ossuary, which in turn was placed in a second tomb. This means that the family might have up to a year to have the ossuary made, inscribed, and even decorated.<sup>21</sup> We know that, whether Jesus rose from the dead or not, his followers spread out across the ancient world heralding him as the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Jacobovici affirms this point, as his book casts Jesus’ brother and wife, Mary Magdalene, as heroic evangelists for the new religion. It would stand to reason then, that the family and followers of this new faith would put just a little effort into his ossuary—at least in terms of providing a legible inscription. Instead, this is what was left to history:



It is easy enough to discern the last two words, *bar Yehosef*, “son of Joseph”:



The first part of the inscription, the name under question, is much sloppier and difficult:



Normally, “Jesus” would be spelled with at least four consonants (right to left, *yod*, *shin*, *waw*, and *ayin*; “Yeshu`a”). In the Jesus ossuary, the first two consonants (reading right to left), the “Y” and the “SH” appear to be joined, if indeed that is what we are seeing correctly. The consonant that served to mark the “u” sound in this name, the *waw*, is apparently missing. Rahmani, who marked the translation of “Yeshua” with a question mark to denote uncertainty, thought this third letter was merged or overwritten with the first stroke of the next letter (they are both vertical strokes) since the inscription was so

“clumsily carved.”<sup>22</sup> This assessment is possible, but it is equally possible that the last stroke of the final letter we can see was merged with a single downstroke of another letter—namely another *yod* (the letter “y”). This would yield the name “Yish`i,” a name that occurs four times in the Bible, typically rendered “Ishi” in English translations.<sup>23</sup> Although Yeshu`a and Yish`i are related in terms of the base consonants (the “root”) from which they are derived, Jesus of Nazareth is never associated with this name.

Nevertheless, it is possible that this inscription reads “Jesus.” That said, this inscription is stunningly sloppy when compared to the other Jesus ossuaries recovered in Israel recorded in Rahmani’s catalogue. These are reproduced here only to demonstrate the comparable clarity of the letters:

Rahmani no. 9<sup>24</sup>

Rahmani, no. 121

Rahmani, no. 63<sup>25</sup>

Rahmani, no. 140

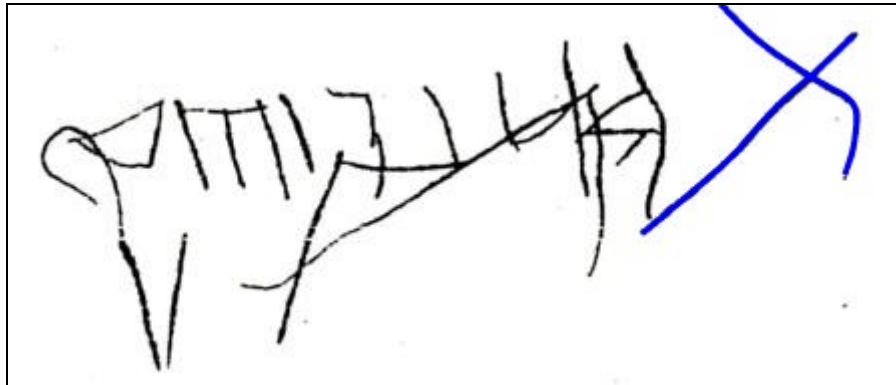
Rahmani, no. 702 (also in Talpiot tomb)

In every instance, the letters are clearly separated and distinguishable. It is difficult to believe that whoever was given the privilege of preparing the ossuary for the fallen leader

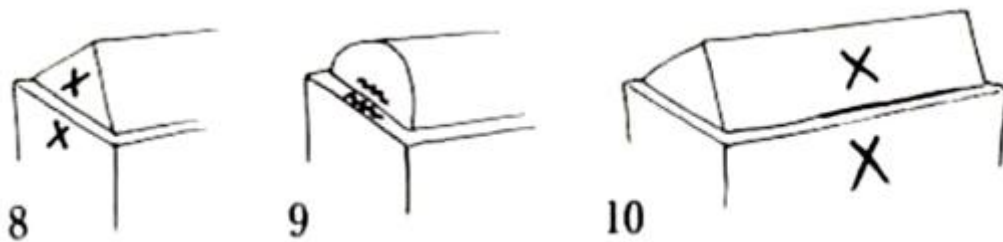
of a new religion, whose influence had already spread through all Israel, would prove so inept as to make the name barely legible. It is equally incredible that his family and followers would have settled for such a slipshod effort on the part of their hero and friend.

