



The Lost Tomb of Jesus

A DEATH-BLOW TO CHRISTIANITY?

By Albert James Dager

The Discovery Channel's March 4 premier of a controversial documentary claiming that the tomb of Jesus and his family has been found, is stirring great debate among scientists, scholars, religious leaders, and people in general. Some claim that it disproves the Resurrection and renders Jesus no more than a mortal man. They also claim that it bolsters the theories of Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene, and the idea that He has descendants living today. The film comes on the heels of the fictional portrayal of those same claims in *The DaVinci Code*.

Directed by Canadian journalist Simcha Jacobovici and produced by Oscar winning director James Cameron (*Titanic*, 1997), *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* was aired

in concert with the release of the book, *The Jesus Family Tomb*, authored by Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino, noted forensic scientist and author. The film and book chronicle a three-year investigation in which the authors cross-referenced the physical evidence "with clues from both the canonical and the apocryphal Gospels" to fill in what the authors call "the first complete picture of the Jesus family."¹

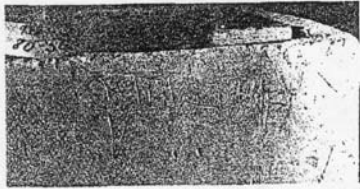
The filmmakers say *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* presents archaeological, statistical, and genetic evidence that the family of Jesus (including Jesus Himself) was interred in the burial cave. It has generated heated arguments and denunciations from some archaeologists and religious leaders.

The film and book contain essentially the same information, though the information in the film is more condensed. So for the most part we'll be addressing the claims in the book, as they are more comprehensive.

DISCOVERY

In 1980, an ancient burial cave was discovered by children playing around a construction site for apartments in the Talpiot neighborhood of southern Jerusalem. The mother of one of the children sensed the importance of the discovery and went to authorities. This prompted an excavation by the Israel Antiquities Authorities (IAA) which revealed ten ossuaries (stone burial boxes containing human remains) inside the

1 James Cameron, Foreword, *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery, the Investigation, and the Evidence That Could Change History* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2006), p. viii.



Jesus son of Joseph ossuary with inscription (Left)

cave. On three of the ossuaries were inscriptions which include: "Jesus son of Joseph," "Judah son of Jesus," and "Mariamene," a Greek name which the The Lost Tomb of Jesus suggests is that of Mary Magdalene.

The findings were published in 1994 by archaeologist Levy Yitzhak Rahmani in A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel. They were also published in 1996 in an article by Amos Kloner, the Bar Ilan University professor who led the excavation in the 1980s. According to Kloner, the Talpiot cave was a typical middle- to upper-class Jewish family's tomb from the Second Temple period (538 B.C. to A.D. 70). It was during this narrow span of time that ossuaries were used, so it is possible to date such tombs to within a 70 to 100 year period. Due to the commonality of the names, Kloner did not ascribe any particular importance to them. Some 900 similar tombs have been discovered within a two-and-a-half mile radius of Jerusalem's Old City.

Jacobovici states that the evidence reveals tremendous odds in favor of the tomb belonging to the family of Jesus of Nazareth. He also states that DNA testing suggests the persons found in the "Jesus" and "Mariamene" ossuaries might have been a married couple, and that the person in the "Judah" ossuary may have been their son.

The film also presents a statistical study suggesting that "the odds are at least 600 to 1 in favor of the Talpiot tomb being the Jesus family tomb" due to the connections between the names found.

"There's a definite sense that you have to pinch yourself," said James Cameron at a February 26 news confer-

