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A New Edition of Matthew 27:64b; 28:13 in Today's Pop Science and a Salty Breeze from the Dead Sea

Ulrich Luz in his outstanding commentary on the Gospel of Matthew¹ emphasizes the irony of Mt 27:62-66; 28:11-15. While making the tomb „*secure* until the third day“ (27:64) and trying to render impossible that any resurrection news could emerge, the guards ironically contribute to affirming the news of the resurrection; they bear witness to the angel's intervention and the empty tomb before the chief priests (28:11). Since Matthew lets the „safeguarding“ guards testify, the resurrection in his gospel comes close to being an unquestionable fact. „[In den Augen des Matthäus] kommt die Auferstehung in die Nähe eines eindeutigen, unzweifelhaften Tatbestands.“² Matthew's readers can only smile. Just like Balaam, those who try to hinder God's work become God's instruments.

One aspect of the story, the disciples' theft, has recently rendered another humorous touch to the story. Who in the first century would have dreamt that Matthew's remark, „this story has been spread *to this day*“ (μέχρι τῆς σήμερον 28:15b), would mean the year 2007? The rumor that the disciples stole Jesus' corpse from Joseph of Arimathea's tomb has indeed been reiterated „to this,“ i.e., our own, „day,“ and it has also made money μέχρι τῆς σήμερον, like it did in the first century (28:15a). No, the enlightened Reimarus³ did not gain earthly riches with this story, although he held the rumor of the theft to be historically true. It needed different people who know how to work PR and money-making machines. Just in time for Lent 2007, Oscar-winning filmmaker James Cameron („The Terminator,“ „Titanic“), Emmy-decorated documentarian Simcha Jacobovici and a learned entourage launched the news that they had found the ossuaries of Jesus, his wife, son, mother and brother in a tomb other than the one provided by Joseph of Arimathea. The Discovery Channel

¹ U. Luz, Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Mt 26-28) (EKK I/4), Neukirchen-Vluyn u.a. 2002.

² The formulation „in die Nähe“ (394) is important for Luz. On p. 421, he makes sure: For Matthew, the resurrection is not *directly* an „unfehlbar festzustellende historische Tatsache.“

³ H. S. Reimarus, Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes, hg. v. G. Alexander, Frankfurt/M. 1972, II 188-206.

broadcasted their production „The Lost Tomb of Jesus“ on March 4th, 2007. At the same time, Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino presented their book „The Jesus Family Tomb,“⁴ which in the Spring of 2007 ranked near the top of the bestseller lists. Their main argument was that the *combination* of names in one burial cave, „Yeshua son of Yehosef,“ „Yehudah son of Yeshua,“ „Yosé,“ „Mariamene alias Mara,“ „Marya“ and „Matya,“ is so unique that this cave must be the family tomb of Jesus of Nazareth. Scholars in their first reactions were quick to jeer that these are very common names. This criticism, however, missed the target. The filmmakers had already factored it in. We need to dig deeper to discover the sandy foundations of the new theory, which not only is making a lot of silver coins jingle, but has also upset a few Christians. The filmmakers indeed attempted specifically to corroborate the old rumor that Jesus' disciples took his body from the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (Mt 27:64; 28:13-15). According to the Discovery Channel, after stealing the crucified body from the Arimethea tomb after sunset on the day after the crucifixion, Jesus' followers deposited it in the family tomb of Talpiyot.⁵

1. The Archaeological Excavation in 1980

The archaeological story started twenty-seven years ago. In March 1980, bulldozers scraped the entrance of an ancient rock-cut tomb in the Dov Gruner Street of the Jerusalem neighborhood of East Talpiyot. A salvage excavation was undertaken by the late Yosef Gat of the Israeli Department of Antiquities and Museums.⁶ Between the end of the first century B.C. and the year 70 C.E., about thirty-five Jews had found their resting place in this burial cave, approximately half of them in ten ossuaries. Limestone chests for bones were fashionable in Jerusalem until 70 C.E. The dead were wrapped in shrouds and buried in caves like Jesus of Nazareth. When the corpses had decayed, relatives collected the bones and deposited them in ossuaries. Space was limited in the burial caves. Most of the Jerusalem ossuaries were used twice (on the average 1.7 times).⁷

⁴ S. Jacobovici/C. Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb. The Discovery, the Investigation, and the Evidence That Could Change History*, San Francisco 2007.

