Observations on the "Jonah" Iconography on the Ossuary of Talpiot B Tomb

In 2002 an authentic first century Jewish ossuary purchased anonymously from the black market was identified as the ossuary of James, the brother of Jesus. It bears the inscription "James son of Joseph brother of Jesus" in Aramaic: scholars have debated over its authenticity[1]. However, I find it a secondary question. The problem is the provenance of presumed biblical relics. J.L. Reed and J.P. Crossan correctly note about it:

> We now have the James ossuary without context, provenance, or history. It is almost a poster warning about the destructive effects of paralegal artifacts collecting, about the potential criminal sanctions for selling and buying on illegal antiquities market, and about the moral difference between scientific archaeology and cultural looting.[2]

Unprovenanced artifacts, such as many presumed Jesus' relics still displayed in churches as if they were authentic, have troubled scholars and are still at the centre of debates: the Shroud of Turin, the *Sudarium* of Oviedo, a large portion of the True Cross, or the *Titulus Crucis* are just some examples.[3]

The discovery of the Talpiot A tomb, in Jerusalem, back in 1980[4], was brought to the attention of the media again in 2007: a Discovery Channel documentary[5], and a best-seller book[6] claimed the Talpiot tomb was that of the family of Jesus. Some scholarly issues regarding the identification of the burial site with the Jesus family tomb have been debated on *Near Eastern Archaeology*[7] and largely on Bible & Interpretation.

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[1] J. Magness, "Ossuaries and the Burials of James and Jesus", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 1, (2005) and a number of different essays published at http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/James_Ossuary_essays.shtml. On the trial see M. Kalman, "Antiquities Collector Acquitted of Forgery Charges in 'James Ossuary' Case", *The Globe and Mail* (March 14, 2012) at http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/antiquities-collector-acquitted-of-forgery-charges-in-james-ossuary-case/article2368752/; a Press Release by the Israel Antiquities Authority on the verdict can be read at http://www.antiquities.org.il/about_eng.asp?Modul_id=14; some comments by scholars on the verdict were collected by M. Kalman, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 14, 2012) at http://chronicle.com/article/Jerusalem-Court-Acquits/131164.

[2] *Excavating Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), p. XVI.

[3] A. Lombatti, *Il culto delle reliquie. Storia, leggende e devozione* (Milan: Sugarco, 2007).

[4] Y. Gath, *Hadashot Arkheologiyot* 76 (1981): 24-26; Y. Gath, A. Kloner, "Burial Caves in East Talpiyot", *'Atiqot* 8 (1982): 74-76; A. Kloner, "A Tomb with Inscribed Ossuaries in East Talpiyot" *'Atiqot* 29 (1996): 15-22. I will refer to this tomb as Tomb A and to the next one from Talpiot as Tomb B.

[5] Available also on DVD: J. Cameron, *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* (Discovery Channel, 2007).

[6] S. Jacobovici, C.R. Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

[7] Articles by E.M. Meyers, J.D. Tabor, S. Gibson, , S. Scham, C.A. Rollston, S.J. Pfann: vol. 69, 3/4 (2006).

The latest discovery concerns another burial site not far from the Talpiot A tomb of 2006. The details of the interpretation of the ossuaries, of their inscriptions and iconography have been published in a paper by J.D. Tabor[8], in a book[9], and in a forthcoming documentary on the Discovery Channel.

In this paper, I would like to advance some observations on the so called "Jonah ossuary" iconography, a bone box which the above mentioned authors believe to depict an image of the biblical Jonah being spat by a great fish[10]. This symbolism represents, in their opinion, an allegorical reference to the resurrection of Jesus (Mt. 12:40). What's the meaning of a fish or a fish-like image on a Jewish ossuary?[11] Is it true that apart from the examples quoted in Tabor's paper, no other such images are to be found on Jewish ossuaries? Finally, does that iconography really represent a fish? Let's start by answering to the second question.

"Other than that possible example there simply are no others", Tabor writes[12]. He refers to two other fish images on ossuaries[13]: they were first published by P. Figueras[14] and then about ten years later by L.Y. Rahmani[15].

I have found at least ten more examples of fish or fish-like pictures on ossuaries and sarcophagi. Their interpretations as fish graffiti are the most probable solution, even if in some cases, as for the name ישוע carved inside a circle[16], it is difficult to interpret. Tabor writes: "He [Figueras] was convinced that he had discovered the first archaeological evidence that could be tied to Jewish followers of

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[8] J.D. Tabor, *A Preliminary Report of an Exploration of a Sealed 1st Century Tomb in East Talpiot, Jerusalem (New Version)*, http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/tab368028.shtml.

[9] J.D. Tabor, S. Jacobovici, *The Jesus Discovery* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

[10] Against Tabor and Jacobovici's latest theories have expressed their disagreements on the ASOR blog (http://asorblog.org) E.M. Meyers, R.R. Cargill, C.A. Rollston, R. Bauckham, M. Goodacre, J.F. McGrath, J.E. Taylor, S. Fine, R. Jensen, J. Magness, J.V. Fernández de la Gala. Further critiques can be found at http://robertcargill.com, at http://tomverenna.wordpress.com, and at http://ntweblog.blogspot.com. At the moment, I am not aware of any paper by a scholar who supports the interpretation of the Talpiot B site as a tomb of Jesus' followers.

[11] I will not deal here with the burial customs of the Jews during the Second Temple period, nor with the reasons for *ossilegium* or with the appearance/disappearance of ossuaries in the Roman Palestine. On this, see R. Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2005) and L.Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs", *Biblical Archaeologists* 44 (1981): 171-177, 229-235; and *Biblical Archaeologist* 45 (1982): 43-53, 109-119.

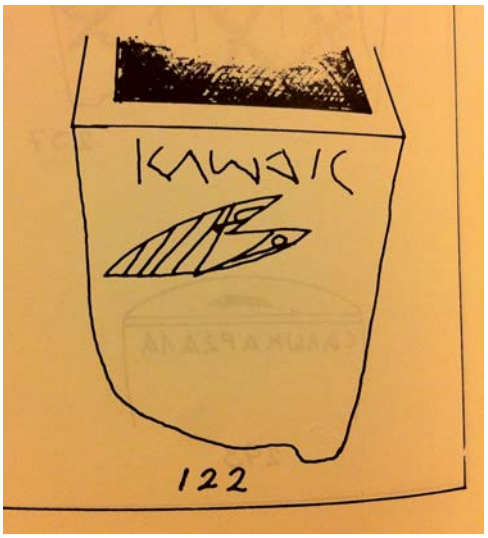
[12] See p. 24.