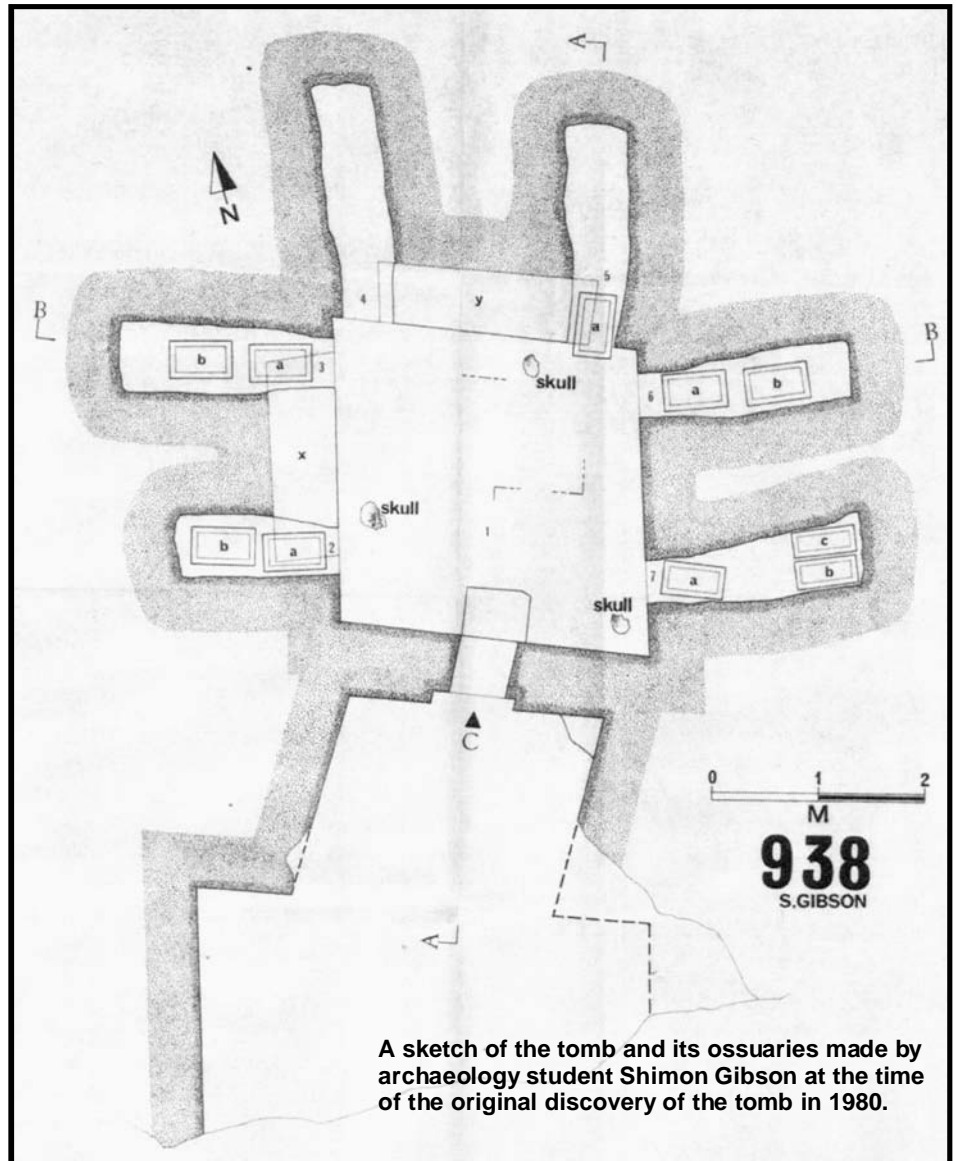
ence. Earlier he had told NBC's Today show that statisticians found "in the range of a couple of million to one" in favor of the documentary's conclusions about the ossuaries—considerably higher than the 600 to 1 that is stated in the film. According to the book, the odds were originally estimated at 2.5 million to one.

SCIENTIFIC DATA

The manner in which the authors present their scientific data is admittedly very compelling. Employing statistical analysts and scientists using modern forensic techniques including DNA sampling, they weave a tale of intrigue, deception, mythology and forensic data to convey the following conclusions:

- Jesus did not rise from the dead; His body was taken by His disciples and laid in a family tomb. After decomposition of His flesh, His bones were later interred in an ossuary inscribed, "Jesus son of Joseph";
- He was married to Mary Magdalene, whose ossuary, inscribed "Mariamene e Mara," distinct from another inscribed "Maria," was found in the same tomb with that of the one inscribed "Jesus son of Joseph";
- They bore a son whose ossuary, also found in the same tomb, is inscribed, "Judah son of Jesus."

These are the critical issues of The Jesus Family Tomb, upon which we will focus our primary attention. Most else claimed by the authors is not of any real concern although we will be addressing other



A sketch of the tomb and its ossuaries made by archaeology student Shimon Gibson at the time of the original discovery of the tomb in 1980.

points of contention, especially as they relate to these three issues.

To begin, we must first look at the physical evidence upon which the authors base their claims:

According to the authors, the inscriptions on the ossuaries found in the Talpiot Tomb read as follows:

Ossuary 80/500: "Mariamene e Mara"

– "Mariamne, also called Master"

Ossuary 80/501: "Yehuda bar Yeshua"

– "Judah son of Jesus"

Ossuary 80/502: "Matia" – "Matthew"

Ossuary 80/503: "Yeshua bar Yosef"

– "Jesus Son of Joseph"

Ossuary 80/504: "Yose" or "Yosa" – a nickname for "Joseph"

Ossuary 80/505: "Maria" – a Latinized version of the Hebrew "Miriam."

Of the ten ossuaries pulled from the niches of the burial chamber, inscriptions were recorded as occurring on six, a very high ratio considering that only 20% of the thousands of ossuaries ever found bear such inscriptions.

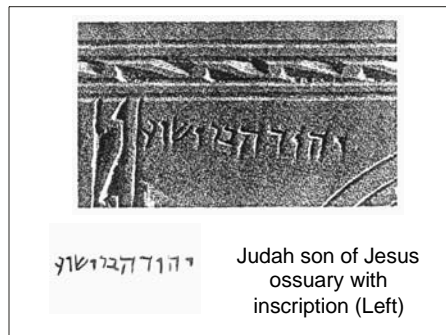
Ossuaries 80/506-508 were plain, with no inscriptions.²

Ossuary 80/509 disappeared before it could be checked for inscriptions or ornamentation. The authors claim that an ossuary inscribed "James son of Joseph – brother of Jesus" was discovered in 2002 to be in the possession of Oded Golan, a dealer in antiquities. Its physical properties and dimensions fit the general characteristics of the other Talpiot tomb ossuaries. If this ossuary is 80/509 it would make for seven inscribed with names that the authors say could be associated with the family of Jesus.