Incidentally, the lower of the two inscriptions for Rahmani no. 9 reads “Jesus, son of Joseph”—just like the Talpiot inscription. Since as we saw above the actual data in the tomb informs us of almost nothing in regard to the relationships of the people named in the tomb, the fact that there are two ossuaries for a “Jesus, son of Joseph” shows us that even that phrase is not unique in the record. One simply *must* have data for the relationships of the people in the tomb for any case to be made that the tomb belongs to the family of Jesus of Nazareth, but that data does not exist.

To bolster the possibility that the first portion of the inscription reads “Jesus,” and that the ossuary is that of Jesus of Nazareth, Jacobovici appeals to the X mark preceding the name (reading right to left):



Rahmani considers this X to be a mason’s direction mark. Kloner did as well.<sup>26</sup> Craftsmen would place direction marks on the container portion of the ossuary and also on the lid, so as to make sure the lid would fit properly or to align two parts of a decoration. Rahmani estimates that 40% of all ossuaries have some sort of mason’s mark, so this is hardly a retreat to an obscure explanation.<sup>27</sup> Here are some illustrations from Rahmani:<sup>28</sup>



Jacobovici, however, considers the X on the Jesus ossuary to be a cross, signifying that this Jesus was the one associated with the cross and Christianity. Is there any way to tell for sure if the X is a direction mark? The answer is yes, and we need look no further than Rahmani's record of the Jesus ossuary.<sup>29</sup> Rahmani notes the location of the Jesus inscription as "narrow side, under rim." The inscription and the X is complemented by a sign resembling an asterisk and a "greater than" sign, in Rahmani's words, "on lid, narrow side."

What this means is that the Jesus ossuary, intact with lid on properly, shows corresponding direction marks. This is no cross symbol, and so it is of no help in making Jacobovici's case.<sup>30</sup>

### "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary"

Throughout their book, Jacobovici and Pellegrino repeatedly emphasize the decisive consequence of the presence of Mary Magdalene in the Talpiot tomb. Without her ossuary in the tomb, their thesis is essentially bankrupt. The evidence offered for connecting Mary Magdalene with one of the ossuaries is the inscription "Mariamenou e Mara" which, according to the film's chief architects, is to be translated, "Mariamne, who is lord/master." The link to Mary Magdalene is the name "Mariamne," which we are told was an ancient name for Mary Magdalene.

Before moving to an overview of the problems associated with the widely publicized "Mariamenou" inscription, it should be noted that the reading of the inscription offered by Jacobovici and Pellegrino is likely wrong. Dr. Stephen Pfann, a scholar who regularly does work in paleography and epigraphy, recently re-examined the inscription and concluded that the inscription reads "Mariame kai Mara," translated "Mary and Martha." Pfann's work is a model of clarity, even for non-specialists, and is highly recommended reading.<sup>31</sup>

Since the Mary Magdalene link is so critical to their theory, Jacobovici and Pellegrino go to great lengths to defend it. Unfortunately, the lynchpin for their case is also its greatest weakness. There is simply no actual evidence supporting an identification of the woman whose bones were placed in this ossuary as Magdalene. Readers of course have heard the contrary, so we'd better be able to demonstrate that clearly. Let's start with the inscription:



Several preliminary observations are significant from the outset. Notice that there is no word “Magdalene” in the inscription, and so in terms of the actual data, there is nothing that explicitly connects the Mary in the ossuary with the town of Magdala on the Sea of Galilee, from which Mary Magdalene came. Also of note is “e” between the second “m” and the “n” in “Mariamenou.” The spelling of the name therefore is not “Mariamne” but “Mariamenou.” This is of course obvious, but it is important since the name “Mariamne” is associated by Jacobovici and his associates with Mary Magdalene. Again, in terms of the spelling on the ossuary, the name is not “Mariamne.” Granted, it must still be discussed whether Mariamne is a contracted form of Mariamenou, but the observation must be made. The reader should also attend to the blue question mark, which relates to the small vertical stroke that appears between the last letter of the first name and the first letter of the second name. The stroke is considered by many on both sides of the debate to be the Greek letter *eta*—the same letter behind the “e” in the preceding “Mariamenou.” It is obvious that the *eta* in Mariamenou doesn’t look like this tiny vertical stroke, which is why some scholars think the “stroke” is in reality just a scratch and not a letter. However, we must allow for the possibility that the vertical stroke is an abbreviated form of the *eta*. Epigraphers often have to deal with such ambiguities.<sup>32</sup> Whether the stroke is or is not a letter affects how one translates the inscription—but in either case there are several translation options, contrary to what Jacobovici implies in his book. With all this as backdrop, let’s get into some details.