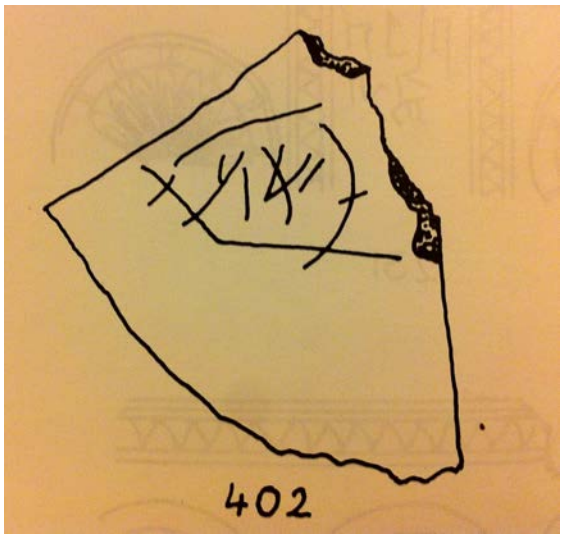
[13] In his paper, figures 26 and 27.

[14] P. Figueras, *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), ossuaries 402 and 112, Plate 6. Other interesting articles are P. Figueras, "New Greek Inscriptions from the Negev", *Liber Annus* 46 (1996): 39-49; *A Byzantine Cemetery Church* (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion Univ. of the Negev Press, 2004); "Grafitos en osarios judíos", *Boletín de la Asociación Española de Orientalistas* 23 (1987): 119-134; "The Inscriptions", D. Urman (ed.) *Nessana: Excavations and Studies* (Beer Sheva : Ben-Gurion Univ. of the Negev Press, 2004).

[15] L.Y. Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collection of the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority - The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), p. 113, pp. 156-157.

[16] See Tabor, fig. 27.

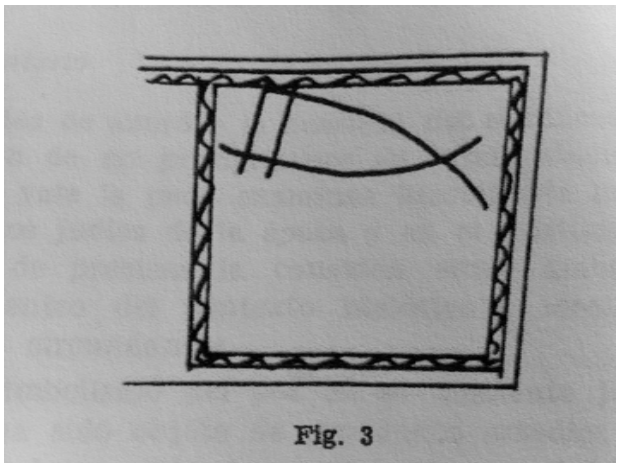




The drawings made by P. Figueras of the two ossuaries showing fish or fish-like iconography mentioned in J.D. Tabor's article.

Jesus".[17] This is not correct. Figueras commented on the iconography thusly: "[it] has no direct relation with the later Christian IXΘYC and it is proved by the fact that the Hebrew characters of the inscription certainly belongs to the first century CE".[18] Moreover, he criticized the Franciscan scholars B. Bagatti[19] and E. Testa[20] for interpreting typical Gospel names and some crosses on the ossuaries unearthed at the Dominus Flevit as evidence of Judeo-Christian followers of Jesus.[21]

The best method, in my opinion, to understand what the "Jonah fish" might be, is to compare the carving to contemporary similar iconography found on ossuaries. The first one is on an ossuary that is in the 'Abd en-Nur Private Collection, in Jerusalem[22]. In the frontal part of it, on the right, a fish graffito is clearly visible. It is in a slightly ascending position. While the tail is well carved on the stone, the head was not finished or probably had been covered by the artisan while drawing the frame motif.


Fig. 3

Another image is on a Jewish ossuary, which is now kept in the Armenian Patriachate in Jerusalem. This is

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[17] *Preliminary*, p. 24.

[18] *Decorated*, p. 21.

[19] B. Bagatti, "La scoperta di un cimitero giudeo-cristiano al "Dominus Flevit", *Liber Annus* 3 (1952-53): 148-184. See also B. Bagatti, J.T. Milik, *Gli scavi del "Dominus Flevit". Parte I. La Necropoli del periodo romano* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press 1958).

[20] E. Testa, *Il simbolismo del giudei cristiani* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1962).

[21] Figueras, *Decorated*, pp. 82-83 and P. Figueras, "Jewish Ossuaries and Secondary Burial: Their Significance in Early Christianity", *Immanuel* 19 (1984-85): 41-57.

[22] Drawings are taken from Figueras, *Decorated*, if it is not stated otherwise.

probably the best fish graffito we have among those found on Jewish ossuaries and in Second Temple burial sites, since its form is carved clearly. It's on the side of the ossuary and it is placed upside down. Therefore, despite what I wrote[23], there is a fish image on Jewish ossuaries to be placed in a vertical position (even if the head is on the upper part and not downwards). No eyes or mouth are visible in the head, which has been separated from the rest of body by an horizontal line. A tail at the bottom is clearly distinguishable.

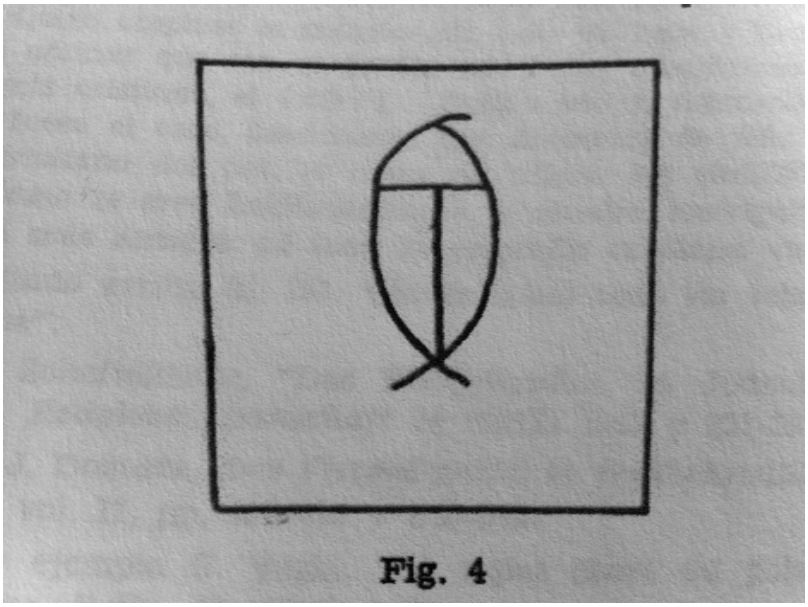
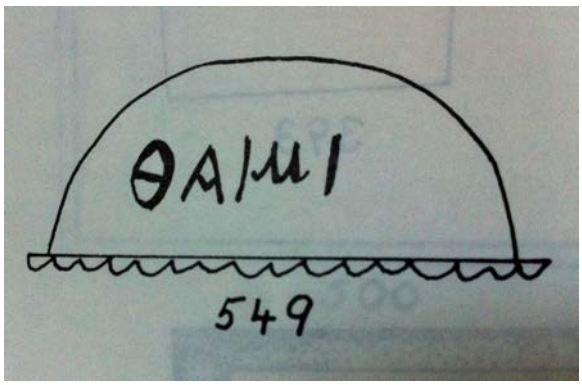