⁵ Jacobovici/Pellegrino, *Family Tomb* (see n. 4), 72-73.

⁶ From March 28th to April 14th, 1980. See A. Kloner, *A Tomb With Inscribed Ossuaries in East Talpiyot – Jerusalem*, *Atiqot* 29 (1996) 15-22; L. Y. Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel*, Jerusalem 1994, 222-224, no. 701-709.

⁷ Cf. Kloner, *Tomb* (see n. 6), 22 note 2; A. Kloner, *Burial Caves and Ossuaries from the Second Temple Period on Mount Scopus*, in: *Jews and Judaism in the*

In three of the walls of the central chamber of the Talpiyot tomb, six loculi⁸ were carved; a single corpse was deposited in each one of them. A stone, today lost, sealed each opening air-tight. Later, some of these cavities were emptied, and ossuaries were placed in them. Other loculi still served for the primary burial of the newly deceased. In the last phase of the tomb, the newly deceased were only buried in loculus 4 and in two arcosolia in the northern and western walls, where originally ossuaries had been displayed.

Six of the Talpiyot ossuaries were inscribed with the names mentioned,⁹ six out of ten. Generally fewer than 60% of the bone chests carry inscriptions. This above-average level does not help to identify the group that was buried here, except that the people *may* have been more educated than the average. But was this true for a craftsman's family from Nazareth?

Three of the seven names in the tomb reflected Hasmonian appellations: „Matthew,“ „Judas“ and „Joseph.“ The ratio of Greek to Aramaic inscriptions is 1:5 and differs from the usual ratio of 3:4.¹⁰ Apparently, the Talpiyot group spoke less Greek than the rest of the Jerusalem ossuary users. Were they intentionally avoiding a Hellenistic Jewish identity?¹¹

2. The Names, New Testament Figures and DNA

Scholars have known all this since 1994/96, when the excavation was first published. It needed the fantasy of filmmakers to coin headlines

Second Temple, Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods. FS S. Safrai, Jerusalem 1993, 75-106, here 105.

⁸ Measurements: The lengths vary from 1.24 to 1.76 m, the widths from 0.34 to 0.54 m. Only the narrow sides of the loculi are open to the central chamber.

⁹ Ossuary no. 1: Μαριαμήνου ἢ [καὶ] Μάρα (Μαριαμήνον is a diminutive of *Mariamene*; the genitive indicates to whom the ossuary belonged; ἢ [καὶ] = „also called,“ „alias.“ What Rahmani and Kloner interpret as an *Eta*, however, is only a vertical line and differs from the well-executed *Eta* in Μαριαμήνον; for an alternative reading, see below); no. 2: ישוע בר יהודה; no. 5: יוסף; no. 6: מריה; no. 3: מתיא, and inside the ossuary מתיה. No. 4 reads: ישוע בר יהוסף; in front of it an X was incised, as on ossuary no. 7. Cf. the images in Kloner, Tomb (see n. 6), 19-20. Both Xs were hastily scratched into the stone. Are they stonemason's marks, crosses, or the letter *Taw*? For the discussion, see below.

¹⁰ For this average number and the one in note 11, see Kloner, Tomb (see n. 6), 16; Kloner, Burial Caves (see n. 7), 104-105.

¹¹ Five of the ossuaries were ornamented, five were not, which is consistent with the average. Four of the inscribed bone chests are bare of decoration, two are not; those of Mariamene Mara and Yehudah, the son of Yeshua, were the most elaborate ones. Ossuary no. 7 has an X-shaped mark. Only no. 10, which was catalogued as broken and today is lost, was blank.

with the material. Wasn't a brother of Jesus called „Joses“ (Mark 6:3)? Aren't Mary, Jesus, Joseph, Judas and Matthew well-known figures in the New Testament? „Matya“ is a short form of „Matityahu/Matthew.“¹² However, this Matya cannot be Matthew, the Evangelist, who began collecting the material for his gospel only after the Jewish War. On the other hand, a Galilean tax collector and disciple was named Matthew (Mt 10:3). But why was he the only disciple buried in Jesus' burial cave? He was not a relative. Jesus' great-grandfather, who was called „Matthat“ or „Matthan“ (Mt 1:15; Lk 3:24), still remains. But in the early 30s C.E., when allegedly Jesus of Nazareth was buried here, this ancestor was already deceased. Were his bones transported from Galilee to Jerusalem? Or did he not live and die in Galilee? Or was Matya a cousin of Jesus, whose existence is not documented anywhere? The circular structure of this argument became obvious. The filmmakers, at least their statistical expert, discarded the Matthew card and turned to the two Marys in the cave.