First, the idea that “Mara” should be translated “lord, master” is easily demonstrated as a case of a theory guiding the translation, the opposite of objective scholarly method. It is well known that “Mara” is a contracted form of the name “Martha.” This is apparent to anyone who makes use of Rahmani’s catalogue. For example, ossuary 468 has *both forms* of the name Martha on the same ossuary. On the rim of the ossuary under the mason’s mark we read “Mara.” Directly underneath that name is found “Martha.” This is akin to ossuary 9 noted above, where two distinct forms of “Jesus” appear on the same ossuary, one in a contracted form. Another example of Mara as Martha is ossuary 868 which reads, “Alexa Mara, mother of Judas Simon, her son.” I doubt anyone would propose we vault Alexa to apostleship at the right hand of Jesus. While dozens of examples of Mara as Martha could be cited in the ancient record, Jacobovici and his research associates failed to site even one ancient text in which Mary was designated as master or in which

“mara” was used as a synonym for “apostle.”<sup>33</sup> Lastly, Jacobovici is likely incorrect in the assumption that the “Mara” of the inscription was a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word meaning “master.” In point of fact, “Mara” was the eighth most commonly used name among Palestinian Jewish females in the period 330 B.C. to 200 A.D.<sup>34</sup> The idea put forth in Jacobovici’s book and documentary that this inscription names Mary Magdalene as a leader or apostle in the early Church is bogus.

Now for a little language lesson. Although many readers may cringe at the idea of thinking about grammar, it’s necessary for proceeding with this inscription. You no doubt learned at some point in your high school or college English class that nouns can function in various ways in a sentence. Sometimes they are subjects or verbs. At other times they are the direct object of the action of a verb. On still other occasions they might be the indirect object of a verb. These functions or roles are called “cases” by grammarians. English readers sort of intuitively know when a noun does each of those things, often aided by word order. If you have ever studied a language other than English, though, you probably recall that nouns in other languages telegraph their grammatical case or role by adding something to the end of the noun. For example, if I see *-en* on the end of a plural noun in German, I know the word is most likely the indirect object. This is how Greek works. Certain endings denote what a noun is doing. End of lesson! That wasn’t so bad, was it?

Getting back to this inscription, proper names like Mary are nouns (we call them proper nouns). Proper nouns often take endings like common nouns. Ossuaries frequently have proper names in what is called the genitive case, the case that regularly denotes possession (“property of”). In the inscription before us, the ending *-ou* on “Mariamenou” tells us that “Mariamenou” is in the genitive case. As such, we can translate the first name as “(belonging to) Mary.” This is obvious to anyone who has had some Greek, and Jacobovici and his associates accept it without hesitation. Unfortunately for their thesis, the fact that we have a genitive *-ou* ending here undermines the assertion that “Mariamenou” is a form of the word “Mariamne.” As noted above, they must prove that Mary Magdalene was in this ossuary, and since certain Gnostic texts seem to say that Mary Magdalene was known by the name “Mariamne,” they feel they have a linguistic connection to this ossuary. They don’t.

Mariamne is actually a common name in the centuries immediately preceding the New Testament era and during that era. It is frequently used in the royal house of Herod, as several of the Herods had wives named Mariamne. If Mariamne were the name of the woman in the ossuary, the genitive form of that name would be Mariamnes (an *-es* ending), not Mariamenou.<sup>35</sup> “Mariamenou” (Mary) is one of several Greek spellings for the name “Mary.” It is unusual in that it is neuter in grammatical gender and not feminine as one would expect for a female name, and as is the case with “Maria” and “Mariam.” The dictionary form of this grammatically neuter proper name would be “Mariamenon” or “Mariamnon.” The name is neuter in gender because it is in what is called in language study a “diminutive” form.<sup>36</sup> A diminutive is a special formation of a word used to convey smallness of an object or to convey special endearment. We use “little” in the same way, even of adults, as in the culturally awkward phrase “the little lady,” or “his

little buddy.” An example along these lines in Greek is when the grammatically feminine *gune* (“woman”; plural *gunaikes*) is changed to the neuter *gunaikarion* (“little woman”).<sup>37</sup> We also add –y to the end of words to convey the same thing. Although practically everyone I know calls me Mike, my wife or mother might call me “Mikey” in a given context. Most often we do that sort of thing with proper names of children (e.g., Sam>Sammy). We cannot know for certain with respect to this ossuary, but “Mariamenou” might mean that a little girl’s bones were in that ossuary. On the other hand, the ossuary might have contained an adult woman beloved as a wife, mother, sister, aunt, or even grandmother. Amid the ambiguity, though, what we do know, based upon the actual data, is that the name of this person was not “Mariamne.”

