What is the Message of "the Patio Tomb" in Talpiot, Jerusalem?

All of us scholars are disenchanted when archaeological discoveries are presented too sensationally or are used to "prove" the Bible truthful or fallacious. By profession, scholars shun sensationalism and do not feel the need to defend biblical truths. We are dedicated to a means of expression in which certainty appears in a spectrum from "conceivable to probable." Thus, it is as absurd to claim with absolute certainty that the Patio Tomb preserves the remains of some of Jesus' first followers as it is unwise to pronounce with equal vigor that such a possibility is unthinkable.

For the official publication of Talpiot I and the definitive research on it by Shimon Gibson and Amos Kloner, see *The Tomb of Jesus and His Family? Exploring Ancient Jewish Tombs Near Jerusalem's Walls*. Ed. James H. Charlesworth. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012 (expected publication date is 15 Oct 2012).
See: http://www.eerdmans.com/Products/6745/the-tomb-of-jesus-and-his-family.aspx
The following is a postscript in that book. Parts of it will appear on my web page.

By James Hamilton Charlesworth
Princeton
June 2012

When I was in Israel in June 2010, I was invited by AP to see what had been discovered in east Talpiot by Rami Arav, James Tabor, and Simcha Jacobovici along with the "Associated Producers team." I was interested in how they were using a custom-made robotic arm outfitted with cameras to explore a first-century tomb (or burial cave). Recently, some individuals have been discussing and blogging through various media about this tomb. With most individuals, I am dismayed by occasional *ad hominem* comments addressed to some scholars by other scholars.

All of us scholars are disenchanted when archaeological discoveries are presented too sensationally or are used to "prove" the Bible truthful or fallacious. By profession, scholars shun sensationalism and do not feel the need to defend biblical truths. We are dedicated to a means of expression in which certainty appears in a spectrum from "conceivable to probable." Thus, it is as absurd to claim with absolute certainty that the Patio Tomb preserves the remains of some of Jesus' first followers as it is unwise to pronounce with equal vigor that such a possibility is unthinkable.

There should be no doubt that this tomb, labeled "the Patio Tomb" (or "Talpiot II"), and the ossuaries still in it date from circa 20 BCE (when the stone industry could produce such artistic works in stone) to 66 CE (when the Land of Israel erupted in a revolt against Rome that proved to be devastating).[1] There are doubts, however, about the meaning of a drawing on one of the ossuaries. I now turn to this challenging drawing

Seeing An Ancient Drawing

In June 2010, I visited a housing complex in Talpiot that is in southeast Jerusalem. I was amazed by what was below an apartment building. I was looking through a camera on the end of a robotic arm into a pre-70 Jewish tomb. There in the darkness below my feet was an ancient tomb with ossuaries (bone boxes) clearly made before the massive revolt against Rome in 66 CE. As the camera turned, I saw a stone door that sealed the tomb in antiquity. Then the camera moved silently past ossuaries and some bones strewn on the floor of the tomb.

Colleagues near me shouted with excitement as an inscription came into view. Then, not much later, the robotic arm which was directed by an archaeologist moved to another ossuary. We could not believe our eyes. We were all riveted to a drawing that ostensibly broke the commandment not to make a "graven image." What was it? What was depicted? What did the inscriber intend to symbolize?

A leading archaeologist and biblical specialist on site first thought the drawing on Ossuary 6 depicted a boat. Was it? They unanimously changed their minds when the full image came into view.

Description: First, it is imperative to realize the image is something inscribed by an unskilled hand on limestone. The inscriber did not use a ruler or compass; he seems to have used only a chisel and a hammer. He thus produced a poorly incised freehand ornamentation. We should expect this type of work in and around Jerusalem in pre-70 strata, since Jews were prohibited, and thus had no skills, to depict any likeness in God's creation (recall the Commandment). There was also probably no workshop or skilled artisans to help him; and perhaps the image was made without sufficient time.

The image as seen through the robotic arm (courtesy: Associated Producers):



The long and concave figure is approximately 23 cm. long and approximately 15 cm. wide at the greatest extremity (the curved "bottom" that is at the top) or 9 cm near the "appendages."[2] The figure merges into a circle on one end and fans out on the opposite end. At the pointed end is a circular shape about 3 cm in diameter. On each side of the figure are lines that appear to be appendages. In the center of the figure are three lines. The section closest to the tip contains square markings while the other two contain something like triangular lines. Halfway between the appendages and the tip is a section that contains numerous lines drawn at different angles. A series of horizontal lines running perpendicular to the main figure run across the sphere at the bottom. What could this image symbolize, or is it simply a sign? That is, is the drawing a sign that may have been well understood in the first century; or is it a symbol with rich meaning? A sign can mean one and only one thing; a good example is the stop sign. We all know that it means we must stop at that spot. A symbol must be interpreted and usually has many meanings. Symbols appear in a world of ambiguity and bring with them more than one meaning.[3]

Differing Interpretations of the Drawing

A Nefesh (a tomb monument that signals the "soul(s)" entombed). Looking at the image on an unpublished ossuary in L. Y. Rahmani's *Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries*,[4] it is easy to imagine the image is a *nefesh*. In both drawings, the "bottom" is concave. Some ossuary images of a *nefesh* do have appendages on their sides that look like spirals. The experts who were studying the Patio Tomb identified a *nefesh* on one ossuary but concluded that the image on Ossuary 6 was not a *nefesh*. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that the drawing is, indeed, a *nefesh*; after all, we should admit that the drawing is crude. One problem with the assumption that the image is a funerary monument is that it would be upside down, with the base at the top. Does that seem likely?