Although the ossuaries that are said to belong to Jesus and His family were excavated in 1980, we are told that the reason the news of these things has been withheld until now is that the impact upon Christianity would be devastating; the Jewish archaeologists connected with the discovery were fear-

ful of the impact such news would have. It seems that the recent spate of media productions and books addressing the Gnostic "gospels" have created a climate that is now more conducive to acceptance of these claims. The time has come for The Lost Tomb of Jesus to be presented to the world.

It may be argued that if these claims are true they would have been made by the original Jewish archaeologists. The Jews would have been happy to expose anything that would cast doubt upon the idea of Jesus as Messiah. Thus they would have exposed them long before now. Their reluctance to do so indicates that the discoverers did not consider them relevant. However, not all Jews are religious or feel threatened by



the Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection. Also, the state of Israel is keenly aware of the support it enjoys from Christians, especially in the United States. The political ramifications of casting such doubt by an Israeli government agency could hinder relations not only with the Christians who support Israel, but even with the United States government upon which the Christian right has some strong influence. This would be counterproductive to Israel's need of this nation as an ally.

There is also the fear of sectarian violence between Christians and Jews in Israel. Although Christians are less prone to violence over aspersion cast upon their faith than are Muslims or other religious adherents, Israel has a

vested interest in not causing any further dissension among its populace than already exists.

So there is good reason that the original scientists involved in the excavation of this particular tomb might dismiss it as nothing extraordinary. Still, we cannot discount that dismissal out of hand.

There are three ossuaries which bear no inscription. But of the seven which do, all but one are thought to be tied to Jesus through biblical accounts. The question is, are all these names of immediate family members, or have the authors erred in their assumptions. If they are all family names, or include the names of spouses, then all the names taken together form a strong statistical probability that this is the Jesus family tomb. The authors did a statistical study that they claim left odds of approximately 2.5 million to 1 that this is indeed the tomb of Jesus and His family. The most conservative estimate came out 600 to 1.

Statistical Probability

One of the elements to piecing together the puzzle of the Talpiot tomb (Tomb 80/500–509 as the "Jesus Family Tomb" is officially classified by the IAA) was to determine the statistical probability that this tomb would be the actual burial site of Jesus of Nazareth and His family. This was left to Charles Pellegrino:

The math of IAA 80/500–509, a.k.a. the Talpiot tomb, was a matter of seeing if one could "prove" that the Talpiot tomb was the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth by taking the most conservative statistical approach possible. I started, naturally, by going straight after the "Jesus" inscription. How would that name stand up against a couple of hundred inscriptions on other ossuaries? How common was "Jesus, son of Joseph"?³

2 http://www.jesusfamilytomb.com/the_tomb/unnamed_ossuaries.html

3 Charles Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb*, op.cit. p. 74.

80/503 “Jesus son of Joseph”

The authors readily state that the names Jesus and Joseph were very common at the time Jesus walked the earth:

According to scholars such as L.Y. Rahmani, Tal Ilan, and Rachael Hachlili, Jesus and Joseph were common names in first-century Jerusalem; for example, among the 233 inscribed ossuaries cataloged by the IAA, the name Joseph appeared 14 percent of the time and Jesus appeared 9 percent. It is estimated that, at most, during the entire period of ossuary use in Jerusalem the male population was 80,000. Out of these, 7,200 would have been called Jesus and 11,200 would have been called Joseph. Multiplying the percentages against each other (.09 X .14 X 80,000), we get 1,008 men who would have been called Jesus, son of Joseph during the century of ossuary use. In other words, approximately one in 79 males was called Jesus, son of Joseph. On my white pad, I wrote: “1 out of 79.”

But how many of those 1,008 men living right before, during, and after the time of Jesus of Nazareth were buried with a Maria or a Judah or a Matthew?

From this point onward, the “Jesus equation” was simply a matter of factoring the probability of each name in the tomb cluster, one after the other, and multiplying them against each other.⁴

80/505 “Maria”

The authors speculate that, because the “Mary” was inscribed with Hebrew characters as “Maria,” a Latin name, it must have belonged to Jesus’ mother:

Forgetting the Talpiot tomb, if somewhere there was an ossuary inscribed with Jesus’s mother’s name,

what should we expect to find on it? Since there is no indication that she was anything other than a first-century Jew, we would expect to find her name written in Hebrew or Aramaic. It wouldn’t surprise us, therefore, if it was rendered as “Miriam.” And it would delight us if it said something like “wife of Joseph,” or “Mother of the Master.” But it would be equally dramatic if we found an ossuary that used four Hebrew letters—“Mem,” “Resh,” “Yud,” and “Hay”—to record the Latin version of her name, Maria, as it has come down to us over two thousand years.