Fig. 4

The next one is kept in the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Jerusalem. It shows a name in Greek, ΘAIMI, at the center of a semicircle closed by a dentelled base. A possible Hebrew equivalent to that name was found at Palmyra.[24] According to Figueras, the closing horizontal line might be toothed base drawn to give the impression of a name coming out from the mouth of a big fish. In my opinion, it could also represent an architectonic motif or the celestial vault, a symbol of the house of the divinity. The name inside it, however, is the main part of the iconography. It may recall a sort of *apotheosis* of the dead. Jews of the period, in fact, believed in the resurrection of the

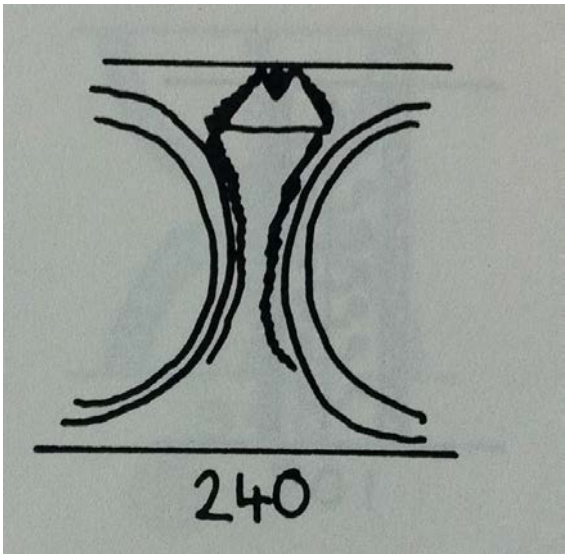


[23] http://www.antoniolombatti.it/B/Blog02-11/Voci/2012/3/1_Never_seen_a_fish_depicted_upside-down.html.

[24] H. Ingholt, "Five dated Tombs from Palmyra", *Berytus* 2 (1935): 59: תימי. See also A. Negev, *The Greek Inscriptions from the Negev* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1981): 48, 52 and 65.

body.[25] It could symbolize the eternal dwelling of the Bible.[26] The ossuaries themselves are shaped in house-like buildings.[27] But on this interpretation, I will comment further in the explanation of the fish or fish-like symbolism.

The next ossuary shows on the central part in the front side a vertical fish-like form between the two rosettes. Attention should indeed be given to the descending wavy lines ending intentionally at a certain point, as well as to the mouth-like form at the middle of the triangular upper end, and to the horizontal line dividing the triangle form from the rest, which could hint at the head. The outer zigzag line may represent the fish scales. I am inclined to share Figueras's interpretation of the ornamentation.[28]



Two more fish carvings were found on two ossuaries of the Dominus Flevit necropolis. They had been identified by E. Testa in 1961:[29] The fish is placed in a horizontal position. Testa was convinced that the artisan carved a fish not too symmetrically with the rest of the motifs and so carved it twice, giving the impression of two fish images (on the left), one inside the other. On the other graffito (on the right), a clear pisciform shape with a long tail is observable.

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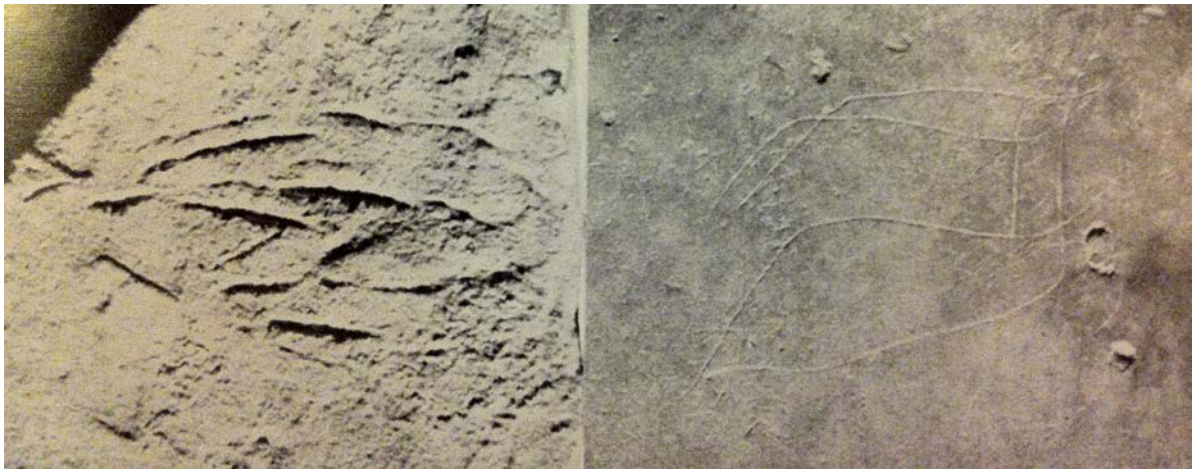
[25] Lk 16:22; 23:43; Jerus. Tal., *Mo'et Qatan* 1,5 and 80c. L.Y. Rahmani writes: "The concept of *ossilegium* was apparently propagated by the Hassidim in the second century BCE. These concepts are explicitly mentioned in late Biblical literature (Dan. 12:2) and exemplified in passages such as II Macc. 7 and 14:46. In II Macc. 12:38-45, a sinnless state is indicated as a prerequisite for such resurrection. The belief was adopted by the Pharisees (Josephus AJ 18:14; BJ 2:163; CA 2:218). [...] even the Sadducees submitted to the formulas of the Pharisees (Josephus AJ 18:17). The Pharisaic belief in individual physical resurrection was thus generally accepted (see M. Sanh. 10:1)", pp. 53-54.