An Amphora. The image does appear in some ways like an amphora. It is rounded and has a top. The image has something on each side. Could these be handles? If so, they are not like any known handles on an amphora, whether drawn or part of an amphora itself. Is it possible that retinal retention has elicited these attempts to discern the meaning? If one stares at an amphora, one can eventually see the image on Ossuary 6 as an amphora. But, is that what the engraver intended? The oval-shaped bottom of the drawing seems too rounded for the base of an amphora. The "handles," moreover, are oddly shaped. Many artisans depicted amphora correctly on ossuaries; why is this image so unlike others?

Any attempt to enter the mind of an engraver in order to discern the intention of an "artist" borders on unsophisticated methodology, frequently speculating with unexamined presuppositions. To discern what it might mean to a viewer is another matter. Both of the attempts so far rightly assume that ossuaries exist with a drawing of a *nefesh* or an amphora.

A Fish. If this is a fish, it seems crudely drawn and depicted downward. It may well be a fish, if one imagines an unsophisticated attempt. The shape does look like a large fish. The head appears pointed and expands outward towards the center and then slopes inward and down to an elongated "tail." That contour is "fishlike." The tail seems concave like the tail of a fish; it is well drawn but the appendages are poorly indicated. Could they be a crude attempt to depict the fins on a big fish? Had the "artist" ever seen a large fish? If this is a drawing of a big fish, where is the eye and where is the mouth? Perhaps the mouth is at the point near "the bottom," and the eye is a barely visible circle to the left of the "mouth." We will need better images to confirm what some see as a mouth and an eye (but many images of fish have no eye).

Fish do appear as faunal motifs in Jewish art (in synagogal and funeral depictions as well as in zodiacs)[5] and on ossuaries. N. Avigad found, in pre-70 strata in Upper Jerusalem, a stone table with a fish, "the only animal figure to have been found in ornamental use."[6] Rahmani reported that Ossuary 348 had a mark that "seems to represent a fish." Is this another example of a fish, and if so, does it merely mean that the one whose bones are inside the ossuary was a fishmonger? According to Nehemiah 13:16, men came to Jerusalem from Tyre (on the coast north of Acco) with "fish" to sell. Rahmani is convinced that the circle on Ossuary 140 around "Yeshua'" ("Jesus") is only coincidentally "a fish."[7] Is that discussion closed?[8]

Why has the engraver spent so much time on the lines within the spherical "bottom"? One can count at least 14 strokes. Why? What was imagined?

Without studying the full context of all the inscriptions and the tomb setting, it could be easy to dismiss the suggestion that someone tried to draw a large fish. The middle section with squares needs explanation. One should be willing to imagine that the image is really an amphora. And staring at it for long periods can convince one it might be a crude attempt at an amphora or a *nefesh*. But, something is intended. We should move beyond what it could possibly be and ask what is the intentionality that created this image?

All attempts have so far failed to explain why the drawing is "upside down." But, if the Jewish engraver who made this etching had Jonah in mind, then it seems that some answers to our questions are forthcoming. According to the biblical author, Jonah was spat out by the "large fish" unto dry land (Jonah 2:11); that could be depicted by placing a fish upside down. Any other angle would mean that "Jonah" was launched into the air.

But, how should we interpret the spherical "bottom"? If the object is "upside down," as almost all seem to agree, then we are looking at the "head" of something, perhaps a fish. Why was so much attention given to the horizontal markings in the round "head"? The author of Jonah also mentions that seaweed was wrapped around Jonah's head: "seaweeds [Hebrew *swp*] twined around my head" (Jonah 2:6). Is this concept being depicted? Has the Jewish engraver tried to avoid depicting a face? Has he imagined Jonah's head protruding from a large fish with a tight mouth spitting out Jonah? Any analogies to what someone over 300 years later than this tomb depicted in a Roman catacomb are too far out of context to warrant discussion. After 70 CE, this image was never seen again until now; hence, it is not a model for other imaginative depictions of Jonah being spewed forth from a large fish.

What is meant by the squares inside the image? Could they be an attempt to depict a large fish (Leviathan?) that would have scales and thus be Kosher? The only pre-70 CE faunal motif found by Avigad was a fish carved on a stone table; it has etched squares just as on Ossuary 6.[9] Could they be an attempt to clarify that the fish is Kosher.

Did the inscriber attempt to meld an image of a fish with a *nefesh*? Is there some conflation of symbols? Are there multiple meanings to be contemplated?