Again, out of all the ossuaries cataloged by scholars, only a handful have been found that have the Latin version of “Miriam” written in Hebrew letters. One of them comes from the Talpiot tomb, where for two millennia it kept a silent vigil next to the ossuary of Jesus, son of Joseph.

Does the Maria inscription on an ossuary in the Talpiot tomb provide us with final and indisputable proof that this ossuary once held the mortal remains of the woman called the Virgin Mary in the New Testament? Of course not. Any number of interpretations can be provided for the same phenomenon. But the fact is that we now have three Jesus-related names clustered on two ossuaries: Jesus, Joseph, and Maria. Back in 1980, the discovery of these three names in a single tomb should have invited a flurry of scientific activity: statisticians should have been drawing up probability studies, and DNA should have been extracted—at the very least—from the Jesus and Maria ossuaries to determine whether there was a familial relationship between the two. But that’s not what happened. Archaeologists with zero training in statistics decided that the names Jesus, Joseph, and Mary were so common in first-century Judea

that the entire cluster was not worth looking at.⁵

Nearly one-quarter of all the women known from ossuaries of the time were named Mary or some close variation thereof. But ossuary 80/505 told a different statistical story. This “Mary” was a Latinized version of the Hebrew name. As it turns out, James Tabor and Shimon Gibson would later find a very similar inscription in their “Tomb of the Shroud,” but in 1980 the Mary of IAA 80/505 was quite rare, written in Hebrew letters as “Maria.”⁶

Pellegrino differentiated “Maria,” the mother of Jesus, from that of “Mariamene e Mara” to narrow the number of times Mary (as Maria) would be found on ossuaries. This lowered the number to 1 out of 24. He states:

...So I wrote “1 out of 24” on my white pad.⁷

80/501 “Judah son of Jesus”

“Judah, son of Jesus” had never been specifically mentioned in either non-canonical or canonical versions of the New Testament. And though the Jesus of the Gospels had both a beloved brother and a trusted disciple named Judah, I decided to attach no mathematical significance to this ossuary. Any value would have lowered the probability and therefore helped our case. So, taking a conservative approach, I neutralized this ossuary completely.⁸

80/500 “Mariamene e Mara”

The authors claim that the ossuary inscribed “Mariamene e Mara” is that of Mary Magdalene, and that “e Mara” means “also known as ‘Master,’” thus denoting her special role as an apostle. Says Pellegrino:

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*, p. 75-76.

Next came the "Mary" known as "Mariamne," inscribed in Greek on ossuary number 80/500. The name was actually written "Mariamn-u," that is "...of Mariamne" with a decorative flare, or tail, at the end. The "nu" was a diminutive of the more familiar "Mariamne," which itself was a Greek version of Miriam—in English, Mary.

The second part of the inscription "Mara" was a Greek rendering of an Aramaic word meaning "Lord" or "Master."

The complete inscription could be read as "of Mariamne, also called Lord/Master."

The title on the ossuary seemed perfectly consistent with the Mariamne described in the [Gnostic "gospel"] Acts of Philip as the sister of Philip. There she is described as an apostle or "master." She is also explicitly equated with the woman the Gospels call Mary Magdalene.

Professor James Tabor pointed out that the same grammatical structure on a handful of ossuaries from other sites revealed that the introductory "of" referred to the ossuary itself, and that the inscription could therefore be read as: "(This is the ossuary) of Mariamne, also known as Master."

This inscription, and it fits with what we know of Mary Magdalene, present us (sic) with a unique situation: there is simply no other ossuary inscription like it. Since it was a one of a kind, out of 193 inscribed ossuaries with women's names, one could say that only one in 193 women could have been called "Mariamne also known as Mara." On my pad I wrote "1 out of 193."

At this point, I multiplied 1 over 79 by 1 over 24 by 1 over 193; what I got was 365,928. Meaning, based on a preliminary calculation, it was

possible to say that the number of men likely to be called "Jesus, son of Joseph," to be found in a tomb with a Latinized "Maria," and to be associated in that same tomb with a Greek-inscribed "Mariamne also known as Master" accounted for one out of about 365,928.⁹

80/504 "Jos'e"

The next ossuary was "Jos'e." The Gospel of Mark (6:3) makes specific mention that Jesus had brothers and sisters, and names the brothers: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Jos'e, and of Judah, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus's brother Joseph is known by his nickname, "Jos'e," just as the name appears on ossuary number 80/504.

In his approach to the "Jos'e" inscription, Amos Kloner, trying to propose alternative explanations and acting from legitimate scientific skepticism, had argued that, though "Jos'e" was an uncommon inscription, it was a contraction of "Joseph," the second-most-common name during the Second Temple period.

There was, however, another way of interpreting the "Jos'e" inscription. The nickname was unique. It did not appear on any other known ossuary, and it was mirrored in the New Testament. Factoring the inscription at almost one in 519 male ossuaries recorded by Professor Tal Ilan, and multiplying 365,928 by 519, we get almost 190 million.