For the Discovery Channel team, Mariamne is Mary Magdalene and Marya Jesus's mother. „Mariamene“¹³ is a variant of „Miriam/Maryam/Marya“ („Mary“), the most popular female Jewish name of that time. Second names such as „Mara“ helped to distinguish the numerous Marys from each other.

However, none of the two Marys in the burial cave can be convincingly identified with the New Testament figures. In the first century sources, Mary, the prominent disciple, was always identified by an addition to her name: „from Magdala“ („Magdalene“). Why was this

¹² מַתְיָהוּ. For this and the following names, cf. T. Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity, Part 1: Palestine 330 B.C.E. – 200 C.E.*, Tübingen 2002, s.v. Ilan also notes how frequently names occur in our sources. Cf. further, e.g., Ilan, *The Names of the Hasmonians in the Second Temple Period*, *Eretz Israel* 19 (1987) 238-241 (Hebr.); R. Hachlili, *Jewish Names and Nicknames in the Second Temple Period*, *Eretz Israel* 17 (1983) 188-211 (Brawer volume; Hebr.); Hachlili, *Hebrew Names, Personal Names, Family Names, and Nicknames of Jews in the Second Temple Period*, in: *Families and Family Relations as Represented in Judaism and Early Christianities. Texts and Fictions*, ed. by J. W. van Henten/A. Brenner, Leiden 2000, 83-115.

¹³ This name can be found on more than twenty Jerusalem ossuaries (cf., e.g., Rahmani, *Catalogue* [see n. 6], 14 and 115-116), also in Josephus, *Ant.* 4.78; Bell. 1.241. Furthermore, Μαριάμη is attested on inscriptions in Asia Minor (MAMA 7.98.1 [Christian?]; 8.127.1); on the Jewish inscription SEG 8.433.1 from Alexandria; on SEG 31.1407.1.1 (10-74 C.E.) from Jericho; on five additional epigraphs from Jerusalem, SEG 33.1278/CIJ 1293.b.1 and SEG 33.1290.1 (both 1st cent. B.C.E. or C.E.), CIJ 1341.1 and 1387.1 (both 2nd cent. B.C.E. to 2nd cent. C.E.), SEG 20.481.a.1 (4th cent. C.E.?); as well as in the papyri PMur 2.113.Fr.A and PBabatha 26, 34 alongside other Jewish persons, among them *Simon*, *Salome* and even *Jesus*: „Jesus Chtusion“ (PBabatha 34, see below).

rule abandoned on the ossuary? Why was another alias used, „Mara,“ which is not documented anywhere for Mary Magdalene? „Mara“ is a short version of „Martha.“¹⁴ That „Mara“ was not the title „lady“ (female form of „lord“), contrary to what the filmmakers suggest, is made clear by the „alias“ in the inscription („Mariamene alias Mara“). Titles were not introduced by „alias.“ Furthermore, why would this title have been given to her on the ossuary while it was denied to the Jesus of the burial cave? Finally, why would the *only* Greek inscription of the cave be dedicated to the Aramaic-speaking Mary Magdalene from rural Galilee? And why would she have been given both an inscription and ornaments on the ossuary? The others – except for Judah – were not honored in this way. The Jesus of the cave did not receive these distinctions. Thus, a stack of inconsistencies would be piling up on the table if Mary Magdalene were Mariamene.

The ossuaries no longer contain bones. Together with other ancient bones, they were re-buried in a consecrated area in Jerusalem after the excavation, and their relationship to specific ossuaries cannot be identified anymore. If the filmmakers are right, Jesus of Nazareth and his family today are buried in a mass grave like Mozart.