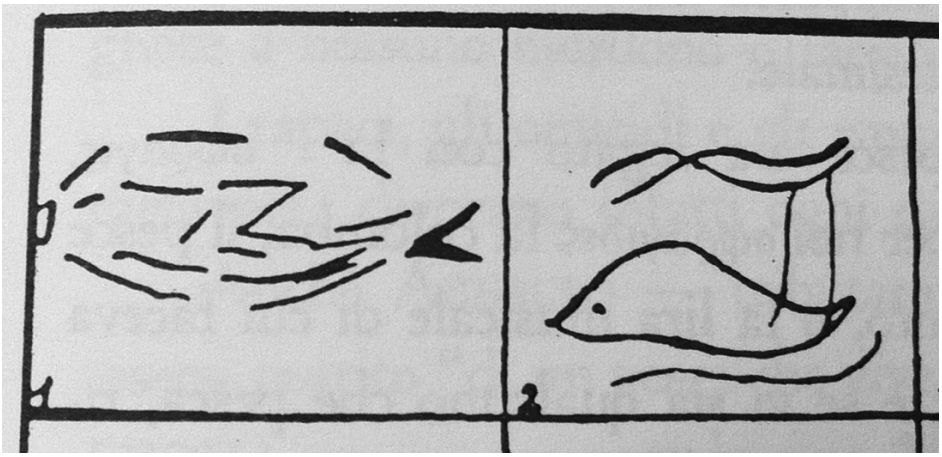
[26] Ecc. 12:5; Job. 30:23; see also Is. 22:16.

[27] This symbolism is much more older: J. Perrot, "Une tombe à ossuaire del IVe millénaire à Azor", *'Atiqot* 3 (1961): 1-83.

[28] *Decorated*, p. 77.

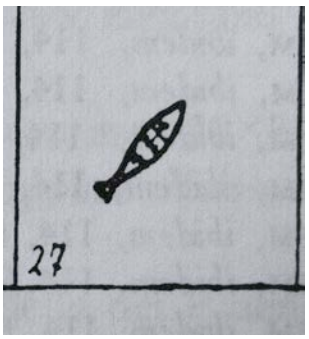
[29] Testa, *Il simbolismo*, Tav. 43.





Fish graffiti on ossuaries of the Dominus Flevit (Testa, *Il Simbolismo*, Tav. 43), *drawing 1 is reversed.*

Another fish graffito on a stone fragment identified by Testa was found at Khirbet Kalkis.[30] It's not clear if it belonged to a burial artifact or to an item of another type. It shows a fish placed in an oblique position: the head and an eye are clearly visible, so as the scales and a tail (on the right). One more fish graffito was found on a sarcophagus fragment unearthed at Beth Shearim, and among other subjects, a fish is clearly visible on the right end of the stone.

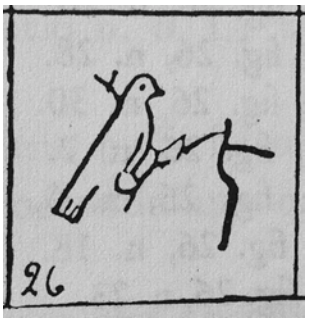




[30] Testa, *Il simbolismo*, p. 137.

In his article, Tabor writes: “Jews did not put images of animals on their ossuaries—perhaps in deference to the commandment against making ‘graven images’ (Dt. 5:8)”.[31] However, we have seen different examples of fish graffiti on Jewish ossuaries. Moreover, on them archaeologists have identified a human figure[32], a dagger[33], some stars[34], Torah shrines[35], a bird,[36] palm trees and plants[37], altars[38], an oil lamp[39], the sun and the moon[40], vine[41], fruits painted in red and yellow[42]: Rahmani calls them “pagan motifs” maybe derogatorily. However, this iconography was found inside Jewish tombs. There is even a “Tomb of the Birds” found on the Mount of the Olives, in Jerusalem, where some peacocks are recognizable[43].





A bird carved on an ossuary at the Dominus Flevit

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[31] *Preliminary*, p. 24.

[32] Rahmani, *A Catalogue*, n. 555. Serval human figurines, made of clay, lead, mud or wax, had been uncovered inside coffins, sarcophagi and in burial chambers: in Ketef Hinnom, Tel Anafa, Marissa, Jericho. According to Avi-Yonah, many of the graffiti and artefacts found inside Second Temple tombs had symbolic meanings recalling immortality and resurrection (M. Avi-Yonah, “Three Lead Coffins from Palestine”, *Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 50 [1930]: 310).

[33] Figueras, *Decorated*, n. 7.

[34] Figueras, *Decorated*, n. 367.

[35] Figueras, *Decorated*, n. 139.

[36] Testa, *Il simbolismo*, Tavola 42.

[37] It was a very popular motif, see Rahmani, *A catalogue*, pp. 290-291.

[38] Figueras, *Decorated*, n. 8 and 138.

[39] Figueras, *Decorated*, n. 27.

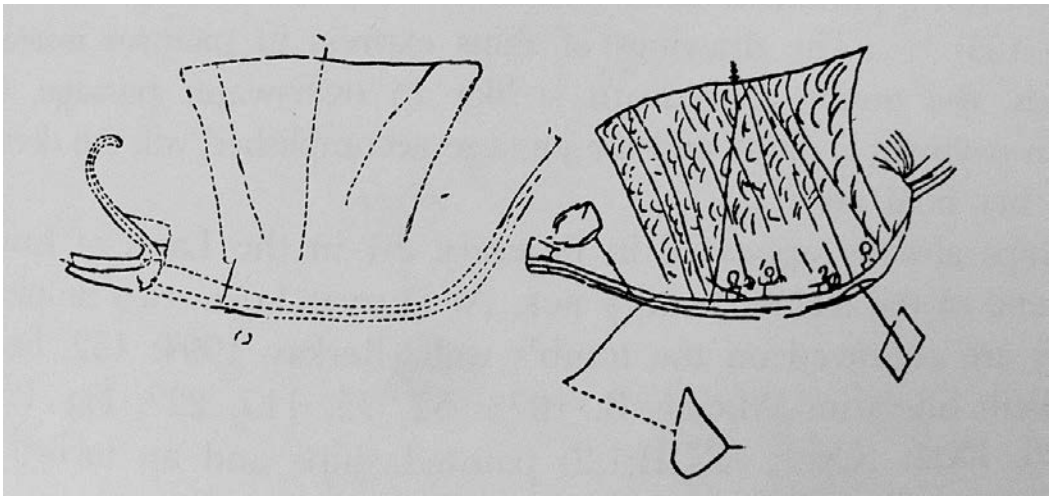
[40] Rahmani, *A catalogue*, n. 251.

[41] Rahmani, *A catalogue*, n. 600.

[42] Rahmani, *A catalogue*, p. 127.

[43] A. Kloner, “A Painted Tomb of the Mount of the Olives”, *Qadmoniot* 29 (1975): 29, plates B-C.

It is well known, in fact, that Jews of the time were influenced by Hellenistic and Roman burial customs.[44] In one ossuary the bones of men and women had been buried together even if it was strictly prohibited.[45]



The graffiti of the ships found inside Jason's tomb.