The result of all this is that the inscription could coherently be translated, “(belonging to) Mary, that is, Martha,” or “(belonging to Mary), who is Martha.” These translations are not the only options, though. As Dr. Alexander Panayotov explains,<sup>38</sup> the inscription could also be translated the following ways:

- “(belonging to) Mara son/daughter of Mariamenon/Mariamene” – The reasoning behind this translation is that the writer of the inscription could have been ordering the grammar of the inscription in right-to-left order (common to Hebrew or Aramaic), despite writing in Greek. That would mean we have two women mentioned on the ossuary, not just one: Mara was the occupant of the ossuary and her mother was Mariamenon (Mary). Further, Mara can be masculine, like certain names in English (e.g., Jan). We might therefore have a male in the alleged Mary Magdalene ossuary!
- “(belonging to) Mariamenon/Mariamene daughter of Maras” – If the tiny vertical stroke is not the letter *eta*—that is, if the two names have nothing intervening—then the second name would also be in the genitive case (the nominative would be Maras). As with the preceding alternative, Maras could be a man or woman.

To this point it should be quite apparent that Jacobovici and his associates have a very long way to go to eliminating these possibilities and actually proving that the ossuary of Mary Magdalene is in the Talpiot tomb. It is basically a hopeless case. But you might be wondering what evidence they *do* muster in support of this connection. It may sound startling, but the only evidence they offer *doesn’t exist*—that is, it is based on what the writers of certain texts *might have believed*. Despite the fact that Jacobovici has a professor from Harvard, Dr. François Bovon, this assessment is accurate. That’s a blunt statement, so let’s unpack why it is true.

For Jacobovici’s thesis about Mary Magdalene to work, he must establish two ideas and then connect them: (1) That Mary Magdalene’s was known by the name “Mariamne”; (2) That “Mariamne” is the real “name behind the name” on the ossuary we have been discussing. We have already demonstrated the second of these claims—the most important one—has no support in the actual data. The Discovery website promoting the Jesus family tomb documentary makes the following statement in support of the first claim:



“From the Acts of Philip, a fourth-century work ostensibly written about Mary Magdalene's brother, Phillip (*sic*), which recently was recovered from a monastery at Mt. Athos in Greece, Professor Franois (*sic*) Bovon (Harvard University) has determined that Magdalene's real name was “Mariamne.”<sup>39</sup>

The claim, then, is that Dr. Bovon has recovered a manuscript that identifies Mary Magdalene as “Mariamne.” Here’s where things go awry for Jacobovici. The text in question is known as the *Acts of Philip*. If one reads through this text, one discovers that the text does indeed mention the name Mariamne—*but the text never actually identifies Mariamne as Mary Magdalene!* This is quite easy for anyone to check, since there are several English translations of the *Acts of Philip* available online.<sup>40</sup> Once on the page, a simple search of the page will produce the following occurrences of Mariamne in this text (note the underlining):

Chap. VIII: 94 It came to pass when the Saviour divided the apostles and each went forth according to his lot, that it fell to Philip to go to the country of the Greeks: and he thought it hard, and wept. And Mariamne his sister (it was she that made ready the bread and salt at the breaking of bread, but Martha was she that ministered to the multitudes and laboured much) seeing it, went to Jesus and said: Lord, seest thou not how my brother is vexed?

We notice here that this text has Mariamne as the apostle Philip’s sister. What is odd is how the text associates Mariamne with Martha—the Martha of the Jesus and Lazarus story (John 11) who had, with her sister Mary, cooked a meal for Jesus (Luke 10:38-42). This would mean that Mariamne is connected to Mary of Bethany, not Mary Magdalene. We are told in the New Testament that Mary of Bethany’s brother was Lazarus, not Philip. Some scholars believe those two women were the same person, but this cannot be established with certainty. At the very least, the author of this text seems to be creating a Mariamne figure who is a composite of the various New Testament Marys (more on this below).

