A Preliminary Report of a Robotic Camera Exploration of a Sealed 1st Century Tomb in East Talpiot, Jerusalem

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This is a preliminary scientific report on the unprecedented exploration by robotic cameras of a sealed 1st century tomb located in East Talpiot (*Armon HaNetziv*), a southeast Jerusalem suburban neighborhood established in 1973. The tomb is presently located 2.1m under the basement floor of a modern condominium building. Our exploration was carried out under excavation license (G73/2009) issued by the Israel Antiquities Authority in 2009 and subsequently renewed in 2010 and 2011. Rami Arav of the University of Nebraska at Omaha and I are co-directors and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte is the academic sponsor.[1] Associated Producers Ltd. of Toronto obtained funding and provided technical expertise, equipment, filming, and other vital logistical assistance.[2]

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[1] Janet Levy, chair of the Department of Anthropology acted as our supervising consultant. Our license covers exploration of two adjacent tombs, the one reported here, presently under a condominium patio, briefly examined in 1981 but never excavated, and another, less than 45 meters distant, presently in a garden area between buildings, that was excavated in 1980 and later sealed up with a concrete cover by the condominium residents. We have not yet re-examined the second tomb. The coordinates for the "patio" tomb are 172400 128800 and for the "garden" tomb 17249 12929. The published coordinates for the latter are incorrectly printed in Amos Kloner and Boaz Zissu, *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period*, Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 8 (Leuven—Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007), pp. 342. In the latitude/longitude scale the "patio" tomb is approximately 31.7524/35.2360 and the "garden" tomb 31.7521/35.2362.

[2] We are grateful to the Israel Antiquities Authority and director Shuka Dorfman for approving our request to carry out this exploration. I thank in particular Simcha Jacobovici, film director, and professor in the Department of Religion at Huntington University, Ontario, and Felix Golubev, producer, both of Associated Producers Ltd, for their tireless work in every phase of our many faceted efforts to make our operations a success. Without their help and dedication none of what we accomplished would have been possible. We also thank The Discovery Channel and Vision TV, Canada for providing basic funding; Bill Tarant of General Electric Inspection Technologies for allowing use of their remote cameras and expertise; Walter Klassen who engineered and skillfully operated the robotic arm, and a host of people on the ground, too many to name, but among them Meyer Shimony Bensimon (engineering and technical advise), Uri Basson (GPR), Noam Kuzar (research), and Eli Zamir (condominium association). Finally I express my gratitude to Prof. James H. Charlesworth of Princeton Theological Seminary who served as our primary academic consultant

Background on the Talpiot Tombs

The tomb we investigated was exposed by a dynamite blast in April, 1981 by the Solel Boneh Construction company preparing the area for a condominium building on what is today Dov Groner street in East Talpiot, less than three kilometers south of the Old City of Jerusalem (*Fig. 1*).[3] Amos Kloner, Jerusalem district archaeologist, went immediately to investigate the tomb on behalf of the IAA as soon as construction workers reported its discovery. Kloner was able to enter the tomb through the break in the ceiling whereas its ancient square "porch" entrance remained closed, sealed tight by a "stopper" style stone.[4] The tomb has a single central square chamber measuring 3.5 x 3.5m with a very shallow "standing pit" area 2.3 x 1.7m. It contains nine nicely carved gabled burial niches (called *kokhim* in Hebrew), 2 to 2.3m deep, three on each of three sides, each sealed with a heavy blocking stone. Four of the niches held a total of eight ossuaries: *kokh* 1 with 3; *kokh* 2 with 2; *kokh* 6 with 2, and *kokh* 7 with one. There were skeletal remains all the *kokhim* with significant primary burial remains in *kokhim* 3, 7, 8, and 9 (*Fig.* 2). During our camera investigation in 2010 Israel Hershkovitz of Tel Aviv University surveyed these bones *in situ* and ascertained that the full skeletal remains of several individuals were

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along the way. The views expressed in this article are my own although they generally reflect the ongoing discussion and debate of our core team.

[3] I thank Amos Kloner for his most helpful map and published reports of the tomb. These allowed us to make careful comparisons with what we observed in 2010-2011. There are three short published reports on the tomb with some differences between them: Amos Kloner, *Excavations and Surveys in Israel 1982*, vol. 1, 78-81 (October 1982), p. 51; Amos Kloner, *Survey of Jerusalem: the Southern Sector* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2000), p. 84; Kloner and Zissu, *Necropolis of Jerusalem*, pp. 342, which contains a map by Kloner. The IAA files contain one single memo dated August 2, 1981 plus some photographs. An April 17, 1981 memo that Kloner wrote right after his team finished their work is referenced in this August 2nd memo but is nowhere to be found. One early Roman period cooking pot was catalogued by the IAA as from this tomb, although excavators remember other items being removed. There is no copy of the excavation license or application in the files. These are unfortunate losses and perhaps these and other materials will be recovered in the future.

[4] See Rachel Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 62-63, for a discussion and illustration of this type of blocking stone.

intact in *kokhim* 7, 8, and 9 with only slight disturbance. Whether these remains indicate the most recent burials of the clan, prior to the bones being gathered and put into ossuaries, is uncertain.[5] Without being able to examine the skeletal remains in the ossuaries themselves it is impossible to ascertain how many individuals might have been buried in this tomb or anything about ages or sex. The 1981 IAA photo of ossuary 1, *kokh* 1 (Kloner's map) shows it filled with heavily decomposed bones to the very top whereas the bones visible in the 1981 IAA photo of the 8th ossuary, now in the Israel State Collection, appear to be those of one individual.[6] Our camera, as noted below, was able to film inside ossuary 5, *kokh* 3 (our map), and skeletal remains of one individual were visible (see *Fig.* 6).

Kloner reports that he was only in the tomb a very short time, just a few minutes before a group of ultra-Orthodox Jews arrived in vocal protest, determined to protect the sanctity of the tomb and especially its bones from being disturbed by the archaeologists. Kloner relates that he only had time to quickly examine the cave before being forced to leave by their protests. He was able to carry off one smaller ossuary, decorated but not inscribed, probably that of a child, which he turned over to the authorities at the Rockefeller IAA Headquarters.[7] Kloner produced a preliminary map of the tomb as he found it in 1981 showing the original position of the ossuaries. The map is now in the IAA archive files. Apparently the smaller ossuary that was removed, now part of the State of Israel collections, was

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[5] See Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, pp. 483-485 on the varied practices associated with *Ossilegium*. Sometime bones were never gathered but left in the *kokhim* for unspecified periods of time.
[6] IAA archive photos nos. 139535, 139536, and 139550.
[7] See Amos Kloner and Shimon Gibson, "The Talpiot tomb Reconsidered: The Archaeological Facts," in *The Tomb of Jesus and His Family? Exploring Ancient Jewish Tombs Near Jerusalem's Walls: The Fourth Princeton Symposium on Judaism and Christian Origins*, eds. James H. Charlesworth and Arthur C. Boulet (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming, 2012). We thank Profs. Kloner and Gibson for making a prepublication copy of their paper available to us. The ossuary Kloner removed is now catalogued as IAA 81-505. See L. Y. Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: The Israel Antiquities Authority and The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), #741, p. 229 and plate 106. Curiously, the Rahmani catalogue incorrectly lists this ossuary from a nearby site, the Mount of Offense, east of the Old City of Jerusalem, and calls it as a "chance find," but Kloner has identified it as the one he removed and the IAA files show it was examined and photographed at the Rockefeller Museum with an April 16, 1981 date card.

originally located at the front of *kokh* 7on his map (*Fig*. 3).[8] One can see a faint smudged out image on the map that seems to mark its original location. The small ossuary is nicely decorated and seems, from its size, to have been originally intended for a child (*Fig*. 4). There is an IAA archive photo showing the inside of the ossuary with skeletal remains *in situ* (*Fig.* 5).[9] Whether these bones were ever studied or analyzed, or what happened to them, we have not been able to determine but presumably they would have been in the keeping of Joe Zias, who was the anthropologist at the Rockefeller at that time.

The tomb was assigned permit 1050 and Kloner left two IAA archaeologists, the late Joseph Gath and Shlomo Gudovitch to continue the investigation since he had to leave the country on a previously scheduled commitment.[10] They were able to remove the heavy blocking stones from the various niches, briefly examine the ossuaries, and take photographs of the tomb showing each *kokh* and the position of the seven remaining ossuaries.[11] Kloner's map is very accurate and corresponds precisely to the extant photographs, providing us with a good record of the tomb in 1981 when it was first examined. In a subsequent publication Kloner mentions cooking pots in three different locations in the tomb.[12] Only one of them could be located today in the IAA Bet Shemesh warehouse, where most artifacts are stored as property of the State of Israel (*Fig*. 6).[13] No one knows what happened to the other cooking pots or whether anything else that might have been removed from the tomb. Based on

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[8] See *Excavations and Surveys in Israel 1982*, vol. 1, 78-81 (October 1982), p. 51. Kloner reports that "three of the *kokhim* contained seven ossuaries" and does not mention removing an eighth one from a fourth niche, see *Survey of Jerusalem: the Southern Sector* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2000), p. 84. Kloner subsequently published a sketch of the tomb showing the locations of all eight ossuaries, distributed in four of the niches, see See *Necropolis of Jerusalem*, pp. 342, published in 2007 with Boaz Zissu.

[9] IAA archive photo #139550.

[10] We interviewed Shlomo Gudovitch in 2011 to verify some of these details.

[11] These photos (IAA archive nos. 139534-139546) were misfiled in the IAA archive but have now been located and are available for study.

[12] See Kloner and Zissu, *Necropolis of Jerusalem*, pp. 342 and forthcoming, Kloner and Gibson, "The Talpiot tomb Reconsidered," *op. cit*.