Even though the bones are lost, the ossuaries contain DNA traces, especially the bone chests of Yeshua and Mariamene. Maybe one day an enthusiastic billionaire will have the genetic material of all ancient individuals in mass graves deciphered and compared to the DNA in the ossuaries. The filmmakers so far were more thrifty. In a renowned lab in Ontario,¹⁵ they had mitochondrial DNA from the Jesus and the Mariamene ossuaries analyzed; they ruled out a common mother – and proclaimed boldly that the two might have been married to each other! They don't tell their audiences that about 35 individuals were buried in the tomb, approximately half of them men. All of these gentlemen were possible husbands – in case „darling Mariamene,“ as the endearing diminutive „Mariamenon“ reads, was married at all. Moreover, the Discovery Channel team overlooked that on average each Jerusalem ossuary was used 1.7 times. Thus, the probability that the filmmakers analyzed organic traces of the pair Yeshua/Mariamene is only 34%. They did not examine how many individuals really were buried in both ossuaries.

However, the inscription itself could have given them a clue. It can also be read as Μαριάμη καὶ Μάρρα („Mariame and Mara“), although Rahmani (1994) and Kloner (1996) did not investigate this possibility. καὶ Μάρρα seems to have been written by a second hand. Whereas the first carver always lifted up the tool once while inscribing an Alpha in „Mariame,“ the second carver, writing more cursively, consistently

¹⁴ Cf. the ossuary in Rahmani, Catalogue (see n. 6), 258, no. 868.

¹⁵ Paleo-DNA Lab at Lakehead University, Dr. C. Matheson.

scratched an Alpha in *one* movement. The only problem with this alternative reading is that the vertical line in front of „Mara“ would no longer be a letter, but just a scratch. On the other hand, Rahmani with his reading of the single line as an Eta struggles with the problem that the other Eta at the end of „Mariame“ differs totally. Thus, we will never be sure what the writer(s) exactly meant with their graffito. If we decide in favor of the second reading, a Mary and a Martha would have been buried in this ossuary. Imagine the rush of the popular media to identify the sisters of Lk 10 in a forensic lab! However, then we would not have a family tomb anymore, as the filmmakers suggest, but a cemetery of Jesus' „true relatives“ (Mk 3:34). Is *this* what the Talpiyot tomb is all about? We will see. First, we need to pinpoint more epigraphic archaeological uncertainties that the filmmakers have swept under the rug.

We do not know which ossuary was placed next to which *in situ*. Was the Jesus bone chest positioned beside Mary Magdalene's? In the course of the salvage excavation, the chests were removed from the tomb. In the archaeological publications, this important information about the *in situ* placement is not mentioned. It seems to be lost. Colleagues A. Kloner and S. Gibson, who witnessed the excavation in 1980, chose not to answer my e-mails asking for clarification.

The publications also do not mention a graffito in the northern arcosolium, which seems to be detectable, but not readable on a photo from the Discovery Channel and in 25 seconds of the film. The filmmakers spoiled the chance to decipher the inscription, since they entered the sealed tomb without an epigrapher, without a trained archaeologist and even without a permit from the Israel Antiquities Authority. How amateurish can pop science be?

In order to hold up their Mary Magdalene theory, the filmmakers are grasping at straws: at the legendary Acts of Philip of the fourth century, which depicts a disciple Mariamene as Philip's sister and even puts a smoke-puffing dragon in the scene. This text has no source value for first century history. It is not even clear whether the authors of the legend meant Mary Magdalene when they mention Mariamene. Nowhere do they mention „from Magdala“ as the usual distinctive mark of this Mary. In 94:7-9, they position Mariamene together with a Martha, which alludes to Lk 10:38-42 and makes any identification with Mary Magdalene even more difficult.¹⁶ The moviemakers would have been better advised to point to Hippolytos, *Refutatio* 5.7; 10.9. But even this text from the early third century lacks source value for

¹⁶ For the same reason also Orig., *c. Cels.* 5.62.16 (Μαριάμνης καὶ... Μάρθας), is a bad reference, contra Jacobovici/Pellegrino, *Family Tomb* (see n. 4), 205. Their hint at Epiphanius (p. 205) totally leads astray; nowhere does Epiphanius use a form similar to *Mariamene*.

the first century. Or do we want to trust a paper written *today* to give new information about George Washington's last days in Mount Vernon more than the documents from 1799?