If this is a large fish and Jonah is intended, then it is possible to image a stick figure inside the fish. If so, the head is absurdly large. Why? Obviously, some Jews imagined the resurrection body to be similar to but different from the fleshy body. Would some early Jews have imagined that a resurrected body would have a large head? Is that the ideal body? We simply need to raise questions and be open to dialogue.

Any scholarly attempt to interpret ancient art should be respected. As Merleau-Ponty pointed out in many books, any refined interpretation demands improving the perception of the one perceiving. And as Polyani showed, all knowledge is personal knowledge. Hence, we need

each other in a dialogue that appreciates the input of others, whether philologists, archaeologists, biblical scholars, or specialists in ancient art.

As we explore the meaning of the drawing we need to include the inscription on Ossuary 5. I sight read the four-line inscription to mean: "Divine Yahweh, who lifts up (or raised up), from (the tomb or death?)."[10] I remain uncertain about the last line and the reading "from" and what is implied. The inscription is impressively chiseled and certainly refers to some Jewish belief in resurrection or the afterlife. Why should this inscription be completely ignored in attempts to understand the drawing?

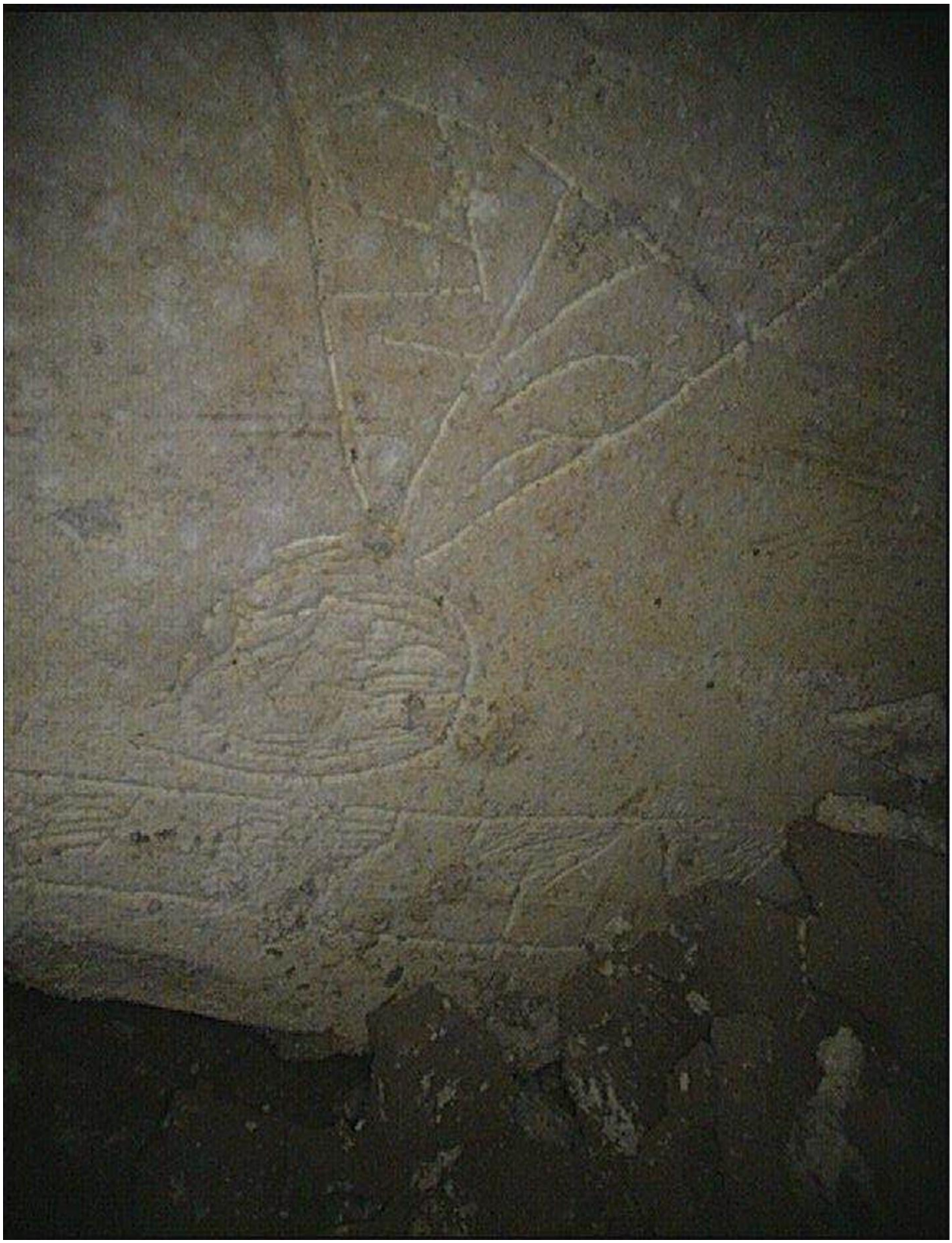
What type of Jew would have made this inscription and the drawing? A resurrection belief was shared by many early Jews, representing various groups or sects. As I showed in *Resurrection: The Origin and Future of a Biblical Doctrine*, resurrection belief means that someone who lived and has died will be raised by God to an eternal existence with God.[11] The belief in a resurrection may be found in some Davidic Psalms, but the first lucid (or un-debatable) reference to it appears, perhaps around 200 BCE, in the *Books of Enoch* (1 Enoch). Then chronologically, the concept appears in Daniel 12. At Qumran, in a document probably not composed at Qumran, the belief clearly appears in *On Resurrection* (5Q521) and in *Pseudo-Ezekiel* 54Q385-388). In many works of Early Judaism the belief in a resurrection is evident, including Josephus' compositions, the *Psalms of Solomon*, the *Life of Adam and Eve*, *4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, 2 Enoch*, the *History of the Rechabites*, the *Lives of the Prophets*, *1-4 Maccabees*, *Pseudo-Philo*, the *Apocryphon of Ezekiel*, *Pseudo-Phocylides*, *Sibylline Oracles*, the *Testament of Abraham*, the *Testament of Job*, the *Testaments of the 12 Patriarchs*, the *Apocryphon of Ezekiel*, and the *Odes of Solomon*. The belief in resurrection is also found in the *Didache*, the *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers*, and the *Amida* or *18 Benedictions*. According to Hippolytus (but not Josephus), the Essenes believed in the resurrection of the flesh (*Haeresies* 9.27). The Samaritans believe that God will summon "his creatures" so that all of them will "arise in one moment before him" (*Memar Markah* 4.12; cf. also *Yom ad-Din* 26). Moreover, the concept of a bodily resurrection created and defined the *Palestinian Jesus Movement*; according to Paul, if Jesus was not raised by God then "our proclamation is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1Cor 15:14). Without any doubt, the concept of resurrection (far more than a belief in a coming Messiah) brings into perspective the shared beliefs and hopes within Early Judaism.[12]