[13] The tag reads: 1050/1981-2162, dated 4/16/81. Compare IAA archive photos nos. 139549 and 231053.

our recent exploration we can affirm that there are no such pots or other visible artifacts, other than the seven ossuaries, in the tomb today. The blocking stones are strewn on the floor of the tomb with a few ropes and wooden planks left from this brief 1981 survey.

Kloner reports that all the ossuaries but one were decorated and two had Greek names inscribed. Local observers confirm that IAA archaeologists worked at the tomb for several days, finally removing all the ossuaries from their niches, opening their heavy stone lids and numbering the ossuaries with chalk marks. There are pry marks on some of the ossuaries indicating that the lids were removed. We were able to see inside one of the ossuaries that had a piece of its end broken off (presently in *kokh* 2, ossuary 4) and the chalk mark number 5 was visible on the inside surfaces (*Fig.* 7). Gath and Gudovich were preparing to hoist the ossuaries up with ropes through the opening in the ceiling for transport to the Rockefeller when they were stopped at the last moment by a group of ultra-Orthodox Jewish protesters. The positions that four of the seven ossuaries occupy today in the niches are different from what is shown in the 1981 photos and on the map Kloner subsequently published. This indicates that the ultra-Orthodox group that halted their work most likely put them back in the niches randomly. The sides of several of the ossuaries show deep horizontal scratches, perhaps caused by their being moved. Fortunately, by a meticulous comparison of the photos from 1981, Kloner's map, and our recent exploration we were able to ascertain the original position in the tomb of each of the seven ossuaries.

The Patio tomb was sealed on April 16, 1981 with the seven remaining ossuaries inside, only to be examined again nearly three decades later by our remote cameras. In mid-July, 1981 the builders poured a thick concrete pillar down into center of the tomb to support the condominium building they

were constructing.[14] The tomb was subsequently sealed off under the basement foundation of the building. The construction crew also installed the "ritual" vent pipes that ran up through the bedrock roof of the tomb, emerging through a first floor patio of the condominium.

Apparently, in their haste, and under pressure from the ultra-Orthodox, the archaeologists failed to notice what we discovered in June, 2010 and subsequently confirmed in 2011 with high definition cameras. We found the two Greek names but to our complete surprise we also discovered a four-line Greek inscription on ossuary 5, *kokh* 3 and what we take to be a hitherto unrepresented iconographic image as well as other unusual markings on ossuary 6, *kokh* 3 (our map, *Fig.* 16).

In terms of wider archaeological context this present "Patio" tomb is less than 45 meters away from a second tomb discovered a year earlier, in March/April, 1980—the so-called "Jesus family tomb." This tomb contained ten ossuaries with six of them inscribed with names, five Aramaic and one Greek: *Yeshua bar Yehosef, Maria, Yose, Yehuda bar Yeshua, Matya* (Aramaic)*, and Mariamenou Mara or Mariam kai Mara* (Greek). The possible connection of this tomb to Jesus of Nazareth and/or his family sparked heated controversy since 2007 when it was first brought to wider public and academic attention.[15] Other than theological objections, the response most often offered to any probable

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[14] Kloner reports this in a handwritten August 2, 1981 memo now in the IAA archives that includes a color sketch of the pillar with the vent running up through it. Oddly, Kloner puts the wrong tomb license number—1053 in this memo—a permit number for a tomb north of Jerusalem having nothing to do with Talpiot.

[15] Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Evidence Behind the Discovery No One Wanted to Find*, rev. pbk. ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2007). The "Jesus tomb," now in the garden area between the present buildings, was examined in a salvage excavation (license # 938) by the late Yosef Gat under the supervision of Amos Kloner on behalf of the Department of Antiquities and Museums from 28/3/80 to 11/4/80. Gath's excavation report, detailing initial findings, was filed on 4/15/80 and is in the archives of the IAA, with a short summary subsequently published by Gath in 1981 (*Hadoshot Arkheologiyot* 76 (1981):24-25). Amos Kloner published a thorough report on this tomb and its inscribed ossuaries in 1996 (*'Atiqot* XXIX: 15-22) and it is briefly included in his masterful survey published with Boaz Zissu (*Necropolis* 2007). A special section of *Near Eastern Archaeology* (69:3-4, 2006:116-137) was devoted to an updated discussion of the tomb and its ossuaries with contributions by E. Meyers, S. Gibson, S. Scham, C. Rollston, S. Pfann, and J. Tabor. Nine of the ten

identification of this tomb with Jesus and his family is that "the names are common." Subsequent research has definitely shown that is not the case, either from a statistical standpoint or even a practical observation—though one hears it endless repeated even from academics who should know better.[16] There is not a single cluster of names ever found in any tomb in Jerusalem from this period, other than this one, out of the estimated 900 that have been exposed, that one could plausibility even make the argument of correspondence with Jesus and names associated with his family.[17] This does not prove the tomb is that of Jesus of Nazareth and his family but it does demonstrate that its probability should not be dismissed.

Just to the north of the "Jesus" tomb, less than 20 meters away, was a third tomb that had been blasted away almost entirely in 1980. All that was left was one of its inside walls with the partial remains of the niches still visible.[18] None of its contents could be studied or evaluated but it likely belonged to

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ossuaries in this tomb were retained in the Israel state collections (80.500-80.508) and are listed in Rahmani *CJO*, nos. 701-709. A special four-day academic symposium, "Jewish Views of the Afterlife and Burial Practices in Second Temple Judaism: Evaluating the Talpiot tomb in Context," was held in Jerusalem in January, 2008 sponsored by Princeton Theological Seminary, organized by Prof. James H. Charlesworth and attended by over 50 scholars. Papers from that conference are forthcoming: *The Tomb of Jesus and His Family? Exploring Ancient Jewish Tombs Near Jerusalem's Walls: The Fourth Princeton Symposium on Judaism and Christian Origins*, eds. James H. Charlesworth and Arthur C. Boulet (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming, 2012). Most recently the tomb is briefly discussed in Hannah M. Cotton, *et al.*, eds., *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*, vol. I.1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), p. 495-500.

[16] M. Elliott and K. Kilty, "Inside the Numbers of the Talpiot Tomb," http://www.bibleinterp.com/PDFs/tomb2.pdf; M. Elliott and K. Kilty, "Probability, Statistics, and the Talpiot Tomb," http://www.lccc.wy.edu/Media/Website%20Resources/documents/Education%20Natural%20and%20Social%20Sciences/tomb.pdf; and Jerry Lutgen, "The Talpiot Tomb: What Are the Odds?" http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/tomb357926.shtml

[17] A perusal of Cotton, et. al., *CIIP*, that surveys over 600 ossuary inscriptions bears this out.

[18] Kloner refers to this 3rd tomb as a "a ruinous cave," *Survey of Jerusalem: Southern Sector*, p. 84 and describes it as "a single chambered rock-cut burial cave with *kokhim* carved in its walls" in *Necropolis*, p. 340. He also refers to a plastered ritual immersion bath, damaged by bulldozers, nearby. The remains of this tomb are shown in IAA archive photo no. 128519. Only the back 30cm of two niches are left from the blast and the tomb itself is a pile of rubble with no remains, whether ossuaries or bones, visible in the photo.

the same farm or agricultural estate as the two extant tombs—the patio tomb and the "Jesus" or garden tomb. In the immediate vicinity there was also an ancient olive press, various water cisterns, and the remains of a plastered ritual bath called a *mikveh*. Joseph Gath, who surveyed the entire area around the tombs, concluded that these installations belonged to a large farm or wealthy estate and were most likely the family tombs of the owner, clustered so closely together.[19]

It was the proximity of these three tombs, and the possibility that they were clustered together on a wealthy estate in the 1st century CE that prompted us to request a permit to carry out further investigations. If, the burial of Jesus, as all our ancient sources report, was carried out by a wealthy and influential member of the Sanhedrin, namely Joseph of Arimathea, who had the backing of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, might we expect any "Jesus family tomb" to be on his property and thus adjacent to other tombs that belonged to his extended clan.[20] The gospel of John indicates that the initial burial of Jesus near the place of crucifixion was a hasty emergency measure in the late afternoon prompted by the nearness of the Sabbath/Passover holiday at sundown on the day of Jesus' crucifixion (John 19:41-42). It was a burial of necessity and opportunity. This particular tomb was chosen because it was unused and happened to be near the place of crucifixion. The idea that this tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea makes no sense. What are the chances that Joseph of Arimathea would just happen to have his own new family tomb conveniently located near the Place of the Skull, or Golgotha, where the Romans regularly crucified their victims? Amos Kloner offers the following analysis, with which I wholly agree:

> I would go one step further and suggest that Jesus' tomb was what the sages refer to as a "borrowed (or temporary) tomb." During the Second Temple period and later, Jews often practiced temporary burial… A borrowed or temporary cave was used for a limited time, and

[19] Typed report of Gath dated April 15, 1980 now in the IAA archive files for License 938.
[20] See Mark 15:42-49; Matt 27:57-61; Luke 20:50-56; John 19:38-42; *Gospel of Peter* 20.

the occupation of the cave by the corpse conferred no rights of ownership upon the family… Jesus' interment was probably of this nature. [21]

Mark indicates that the intention of Joseph was to complete the full and proper rites of Jewish burial after Passover. One would assume a more permanent burial cave would have been provided for Jesus as soon as the Passover was over and burial rites could be completed.[22]

The object of our investigation was to determine whether the "patio" tomb, still intact, might contain names or other evidence that would provide for us further data that might conceivably shed light on the adjacent "garden" tomb with its intriguing cluster of names. We mention this to make the point that although we are thoroughly fascinated with the untapped potential of this technology of exploring a sealed tomb by remote cameras, we did not randomly pick any tomb in the Jerusalem area as our test case. Our stated intent in our proposal to the Israel Antiquities Authority was that we wanted to determine if further scientific information about these tombs and their possible relationship to one another might still be obtained 30 years after their initial exploration.