But on a gut level, that seemed too much. So I decided to agree with Kloner and to treat the "Jos'e" inscription as just another "Joseph" in the tomb. I was going with 14 percent of males being called Joseph, that is, one out of every seven. If we multiply 365,928 by 7 we get one in just over 2.5 million.¹⁰

80/502 "Matthew"

Some names, such as Jonah and Daniel, would have led us to question the entire assemblage because they did not appear in either Joseph's or Mary's family tree as provided in the Gospels. Assuming that the genealogy in Luke 3 describes that of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as many scholars believe, "Matthew" was a common name in her family. It is, as James Tabor has argued, a priestly name, and Mary, by her relationship with Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, had a priestly connection. Also, Mary's grandfather was called Matthew, so it is entirely possible that, for example, a first cousin called Matthew after the grandfather, might be buried in the family tomb. Furthermore, in the Acts of the Apostles (1:23-26), there is an interesting incident where Jesus's disciples vote on who will replace Judas Iscariot. A Matthew is elected. If this Matthew was a member of the family, that would explain his sudden elevation to the status of disciple. In any event, the "Matthew" inscription on the ossuary in the Talpiot tomb did not explicitly match any known family member. Statistically, it didn't invalidate anything, but neither did it validate anything. I discounted it.¹¹

80/509 "James"

The "James" ossuary presented several problems to the equation, which we will address later. For now, it serves us to know that, because the "James" ossuary could not be definitively linked to the Talpiot tomb, Pellegrino chose to discount it also.

At this point in my statistical analysis, my probability factor held at one in 2.5 million. Meaning, the odds were 2.5 million to one in fa-

9 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

vor of the Talpiot tomb being the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth.¹²

Outside Analysis

Pellegrino's statistics were validated by an independent statistical analyst, Professor Andrey Feuerverger of the University of Toronto, one of North America's leading statisticians. Says Pellegrino:

...Like me, Feuerverger constructed his equation conservatively. Like me, he assigned no value to the "Judah, son of Jesus" inscription and counted the unusual "Jos'e" as just another Joseph. In the end, Feuerverger's version of the equation was standing in the same statistical ballpark as mine, sort of: one in 2.4 million instead of 2.5 million.

He then emphasized: "One of the things that turns out to be most interesting about this tomb," Feuerverger reported to Simcha, "is that, if you focus on the names individually, you can easily come away with the impression that there is nothing the least bit unusual about this particular cluster.

"However, Simcha, your team was correct to point out that the proper way to analyze this is to look at all of the names in unison.

"And what happens when you do this," the statistician confirmed, "is that even if the individual probability of each particular name is not terribly small, when they are factored all together, they start to build a picture in which the overall tomb assemblage is a very rare event."

"It really is a possibility," Feuerverger said, "that this particular site is in fact the tomb of the New Testament family. It is a possibility that I think now needs to be taken seriously."¹³

After arriving at his 2.4 million-to-one figure Feuerverger took one more step in order to be more accurate. Rethinking the equation, he came up with what he called a "probability factor."

What this meant was that Feuerverger was going to give a power to the names of Jesus' family members who were not in the tomb. Their power was to diminish the mathematical force of the names that were in the tomb.¹⁴

Applying the names of other perceived members of Jesus' family, such as Simon, to the equation, since their names were not on any of the ossuaries in the Talpiot tomb, Feuerverger arrived at a final figure of 1 in 600:

When he did all that, he got to a "P factor" (probability factor) of 600 to one in favor of the tomb belonging to the family of Jesus of Nazareth....

"But remember," he said, "even without James, a P factor of one in 600 means that if you had a drug that you claimed cured cancer and it failed to cure only one in 600 patients, you would be looking at a Nobel Prize."¹⁵

CONSEQUENCES

These are stunning claims, sure to shake the faith of many. For if they are true, then Jesus was merely a man—not the Word of God who became flesh; He did not rise from the dead; He did not ascend into Heaven; and the faith of some one-and-a-half billion professing Christians alive today (not to mention the millions that came before) is in vain.

Now if Christ is proclaimed that He rose from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not risen;

and if Christ has not risen, then our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if it is so that the dead do not rise.

For if the dead do not rise, then Christ was not raised. And if Christ was not raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins.

Then they also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. (1 Corinthians 15:12-19)

One can easily see that if these claims can be substantiated, faith in Jesus Christ is a sham and the Bible is a false witness, worthy of being thrown in the trash. Everything taught in the Bible, particularly those in the writings of Jesus' disciples, becomes suspect. There would be no basis for biblical faith or for any of the teachings of Jesus. And there would be no hope of a resurrection to eternal life, which hope has sustained the hearts and calmed the minds of countless adherents to faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer of mankind. Yet Pellegrino states that this discovery does nothing to hinder belief in Jesus' Resurrection:

"Wait a minute," I said. "If the numbers, after I run through them, do suggest that this is the final resting place of Jesus and his family, isn't the ossuary of the risen Christ supposed to be empty?"

"What do you think? Should his ossuary be empty?" asked Simcha.