Are the inscription and the drawing not to be perceived within Jewish resurrection beliefs? It is as absurd to dismiss the possibility that this tomb has some relation with the Palestinian Jesus Movement as to claim that it clearly must be labeled a "Christian" tomb. Emotions are too inflamed by such unscholarly outbursts.

Regarding Etchings on an Ossuary in "the Patio Tomb"

Now, let us turn, with an open mind, to some etchings inside the drawing, at "the bottom." Some markings seem to appear on the image near what some think is the mouth of an amphora or the closed mouth of a "large fish." When the inscribed drawing is seen as it is on the ossuary (an amphora or a fish upside down), the etchings look like an inscription in Hebrew.[13] Four separate markings may be discerned on the stone; each was most likely made by a hammer and a chisel. I shall begin with the clearest Hebrew letter and then move to its right (even though it should be obvious that the letters were written right to left).

I have been told the following image is not altered or edited (courtesy: AP):[14]



The first etching on the left has the unmistakable form of a *he*. The letter is written in three strokes. First, the person drew the horizontal line (the "roof"), and then added the leg to the right and then a shorter, slanted leg to the left. The left leg is well within the end stroke of the horizontal roof. The form of the *he* is typical of pre-70 scripts well known from Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts; examples are plentiful, see e.g. 4QDan^{b} that dates between 20 and 50 CE. The *he* is similar to many inscriptions on ossuaries.[15] Hebrew *he* represents the English "H." Anyone who has worked on early manuscripts or pre-70 lapidary scripts should immediately see the *he.*

The meaning of the mark to the right of the *he* is not *prima facie* obvious. It is one connected stroke as the following image presented here shows (below). Conceivably, it can be a *lamed* [= L], but the upper portion of the stroke is too slanted to the left and the lower one appears too long (but the *lamed* appears in various ways prior to 70 CE). The one continuous stroke reminds me of a *nun*; one should be able to discern the turn to the left at the bottom of the stroke. The form is far from clear because the upper portion seems too long; but a lapidary *nun* is not to be confused with the Herodian Formal Book Hand inscribed upon lined leather. For example, in Ossuary 571 in Rahmani, the *nun* has a very long bottom stroke and it intrudes underneath two following letters. Perhaps this was caused by the need to inscribe stone with a chisel and the absence of a scribal horizontal line to guide the inscriber for hanging the Hebrew letters. Plus a stick figure and the alleged "mouth of a fish" may be intruding within or causing the elongated *nun*. The form of this *nun* is somewhat similar to the forms in hundreds of Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts; for example, it appears in 4QDeut^{j} that dates from about 50 CE (also, in contrast, the Deut ms. represents the Formal Book Hand on leather). The *nun* becomes more likely when one studies that letter on ossuaries.[16] Hebrew *nun* represents the English "N."

The slightly curved scratch to the right of the *nun* is inelegant and some imagination is required (and speculation is frequently the case when studying lapidary scripts).[17] It seems somewhat similar to the *zain* in 4QNum^{b} that dates from the early first century CE. Most likely the form represents a *waw*. The top of this "letter" may have a "loop" as in the "Loop Mode" of the Herodian Ossuary Script.[18] The form appears similar to the right-curved *waw* in Murabba'ât 18 that has been dated to 55 or 56 CE. The curved backward *waw* of *COJO* 38 is similar.[19] This Hebrew letter equals the English "W," "U," or "O."