The attempt to identify Jesus' mother with the Marya of the tomb is equally disastrous. On the ossuary, the Latin form מריה/„Marya“/„Maria“ is spelled out. However, never in her life was Jesus' mother called the Latin version of her name. The Greek New Testament texts *consistently* name Jesus' mother with the Semitic „Mariam“ (מרים). Why would this rule have been abandoned on the ossuary of a Galilean Aramaic-speaking woman?

Yehudah (Judas), son of Jesus, bears the third most common Jewish name in Hellenistic-Roman times. Authors of mystery novels such as Dan Brown suggest that Jesus had a child, but this does not have any basis in the historical sources. It does not help to speculate about the anonymous beloved disciple in the Gospel of John or about the boy of Mk 14:51, as the filmmakers do.¹⁷ The legend of a romance between Jesus and Mary Magdalene was produced by the erotic fantasy of ascetic Gnostics in the second and third centuries. The historian of the first century has no historical evidence at all to confirm a passionate spark between the man from Nazareth and the girl from Magdala.¹⁸

Thus, only Yosé and Jeshua remain for possible identification with New Testament personalities. Jesus' brother, Joses, represents a good possibility. „Yosé“ and „Joses“ both are endearing short versions of „Yehosef“ („Joseph“). „Yosé“ often occurs on ossuaries.¹⁹ However, if the filmmakers were right, it would be strange that in our burial cave the patronym „Joseph's son“ was only added to „Yeshua“ and not to „Yosé.“ Were they really brothers? We cannot even exclude that Yosé was Yeshua's father!

The house of cards collapses with Yeshua (Yoshua/Jesus). Ironically, „Yeshua“ is the least legible name on the six ossuaries. Ironically, his name was carved in a more slipshod cursory way than the other inscriptions, with only superficial incisions. Each of the four Aramaic letters is unclear, especially the first two.²⁰ But let us accept the Jesus reading!²¹ The problems only start then.

¹⁷ Jacobovici/Pellegerino, Family Tomb (see n. 4), 207-209.

¹⁸ For the sources of the 1st to 3rd centuries, see P. Lampe, *Küsste Jesus Magdalenen mitten auf den Mund?*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2007, 13-18.

¹⁹ See Rahmani, Catalogue (see n. 6), 295.

²⁰ Photos in Kloner, Tomb (see n. 6), 19. Kloner's own assessment: „Each of the four letters... is unclear“ (18).

²¹ So Rahmani, Catalogue (see n. 6), 223. But in view of the uncertain reading, it becomes clear that the filmmakers, when thinking about the possible fatherhood of Jesus of Nazareth, risk being drawn into the whirlpool of a circular argumentation: Since a Yeshua is clearly identifiable as the father of a Yehudah on ossuary no. 2, Rahmani reads Yeshua on ossuary no. 4; ergo, in ossuary no. 4 a Yeshua

If Jesus of Nazareth were buried here, again inconsistencies would pile up. Nowhere is there evidence of Christianity in the cave, not even the Aramaic prayer exclamation of the earliest Christians, „Maranatha“ („Our Lord, come!“), which expressed their longing for Jesus' coming back at the end of all times. Rosettes and circles decorate the ossuaries. Nowhere is there a sign of veneration for this Jesus as living lord.²² At best, a coin-sized graffito on the lid of the Yeshua ossuary, an X with a third (and fourth?) line, could be interpreted as a roughly scrawled star, if the X is not the dashed-off mark of a stonemason, which also can be seen on the ossuary itself,²³ whereas the other scratches, here as everywhere else on the ossuary's surface, might be merely coincidental. This is not enough evidence to salute the rough carving as the „Star out of Jacob“ (Num 24).²⁴

Different from Kloner,²⁵ Jacobovici/Pellegrino²⁶ do not interpret the X on the ossuary as a stonemason's mark. With reference to Ez 9:4,²⁷ they construe the X in front of the name „Yeshua“ as a Taw, a symbol for the just. But this would not be a Jewish-Christian indication or a sign of venerating a lord „sitting at the right hand of the Father.“ Any righteous Jew would be eligible for this symbol. A Christian cross also cannot be seen in this X.²⁸ The early graffito of a clearly Christian cross under San Sebastiano in Rome (ca. 150-240 C.E.) depicts the cross as a T,²⁹ not as an avellan cross. Minucius Felix, Oct. 29.8, and Tertullian, Apol. 16.6-8, contemporaries to the illustration under San Sebastiano, know the cross as a Christian symbol, but at the same time show a world, even pagan cult, full of cross-shaped objects without any Christian content.