"Well," I said, "maybe. Maybe not. People who believe in a physical Resurrection would not be affected by the discovery of a Jesus bone box. In the Gnostic Gospels, Jesus appears before the apostles as a sort of holy ghost—here again, gone again. And

12 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

he continues manifesting in this way for almost two years after the Crucifixion. In the four Gospels, Jesus only sometimes has a physical form—as when Doubting Thomas Didymos touches the five wounds only minutes after Jesus enters the room, spiritlike, through shut doors (see John 20:26-29). The author of Luke wrote almost apologetically, acknowledging at the start that all of this sounds strange but that this is how it appears to have happened....

“In any event, even a physical Resurrection doesn’t depend on the fact that the first tomb was empty. It depends on Jesus’s appearances among the disciples. A Christian believer can believe that Jesus was removed from the first tomb, traditionally identified with the tomb under the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and laid in a second tomb. With respect to his Ascension to heaven, the New Testament also does not tell us that its chroniclers believed that Jesus, when he ascended, needed to take his entire body with him. So if you believe in a physical Ascension, the ossuary is a problem. But if you believe in a spiritual one, it becomes an object of veneration.”¹⁶

This is an argument that has been posited by some Christian leaders who have had nothing definitive to say to repudiate the conclusions drawn by the researchers that the “Jesus” ossuary contained the Lord’s bones. They allow for a “spiritual” resurrection so as not to appear compromised. Yet Scripture is clear that Jesus rose bodily:

Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Then the Jews said, “Forty-six years this temple was in building, and will you raise it up in three days?”

But He spoke of the temple of His body. (John 2:19-21)

A spiritual resurrection means nothing, because one’s spirit does not die in the same sense as does one’s body. Spiritual death is the result of sin, and is manifested in separation from God. Jesus did not die spiritually, so He did not need to rise spiritually. The belief that He died spiritually is peculiar to certain cults within Christianity, but it is not scriptural. He died physically. Thus, His resurrection was physical.

This is a central tenet of biblical faith. Granted, these men have no biblical faith, so their suppositions regarding spiritual vs. bodily resurrection must find some compromise in order to validate their findings among Christians. Sadly, they find many that are all too willing to accept their conclusions.

So the question arises: is what the producers of *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* say true? Or is this just another attempt by anti-Christians to discredit faith in Jesus?

One thing is certain: knee-jerk reactions based on nothing more than, “I refuse to believe it” do disservice to the Faith. Most negative reactions to these claims have been based more on emotion than on any reasonable evidence to the contrary. To some, this isn’t important; they aren’t going to be swayed by any evidence, no matter how compelling. They ask why bother even addressing the subject. I suspect that, for some of these people, there is a genuine fear of facing the evidence; they do not want their faith challenged. For others, they really don’t see why any concern should arise. They are confident on the face of it that the evidence is not valid. However, the reason these things must be addressed is that there are many new believers and weak believers who could easily be dissuaded from the Faith if we are not able to present at least sufficient reasonable doubt to the claims. Without the knowledge to refute these claims it makes witnessing to nonbelievers who believe them all the more difficult. For these reasons we must

be careful to take the time to thoroughly research the data and admit to facts that are indisputable. Where it leads us is in the hands of God. With that, we begin.

ANALYZING THE ANALYSES

It’s true that in terms of finding a cure for cancer a one-in-six hundred failure rate would be extraordinary. However, we are not addressing science, but probabilities based upon certain assumptions. For example, the statistics of both Pellegrino and Feuerverger were based on the assumption that all the names are directly linked to Jesus of Nazareth, and that at least one—Miriamene e Mara—is that of Mary Magdalene who would have been His wife. We will look at each of the relevant ossuaries and see just what they tell us.

80/503 “Jesus son of Joseph”

The findings in the Talpiot tomb are not as unique as the authors wish us to believe. Their accounts are riddled with suppositions. The words “if,” “possibly,” and “maybe,” among other such uncertainties, permeate their study.

One footnote in their book regarding the earlier discovery of another tomb in Talpiot does reveal that the “Jesus” ossuary is not so unusual:

In September 1945 in Talpiot, a tomb was found containing eleven ossuaries. Sukenik was the excavator. Architecturally, it is very similar to the “Tomb of the Ten Ossuaries.” On ossuary 8, there are large cross-marks. There is also an inscription written in Greek “Jesus Aloth.” It has been suggested that this is a rendering of the Hebrew verb “Aleh,” meaning “rise up.” On ossuary 7, there is Greek writing drawn in charcoal. Sukenik translated it as “Jesus, woe!” On ossuary 1, a Hebrew inscription was found, “Shimon bar Saba.” Barsabbas is a family name known only from Acts (1:23, 14:22).¹⁷

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

This footnote is relative to the idea that a large “cross,” or Greek letter “X” precedes the name “Yeshua” on the Talpiot tomb ossuary the authors believe belonged to Jesus of Nazareth. As it turns out, at least as far as the authors state, the “X” was commonly used for early Hebrew Christians.