Chap VIII:100 And in that hour the leopard and kid rose up and lifted up their forefeet and said: We glorify and bless thee that hast visited and remembered us in this desert, and changed our beastlike and wild nature into tameness, and granted us the divine word, and put in us a tongue and sense to speak and praise thy name, for great is thy glory.  
101 And they fell and worshipped Philip and Bartholomew and Mariamne; and all set out together praising God.

Here we have an account of animals talking (!) and worshipping Philip, Bartholomew, and Mariamne. While the account is a bit odd, it is interesting that Mariamne is worshipped along with two recognized disciples. Jacobovici (and writers like Dan Brown in *The DaVinci Code*) go to great lengths to make Mary Magdalene a leader in the early Church due to a close relationship with Jesus. Many of the same arguments could be applied to Mary of Bethany.

Chap IX:107 (Introductory.) In the days of Trajan, after the Martyrdom of Simon, son of Clopas, bishop of Jerusalem, successor to James, Philip the apostle was preaching through all the cities of Lydia and Asia. 108 And he came to the city Ophioryme (Snake street), which is called Hierapolis of Asia, and was received by Stachys, a believer. And

with him were Bartholomew, one of the Seventy, and his sister Mariamne, and their disciples. And they assembled at Stachys' house. 109 And Mariamne sat and listened to Philip discoursing. 110-112 He spoke of the snares of the dragon, who has 'no shape' in creation, and is recognized and shunned by beasts and birds. 113 For the men of the place worshipped the snake and had images of it, and called Hierapolis Ophioryme. And many were converted. 114 And Nicanora the proconsul's wife believed, she was diseased, especially in her eyes, and had been healed. She now came in a silver litter. 115 And Mariamne said in Hebrew: Alikaman, ikasame, marmari, iachaman, mastranan, achaman, which means: O daughter of the father, my lady, who wast given as a pledge to the serpent, Christ is come to thee (and much more).

“Their disciples” could refer to either the disciples of Philip and Bartholomew, or to disciples of Philip, Bartholomew, and Mariamne. The latter is probably more likely, especially in view of the next reference. The text mentions the apostles (plural) were arrested and strip-searched. Mariamne is strip-searched, so logic dictates that she is an apostle (whoever she is).

Chap IX:120 And he dragged her by the hair and threatened to kill her. And the apostles were arrested, 121 and scourged and dragged to the temple, 122 and shut up in it (with the leopard and the kid. These are omitted in the principal text, but constantly occur in another recension: rightly, of course). 123 The people and priests came and demanded vengeance on the sorcerers. 124 The proconsul was afraid of his wife, for he had been almost blinded by a wonderful light when he looked through the window at her when praying. 125 They stripped and searched the apostles for charms, and pierced Philip's ankles and thighs and hung him head downward, and Bartholomew they hung naked by the hair. 126 And they smiled on each other, as not being tormented. But Mariamne on being stripped became like an ark of glass full of light and fire and every one ran away.

Chap IX:135 Jesus appeared and rebuked Philip. 136 But he defended himself. 137 And the Lord said: Since you have been unforgiving and wrathful, you shall indeed die in glory and be taken by angels to paradise, but shall remain outside it forty days, in fear of the flaming sword, and then I will send Michael and he shall let you in. And Bartholomew shall go to Lycaonia and be crucified there, and Mariamne's body shall be laid up in the river Jordan. And I shall bring back those who have been swallowed up.

Chap IX:141 Further he spoke to them of the incarnation, 142 and bade them loose Bartholomew, and told him and Mariamne of their destiny. Build a church in the place where I die, and let the leopard and kid be there, and let Nicanora look after them till they die, and then bury them at the church gate: and let your peace be in the house of Stachys: and he exhorted them to purity...

Chap IX: 147 After three days the vine grew Up. And they made the offering daily for forty days, and built the church and made Stachys bishop. And all the city believed. 148 And at the end of forty days the Saviour appeared in the form of Philip and told Bartholomew and Mariamne that he had entered paradise, and bade them go their ways. And Bartholomew went to Lycaonia and Mariamne to Jordan, and Stachys and the brethren abode where they were.