On first viewing, the next stroke to the right looks like a *zain*. The top slants downward past the horizontal stroke. On examination, one can clearly see an upper loop to the left of the vertical stroke. The letter may well be *yod* as in the "Loop Mode" form,[20] but the extension to the upper right is problematic. Perhaps the inscriber meant to denote a *yod*. Similar forms with a looped *yod* appear in *COJO*, 82, 380, 411, 414, 421, 430 (*bis*), 435, 559, 603, 705, and 706. This Hebrew letter represents the English "Y," "I," or "J."

Thus from left to right, which is the direction in which English is read, we may discern: HNOJ. Since Hebrew is written right to left, we may recognize: JONH. The "a" vowel did not appear in Hebrew manuscripts until after the seventh century CE. Most likely, therefore, we may comprehend the inscription: "JONAH."[21]

The following high-definition image is not altered or enhanced. Notice that the *nun* is connected and appears to be one angular stroke. Obviously, I never intimated that all the lines in "the head of the fish" are letters; anyone who imagined that I did make such a claim, or that I ignored some lines, simply was dependent on a journalist's summary of my rather lengthy and detailed comments.[22]

I am open to the suggestion that the "artist" intended an oblate circle to symbolize an eye of the fish and the long line to denote a closed mouth; conceivably he also seemed to depict a stick-figured Jonah (which I will discuss later). (Image courtesy: AP):



Finally, no assurance is provided for any reading. I am bothered by the mixing of scripts. The inscriber began with the looped lapidary script and then continued with forms known from leather manuscripts. Had he been trained as a scribe? Did he begin with the well-known lapidary script and shifted to forms with which he was more familiar? The lack of precision in this inscription is due perhaps to the need to chisel on stone. Were the forms twisted by the shape of the circular mouth of the alleged fish? Did the inscriber wish to meld the inscription with a stick figure within the mouth? The Hebrew letters, the image of the stick figure, and the drawing seem to me to be the same depth and style.

Once again, what about the curving nature of the script? First, one should not resist the possibility of a script because it is curved; a curved or waving script is evident on some ossuaries. Second, one should not confuse a lined formal Herodian script with a lapidary inscription. Even in editing ancient manuscripts we are forced to work with consonants that are virtually impossible to discern; context alone indicates that a *beth* has masqueraded as a *kaph*. An unsophisticated engraver chiseling on stone is not to be confused with a skilled scribe. Third, the one who made the inscription was daily familiar with coins bearing curved Hebrew inscriptions. On these coins, the Hebrew letters were rounded and within a curved border as we see with Ossuary 6.

As we all know, Jewish coins contemporaneous with Ossuary 6 have inscriptions. They are also curved and resemble the letters that are curved in the putative mouth of a fish.

This reading represents my present speculation and on-going research. I and all others need to see the ossuary itself or at least a better image of the inscription and the drawing. We are now working with an image that is possibly distorted by a flexible camera. I offer my reading for

other epigraphers to discuss. As with many inscriptions, my reading can neither be proved nor disproved.

I am pleased to learn that one of the finest epigraphers in Israel, Robert Deutsch, has no doubt that the inscription clearly reads "YONAH." Deutsch sent me this question: "What are statistically the chances for a so-called decoration to look like these four letters?" He answered: "One in over 1 billion." I have been informed that Professor Haggai Misgav says definitely there are letters, but he prefers maybe *zayin* and *lamed*, thus "ZILA" or "ZEILA."

The Jonah Stick Figure

Is there a stick figure in the alleged mouth of "the fish"? Along with others who first saw the drawing, I saw what looked like a stick figure inside the fish. I am persuaded that a Jew may have etched a figure inside the so-called fish. It extends downward to become part of the mouth and then protrudes from the "fish" with a bubble head. To the left of the stick figure is a circle that seems intended. Could it be the eye of the fish?

Rahmani interpreted a second century CE incised drawing as a "featureless human figure(?)."[23] He perceived an outer garment that covered the shoulders and a "peaked cap or hairdo." The figure's "hands are covered by the garment." He wisely reported that this drawing seems to be a depiction of "the deceased and his 'soul,'" since no *nefesh* or contemporaneous tomb-structure or tower has "'lattice'-patterned triangles." Rahmani is to be lauded for his reflections and focused imagination. The same applies to what seems to be a stick figure in a "large fish."

Finally, how important is the discovery of ossuaries in the Tapiot Patio Tomb? Will those in the media or academia twist what may be informative in our search for understanding early Jews, including some phenomena perhaps related to Jesus? Can we have a civil and sensitive discussion about a drawing that is clearly Jewish, unique, and pre-70? How do we discern the intended, implied, or attributed meaning of an early Jewish drawing?

If some Jewish engraver intended to depict Jonah and the "large fish," it is *prima facie* possible that repentance is intended. That seems to be the meaning attributed to Jesus by Luke (ch.11); and Jonah is still read on the evening of Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement) to signal the importance of seeking forgiveness before God. If God forgave the heathen, then God will forgive his chosen people, the Jews.

If meaning resides in ambiguity, and all symbols are multivalent, then how can anyone continue to be scholarly while issuing dogmatic pronouncements about the intended meaning or perceived meaning in a symbol?