One glitch in thinking is that, when people see the name “Jesus,” they, by far, automatically think of Jesus of Nazareth—the Lord Jesus Christ. However, “Jesus” is the English translation of the Greek *Iesous* which, in turn, is a Greek translation of the Hebrew, “Yehoshu’a” (“Yeshua” is a common contraction). In the writings of the prophets the name is translated in English to “Joshua.” This is one of the more common names found among the ancient Hebrews. Just because the name “Jesus” or “Joshua” is found among the names of Mary, Judah, and Matthew, does not mean that this Jesus is the Lord, particularly when “Judah” is not found anywhere in direct relation to Jesus.

Yet Pellegrino insists that there is virtually no chance these names would be found together unless this Jesus is Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁸

It baffles me how Pellegrino got the starting equation of 1 in 79 that this is not the tomb of Jesus. He states that there could have been 1,008 men named “Jesus son of Joseph” living at the time of Christ. It seems to me that this would mean the starting statistical odds should have been 1,008 to 1 that this is the tomb of Jesus. In other words, the odds are far against it being Jesus’ tomb. In betting, the larger figure would indicate that it is virtually impossible to win at those odds. It seems as if the analysts reversed the statistics in favor of a predetermined outcome.

Statistical analysis can be a strange metaphysical alchemy that can change reality into conjecture that loses truth in the black hole of uncertainty. That certainly seems to be the case here.

80/505 “Maria”

Jacobovici assumes that, because the inscription “Maria” is in Latin, this ossuary must have belonged to Jesus’ mother Mary. In fact he says that this is “equally as dramatic” as if the ossuary had said “wife of Joseph,” or “Mother of the Master.”

How can that be equally as dramatic? What do the Latin and Greek languages have to do with anything? There is no historical evidence to suggest that Latin and Greek were peculiar to the family of Jesus. Both were common languages for that time, and could have been utilized by anyone in the Hebrew culture.

To factor in the languages in which the names were written merely narrows the possibility in favor of a presupposed conclusion. Others could have had their names inscribed in these languages.

Because Mary in its various Hebrew, Latin and Greek forms was the most common name for women at the time of Jesus, there can be very little if any statistical value placed upon that name.

As far as saying that the original discoverers of the tomb should have “at the very least” conducted DNA tests on the Jesus and Maria ossuaries to determine their relationship, why didn’t Jacobovici and Pellegrino have this done? Instead they tested only the “Jesus” and “Mariamene” ossuaries.

80/501 “Judah son of Jesus”

The analysts took what they call a conservative approach by considering the “Judah” ossuary neutral. But since there is no mention anywhere of Jesus having a son named Judah, the truly conservative approach would have been to raise the probability, not keep it neutral. Keeping it neutral is the least one can do; this can hardly be called taking the conservative approach. What if there had been an ossuary saying, “David, son of Joseph”? Since there is no David named anywhere as a member of the immediate family of Jesus,

would it be “neutral” to ignore him? No, rather it would interfere with the odds sought by someone trying to draw a presupposed conclusion.

Neither Pellegrino nor Feuerverger considered raising the probability that this was not Jesus’ family tomb due to the lack of evidence that Jesus had a son named Judah (or one by any other name). Had they done so, the “P factor” would have been considerably less than one in 600. Applying the same value to this discrepancy as they did to the discrepancy due to lack of certain family names, the “P factor” may have been closer to the original 1 in 79 (really 1 in 1,008). In other words, it would have rested on the probability that, of all the “Jesus son of Josephs” living at the time, only one in 79 (really 1,008) would be the Savior.

The idea that Judah was the son of Jesus is directly tied to the unsubstantiated belief that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and bore children. This, again, is not even found in the Gnostic “gospels,” but is pure conjecture by those who try every which way to find reasons to dispute the Lord’s divine nature.

Another curious idea Jacobovici raises is the possibility that Judah, as Jesus’ son, was also the “beloved disciple” found in the Gospel of John. He assumes that, although Judah would have been a young lad, as Jesus’ son he could have been a disciple who found special favor with the Lord.

Again, Jacobovici speculates based on a low view of Scripture. The “beloved disciple” had to be among the twelve apostles (Matthew 26:20; John 13:23). Besides Judas Iscariot, only one other apostle is named Judas, and that is the brother of James, the children of the Mary who was most likely Jesus’ aunt. He could not have been Jesus’ son.

There is no historical, biblical, or even Gnostic allusions to Jesus having any children, let alone one named Ju-

18 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

dah. The idea that this is the ossuary of a son of Jesus is pure speculation based on nothing. This ossuary, also, should have incurred a negative "P factor."

80/500 "Mariamene e Mara"

Here we have a number of problems.

(1) The authors' statement, "What we know of Mary Magdalene" is pure conjecture gleaned from a questionable Gnostic gospel. They can only speculate about Mary Magdalene beyond what the Scriptures say. While the authors take several occasions to impugn the reliability of the Four Gospels of Scripture, they are all too eager to take at face value whatever the Gnostic "gospels" state, even if contradictory to the earlier eyewitness accounts.