These are all the references to Mariamne in the Acts of Philip. None of them explicitly identifies her as Mary Magdalene. In terms of data that actually exists, we are told only that Mariamne was the sister of Philip. Furthermore, *there is no ancient text in existence today—including the New Testament—that identifies Mary Magdalene as the sister of*

*Philip*. This connection is entirely speculative, and Dr. Bovon is behind that speculation. There is no data that exists that makes the connection Jacobovici and his associates need to make their case.

In fairness to Dr. Bovon, Jacobovici has slightly overstated what he has actually written with regard to Mariamne and the *Acts of Philip*. Bovon's work on this text is part of a scholarly work entitled *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).<sup>41</sup> In regard to Mariamne in the *Acts of Philip* Bovon states, "The woman, it is my contention, is Mary Magdalene . . . The text presupposes that Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany are the same person."<sup>42</sup> Bovon adds, "To be clear, I am not interested here in the reconstruction of the historical figure of Mary Magdalene, but in her portrayal in literary texts, particularly the *Acts of Philip*."<sup>43</sup> This statement further clarifies Bovon's position that his remarks refer to Mariamne as a literary character without committing himself to any notion that what is written in the *Acts of Philip* is to be deemed historical in nature.

There are a few additional salient details to note with respect to the Acts of Philip. The manuscript of this book discovered recently by Bovon and an associate (1974) dates to the *fourteenth* century A.D.—well over 1,000 years later than the time of Mary Magdalene. While the manuscript is considered to reflect a work originally composed in the fourth century A.D., there are no older witnesses than this fourteenth century text. In a day when it is common to hear people questioning whether they can trust the New Testament as a historical document since it was "written so long after the events" (roughly sixty years at the longest), why is it that we are supposed to so unquestioningly trust this text, over a millennium removed from the events it purports to describe? Does Jacobovici really expect this to be compelling, especially when it fails to name Mary Magdalene as Mariamne? Further, can we really trust a book that has Philip, Bartholomew, and Mariamne evangelizing a leopard and a goat that talk as a historical resource?

There are other, older texts than the *Acts of Philip* that record the name Mariamne. We know from the writings of Hippolytus (*Refutation of All Heresies*, 228-233 A.D.) that the Gnostic sect known as the Naassenes claimed to have a secret teaching that James the brother of Jesus had transmitted to Mariamne:

Book V, Chap. 2 - These are the heads of very numerous discourses which (the Naassene) asserts James the brother of the Lord handed down to Mariamne. In order, then, that these impious (heretics) may no longer belie Mariamne or James, or the Saviour Himself, let us come to the mystic rites (whence these have derived their figment),-to a consideration, if it seems right, of both the Barbarian and Grecian (mysteries),-and let us see how these (heretics), collecting together the secret and ineffable mysteries of all the Gentiles, are uttering falsehoods against Christ, and are making dupes of those who are not acquainted with these orgies of the Gentiles.

Many modern Gnostics and Jesus revisionists assume that the Mariamne in this passage is Mary Magdalene. That might be true, but we don't actually know, since this text, like the *Acts of Philip*, do not explicitly equate Mariamne with Mary Magdalene.

But what do we make of the Mary Magdalene / Mary of Bethany overlap? This apparent blending or confusion of Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany has led scholars to ask whether Mariamne of the *Acts of Philip* is indeed Mary of Bethany.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the most coherent view is that of Dr. Stephen Shoemaker, who argues that "the Gnostic Mary" is a kind of composite Gnostic character with characteristics from these several Marys.<sup>45</sup>

The points made in this review of texts that mention Mariamne are important. It is easy to surmise, as Jacobovic, Bovon, and others do, that the Gnostics identified Mary Magdalene and Mariamne. But if that was the case, we would expect at least *one* Gnostic text to actually make that explicit identification. There are *none*. Yes, one can speculate that is what a Gnostic sect like the Naassenes had in mind, but that's all it would be—speculation. Should we base what we think of as truth on data that exist, or on data that we imagine might have existed?

There is one last question to raise in regard to the names in the Talpiot tomb. Where does Mariamne come from if it is not grammatically related to Mariamenou and is not linked to Mary Magdalene? The answer appears to be a linguistic one.