The Prophet Jonah and Jesus' Followers

Only Luke and Matthew recorded the name "Jonah." How do these Evangelists help us in this research? Luke does attribute to Jesus a reference to Jonah and focuses on "the sign of Jonah," denoting the possibility of repentance (Luke 11:29-32).

Did Jesus mean by a "sign" the time for seeking atonement through repentance or resurrection? The latter becomes clear only in Matthew:

> Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying to him, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he [Jesus] answered (and) said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but[24] no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster,[25] so

> will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will arise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. (Mat 12: 38-41)

Matthew claims that as Jonah was three days in the body of the large fish, so Jesus was three days in the body of the earth, and was resurrected by God. These Jewish reflections are from the first century CE, but after 70 CE they were reported by those who were claimed to have seen a resurrected Jesus:

> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: That Christ … was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [= Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time … Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all … he appeared to me." (1Cor 15:3-8)

As Pope Benedict XVI states in *Jesus of Nazareth*, although the "essential point is that the Resurrection itself is in accordance with the Scriptures," no scripture passage clearly supplies Paul's text: "There is no direct scriptural testimony pointing to 'the third day.'"[26] Jesus was not three days *and three nights* in the tomb.

On 1 April 2012 in *The Catholic Registrar*, Michael Swan wrote the following:

> The idea that this tomb may contain the bones of Jesus is presented as something perhaps scandalous to Christians. The film makers concede there's no way to prove that any particular bones buried in first century Jerusalem belong to any particular person. But even if they could, how scandalous is it? Catholics have always known the resurrection does not refer to a resuscitated corpse. Jesus was resurrected in a spiritual body, just as all of us will be resurrected at the end of history regardless of the decay of our flesh and bones. And of course Jesus spiritual body is no less real than the body Mary bore in her womb.
>
> Putting aside the scandal that's not really a scandal, The Jesus Discovery does not explore this tomb. It photographs the other tomb, which may belong to Joseph of Arimathea. The idea is that if this second tomb belongs to Joseph of Arimathea it would, based on the Gospel story, bolster the theory that the first tomb contains bones of Jesus, His mother and His brothers.
>
> While we find no hard evidence that the second tomb actually belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, there's lots of circumstantial evidence. It could be. We also find, carved onto one of the ossuaries a Christian symbol of the resurrection. It is a depiction of Jonah being spat out by the whale.
>
> What's interesting about this is not whether the ossuary belonged to Joseph of Arimathea or some other wealthy Jew who followed Jesus. What's interesting is that core of Christian belief in years immediately following events we celebrate during Holy Week was resurrection.

> Here is another grain of evidence in the mountain of archeological proof which has come to light in our lifetimes that says the first Christians believed what the Church still believes — Christ rose from the dead, and we shall rise with him on the last day.

This feature presents balanced and insightful advice for Christians, and not just Roman Catholics. It is the position that I have taken from the beginning of discussions focused on the Talpiot I Tomb. Yet, some so-called Christians castigated me, one seminary withdrew a D.D. that had been unanimously offered, claiming that Jesus' bones, if found, would mean the disproval of Christian beliefs. Other Christians wrote, stating that I was a heretic and that Jesus' bones had to be in heaven.

I do not wish to prove them wrong (how could I). I wanted to be open to reflections that Jesus could have been raised by God and yet his bones could still be in some place on earth. After Jesus' resurrection, according to John, he passed through walls and doors. I doubt that he was doing so with his old bones.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to focus on what is being seen. I am not interested in supporting either the minimalists or the maximalists. I appreciate Dominic Crossan's suggestion that exhorts experts to stop bickering and look at the image.[27] I am convinced we should avoid any claims that the image is related to the *ichthus* anagram which means "Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Savior." That anagram appears much later.

I do not see a strong connection between the recent discoveries in Talpiot II and Talpiot I that was incorrectly (in my judgment) hailed as Jesus' tomb. I am known for concluding that Talpiot I may belong to Jesus' clan or followers. As we seek to discern who is the "Jesus, son of Joseph" that is on two separate ossuaries, we should recall that four men named "Jesus" and three men named "Joseph" served as high priests from about 35 BCE to 64 CE.

Whereas Talpiot I had at least six names etched on ossuaries, Talpiot II has only one ossuary that can be seen with a name: "Mara" in Kokh Two.[28] As we seek to discern the historical and theological importance of all these archaeological discoveries, let us seek to avoid the declarations that have not been fruitful.

Let scholars agree to continue questioning and debating. As we interpret ancient images, none of us can be certain. We come closer to certainty through discussions and open conversations through the usual means of publication. We may part disagreeing. That is fine; and I will never forget Nelson Glueck arguing with Benjamin Mazar beneath the Temple Mount and Kathleen Kenyon blasting Roland de Vaux in the large lecture hall in the Ecole Biblique. But, they disagreed without jeopardizing the deep admiration they reserved for each other.