Despite this evidence, Rahmani refutes[46] a symbolic interpretation of such images; I am convinced, on the contrary, that it is very likely that some Jews gave them a metaphorical meaning. Birds on ossuaries and in burial walls may recall the belief in afterlife: "Whilst the soul can say: the body has sinned, that from the day I departed from it, I fly about in the air like a bird" (BT *Sanhedrin* 91a). In another tomb a stag is carved on the burial wall.[47] It is also true, that even if animals such as birds and fishes were found on Jewish ossuaries and in tombs, they remain a minority of the about 1500 ossuaries that I am aware of.

Another example of a funerary graffito comes from the famous Jason's Tomb[48]. In this tomb on a wall, some ships have been carefully carved. Death was viewed as a journey on a ship or ferry across a river that separated the world of the living and the world of the dead.

By the time of the Maccabeans, death had come to be understood as an extended process of a journey leading to a new world: "The drawings of ships express in pictures instead of words the notion that death is like an over-water passage. Only when payment is made and the passage accomplished will the

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[44] R. Hachlili, A. Killebrew, "Was the Coin-On-The-Eye Custom a Jewish Burial Practice in the Second Temple Period?", *Biblical Archaeologist* 46 (1983): 147-153. R. Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary*, p. 441, pp. 514-515.

[45] N. Haas, "Anthropological Observations on the Skeleton Remains from Giv'at ha-Mivtar", *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970): 31.

[46] Rahmani, *A catalogue*, p. 27.

[47] L.Y. Rahmani, "Jason's Tomb", *Israel Exploration Journal* 17 (1967): 61-100, fig. 6; É. Puech, "Inscriptions funéraires Palestiniennes: Tombeau de Jason et ossuaries", *Revue Biblique* 90 (1983): 481-583.

[48] Rahmani, "Jason's Tomb", figs. 5a and 5b.

deceased find his/her final rest".[49] Symbols were part of the Second Temple burial iconography as it has been for all ancient cultures around the planet, despite religious prohibitions. Jews even wrote magic formulas in several tombs and inside/on ossuary lids[50]. In the light of these examples, so what can a fish represent?

Let me first briefly explain the meaning of the symbology of the fish among the Jews of the time, in early Christianity, and to set it in its proper historical and ideological context[51]. I. Scheftelowitz[52], F.J. Dölger[53] e C. Vogel[54] have widely dealt with the subject: the former considered it to be a Christian symbol but rooted in ancient Judaism, while the other two scholars supported the idea that it had been an iconography exclusively invented by the early Christians. Before the fish became the symbol of Jesus, it had actually been a Jewish symbol.

The earliest written sources on the fish as a Christian symbol date back to an inscription composed by Abercius of Hierapolis[55]. There is also a text by Tertullian (*De Bapt*. XX) and one by Clement of Alexandria (*Paedag*. III, XI). Tertullian says Jesus is like big fish and the Christians are his little fishes[56], and Clement suggests that Christians identify themselves with a seal depicting a fish or dove.[57] Historians saw a transposition of the messianic symbol of the fish from Judaism to Christianity. In fact, the "pure meal" of the *paraskevi*, in which fish was served, was adopted by Christians with eucharistic symbolism. At least, this is what Abercius's inscription seems to suggest.

The fish has a very old symbolic tradition among different peoples of the Ancient Near East: Egyptians, Phoenician, Philistines, and later Nabateans; some of

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[49] D. Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death in Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Routledge, 2002): pp. 17-18, pp. 102-103,

[50] R. Hachlili, "Did the Alphabet Have a Magical Meaning in the First CE?", *Cathedra* 31 (1984): 27-30; A. Kloner, "Abecedary Incriptions in Jewish Tombs in the Light of Finds at H. Eitun", *Proceeding of the Ninth World Congress for Jewish Studies*, edited by M. Goshen-Gottstein; assisted by D. Assaf (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies-Hebrew University-Magnes Press, 1986), DIV. A, pp. 125-132; B.A. De Vaate, "Alphabet-Inscriptions from Jewish Graves", *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy*, edited by J.W. van Henten, P.W. van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 148-161.

[51] E.R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953-1968), especially volumes III, V and VI: some unreferenced photos are taken from his work. My hypothesis is mainly based on the theories advanced in these works on the subject: F.J. Dölger, *Ichthys* (4 vols., Münster: Aschendorff, 1922-1943); J Quasten, "Fish, Symbolism", *New Catholic Encyclopedia* V (1967): 943 f.; J. Engelmann, "Fisch", *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* VII (1969): 1085-1095; A.C. Moore, *Iconography of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

[52] I. Scheftelowitz, "Das Fisch-Symbol im Judentum und Christentum", *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 14 (1911): 1-53 and 321-392.

[53] F.J. Dölger, *Das Fisch-Symbol in frühchristlicher Zeit* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1957).

[54] C. Vogel, "Le repas sacré au poisson chez les chrétiens", *Revue de Sciences Religieuses* 40 (1966): 1-26.

[55] http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/abercius.html.

[56] http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian21.html.

[57] http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-instructor-book3.html.

them attributed to it a notion of immortality, strength and even sexual power.[58] It seems that even Jews in Egypt were aware of this power.[59]

The fish is to be found in many Christian, Roman and Jewish tombs of the period. Different fishes and a dolphin were found on lead coffins,[60] others were identified on lamps.[61] Lamps with fish shapes, dating around the second half of the fourth century were unearthed in Palestine, and on them also a cross and the name IXΘYΣ were visible.[62]

There are more examples of the fish iconography in Jewish burials. In the Marissa tomb, near Beit Guvrin, two fish decorate a burial chamber.[63] In the necropolis of Beth Shearim, a sarcophagus fragment was unearthed which shows a fish between two ornamental motifs, and fish were identified also on another coffin and on a wall.[64] Inside a Jewish tomb at Gezer it was found a pisciform amulet. In Rome, the ritual banquet with fish is represented in Christian catacombs, but it was also found on a Jewish glass medaillon, and on a Jewish sepulchral tombstone in Monteverde.[65]

Considering the recurrence of the fish iconography in Jewish tombs and burial artifacts, it can be stated that it had a symbolic meaning for the Jews of the period, and was adopted by the Christians. In the Hellenistic and Roman times, there was a certain tendency to relate fish or fish-like images to immortality. It might have been an eschatological fish, so what was its purpose on ossuaries and in tombs?

The flesh of the Leviathan was intended to feed the righteous in the final banquet. Therefore, the fish represented a graphic expression of the desired immortality for the deceased. This iconography was not an invocation, as in later Christian imagery, but an evocation of a future happy life, immortality, and the coming resurrection, which was described in the Jewish literature of the period.[66] That said, I have little doubt that the name ישוע inside that fish-like graffito recalls the hope for the saving of the deceased soul.

Johannan Ben Zakkai, in the second half of the first century, affirms:

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[58] Dolger, vol. 2, pp. 175-211; R. Eisler, “Der Fisch als Sexualsymbol”, *Imago* 3 (1914): 165-196.