The Technical and Logistical Challenges

Obtaining all the permissions needed from the Israel Antiquities Authority, the condominium owners, the ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups that object to the archaeological exploration of tombs, and the municipal police were challenge enough but the technical task of precisely locating and accessing

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[21] Amos Kloner, "Did a Rolling Stone Close Jesus' Tomb?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 22:5 (1999): 23-29, 26. Kloner cites several rabbinic texts to support his assertion. Compare his fuller academic treatment "Reconstruction of the Tomb in the Rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre According to Archaeological Finds and Jewish Burial Customs of the First century CE," in *The Beginnings of Christianity. A Collection of Articles* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2005), pp. 269-278.

[22] Both Matthew (27:60) and the *Gospel of Peter* (20), indicate that Jesus was laid to rest in a tomb that belonged to Joseph. These traditions, coupled with those in Mark and John about the first or temporary burial, likely represent a conflation of sources that attempts to reconcile the "empty tomb narratives" of all our gospels sources with these two mutually exclusive burial traditions.

the tomb, now several meters below the basement of the condominium building was paramount (*Figs.* 8, 9).[23] Our only clue as to location was the ritual "vent' pipe the builders installed that we knew from our preliminary investigations in 2007 ran down into the tomb itself (*Fig.* 10). At that time we were able to drop a small camera, dangling by a cable, into the vent from its opening on a patio on the 1st floor of the building and get some footage inside the tomb but with no maneuverability to examine anything closely. By a careful examination of that footage, combined with study of the building plans, outside measurements, and Ground Penetrating Radar, Felix Golubev and his team isolated a tiny 1 x .30m area in the basement storage area of the condominium building that they ascertained was likely over the tomb itself. The plan was to remove the tiles and drill a series of probe holes through the poured concrete floor in the hope that they would emerge into the tomb, approximately 2.1m below (*Fig.* 11). On May 6, 2010, after several test probes, our team was successful. We were indeed over a tiny portion of the tomb in its southwest corner and were able to drop a light and camera dangling from a cable into the tomb itself and transmit images (*Fig.* 12). The challenge now was for Walter Klassen to construct a robotic arm that could be inserted into an enlarged 20cm probe hole that could then have the leverage to bend and extend itself throughout the 3.5 x 3.5m tomb as well as into the *kokhim* that held the ossuaries that were on average between 2m to 2.3m deep, but in a confined space that was only 2.1m from tomb floor to ceiling. In the end three 20cm probe holes were drilled to allow the robotic arm to enter the tomb from various angles so as to reach its recesses. At the same time a second camera was to be inserted into the tomb so we could see what was happening with the robotic arm itself when it was moving about inside the tomb (*Fig.* 13). Klassen successfully tested a prototype version of the robotic

[23] The agreement that Simcha Jacobovici negotiated with the ultra-Orthodox groups, allowed us to carry out a full camera investigation of the tomb so long as we gave our word we would not move or disturb anything inside. This presented a number of challenges since the ossuaries in *kokhim* 2 and 3 are jammed tightly together restricting our ability to get clear wide camera shots.

arm that first week of May, 2010 that enabled him to take precise laser measurements inside the tomb itself (*Fig.* 14). He returned to his lab in Toronto and built the final version of the robotic arm.

Our entire team reassembled in June, 2010. Our plan was to explore the tomb systematically, niche by niche, working counterclockwise from the sealed entrance. Although we carefully filmed all the features inside the tomb our concentration was on the ossuaries themselves, and any markings or inscriptions they might have. The robotic arm not only had a main camera mounted on its tip but a snake camera with a light that could extend another 1.5m beyond the main probe to allow filming of several of the ossuaries that were deep in the recesses of the niches. The camera also had the capability of shooting laser beams to obtain micro-centimeter measurements (*Fig.* 14). We set up a command station with a bank of monitors and controls in the corner of the crowded basement corridor. Every phase of the operation was filmed in real time by both the monitoring camera and the robotic arm cameras. Although we were successful beyond anything we might have hoped we want to emphasize that there were many operational challenges. The lens of the camera had to be cleaned regularly when it picked up soil from the walls or floor of the tomb, requiring the entire apparatus to be removed and reinserted. At one point the main cable operating the robotic arm snapped and the entire apparatus seemed hopelessly stuck at an angle that prevented removing it for repair. The robotic arm had to have a makeshift extension added during our operations, even with the snake camera probe, to be able to film behind three of the ossuaries that were over a meter inside the niches (*Fig.* 15). Finally, we had to maneuver around the large concrete pillar that the builders of the condominium had poured in the center of the tomb making access to *kokh* 2 and 3 extremely challenging. Operating the probe itself was a skill that Klassen and his remote camera assistant Bill Tarant, had to develop by trial and error since no one had ever used this equipment before. Thanks to the ingenious improvising skills of our technical team we were able to overcome each of these obstacles and our exploration turned out to be a great

success. We hope our pioneering work will find application in various archaeological operations, whether remote exploration of tombs, confined recesses, or other difficult to access excavation areas.

The Ossuaries and their Inscriptions

Moving counterclockwise around the tomb beginning at the sealed entrance on the south we examined the seven ossuaries with the following results. Ossuary locations are given here based on our map showing present locations (*Fig.* 16). Since four of the seven ossuaries currently in the tomb were moved and replaced in different niches their original locations as correlated to Kloner's 1981 map are also indicated for comparison.[24]

1. Ossuary 1:1=Kloner 3:1[25]. This ossuary remains in its original niche. It is highly ornamented on its front side with two deeply carved rosettes, an elaborate frieze border, and a narrow pillar or *nephesh* carved between the rosettes. The high relief points of the rosette's petals are washed with a reddish-rose paint. The sides and back of the ossuary are plain and no inscriptions were found. The ossuary had deep horizontal scratches on its unornamented back.

2. Ossuary 2:2=Kloner 2:1. This ossuary is highly decorated on its front side with deeply carved rosettes and frieze border. The sides and back of the ossuary are plain. It has an odd incised marking in the upper right corner of the decorated front: a stick-like "animal" figure with four legs, head, and tail, though we were not certain of that identification (*Fig.* 17). We also considered it might be a

[24] Fortunately the archive photos of each niche showing the ossuaries *in situ* allow fairly certain correlations with the video footage we made showing present locations. In a few cases the lids that were removed from the ossuaries for purposes of chalk marking inside were switched around and replaced on a different ossuary.

[25] The seven ossuaries are numbered sequentially on both maps, moving counterclockwise around the tomb from the sealed entrance. In our numeration the first number is that of the ossuary, followed by its niche number shown on the two maps: thus 1:1 indicates ossuary 1 in niche 1.

representation of the divine name, Yod, Heh, Vav, Heh (Yahweh) written in either stylized Hebrew or Greek: יהוה =ΠΙΠΙ.[26] If such is the case it might shed light on the Greek inscription on ossuary 5:3, line 2, that we think has the divine name written in the Greek letters IAIO. If so we have something unique and highly irregular as there are no examples of Jewish inscriptions from this period in Jerusalem that write out the divine name Yahweh. [27] We have to assume that such a practice, particularly in a tomb, which was considered *tum'a*—that is, ritually unclean—is heterodox, reflecting a sectarian perspective (Numbers 19:16).[28]

3. Ossuary 3:2=Kloner 6:6. This otherwise plain ossuary had an incomplete rosette etching on the right end with the name MAPA faintly written in uncial Greek letters (*Fig*. 18). *Mara* is a rare name on ossuaries with only five, possibly six (3 Greek, 2/3 Aramaic), other examples out of 650 inscribed Jerusalem ossuaries from this period that are known.[29] One of these examples is from the adjacent Talpiot "Jesus" tomb—namely the inscription *Mariamenou Mara* or *Mariam kai Mara* . The name is often equated to that of Martha (מרתא), based on *CIIP* no. 97 that has the inscription מרה מרתא. However, other examples such as *CIIP* no. 517 with Alexa Mara (ΑΛΕΞΑΣΜΑΡΑΜΗΤΗΡ), as well as the masculine מריקבר that has a Greek translation inscribed as ΚΥΡΕΤΥΣΤΟΥΤΟΥ,

[26]Certain ancient versions of the Greek Old Testament (e.g., Origen's *Hexapla*, the Greek versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and some manuscripts of the LXX represented the Hebrew divine name, Yod Heh Vav Heh in Hebrew letters which were read by the uninitiated to look like the Greek letters Pi, Iota, Pi, Iota—thus PIPI.
[27] Cotton, *et al.*, *CIIP* is the latest published survey of 692 known inscriptions.
[28] See *Sanhedrin* 10:1; *Tosefta Sanhedrin* 12:9: "All Israel are worthy of the world to come…and those are not: he who argues that the resurrection in not in the Torah and that the Torah is not from heaven and the Epikores…Aba Shaul says: and he who pronounces the Name by its letters.
[29] See Cotton, *et al.*, *CIIP* nos. 97, 200, 262 (uncertain), 477, 517, 563.

"masters of the tomb," indicates it can be taken as a feminine absolute of the masculine *mar/mara*, thus meaning "lordess" or in English, "lady."

4. Ossuary 4:2=Kloner 4:2. This ossuary is in its original position. It is ornamented but due to its distance in the niche and its closeness to the wall we were not able to examine its façade closely. Its far end has a name inscribed in Greek but unfortunately even our snake camera probe could not reach far enough inside the niche to shoot back at that end and get a clear wide shot of the letters. All we have is the 1981 enhanced photo in which the Greek letters are faintly visible but remain undeciphered. Our best reading at this point is that the name might be ΙΟΝΑΣ (Jonah) ΙΟΝΕΣ (John) or maybe even ΙΟΥΛΙΑ (Julia), but these are uncertain possibilities.