Not only was the Yeshua of Talpiyot not venerated, he was even treated with less attention than others in the burial cave. His inscrip-

was buried, and we have to conclude that Jesus of Nazareth begot a son named Yehudah...

²² Did Jesus' family members, including his mother and his brother James, who allegedly placed his bones in the ossuary one year after his death, not share the Christian belief in his resurrection? This belief did not automatically presuppose an empty tomb (see below). The motif of an empty burial site cannot be found in our sources until relatively late, not before around 70 C.E. (Mk 16).

²³ In front of the name. Both Xs are on the narrow sides of the lid and the ossuary. Stonemasons usually marked which lid belonged to which bone chest.

²⁴ Contra Jacobovici/Pellegrino, Family Tomb (see n. 4), 211f. I looked at the ossuary and the graffito on Feb. 26, 2007, in New York from a 2m distance; a closer look was not allowed at this press conference.

²⁵ Tomb (see n. 6), 18.

²⁶ Family Tomb (see n. 4), 196.

²⁷ As well as Orig., *Selecta* in Ez. 13.800.50-13.801.14, and I. Mancini, *Archaeological Discoveries Relative to the Judeo-Christians*, Jerusalem 1968.

²⁸ Jacobovici's and Pellegrino's reference to Herculaneum (Family Tomb [see n. 4], 195) leads astray. See P. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus. Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, Minneapolis 2003, 9.

²⁹ Lampe, *Christians at Rome* (see n. 28), 29 and 141; see the image on p. V.

tion was incised with less care than the other epigraphs. Professionally carved ornaments decorate five of the other ossuaries, but not the Jesus bone chest, which was not even given a prominent place in the cave. There were two such eminent places: the two arcosolia, which were carved out of the rock with greater attention to detail than anything else in the burial chamber. Originally they accommodated ossuaries. But even if Jesus' ossuary once had been displayed in one of these two arched niches, it would have been removed from there to a less prominent place to give room for first burials of the newly deceased. Would Christians have treated their Messiah in this way?

3. Statistics in Historiography

Whenever no reasonable historical arguments can be given, lady statistics is invited to the slippery dance floor. Guided by the filmmakers' arms, she reveals herself to be a willing partner. In the heated calculation of probabilities, she is oblivious to the mentioned historical inconsistencies. The filmmakers only ask her one question: What is the probability of finding a closely knit group of people named „Jesus,“ „Mariamene,“ „Marya“ and „Yosé?“ Based on epigraphic-demographic data from the Hellenistic-Roman period, she answers: The probability is extremely low. According to her, the combination of „Jesus son of Joseph“ (this name occurs in 1 of 190 cases³⁰), „Mariamene“ (in 1 of 160), „Maria“ (in 1 of 4) and „Yosé“ (in 1 of 20) is so rare that the probability to meet such a group dwindles to 1/600.³¹ Scholars in their first reactions sneered that all four names are as common as Smith and Jones. But this does not throw the dancers out of step. The filmmakers already included this in their calculations. One of their mistakes is that they do not realize that the probability of

³⁰ The film team (Jacobovici/Pellegrino, Family Tomb [see n. 4], 65-78) reasonably calculates that a little more than half percent (0.526 %) of estimated 80,000 males in the Jerusalem population of that time (end of 1st cent. B.C.E. until 70 C.E.) was called „Jesus son of Joseph,“ that is, 1 in 190 males. This corresponds to the inscribed ossuaries: 9 % of the names on 223 ossuaries are „Jesus,“ 14 % are „Joseph.“ The probability of finding them combined consequently is $9/100 \times 14/100$, that is, 1.26 %. This figure can be cut in half, since the combination „Jesus son of Joseph“ may have occurred as frequently as „Joseph son of Jesus.“