The various Greek New Testament words for Mary ("Maria" and "Mariam") are related to the Jewish names for Miriam (Maryam). When the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, rendered that name, it did it in two ways: "Maria" and "Mariam," which is simply a transliteration into Greek letters of the Hebrew letters in Maryam. All the Marys of the New Testament—Mary, Mary the mother of Jesus; Mary Magdalene; and Mary of Bethany—have their name spelled both ways in the Greek text of the New Testament. Why the difference in spelling? As Dr. Richard Bauckham points out, "Greek nouns never end in consonants other than *n*, *r* and *s*. So 'Mariam' in Greek looks barbaric (hence Josephus, e.g., never uses it)."<sup>46</sup> "Maria" cured the "barbarization problem" by dropping the final "m" in the Hebrew name. Other Greek writers adopted the convention of adding an "m" and the feminine "e" ending for Greek nouns (-me) to make the word look more appropriately Greek. This name, "Mariamme" is widely attested in Jewish in Jewish usage back into the first century A.D. In contrast, one does not see "Mariamne" in Christian writings (Gnostic or orthodox) until Hippolytus in the third century A.D.

Mariamme shows up in all sorts of texts outside the New Testament, including Gnostic works. Apparently, some Greek speakers had difficulty with the double-m name, and began to slip an "n" in for the second "m"—and so, Mariamne. We know this happened, since in various manuscripts of Hippolytus's *Refutation of All Heresies* quoted above, some read "Mariamne" while others have "Mariamme." The name "Mariamne" is therefore most likely a deformation of the very common Mariamme.

This is the final "nail in the ossuary," as it were, to Jacobovici's thesis, at least as it pertains to the names in the Talpiot tomb. There is no evidence of Mariamne in Christian (or his "Judeo-Christian" category) texts which he can reference to support his idea that "Mariamenou" on the Talpiot ossuary is an early form of Mariamne. And even if he could produce an attestation of a Christian Mariamne from the first century, he would have two

obstacles: (1) “Mariamenou” has the wrong case ending if it comes from Mariamne, and (2) that attestation would still need to refer to Mary Magdalene explicitly. As it stands now, Jacobovici has none of the required data to make his case.

### *Conclusion*

As I noted at the beginning of this article, those who care about the Jesus family tomb theory must make a fundamental decision about how to process the theory. Will the reader based his or her decision on the data that actually exists, or on data that does not exist, but is speculated to have existed? There is no doubt which perspective is scientific and grounded in sound reasoning. As fascinating as a given speculations might be, it is nevertheless a speculation.

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<sup>1</sup> The Discovery Channel documentary was not the first public media claim that this tomb held the bones of Jesus of Nazareth. The tomb was profiled in the *London Times* on March 31, 1996 under the headline “The Tomb that Dare not Speak its Name.” A documentary by the BBC on its *Heart of the Matter* news magazine followed soon thereafter.

<sup>2</sup> An extended account of the salvage operation can be found in Jacobovici and Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb*, 16-23.

<sup>3</sup> Details of the contents of the tomb come from the excavation report written by Amos Kloner, based on notes taken by Yosef Gat. Gat died a year after the discovery without writing a report. Kloner’s report was published in 1996 in the IAA publication *Atiqot* (XXIX, 1996). The Discovery Channel has Kloner’s report and Gibson’s drawings [online](#) as a PDF document for download.

<sup>4</sup> Kloner, *Atiqot* (XXIX, 1996): 22 (footnote 2).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Jacobovici, 18.

<sup>7</sup> David Horovitz, “New Film Claims Jesus Buried in Talpiot,” [Jerusalem Post](#) online edition, February 25, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Jacobovici states this explicitly on page fifteen of his book (“There were ten ossuaries all told”).

<sup>9</sup> L. Y. Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority; Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994). It is true, as Tabor noted on his Jesus Dynasty [blog](#) on March 7, 2007, that Rahmani’s descriptions on pp. 222-224 (ossuary numbers 701-709) only list nine ossuaries from the Talpiot tomb. However, the Table of Tomb Groups on p. 304 of Rahmani’s catalogue clearly indicates that ten ossuaries were recovered from the Talpiot tomb.

<sup>10</sup> Jacobovici, 15.

<sup>11</sup> David Horovitz, “Kloner: Great Story, but Nonsense,” [Jerusalem Post](#) online edition, February 27, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Tabor, Jesus Dynasty [blog](#) on March 7, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> See the image located at <http://www.accordingtothescriptures.org/romancatholic/James.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Kloner, 16.

<sup>15</sup> See the brief [discussion](#) by archaeologist Joe Zias on this possibility.

<sup>16</sup> See Dr. Kilparick’s [blog](#) on this theory.