5. Ossuary 5:3=Kloner 5:2. This ossuary is has a highly ornamented front façade with twin rosettes and an elaborate frieze border. In the narrow curved blank space between the rosettes there is a four line Greek inscription written in uncial letters (*Fig.* 19). The final two letters of line 4 are uncertain, both in their formation and due to the limitations of remote autopsy by camera. The following variations appear possible:

ΔΙΟΣΙΑΙΟΥΨΩΑΓΒ

ΔΙΟΣΙΑΙΟΥΨΩΑΓΙΩ

ΔΙΟΣ ΙΑΙΟΥΨΩΑΠΟ

ΔΙΟΣΙΑΙΟΥΨΩΑΠΒ

We are convinced that each line of the inscription is a separate and discrete word, yielding the following word divisions. I include here the variables of line 4:

1. ΔΙΟΣ

2. ΙΑΙΟ

3. ΥΨΩ

4. ΑΓΒ ΑΓΙΩ ΑΠΟ or ΑΠΒ

All the letters of lines 1, 2, and 3 are quite clear although we did consider the possibility that l.1 might be a zeta rather than an iota but ZAIO seems to make no sense either in isolation as part of another combination of words from lines 1-3. There is an obscure word in Pliny's *Natural History*—ZAIOΣ, that refers to some kind of fish—apparently of the sea urchin variety, which interested us greatly considering the iconography on ossuary 6, described below.[30] However, there is no sigma in l. 2 or beginning of l.3. Taking these words one by one, based on our line-by-line breakdown, we have the following:

ΔΙΟΣ is an adjective (masc. nom/voc. sing.) likely modifying what we take to be the proper noun in line 2. It can be variously translated as "heavenly," "divine" "wondrous"–but here in this context it seems to clearly refer to God.[31]

IAIO we take as a Greek representation or transliteration of the Tetragrammaton: י ה ו ה (Yod, Heh, Vav, Heh)—that is Yahweh. It is unusual in that it has four letters rather than the common three-letter form IAΩ.[32] Josephus says the divine name is represented by four "vowels."[33] It is possible that this writer intended it as a precise transliteration—since the Hebrew name of God also has four letters.[34]

Accordingly, the inscription, though written in Greek letters, is purposely bilingual—first a Greek representation of God—the "Divine one," followed by a Hebrew presentation—Yahweh—but represented in Greek letters.

ΥΨΩ is the present indic. act. 1st person singular of the contract verb ΥΨΟΩ, to "raise," "lift up" or "exalt." As literally written it could then be translated "I divine Jehovah raise up" or "I exalt [you] O divine Jehovah" (taking ΔΙΟΣ as a vocative). This verb is most interesting in the context of early

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[30] Liddell Scott, sv. ζαιός· εἶδος ἰχθύος, Hsch., cf. Plin.HN9.68 (v. ζαζαῖος).
[31] Liddel Scott, sv. Διος.
[32] There is an example IAIOΩ referring to "Baal" in a papyrus published by David R. Jordan, "Notes from Carthage," Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 111 (1996) 115–123. Other examples are: Diodorus Siculus Ιαῶ (Iao); Irenaeus says certain gnostics formed a compound Ιαωθ(Iaoth=related to Sabaoth?);Valentinians use Ιαῶ (Iao); Clement of Alexandria: Ιαοὺ (Iaou) or Ιαουέ (Iaoue)and Origen of Alexandria, Ιαῶ (Iao), see: Diodorus Siculus, *Histories.* I, 94.; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* II, xxxv, 3, in P. G., VII, col. 840 and I, iv, 1, in P.G., VII, col. 481; Clement, "Stromata", V, 6, in P.G., IX, col. 60; and Origen, "In John.", II, 1, in P.G., XIV, col. 105.
[33] Josephus, *Wars* 5.235.
[34] I thank Richard Bauckham for this point. He suggests that the first iota and the second one are purposely written in a different style to represent the two Hebrew letters Yod and Vav.

Christianity and late 2nd Temple Judaism.[35] Paul uses the intensified verb ὑπερυψόω in Philippians 2:9, speaking of Jesus' exaltation or "super-lifting up" to heaven. He then applies a text from Isaiah 45:23 about "every knee bowing" to Yahweh, equating it to Jesus in his new heavenly status. Most scholars agree that Paul here is drawing upon a very early Christological hymn.[36] John 12:32 uses the verb ὑψόω to refer to both Jesus' resurrection from the dead and his exaltation or "lifting up" to heaven: "And I, when I am lifted up out of the earth (ὑψωθῶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς), will draw all people to myself." The thought here is identical to that of Paul in the Philippians hymn, as an echo of Isaiah 45:23. Jesus is taken up from the earth to heaven and in his new status draws all of humankind in homage as Yahweh's representative and one who bears Yahweh's name. John repeats this theme often using the same verb, referring to both Jesus being lifted up on the cross—and thus exalted to heaven (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34). Acts 5:31 echoes a very similar thought, using again the verb ὑψόω: God lifted up this one at his right hand (ὕψωσεν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ) as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." This "lifting up" of Jesus "embraces resurrection, reception, ascent, enthronement, and royal dominion."[37] In the New Testament there are many passages in which Jesus knows, bears, and reveals God by his "Name" Yahweh—that is the four-letter Tetragrammaton. Accordingly, depending on the wider context of this tomb, if it does indeed relate to early Jesus followers, they might be appropriating the divine name Yahweh in referring to Jesus, as Paul does numerous times in his authentic letters.[38]

In the LXX the verb is also used for one being "lifting up" from the gates of death: Psalm 9:14 (13 English) ὁ ὑψῶν με ἐκ τῶν πυλῶν τοῦ θανάτου. This should be compared to Psalm 29:2 (Psa 30:2 Hebrew/ 30:1 English) Ὑψώσω σε, κύριε, ὅτι ὑπέλαβές με. The writer, in context, is celebrating deliverance from Sheol: "O Yahweh, you have *brought up* my soul from Sheol; You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit." These kinds of strong parallels with some of our earliest Christian materials about the exaltation of Jesus, involving heavenly ascent and enthronement at the right hand of God, provide a very convincing background to the use of the verb ὑψόω among Jesus' earliest followers.

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[35] Sv. ὑψόω TDNT; BGAD 1045-1046.
[36] See James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 114-121.
[37] Sv. ὑψόωTDNT.
[38] I thank Simcha Jacobovici for pointing out this possibility. See Charles A. Gieschen, "The Divine Names in Ante-Nicene Christology," *Vigilias Christianae* 57:2 (May, 2003), ppl 115-158 and David B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology*, WUZT 2.47 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1992).

We are inclined to argue that in this inscription, even though the three-letter verb ΥΨΩ can be read as a 1st person singular present indicative active, when crammed into this small space, it is most likely suspended or abbreviated. When first working on the inscription we considered that it might be a shortened form of the dative superlative ΥΨΙΣΤΩ, which is so commonly found in dedicatory inscriptions "to the most High God."[39] However, the ending in omega strongly argues against this possibility. Even though one finds suspended forms of ΥΨΙΣΤΩ they never drop the third letter iota and substitute it for an omega. Also ΔΙΟΣ is clearly either nominative or vocative, not dative, as would be required in such a case.

We propose that what we have here is ΥΨΩ[ΣΕΝ] (aorist indic. Act. 3ms "he has raised up"), ΥΨΩ[ΣΕΙ] (future indic. Act. 3ms "he will raise up") or more likely, as I will explain below, ΥΨΩ[ΣΟΝ] (aorist Imperative, 2ps "Raise up!"). Given the cramped space the omega ending would be enough to carry the meaning in this context. If so this inscription would be a plea to "God/Yahweh," called upon in bilingual fashion, to raise someone up: "O Divine/God Jehovah, raise up!—or alternatively a call to Jesus as Yahweh's representative.

Much depends on the transcription of the last line with its three letters since the final two are difficult to read. If we take the final line as ΑΠΟ, that is, the preposition "from," it is possible that it might be an abbreviated plea for resurrection "from [the dead]." If we read it as ΑΠΒ it makes no sense as a word but it could perhaps be either initials or some kind of apotropaic cipher.[40]

In looking at both the photos and the previous three words we are inclined to argue that we have here either ΑΓΙΩ or more likely ΑΓΒ. If line 4 reads ΑΓΙΩ (taking the last letter as a ligature) in the dative case, it could mean "to the holy," perhaps referring to God/Yahweh to raising up to the "holy place" or the "holy one" (i.e., throne of God)—or being raised up to the holy place. This notion of ascent

[39] Stephen Mitchell, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews, and Christians," *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, eds. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 81-148.

[40] See examples in Cotton, *et al.*, *CIIP*, nos. 84, 112, 113, 284, 383, 509, and 606—none of which have been deciphered.

to heaven or heavenly exaltation we know from many Jewish and early Christian texts of this period.[41] For example, Clement of Rome writes of Paul who "thus departed from the world and went to the holy place" (*1 Clement* 5:7).