³¹ The reasonable calculation of Prof. A. Feuerverger (University of Toronto) of the Discovery Channel team runs like this: $1/190$ („Jesus son of Joseph“) \times $1/160$ („Mariamene“) \times $1/20$ („Yosé“) \times $1/4$ („Marya“) = $1/2,400,000$, multiplied by 4 (adjust for bias of sources), multiplied by 1,000 (adjust for all possible first century collective tombs in Jerusalem). The result is 1 in 600.

identifying the two New Testament Marys in the Talpiyot tomb approaches zero (for the moment, I am kindly leaving out the improbability of the Jesus identification in the calculation; see above). After all that has been said above about the Marys, the only legitimate question of statistics would be: how probable was it to encounter the pairing „Jesus“/„Yosé“? On the basis of the same epigraphic-demographic data and statistical methods used by the Discovery Channel team, the probability would be 1/1.9 (53%).³² With a 53% chance of rain, it does not hurt to pack an umbrella.

However, the concerns of the historian are not alleviated. Epigraphically based statistical data mirror demographics only blurrily. Generally, the more elevated strata of society eternalized themselves in inscriptions. Therefore, they are over-represented in epigraphic as well as in ancient literary sources. Moreover, inscription finds are caused by off-topic factors. One epigraph is discovered because of aggressive development around Jerusalem, and another one stays undetected somewhere in the Gaza strip. We are in the dark when we try to extrapolate demographic information from frequencies of names on inscriptions and in ancient literary texts. We are not even certain about the total numbers of ancient populations, be it in Jerusalem or Judea. *All* statistical data tossed back and forth in the media as a reaction to the Discovery Channel production are to be taken with more than one grain of salt. They give the semblance of objectivity to a public that worships science as a substitute religion and is impressed when words such as „mitochondrial DNA“ or „statistical probability“ are dropped. To erect a tower of arguments on the foundation of unrepresentative epigraphic frequencies of names means building on a sand dune that shifts every time a new inscription is found.

The final fatal wind gust for the filmmakers' house of cards blows from the Dead Sea. A Jewish woman named Babatha left us her personal papers, papyri. In the 120s C.E., she lived in the port town of Maoza at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Her close social network comprised her husband *Jesus*, his children, her father *Simon*, a co-wife *Mariame* and men named *Jacobus* and *Judah* (PBabatha 17 from 128 C.E.; 25-26 and 34 from 131 C.E.). These people clearly had nothing to do with the New Testament, and nothing to do with the Talpiyot tomb. According to the rationale of the filmmakers, these people

³² „Jesus Son of Joseph“ occurs in 1 of 190 cases, according to the epigraphic-demographic data used by the team; „Yosé“ in 1 of 20. The probability then is $1/190 \times 1/20 = 1/3,800$. In order to balance out biased tendencies in the sources, this is multiplied by two: $1/3,800 \times 2 = 1/1,900$. And this is multiplied by 1,000, the number of collective tombs that may have existed in first century Jerusalem. The result is 1/1.9. It is not necessary to question the figures of the filmmakers (190, 20, 160, 4) – they *know* Ilan's lexicon of Jewish names! – as long as we can refute them on the basis of their *own* data.

should not have existed. Will the next „documentary“ try to sell the story that Jesus lived to be 120 years old and happily enjoyed his last years in the midst of his children under date palms by the Dead Sea?

4. The James Ossuary

The final card the filmmakers pull out of their sleeve is the speculation that the famous ossuary of James, „brother of Jesus,“ which emerged from a private collection in 2002, originates from the Talpiyot mausoleum and was stolen after the salvage excavation. Its surface purportedly matches the surfaces of the Talpiyot ossuaries. This statement, based on a 2006 analysis of the CSI Suffolk Crime Lab (New York), is incorrect. The methodologically best study of the James ossuary by an internationally renowned patina expert, Wolfgang Krumbein, from 2005 found that for at least two centuries the James ossuary was exposed to wind, weather, direct sunlight and also water and *not* to the atmosphere of a cave.³³ Krumbein's chemical surface analysis also does not match with that of the filmmakers.³⁴ They do not even discuss the results of the Krumbein report.