[59] R. Patai, “Fish Charms in Jewish Birth Customs”, *Jewish Heritage online Magazine* at http://jhom.com/topics/fish/charms.html and other essays at http://jhom.com/topics/fish/index.html.

[60] M. Avi-Yonah, “Three Lead Coffins from Palestine”, *Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 50 (1930): 300-312.

[61] M. Schaar, “Five Lamps with Fish Reliefs from Israel and Other Mediterranean Countries”, *Israel Exploration Journal* 1 (1950-51): 84-95.

[62] B. Bagatti, *Il Museo della Flagellazione in Gerusalemme* (Jerusalem: Tipografia PP Francescani, 1939), p. 99.

[63] J.P. Peters, H. Thiersch, *Painted Tombs in the Necropolis of Marissa* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1905).

[64] N. Avigad, “Excavations at Beth Shearim”, *Israel Exploration Journal* 9 (1959): 205-220.

[65] J. Dello Russo, “The Monteverde Jewish Catacombs”, *Roma Subterranea Judaica* 4 (2010): 1-37.

[66] Figueras, *Decorated*, pp. 78-66.

> Rabbah said in the name of R. Johanan: The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come make a banquet for the righteous from the flesh of Leviathan; for it is said: Companions will make a banquet of it. [...] Rabbah in the name of R. Johanan further stated: The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come make a tabernacle for the righteous from the skin of Leviathan; for it is said: Canst thou fill tabernacles with his skin. If a man is worthy, a tabernacle is made for him.[67]

This is also why I am convinced that the author, who carved the names ישוע and ΘAIMI inside those apparently meaningless circles, wanted to represent their hopes in a concrete form, where both deceased were metaphorically placed inside the tabernacle of the salvation represented by a fish.

I am not going to compare the ossuary motif to contemporary pottery vessels, even if among the grave goods found in tombs and burial chambers of the Second Temple are indeed *unguentaria*, *lacrimaria*, or *balsamaria*,[68] and most resemble our "Jonah" iconography, and also a glass *amphoriskos* found in the Jericho necropolis. In fact, I have focused this paper on similar fish-like iconography on ossuaries and in tombs to be compared with our "Jonah" carving.[69] Therefore, also pottery vessels have to be related to the Talpiot B ossuary only in their pictorial forms.

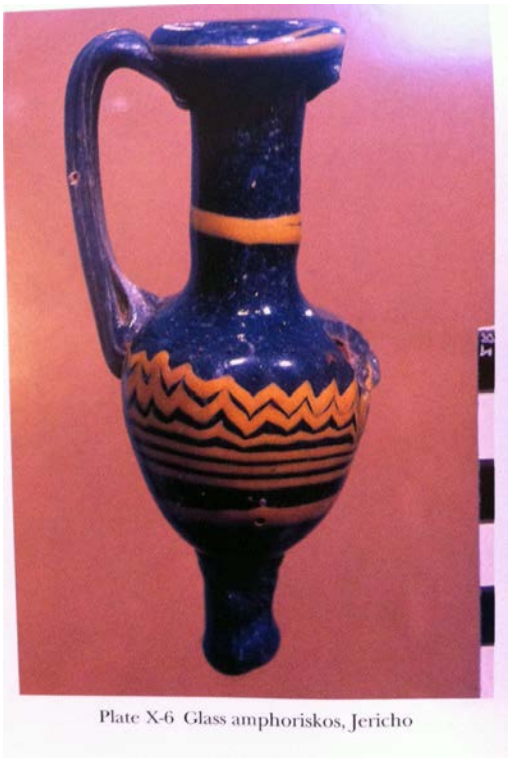
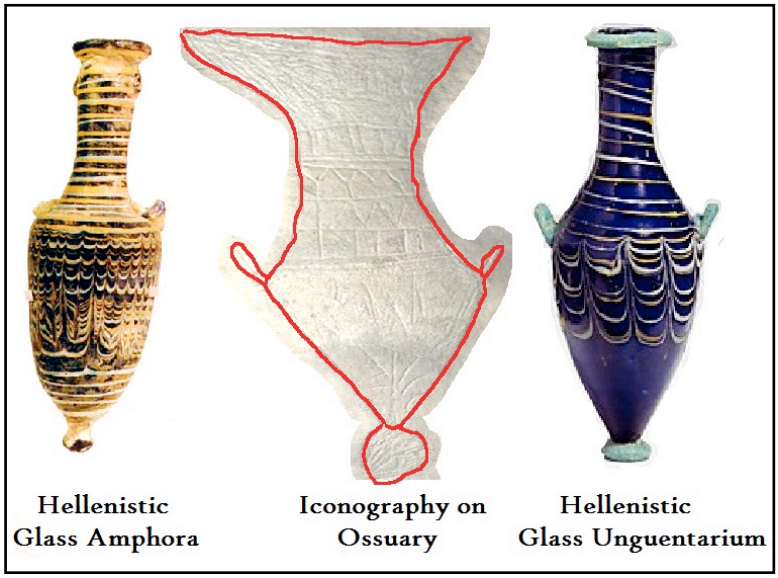