If it reads ΑΓΒ, which seems quite likely, there are several possibilities. It might be a Greek representation of the rare Hebrew name *Hagab* (Ezra 2:46; Neh 7:48), which in Greek appears as Agabas (Ἄγαβος). We do in fact know of an early Christian prophet from Jerusalem mentioned in Acts 11:28 and 21:10 by this name. In which case the inscription would read either "I Hagab exalt [you] O Divine Jehovah," or "I Divine Jehovah raise up Hagab."[42] Although this reading is possible we do not find it compelling in this context. In the first reading it seems more natural to take ΔΙΟΣ ΙΑΙΟ as a simple nominative—as the subject of the declaration—and thus there is no need to supply the personal pronoun object "you." But beyond the grammar we have no examples on ossuaries of personal statements of praise to God, or alternatively 1st person utterances by God. This inscription is unprecedented and it likely is intended to affirm much more than the utterance of an unknown Hagab or God's utterance about him. It is true that names are the most common phenomenon on ossuaries, as "tags" representing the name of the deceased, but this intriguing inscription seems to represent something quite beyond recording the name of the deceased. In this case context is everything and we have to remember we are talking about an inscription in a tomb written by a Jewish family bold enough to write the letters of the name of God in a tomb while declaring a message about "lifting up" or resurrection.

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[41] See my entry "Heaven, Ascent to," in the Anchor Bible Dictionary 3:91-94 (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1992) and James D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and early Christian Contexts*, Studies in Judaism (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986).

[42] I am indebted to Richard Bauckham for these suggestions involving the proper name Hagab.

Another possibility is that ΑΓΒ might be read backwards as an Aramaic word written in Greek (*bagah*) a phenomenon we find on other inscriptions, and thus would be referring to God Yahweh raising up "from it [the tomb]."[43]

We are inclined to take ΑΓΒ as a transliteration of the Hebrew Hiphil imperative *hagbah* (הגבה) from the verb גבה, to "lift up."[44] In which case we would have a double imperative—Raise up! Raise up!—once in Greek (line 3), repeated in Hebrew with Greek letters (line 4). This seems to parallel lines 1 and 2 in that we also there have first Greek, for God, followed by the Hebrew Yahweh represented in Greek letters. If such is the case we would have a cleverly balanced bilingual inscription with a plea for God/Jehovah to raise someone up, or alternatively, depending on how the Greek verb ΥΨΩ is understood, a declaration or celebration of God having so acted. There is a remarkable parallel to this idea in Ezekiel 21:31 [v. 26 English]: "Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Remove the mitre, and take off the crown; this shall be no more the same; *exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high*." Here the Hebrew phrase is הַשְׁפֵּיל וְהַגָּבֹהַּ הַגְבֵּהַּ הַשָּׁפָלָה, using the verb גבה and the LXX parallels this with forms of ὑψόω—thus "ἐταπείνωσας τὸ ὑψηλὸν καὶ τὸ ταπεινὸν ὕψωσας." The context of this passage in Ezekiel is quite remarkable as it has to due with abasing one branch of the messianic Davidic lineage and exalting another. There is also a fragment of the Dead Sea Scrolls from cave 4 that uses the same verb for heavenly exaltation, most likely of the leader of the community: "to [the eternal height and to the cl]ouds of the heavens and He shall exalt him in stature. With the heavenly beings in the congregation of [the Yahad] חקים יגביה בקומה. ועם אלים בעדת [לרום עולם ועד ש (4Q431 f2:8).

I will discuss the further implications of this preferred reading of the inscription in my concluding analysis below but prior to that I want to describe what we discovered inscribed on the next

[43] See Cotton, et. al., no. 287 for an Aramaic example of בגוה that seems to mean "in it," i.e., in the ossuary. Simcha Jacobovici suggested this possibility though he favors an alternative interpretation.
[44] I thank Noam Kusar and Simcha Jacobovici for pointing out this compelling bilingual option.

ossuary. We believe it provides further context to the tomb as a whole, and thus how the inscription might best be read.

6. Ossuary 6:3=Kloner 1:1. It should be noted that this ossuary, now in *kokh* 3, was originally in *kokh* 1, position one, indicating its prime location in the tomb in the first niche just to the right as one enters the tomb.[45] This ossuary is by far the most fascinating in terms of its decorations. It is plain on the backside but on the front is what our excavation team concluded was a clear image of a fish, complete with tail, fins, and scales with a stick-like human figure with an oversized head coming out of its mouth (*Figs.* 20, 21).[46]

We interpret this drawing as a presentation of the biblical story of Jonah and the "big fish." In ancient Jewish art there are no attested representations of Jonah and the fish.[47] Other biblical scenes are common such as Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, Noah and the ark, Moses and the burning bush, Daniel in the lion's den, especially in the 3rd and 4th centuries CE. In contrast, images of what is called the "Jonah cycle" occur over 100 times in early Christian art, most often in tombs, as a way of proclaiming and celebrating the resurrection of Jesus—and thus Christian resurrection hope more generally (*Fig.* 22).[48]

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[45] Apparently the loculi or *kokhim* were cut and/or occupied in a counterclockwise direction, beginning at the entrance to the tomb, see Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs*, p. 56. This might well indicate the prominence or importance of this ossuary, occupying as it does the first space in the tomb.

[46] Amphoras are found inscribed on a few ossuaries and they seem to represent funerary urns often found atop Greek tomb monuments. Since Jews eschewed cremation they were merely ornamentation, see Rahmani, *CJO*, pp. 34. It is clear that no one would mistake one of these amphoras for a fish.

[47] See discussion by E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, Bollingen Series XXXVII (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 225-227. Goodenough mentions an Jonah amulet published by Bonner that appears to be Christian and much later. Although he concludes there is "no attested Jewish representation of Jonah and the fish," he concludes that there must have been Jewish prototypes since the image became so popular among Christians.

[48] See Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), p. 87 has a chart showing the most common motifs of early Christian art. Jonah images number 108 examples while the next most frequent images would be Noah in the Ark (8) and Daniel in the Lion's Den (6).

However, these images only appear in the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, with many in the catacombs of Rome, but never earlier. If we do have a Jonah image in our tomb it would be a clear first and its implications would be quite dramatic.

How might we account for such? In our earliest gospel traditions there are a cluster of references to the "sign of Jonah," in both the Q source and Matthew's reworking of Mark (see Luke 11:29-32//Matthew 12:39 and Mark 8:11 with Matthew 16:4), as referring to faith in Jesus' resurrection. As Jonah was in the fish for three days and three nights, but emerged alive, Jesus would likewise emerge from the tomb/death. If our interpretation is correct this Jonah image would be the only archaeological witness to a sayings tradition attributed to Jesus predating the written gospel traditions (post 70 CE) but it would also represent archeological evidence related to faith in Jesus' resurrection from the dead—presumably by his contemporary 1st century followers.

In terms of style our Jonah image would be a first, most likely modeled from the biblical book of Jonah itself rather than developed from any preexisting motifs in Jewish art—since there appear to be none. This mean the person who drew the image is relying upon an imagined template, most likely drawn from the text and tradition of the tale of Jonah directly. Accordingly, we take the head of the figure, with its strange set of tangled lines, to represent the "weeds wrapped about my head" mentioned in Jonah 2:5 and the scales or markings on the body to indicate that the fish is "kosher," which also fits Jewish traditions about Leviathan—the great sea monster, representing death and chaos, that the righteous will consume in victory in the last days.[49]

Ossuary 6 has several other interesting inscriptions. The Jonah image is on the front left panel, with the head pointed down to the bottom of the ossuary, as if the fish is vomiting Jonah onto the land.

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[49] *B. Hullin* 67b; *b. Baba Batra* 74a; 2 Esdras 6:49-53; 1 Enoch 90:7-9. See the discussion in E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, Bollingen Series XXXVII (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), vol. 5, pp. 35-39.

Along the top border are a series of smaller fish that seem to be swimming along a river. On the left end there is a bell-shaped circle with a cross inside (*Fig.* 23). Whether this cross is intended as a Christian symbol or not belongs to the larger question of how the tomb is interpreted as a whole—that is whether it can be associated with followers of Jesus or not—but as a minimum, given the biblical Jonah story it might well represent the "bars of death" mentioned in Jonah 2:6. Jonah prays in the belly of the fish, similar to our Greek inscription, "You *brought up* my life from the Pit." On the right end of the ossuary is the scaled body and tail of a fish, with only the lower portion shown as if it is diving down into water (*Fig.* 24). Taken together, given the bones inside the ossuary, one might interpret the ossuary's markings as a whole to represent a "resurrection" narrative—one enters through the cross-like "bars of death," submerged under the water in the great fish, but then is vomited out alive on land—thus overcoming death.

7. Ossuary 7:6=Kloner 7:6. This ossuary is plain and has no markings. It remains in its original position from 1981.

Brief Concluding Observations

Clearly the most extraordinary features in the "Patio" tomb are the four-line Greek inscription and the Jonah image. Both are unprecedented, either as ossuary inscriptions or inscriptions more generally for period. Though Greek and Roman epitaphs are a commonplace phenomenon on tombs of this period such expressions are almost completely absent from contemporary Jerusalem tombs and ossuaries.[50] However one reads this inscription it seems clear that this four-line epitaph is unprecedented on an ossuary from this period and culture. One finds a dozen or so epigrams but

[50] Rahmani, *CJO*, pp. 17-18.

invariably they are protective formula having to do with prohibitions against disturbing the bones or opening the tomb of the deceased.[51] We are convinced that our inscription clearly makes some affirmation about either resurrection from the dead or lifting up to heaven. Whether one might identify it as "Christian," or to be more historically precise—as associated with the early followers of Jesus, is another question. I would strongly argue in the affirmative. Although it is true that ideas of resurrection of the dead and even ascent to heaven are found in a multiplicity of Jewish sources in the late 2nd Temple period, they do not appear as expressions in burial contexts unless we have an exception here in the Talpiot tomb. That, along with the unprecedented example of writing the divine name Yahweh in Greek letters in a Jewish tomb—a place of *tum'a* or ritual defilement—argues for a heterodox or sectarian context. The family buried in this tomb are Jews to be sure, and the style of the tomb, the ornamentations of the ossuaries, and everything else about it is nothing out of the ordinary—other than these semi-informal inscriptions of both epitaph and icon.