Finally, we Christians do not need any proof or support for our commitment to God through Jesus Christ, but we should find inviting the enlightening reflections in windows provided by the Talpiot Patio Tomb. Through them, we may see more clearly the world that shaped the lives and beliefs of luminaries like the Righteous Teacher, Hillel, John the Baptizer, Jesus, Peter, Gamaliel, Paul, and Stephen. What are we now learning about Jewish resurrection faith before the burning of the Temple in 70 CE?

Appendix I

Postscript: From Professor Rami Arav on 5.6.12:

Thank you very much for this detailed article. It is brilliant as always.
Now when you point it out, I see the word "Jonah." How did we miss it immediately when we saw it? It is not only clearly "Jonah," but it is exactly where it is supposed to be. It is not on the top of the ossuary, alluding perhaps to the name of the deceased, or even at the bottom as perhaps a caption, but in the mouth of the fish, in both sides of the stick representing Jonah's body. The inscription could not be better.
I find it very similarly to Jewish coins where a name with a title, is surrounded by symbols instead of a portrait or a figure (like Jonathan High Priest and the Head of the Jewish Assembly surrounded by the cornucopias, or the name Tiberius Caesar surrounded by wreath on Tiberias coins minted by Antipas). You are absolutely correct: Hebrew inscriptions on ossuaries are notoriously difficult to interpret. However, I am pleased my initial guess that it is Jonah is confirmed in this inscription.

Appendix II

One can appreciate the main reason there is such heat generated by this debate over tombs that may in some way be related to Jesus or his followers. It reminds me of the problems confronted by the great scholar Eliezar Sukenik. The Israeli journalist, Tom Segev, reminds us in his *One Palestine, Complete,* that Colonel Frederick Kisch "immediately demanded that he (Eliezar Sukenik) deny the story to avoid giving the impression that Zionists were challenging the status of Jesus' traditional burial site."[29] Kisch, one of the few Jews who joined the British Army and a learned and experience man with manners of a *diplomat de carrière*, ran the political department of the Zionist Commission. The "story" was Sukenik's discovery of an ossuary bearing the name "Jesus, son of Joseph." Referring to archaeological discoveries on the property of A. David Kiraz, Sukenik concluded: "All our evidence indicates that we have in this tomb the earliest records of Christianity in existence. It may also have a bearing on the historicity of Jesus and the crucifixion."[30] The luminary and founder of the Ecole Biblique, L. H. Vincent, confirmed that the ossuary did preserve the name "Jesu' son of Yehosef," and that it dated from 150 BCE to 150 CE; but no scientific data connects the name or tomb with "our Savior."[31] A feature on Sukenik's discovery appeared in *Life* (December 22, 1947).[32] How and in what ways Sukenik's research is related to Talpiot I and Talpiot II, and the provenience of the ossuary he announced to the world, is worth exploring.

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[1] Ossuaries are found in Galilee and are locally made, but they date only after 70 CE. L.Y. Rahmani chooses 70 CE as the *terminus ad quem* for ossuaries in Jerusalem; this decision is understandable. But, I am convinced that by 66 most stone masons had wandered off to join the revolt. See Rahmani's helpful chart on the distribution and constitution of ossuaries, *Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: The Israel Antiquities Authority, 1994) p. 22, Table 1. This major reference work is abbreviated *COJO*.

[2] At this stage, none of us can be precise. We must work with an image taken from a distance and a CGI generated image created from a composite of several photographs from different angles and in different lighting. The ossuary is still in the tomb. At least no one can debate the provenience of the ossuary. I am trying to discern the tomb in which Sukenik found the ossuary in the Palestine Archaeological Museum; it bears the name "Jesus, son of Joseph." Here are some corrections to *COJO*: In 222, the Hebrew is backward. In 288, the name is "Liezer" (not "Eli'ezer"). In 428, the name is "Maryah" (not "Kyria") and "Shim'on" is scratched out (as is a name in the so-called ossuary of

Simon of Cyrene). In 430, the reading seems to be "Shalom Hallel." The שלם may be conceivable, but הלל seems clear. Recall the name in Judges 12:13-15: "Abdon son of Hillel." Of course, one immediately thinks of the famous Hillel, the so-called Pharisaic teacher prior to Jesus from Nazareth. In 557, the *beth* should not be restored; it should appear with a supralinear circle. I know no better way to honor Rahmani for his superb catalogue than to suggest ways to improve it. (Note that the object to the right of the incised image is another ossuary.)

[3] The serpent can be seen to have about 30 meanings. See Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent* (The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library; New Haven and London: YUP, 2010).

[4] The ossuary is in the Ecole biblique. See L.Y. Rahmani, *COJO*, p. 32, Fig. 30 (drawing of the *nefesh*).

[5] As far as I know, all are post-70 CE. See R. Hachlili, "Fish," *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1988) p. 330 and Illus. 18 and 19.

[6] N. Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Nashville and New York: Thomas Nelson, 1983) p. 168; see Illus. 185.4 The mouth of the fish is open and horizontal. There is no reason to imagine that the Jonah story has influenced the artist. But, did the image not break the commandment against making graven images?

[7] *COJO*, 140; see p. 113 and Plate 20.