Plate X-6 Glass amphoriskos, Jericho



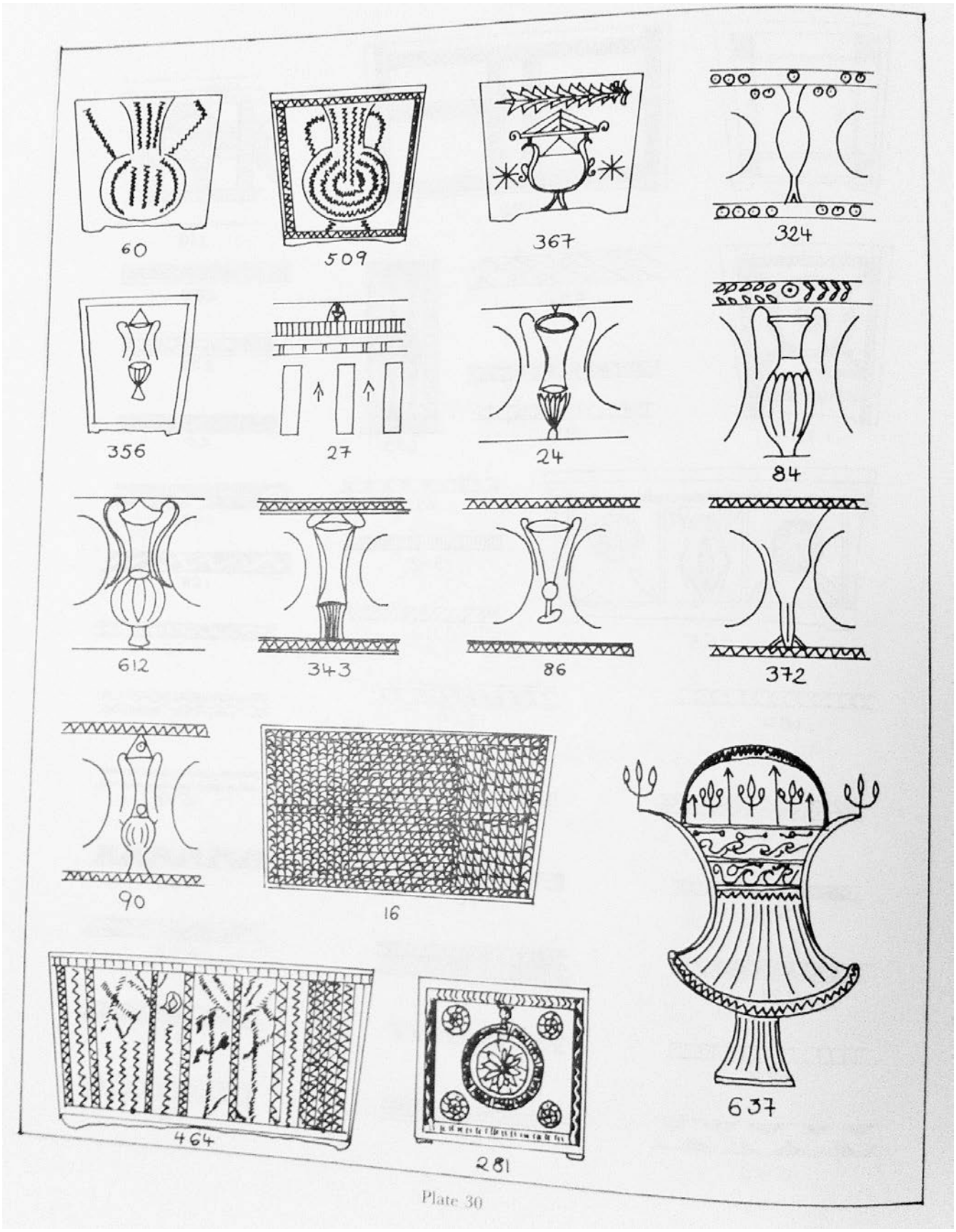
(Above) Images compared by Tom Verenna at http://tomverenna.wordpress.com/2012/03/04/some-considerations-about-the-iconography-on-the-ossuary/

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[67] *Baba Batra* 75a, http://www.come-and-hear.com/bababathra/bababathra_75.html.

[68] For a possible use of *unguentaria* and their symbolism in Second Temple tombs see Hachlili, *Jewish*, pp. 383-385.

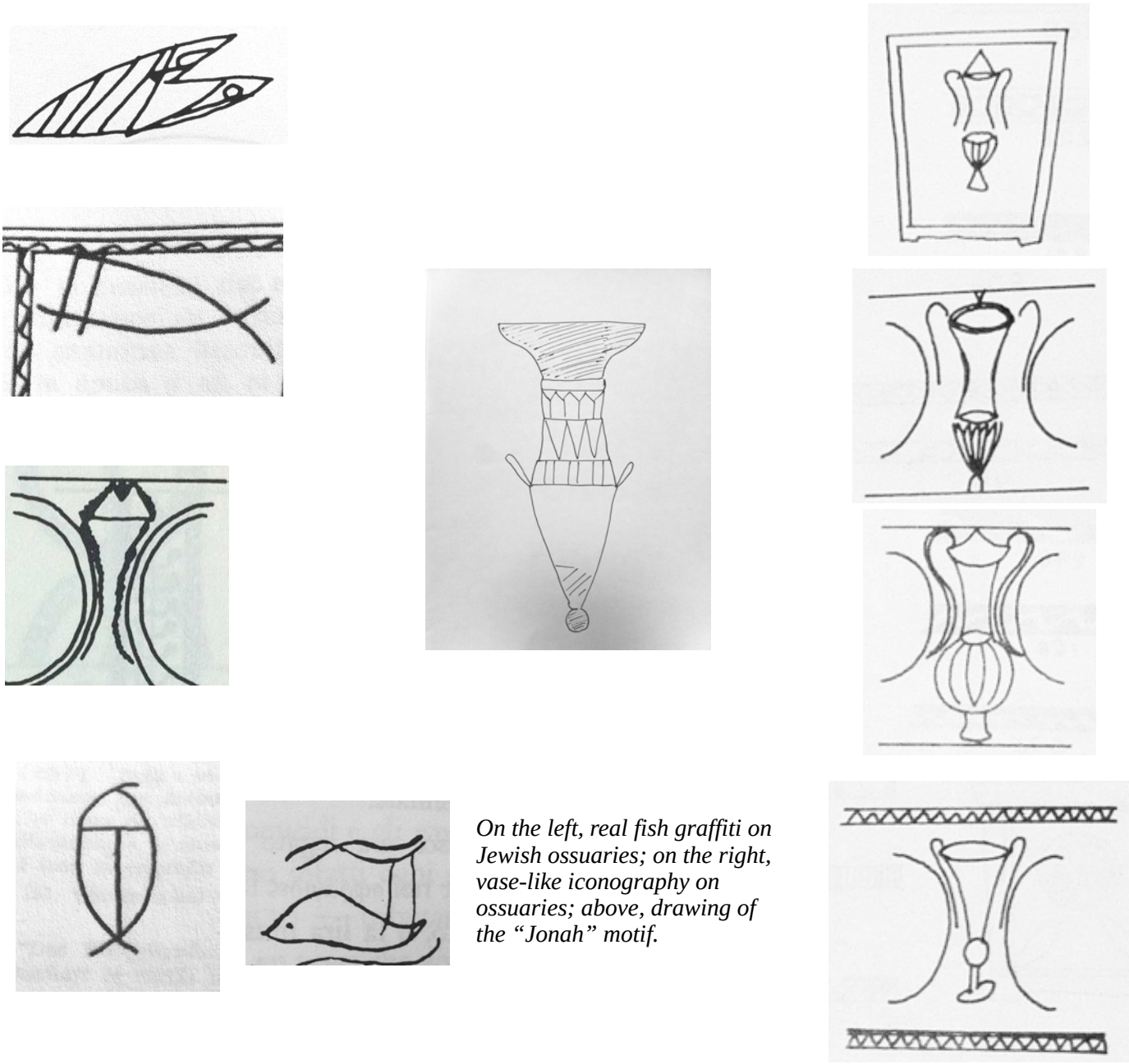
[69] A. Kloner, "Amphorae with Decorative Motifs on Ossuaries. Sources and Influences", *New Studies in Jerusalem*, edited by E. Baruch (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1998): 48-54.