What we have interpreted as the Jonah image is as unprecedented as the inscription. Although we initially considered the possibility that the image might be a funerary *nephesh* or pillar, or perhaps a crudely drawn amphora, we soon realized that we were dealing here with something far different—never seen before on an ossuary. Our image, drawn as it is, with the prominent tail, fins, scales, eye, and stick figure, with the head coming out of the mouth, is no vase or column. The six smaller fish along the top of the ossuary as well as the "half fish" on the end, as if diving under water, along with the cross-like door or "bars" of death, all combine to tell a "resurrection" story. We have carefully examined all the extant examples of *nephesh* and amphora on ossuaries of this period and have not found anything that is even close (*Fig.* 25). One way to contextualize this is trying to imagine that *any* extant image of a

[51] See Cotton, *et al.*, *CIIP* nos. 359, 375, 385, 439, 451, 458, 460, 466, 604, 605. One disputed exception might be no. 93 that has been variously translated as "no man can go up" or "no one has abolished his entering."

pillar/*nephesh* or amphora might in fact be a fish.[52] The correspondence simply is not there.

Jews did not put images of animals on their ossuaries—perhaps in deference to the commandment against making "graven images" that specifies "any likeness . . . in heaven above, on the earth beneath, or *in the waters* under the earth" (Deuteronomy 5:8). There is a possible fish on an ossuary of the period of unknown provenance inscribed with the name Claudius in Greek (Iklwdiv).[53]Although most seem convinced the image is a fish, with its significance variously interpreted, I find it less certain than our Jonah image. We recently examined it closely. Its two "eyes" seem to resemble no fish I am aware of and it lacks any kind of tail (*Fig.* 26). Other than that possible example there simply are no others. However, our recent discovery of the Jonah image has caused us to go back to the drawing board in reconsidering other images.

In the 1970s Pau Figueras came across a small fragment of an ossuary in the IAA warehouse of unknown provenance that had the name Yeshua—Hebrew or Aramaic for Jesus—inside a circle that he identified as a fish (*Fig.*27). He was convinced that he had discovered the first archaeological evidence that could be tied to Jewish followers of Jesus.[54] Most scholars disagreed, taking the so-called fish as a carelessly drawn circle, simply calling attention to the name of the person buried in the ossuary. Rahmani wrote "The similarity of the circle to a fish is coincidental and the inferences drawn by Figueras excessive."[55] Jonathan Price recently concurred, labeling Figueras' suggestion "an over-interpretation." These editors of the two most prestigious catalogues of ossuary inscriptions from this period represent a general consensus. They maintain that not only is there no distinctive archaeological evidence left behind by Jesus' first followers, but also ossuary ornamentations in general are non-

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[52] See photos in Rahmani, nos. 183, 213, 231, 378, 399, 815.
[53] Rahmani, *CJO*, no. 348.
[54] Pau Figueras, *Jewish and Christian Beliefs of Life After Death in the Light of the Ossuary Decoration*, Ph.D. Hebrew University Ph.D. Dissertation, 1974. His more comprehensive work is *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries Documenta Et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui* 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1983).
[55] Rahmani, *CJO*, no. 140; Cotton, *et al.*, no. 546.

symbolic and have nothing to do with expressions of hope for resurrection or the afterlife. This might well be the case for the standard repertoire of designs such as rosettes, patterned borders, pillars, lattices, gates, tower monuments, vases, and a variety of flora, but what about markings that fall out of the ordinary pattern and seem to have some individual stamp of expression—such as the Jonah image in our tomb? We are convinced that a new examination of the evidence might reveal something that has previously been overlooked.

We recently examined the Figueras ossuary fragment firsthand in the warehouse of the Israel Museum. We suggest here, in light of our recent discoveries, that the Figueras fragment is nothing less than a representation of the "sign of Jonah"—Jesus inside a fish. It appears to be a fairly well drawn fish, not a careless circle, and the inscription inside the fish—Jesus—might not refer to a person named Jesus who was buried in the ossuary, but rather to that person's faith in Jesus and his resurrection. In other words it would be a symbol of faith, not a careless marking. Price mentions that there are only two other examples of names within "circles" on ossuaries and one of them is from the Jesus tomb—the name Mariamene Mara. We had never really paid attention to it before but from the photo one can clearly see the sweeping flourish of a bulging circular shape enclosing her name. We recently made a special trip to the IAA warehouse at Bet Shemesh to examine the inscription firsthand. The "circle" is very much in the shape of a fish—maybe even a great fish (*Fig.* 28). Was this just a thoughtless flourish or was it purposely and carefully executed to convey some kind of symbolic meaning? If the custom of drawing circles around names only occurs three times out of 650 ossuary inscriptions, and two of them are connected to a "Jesus" name—and the third well might be a fish also, we think the majority view might well have overlooked something quite important here. It seems very likely that followers of Jesus were moved to do what other Jews eschewed—in testimony to their faith in Jesus' resurrection. Clearly the Jonah image and the Greek inscription, in such close proximity to a tomb with names corresponding

to Jesus and his family, should cause us to reexamine some of the other ossuary inscriptions that Eliezar Sukenik, Bellarmino Bagatti, and others have identified as Christian—some of which are in the close geographical proximity to the Talpiot tombs.[56]

Identifying religious affiliations, especially Jewish or Christian, in ancient epigraphic sources is notoriously fraught with difficulties and complexities, as Ross Kraemer and others have pointed out.[57] Many scholars are convinced that the Jewish followers of Jesus, living and dying as Jews, and burying their dead in Jerusalem and Galilee in the 1st century CE left behind no distinctive material remains—no cross or *tau* marks, no iconographic images, and no epigrams or inscriptions.[58] And yet we have a near contemporary text that explicitly compares the cross to the letter Tau or T two centuries before the cross was supposed to have first appeared as a Christian symbol (*Barnabas* 9.8). We hope the evidence in this tomb, alongside its wider immediate context of the "Jesus tomb," will spur a full reexamination and discussion of the entire phenomenon of Jewish-Christian archaeological remains in 1st century CE Judea and Galilee.

In both the case of the Greek inscription and the Jonah image context is everything. Both are

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[56] E. L. Sukenik, "The Earliest Records of Christianity," in *American Journal of Archaeology* 51 (1947): 351-65. There has been an extensive discussion and critique of Sukenik's proposals, see the bibliography in Cotton, *et al., CIIP*, p. 502. See the many examples that most scholars have ignored in Bellarmino Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision: History and Archaeology of the Judaeo-Christians*, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Minor 2, trans. Eugene Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1971).

[57] Ross S. Kraemer, "Jewish Tuna and Christian Fish: Identifying Religious Affiliation in Epigraphic Sources," *Harvard Theological Review*, 84:2 (April, 1991), pp. 141-162.

[58] The literature is vast and this paper is not the place to debate the wider question, however for the parameters of the discussion see: See Jack Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, Revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 359-74 for a summary of the positive case. James Strange, offers an assessment of the evidence for and against, see "Archaeological Evidence of Jewish Believers," in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, editors (Henrickson: Peabody, 2007), pp. 710-741. For other dissenting views see Joan Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places* (New York: Oxford University Press,1993), as well as Gideon Avni and Shimon Gibson, "The 'Jewish-Christian' Tomb From the Mount of Offense (*Batn Al-Hawa'*) in Jerusalem Reconsidered." *Revue Biblique* 115 (1998):161-175.

unprecedented in a Jewish tomb of this period. We are dealing here with a family or clan that is bold enough to write out the holy name of God in a tomb, with a declaration about "raising up" or resurrection—something totally unparalleled in any of the 900 tombs from the period known in Jerusalem. And further, this is a family that is willing to put an image of a fish and a human, both eschewed by pious Jews as "graven images" on the most prominent ossuary in this wealthy tomb—located at the front of the first niche on the right as one enters the tomb—and fill it with the bones of more than one family member. The Jonah ossuary itself shows no signs of professional ornamentation, as do the other decorated ossuaries in the tomb that might have been purchased from a shop. It was clearly done by a family member, or someone associated with the family, who was not a professional engraver. It is nonetheless the most elaborately carved ossuary in the tomb, testifying to the importance of its individual and particular expression. Likewise the inscription is scratched between the two professionally carved rosettes in the small space available—again as an individual expression intended to communicate something very singular and special.

We are convinced that the best explanation for these unusual epigraphic features in the Talpiot "patio" tomb is its proximity to the Jesus family tomb less than 45 meters away. What we apparently have is a family connected to the Jesus movement who reaches beyond the standard burial norms of the Jewish culture of the period to express itself individually in these unique ways.