The Krumbein report also determined that all inscribed letters on the ossuary are probably genuine. On the one hand, the letters were unprofessionally cleaned more than once over a period of several years. On the other hand, in at least three different places, traces of natural patina can be found on letters of both the first and last sections of the inscription.³⁵ The surface of the last letters („brother of Jesus“) does not differ from that of the remaining inscription. The entire

³³ This is shown by marks of roots or of climbing plants as well as by severe biopitting caused by lichen and fungi after >150 years. Furthermore, alluvial dirt covered the inscription over a longer period of time.

³⁴ Jacobovici/Pellegrino, Family Tomb (see n. 4), 175-192. According to the analysis of Prof. W. Krumbein (University of Oldenburg, Sept. 2005), the surface contains not only calcite (CaCO₃), but also patina composed of the following minerals (in descending order of quantity): *apatite* (calcium phosphate), *whewellite* (hydrated calcium oxalate) and probably also *weddellite* (calcium oxalate). Apatite and whewellite are typical for biogenic patina, which develops over longer periods of time when exposed to open air, to microorganisms (fungi and bacteria) and to lichen. Furthermore, the patina comprises *microfossils* and *quartz* (SiO₂), which were probably blown onto the surface by dusty winds. Krumbein's report can be read on www.bib-arch.org/bswbOOossuary_Krumbeinreport.pdf; in addition, I exchanged e-mails with the author.

³⁵ In photos from 2003/04, the natural patina can also still be seen in the letters *Shin* and *Ayin* of the name „Yeshua.“ Furthermore, the surfaces of the letters comprise the same windblown microfossils and the same windblown quartz as the surface of the remaining ossuary, which does not corroborate, but rather refutes the hypothesis that the inscription was forged.

inscription thus may be authentic. But the probability that it denoted James, the apostle and brother of Jesus, amounts to only 17-20 %:³⁶ In view of the (admittedly never representative) epigraphic data, at least five Jacobs, sons of a Joseph and brothers of a Jesus, would have walked Jerusalem's streets in our time period. Besides, also this ossuary does not show any sign of Christian provenance.

5. Theology

At least theologically, the Discovery Channel people did their homework. With the finding of the alleged remains of Jesus' bones they do not want to challenge the Christian faith in resurrection. Indeed, Paul wrote that „flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable“ (1 Corinthians 15:50).³⁷ Many Christians believe that, when creating the human being anew in the act of resurrection, God does not need to rely on the molecules of the deceased body. Matter does not even sustain the continuity of the earthly human being. Nobody reading this article still has any molecules left from the body that once attended first grade. No matter how shocked Christians might be by the hypotheses of the Discovery Channel, they may relax and joyfully await Easter.

³⁶ „Jacob“ can be found six times on Jerusalem ossuaries, according to Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names* (see n. 12), plus once on a funereal epigraph (s.v.). Six of 519 inscribed ossuaries of males equals 1.16%. If we take, e.g., Jacobovici's and Pellegrino's figure (Family Tomb [see n. 4], 67-83; that is, 80,000 males in Jerusalem from the end of the 1st cent. B.C.E. until 70 C.E.), we end up having 928 „Jacobs“ in Jerusalem at that time. The combination „Jesus/Joseph“, according to Jacobovici/Pellegrino, occurs in 1 of 190 cases, that is, in 0.526%; 0.526% of 928 amounts to 5 males. – One of the many alternative, but similar calculations could be: „Jesus“, according to Jacobovici/Pellegrino, occurs in 9%, „Joseph“ in 14%. The combination „Jacob/Joseph“ („Jacob son of Joseph“ or „Joseph son of Jacob“) therefore may have happened about 130 times (14% of 928), „Jacob son of Joseph“ about $130/2 = 65$ times. If we factor in „Jesus“ (9% of 65), we end up having 6 males. Nobody bets their savings when the probability of success is only 17-20 %. I purposefully use Jacobovici's and Pellegrino's figures, since they emphatically advocate that the ossuary belonged to James, the apostle and brother of Jesus.

³⁷ For the Pauline concept, see P. Lampe, *Paul's Concept of a Spiritual Body*, in: *Resurrection. Theological and Scientific Assessments*, ed. by T. Peters/R. J. Russell/M. Welker, Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK 2002, 103-114; P. Lampe, *Die Wirklichkeit als Bild. Das Neue Testament als ein Grunddokument abendländischer Kultur im Lichte konstruktivistischer Epistemologie und Wissenssoziologie*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2006, 102-104.