Vase-like graffiti on Jewish ossuaries

Vase-like graffiti are ornamental motifs not very common on ossuaries, but they appear on most of their different types. I have been able to find about 20 vase-like images on ossuaries. There was not a simple pottery flask used in the Roman Palestine until 70 CE to provide a suitable pattern.[70] Artisans carved images that resembled amphorae, Greek craters, elongated bowls, *kantharos*, or the Attic *pelike*.[71]

If we compare the "Jonah" motif to contemporary vase-like graffiti we notice an undoubted similarity. Real first century fish drawings on ossuaries and in tombs, on the other hand, look much simpler in their forms.[72]



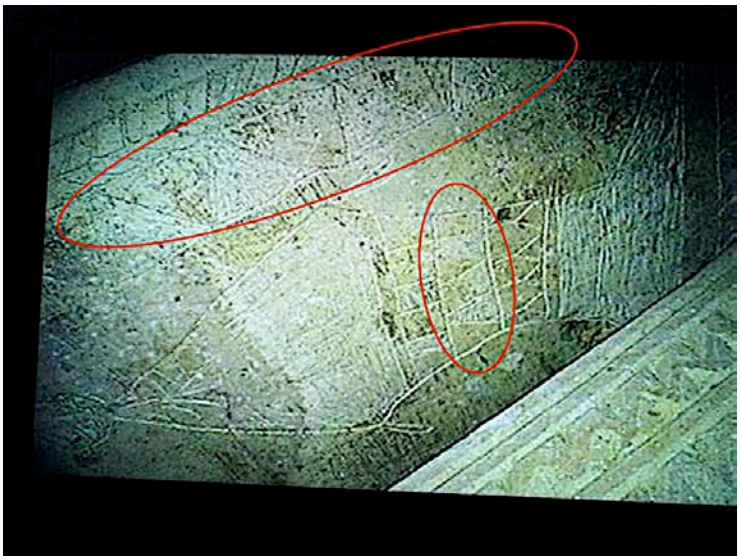
On the left, real fish graffiti on Jewish ossuaries; on the right, vase-like iconography on ossuaries; above, drawing of the "Jonah" motif.

[70] P.W. Lapp, *Palestinian Ceramic Chronology 200 BC - 70 AD*, (New Haven: ASOR, 1961) and P. Kahane, "Pottery types from the Jewish Ossuaries and Tombs around Jerusalem", *Israel Exploration Journal* 2 (1952): 125-182 and *Israel Exploration Journal* 3 (1953): 48-54.

[71] Figueras, *Decorated*, pp. 72-73.

[72] We must also bear in mind that ossuary ornamentation was made by artisans and craftsmen, and not by professional artists, A. Matz, "Die jüdische Standreherei in herodianischer Zeit", *Technik und Geschichte* 45 (1978): 297-320.

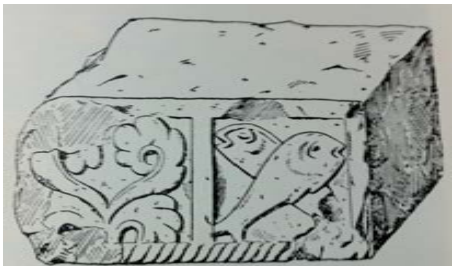
Moreover, if we observe at the presumed “fish scales” on the Talpiot ossuary, as it was observed by M. Goodacre[73], they look like the decorative motif of the external frame.

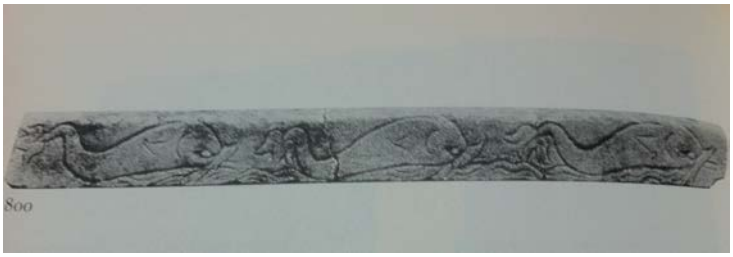




As for the uniqueness of the “Jonah” picture, I have to underline that if we take a closer look at the vase iconography on ossuaries, we could say that each graffito is unique: each one with its distinctive lines and style.

Before drawing my conclusions, let us consider some more examples of Jewish fish graffiti on stones from the Roman period: some fishes were carved on a lamp inside a vase picture found at Gezer, another fish is visible on a stone slab, two fishes were engraved in the synagogue of er-Rafid, and three more fish are on sarcophagus.





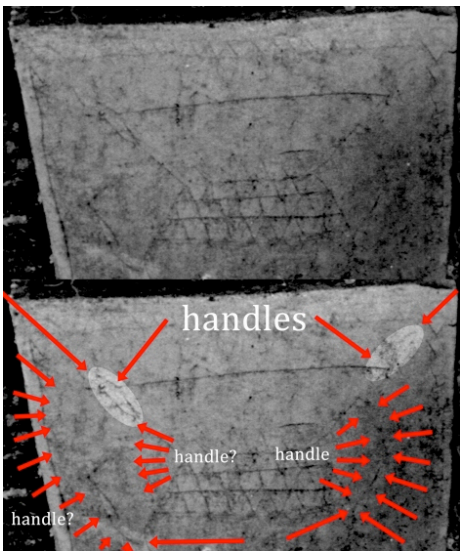


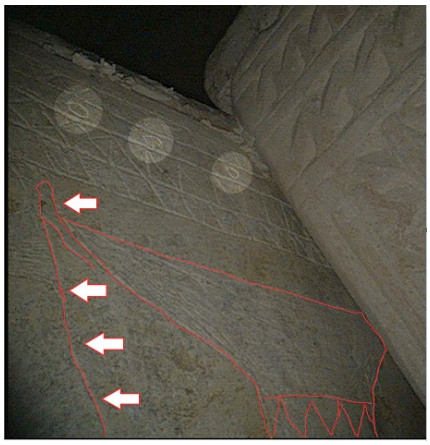


[73] http://ntweblog.blogspot.com/2012/03/scales-of-fish-on-talpiot-ossuary.html.

Once again, fish were engraved very simply and are easily recognizable by their forms and positions.

Moreover, according to the clear evidence of digital manipulation of the photos proved by R. Cargill,[74] and to S. Caruso who showed that the "ball" on the bottom can be the base of a vessel,[75] it seems I got a confirmation of my idea. Therefore, I believe that we must include the "Jonah" graffito in the vase-like ossuary iconography, rather than among the surviving fish or fish-like images on Jewish burial boxes and in Second Temple Period tombs.







On the left and above, carvings of handles identified by R. Cargill; on the right, the "ball" has not a spherical shape but it could be the base of a vessel by S. Caruso.

[74] http://robertcargill.com/2012/03/13/sins-of-commission-and-omission.

[75] http://aramaicdesigns.blogspot.com/2012/03/aspect-adjustment-on-jonah-ossuary.html.