The Expedition Team





Basson, Arav, Golubev, Tabor, Kuzar



Jacobovici, Tabor, Charlesworth

Figures

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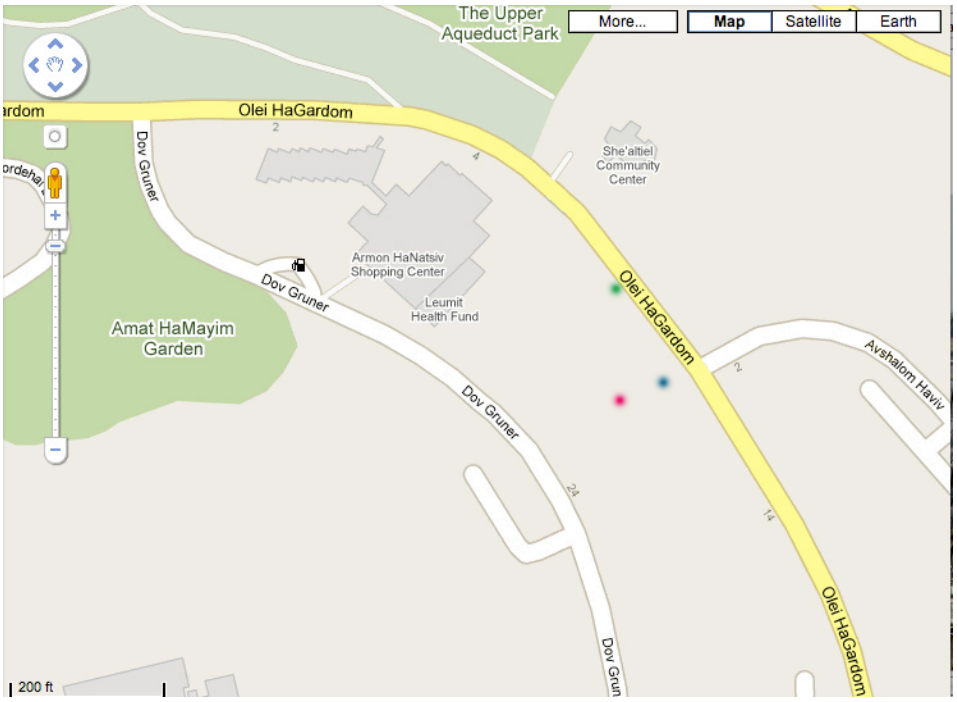


Figure 1. Map of the three tomb Locations on ancient estate in East Talpiot
Green: Patio tomb; Red: "Jesus" tomb; Blue: Ruined tomb



Figure 2. Skeletal remains in kokh 8.

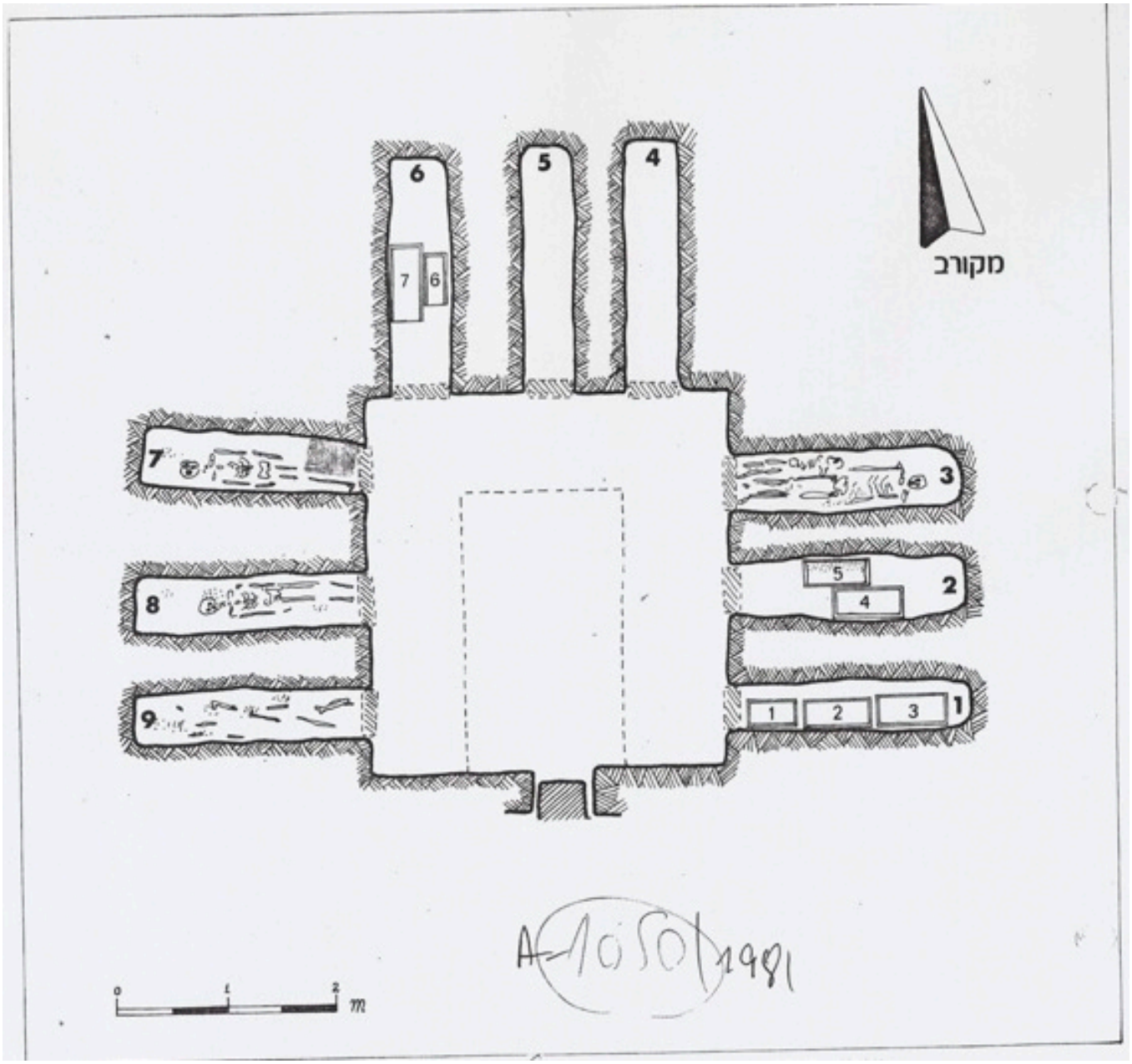


Figure 3. Kloner's original map in the IAA excavation file (Israel Antiquities Authority)



Figure 4. Golubev and Jacobocivi examine the eighth ossuary, now at the IAA Bet Shemesh warehouse



Figure 5. 1981 photo of the child's ossuary with bones inside (Israel Antiquities Authority)



Figure 6. Tabor and Jacobovici examine cooking pot now in the IAA Bet Shemesh warehouse



Figure 7. Chalk mark numbering from 1981 inside ossuary 4, kokh 2.





Figure 8. Basement area of the condominium today and "Jesus" tomb less than 45 meters away