[8] P. Figueras disagrees with Rahmani's interpretation. See Figueras, *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries* (Leiden: Brill, 1983) and his "The Ornamentation of Jewish Ossuaries – Is It Symbolic?" *Archaeologya* 2 (1989) 49-51.

[9] See the image of the fish in Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, Illus. 185.4 (opposite p. 168).

[10] For an image of the inscription see J.D. Tabor and S. Jacobovici, *The Jesus Discovery* (New York, London: Simon & Schuster, 2012) p. 91. The inscription may be in alternating languages: Greek, Hebrew, Greek, and Hebrew, meaning: "Divine Yahweh, lift up, lift up. Jim Joyner informs me that the ASOR Blog has a careful study of the possible readings by Richard Bauckham. Richard and I have been discussing the inscription for months; I appreciate his dedication and intensive studies.

[11] See J.H. Charlesworth, et al., *Resurrection* (New York, London: T & T Clark, 2006) pp. 12-17.

[12] But note Sirach 10:11; Sirach apparently taught that after death a person inherits worms. The Sadducees probably denied any concept of resurrection or positive afterlife (viz., Josephus *War* 2.165; Acts 23:8).

[13] Hebrew letters on ossuaries are notoriously difficult to discern and can be idiosyncratic. For examples, in *COJO* the *aleph* has no left foot, in 483 the *aleph* has two left slanted vertical strokes, and in 803, the *aleph* looks like an inverted *'ayin*. In 559, the *shin* has only two arms. In 571, the "Bar Naḥum" becomes possible if we allow the final *mem* to be two disconnected strokes.

[14] Felix Golubev sent me this clarification: "Attached are the two best images of the 'Yonah' inscription. One image came from the high definition camera and the other from the fiber-optic video probe. None of these images was altered, enhanced, or even colour corrected. The difference in colour is due to how these two cameras process light. In the HD image, you will notice that the subjects on the left and on the right are out of focus. This is because the HD camera has a shallow depth of field and when you zoom in whatever is in front goes out of focus."

[15] For examples, see *COJO*, 8, 16, 107, 222, 414, and 730.

[16] For examples, see *COJO*, 12, 68, 107, 270, and esp. 76 and 571.

[17] Notice the odd *nun* in COJO 465 (p. 181); it has a long horizontal base that extends way past the next consonant, supplying "Kynoros." "Aninas" in no. 475 is really "Aniinias."

[18] See the example in A.Yardeni, *The Book of Hebrew Script* (Jerusalem: Carta, 1997) pp. 178-79.

[19] I am also impressed that this *waw* looks like the *zain* on ossuaries 74, 75, 82, and 88.

[20] See Yardeni, *The Book of Hebrew Script*, pp. 178-79.

[21] On the name "Jonah," see Rahmani, *ICOJO*, p. 134. It is rare.

[22] My reading was announced in the *Globe and Mail* on April 11, 2012. Graffiti on ossuaries are often just scratches; some cannot be deciphered (Rahmani, *COJO*, 83, 89, 130). Some inscriptions are curved as in Ossuary Six (*COJO*, 83). Some graffiti are extremely sloppy (e.g., *COJO*, 191, 582, 610, 651, 682, 694, 718, 773). As I have said before, in 704 (the famous ossuary from East Talpiot), the name "Yeshua, son of Yehosef" is an educated guess. Debates are focused on the meaning of some inscriptions (e.g., see *COJO*, 15 and the suggestions of Mayer, Sukenik, Rahmani, Savignac, and Klein). Do the markings on Ossuary 33 in *COJO* have meanings?

[23] *COJO*, pp. 195-96; see the drawing on p. 195 [B]. See Plate 79 with the image in 555:B (detail). The figure does look as Rahmani states. I can discern lines that look like "stick-legs and feet." In the photograph (but not the modern drawing), the garment does look like it is pulled around the shoulders. What looks like an "eye" is only a pockmark in the stone.

[24] Lit. "and."

[25] Or, "large fish."

[26] Joseph Ratzinger [=Pope Benedict XVI], *Jesus of Nazareth: Part Two* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011) p. 257.
[27] If it becomes relatively certain that the image was made by a follower of Jesus in Jerusalem, then we should expect him to be very circumspect and careful not to reveal his beliefs. Thus, he might have intentionally drawn an image that would be ambiguous. After all, John the Baptizer, Jesus, and perhaps Stephen had been martyred. Was Stephen stoned and buried within the present confines of the Ecole Biblique?
[28] The 1981 black-and-white photograph indicates a name on Ossuary Four. Amos Kloner reported seeing two Greek names on an ossuary.
[29] T. Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (London: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000) p. 302.
[30] Sukenik, *The Earliest Records of Christianity: With a New Introduction by George A. Kiraz* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008 [originally published in 1947]) p. 30.
[31] L.H. Vincent, "Épitaphe prétendue de N.-S. Jésus-Christ," Rendiconti della Pont. Accad. Rom. Di Archeol 7 (1931) 215-39; see p. 238.
[32] Note the issue appeared just before Christmas. See "A Tomb on the Road to Bethlehem," *Life* (December 22, 1947) 75ff. [I have copies of the article but cannot discern page numbers.]