<sup>17</sup> Rahmani’s catalogue lists six, including the Talpiot ossuary. Ossuaries bearing the name “Jesus” with respect to the identity of the person in the ossuary are numbers 9, 63, 121, 140, and 704, which is the Talpiot ossuary. The name “Jesus” occurs on a sixth ossuary (from the Talpiot tomb) which reads “Jude, son of Jesus.” Therefore, there are at least four other ossuaries whose occupant was a “Jesus.” T A more recent reference work detailing Jewish ossuaries lists 22 occurrences of the name “Jesus.”

<sup>18</sup> For a concise explanation of the importance of patronym

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.breitbart.com/news/2007/02/26/D8NHI2MO2.html>.

<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.deinde.org/story/2007/3/2/203419/9162>.

<sup>21</sup> As Rahmani’s catalogue shows, many ossuaries were decorated, some quite ornately.

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<sup>22</sup> Rahmani, 223.

<sup>23</sup> The four occurrences are 1 Chron. 2:31; 4:20, 42; 5:24.

<sup>24</sup> “Yeshu” is a recognized abbreviation of “Yeshua.”

<sup>25</sup> “Yehoshua” is a well-attested alternate spelling of “Yeshua.”

<sup>26</sup> Kloner, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Rahmani, 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>30</sup> This conclusion is shared by research on these alleged cross marks on a range of Jewish ossuaries. See R. H. Smith, “The Cross Marks on Jewish Ossuaries,” *Palestine Excavation Quarterly* 106 (1971) 53-66.

<sup>31</sup> See Stephen J. Pfann, “[Mary Magdalene is Now Missing](#).”

<sup>32</sup> At least one scholar who works regularly with inscriptions doesn’t think the inscription even reads “Mariamenou [e] Mara.” Dr. Stephen Pfann [argues](#) that the name Mariamene or Mariamne does not appear on the ossuary at all, opting instead for the reading “Mariame and Mara.” Pfann contends that “the inscription reflects the writing of two distinct scribes who wrote in different forms of the Greek script,” and so “the ossuary thus contained the bones of at least two different women, interred at two separate times, one named Mariame and the other Mara.” Dr. Pfann bases his reading on personal observation and parallels from contemporary inscriptions and documents.

<sup>33</sup> This observation was made by Dr. Charles Quarles as cited by Dr. Darrell Bock in his [blog](#) of March 5, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Quarles; see also Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> There is a Mariamnou in Rahmani’s catalogue (p. 105). It occurs on the underside of the lid of ossuary 108. The form of that word is genitive, but this would not be a genitive of Mariamne. Rather, it is the genitive of Mariamnon, the name Mariam in what is called the diminutive case. The diminutive case is common in Greek. A neuter ending is applied to a feminine personal noun to show endearment. As such, ossuary 108 is not evidence that Mariamne can have an *-ou* ending. Mariamne is not in the diminutive case, and so the genitive must be Mariamnes. Dr. Richard Bauckham has commented on the issue of the genitive form in his own March 1 [response](#) to Jacobovici’s theory and a March 6 [followup](#) to that response.

<sup>36</sup> See the comments on the diminutive in Greek in Friedrich Blass et al., *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 60.

<sup>37</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (“Based on Walter Bauer’s Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur, sixth edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker; 3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 208.

<sup>38</sup> Post on the [Paleojudaica](#) blog, March 7, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> See <http://dsc.discovery.com/convergence/tomb/explore/explore.html>.

<sup>40</sup> For example, the translation by M. R. James (Oxford, 1924) is found on the [Non-Canonical Homepage](#) maintained by the Wesley Center for Applied Theology. Another translation is that found on the [Christian Classic Ethereal Library](#) (CCEL).

<sup>41</sup> This book is edited by F. Stanley Jones. Bovon’s work is found on pp. 75-89.

<sup>42</sup> Bovon, 80, 82.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>44</sup> One such scholar is Tony Chartrand-Burke, professor of Biblical Studies at the Atkinson School of Arts and Letters, which is part of York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Dr. Chartrand-Burke administers the blog Apocryphicity, which is devoted to the study of Christian Apocrypha like the Acts of Philip.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen Shoemaker, “Rethinking the “Gnostic Mary”: Mary of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala in Early Christian Tradition,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9:4 (Winter 2001): 555-595.

<sup>46</sup> See Bauckham’s “Addenda and Corrigenda” on the [Paleojudaica](#) blog of March 6, 2007.