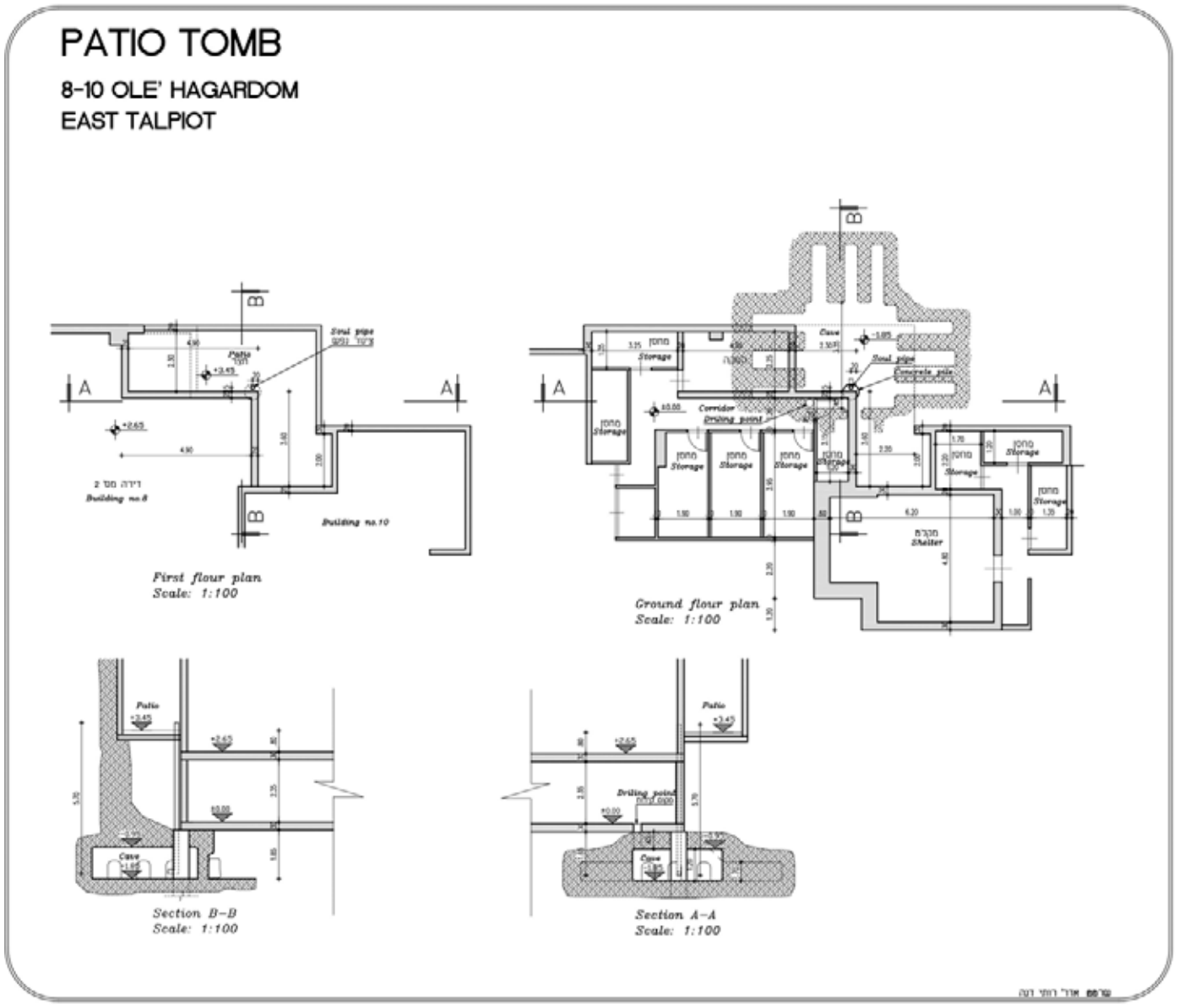


Figure 9. Map of Condo and Tomb Location



Figure 10. Tabor stands over ritual vent pipe emerging from 1st floor patio



Figure 11. Drilling probe holes into the tomb

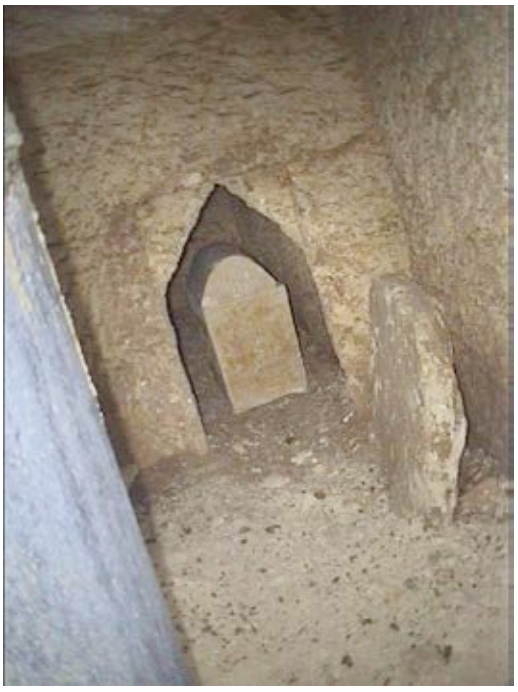


Figure 12. First view inside the tomb of kokh 1 on May 6, 2010



Figure 13. Klassen and Jacobovici with the retracted arm, Tarant and Walter with the full extension



Figure 14. Laser measurement capabilities



Figure 15. View of the snake camera and its light approaching kokh 3

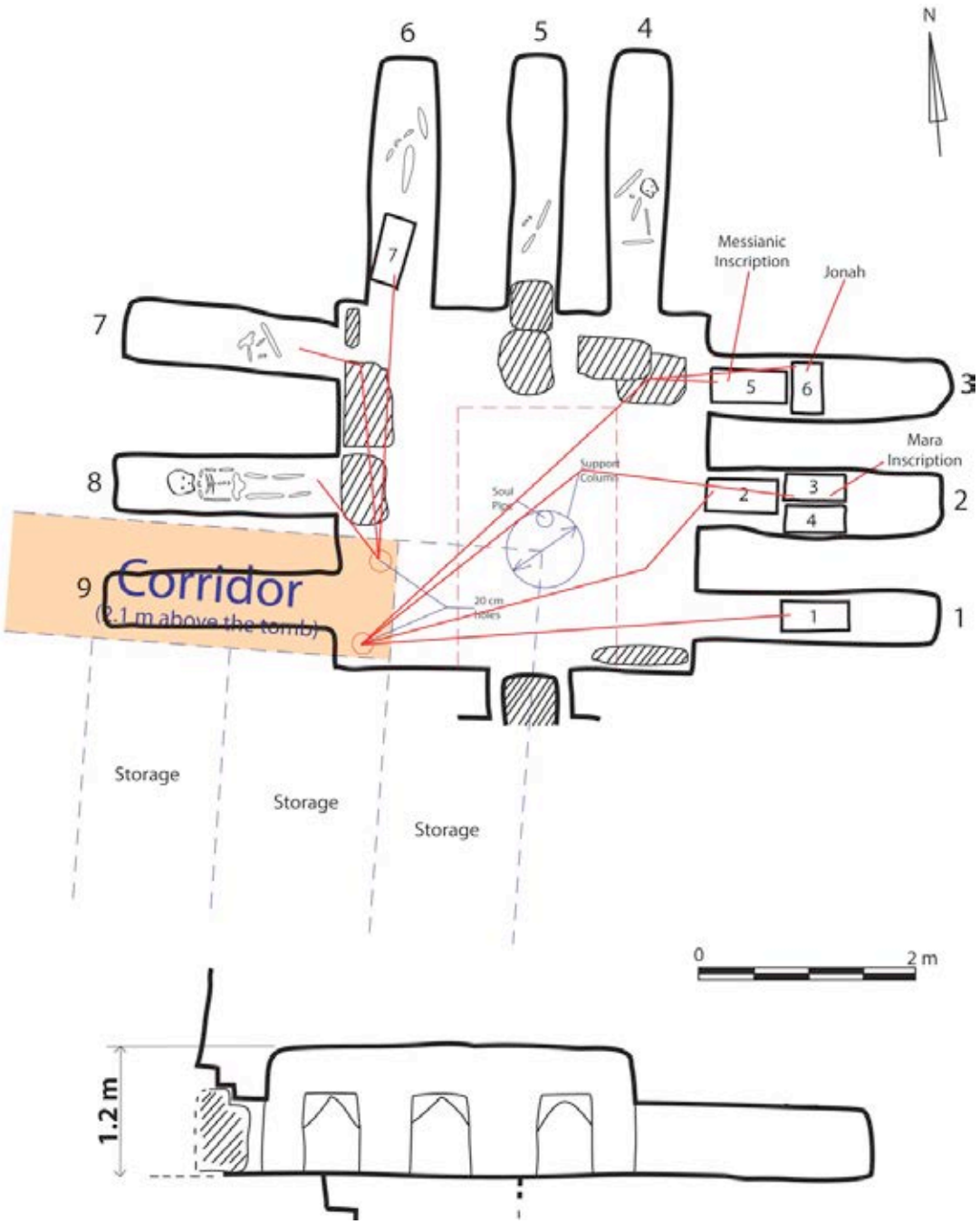


Figure 16. Current map of the tomb with ossuary locations



Figure 17. Animal-like stick figure or perhaps Hebrew/Greek etching



Figure 18. Mara inscription



Figure 19. Four-line Greek inscription and museum replica showing placement on ossuary on the panel between the two rosettes.



20. Jonah image on front façade of ossuary 6.





21. Museum replica showing placement of image on front panel and CGI composite of image



22. Jonah image from San Sebastiano catacomb, Rome



Figure 23. Bell-shaped circle with cross mark inside



*Figure 24. Tail and body of fish as it subm*erges (Israel Antiquities Authority)

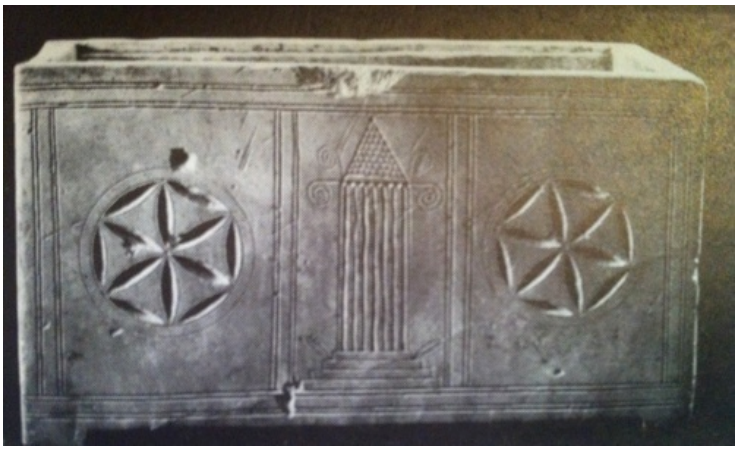




Figure 25. Examples of a nephesh/pillar and an amphora on two ossuaries in the Israel State Collection



Figure 26. The Claudius "fish"



Figure 27. The Yeshua "Circle" or Sign of Jonah

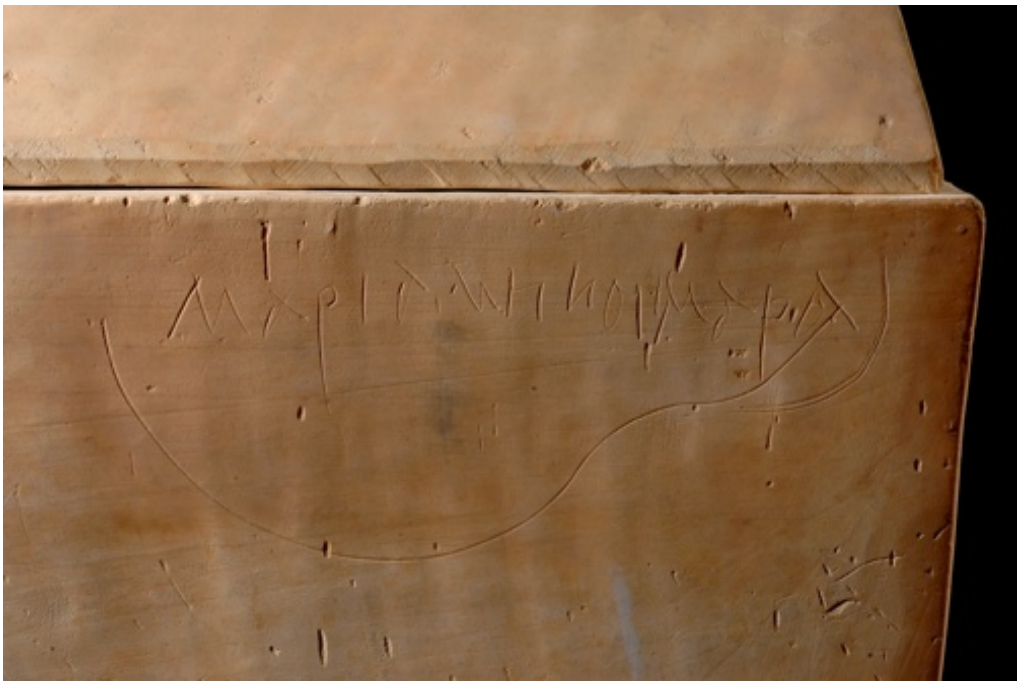


Figure 28. The Mariamene ossuary with "circled" name