(2) "Mara" may indeed mean "master," but it could also have another meaning. It, too, is merely one variation of the name of Mary. It is a Hebrew name that was taken by Naomi (Ruth 1:20). The ossuary inscription could just as easily be translated "of Mariamne, also known as Mara."

One of the claims found in *The Jesus Family Tomb* is that the ossuary inscribed "Miriamene e Mara" could mean "Mary Magdalene" along with a word that denotes "Master" or "Lord." This mention of "Master" or "Lord," the authors say, suggests that Mary Magdalene was a leading apostle of Jesus. They lament that the word "Magdalene" is missing from the inscription, but turn to the Gnostic Acts of Philip to supply the missing element.:

Working from a hunch that the second Mary of IAA 80/500-509 (the IAA catalogue number of Mariamene's ossuary), might be connected to Magdalene, Simcha's team conducted a search of the name Mariamne; that search led, in a single stroke, to the work of Francois Bovon, a New Testament scholar at Harvard University.

"And do you know what we found?" Simcha asked me, after I had signed the confidentiality agreement.

He handed me a folder containing copies of an ancient manuscript, penned in Greek, along with Professor Bovon's translation. The first page was headed by the words "Acts of Philip." In this text, Mary Magdalene was an apostle who preached and baptized and performed healing miracles. This Mary was very, very different from the Magdalene of Church doctrine, and not a "fallen woman" at all.

"Did you notice the Greek version of her name?" Simcha asked.

"According to the apostle Philip, who identifies himself as Mary's brother, she is not known as Magdalene, the 'woman from Magdala.' Rather, she is known by her given name, by the same word inscribed on the side of IAA 80/500: Mariamne."¹⁹

The authors quote the French biblical scholar Francois Bovon:

"What's just as explicit, throughout the Acts of Philip, is that Philip's sister carries even the title 'Apostle.' Whenever the text describes these three apostles, traveling from city to city, it gives their names in the same sequence: Philip, Mariamne, and Bartholomew. So she's considered an apostle, which means 'to be sent,' and she was sent, just like the two other apostles. There was no difference."²⁰

It is this unique spelling of "Mariamne" (without the first "e" found on the ossuary—"Marriamene") that the authors insist points to Mary Magdalene.

Importantly, the authors admit that, without the Gnostic gospels, they could not be sure of their position:

For our part, we learned that, independent of the Talpiot discovery, leading Mary Magdalene experts have concluded that the woman known in the Gospels as Mary Magdalene was actually called by the Greek version of her name: "Mariamme," [Mariamene, or Mariamne]. The information comes, in the first instance, from the Church father Origen, who calls Magdalene "Mariamme," and then from the writer Epiphanius and noncanonical texts such as the *Pistis Sophia*. But the clincher is the Acts of Philip.²¹

The *Pistis Sophia* is an important Gnostic book based on the teachings that Sophia (Wisdom) is the female divinity. So it turns out that the clincher for the researchers, "proving" that Mariamene of the Talpiot tomb is Mary Magdalene is the Gospel of Philip bolstered by the *Pistis Sophia* and other Gnostic sources.

However, this conjecture cannot be used to state anything as a certainty. Firstly, by the authors' own admission, the Gnostic Acts of Philip does not identify Philip's sister as Mary Magdalene. It merely alludes to someone named "Mariamne." This Mariamne (one Greek spelling for Mary), could be any Mary. The authors merely assume it is speaking of Mary Magdalene because that is how "Mariamne" has been translated into English from the Gnostic "gospels." Secondly, their conjecture is based on a questionable text whose content departs significantly in other areas from the eyewitness accounts of the four Gospels of Scripture. This is hardly a scientific method for determining truth.

(3) The authors' conclusions are largely based upon the belief that "Mariamne" was Mary Magdalene. One of their associates, Ron Pappin, an amateur devotee of ancient studies, Googled

19 *The Jesus Family Tomb, op. cit.*, p. 69.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 205.

"Mariamne." Jacobovici relates a startling discovery:

... "Look, Simcha," Ron exclaimed. Over his shoulder I peered at the screen and the article his search had led him to. "According to modern scholarship," he read out loud, "Mary Magdalene's real name was Mariamne."

The "modern scholarship" to which Pappin alluded is liberal scholarship which places more emphasis upon the Gnostic "gospels" than upon the proven Scriptures. Of course they would find this "information." It is circular reasoning based on a presupposition revealed in the English translations of the Gnostic "gospels" where "Mary Magdalene" is inserted for the original "Mariamne."

This further exposes the biased approach to this "investigation."

Although the Gnostic gospels do not state so openly, modern scholars (particularly those of a liberal Christian persuasion) interpret them to suggest strongly that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and that she bore him children. This interpretation is based largely upon a missing piece of text in the Gnostic Gospel of Philip:

In the third-century Gnostic text called the Gospel of Philip, also found at Nag Hammadi, it states: "The Lord loved her [Mary Magdalene] more than all other disciples and often kissed her on her..." (55). Here there is a hole in the text where many scholars believe the original stated "mouth."²²

They might just as well believe the text stated "hand," or "forehead." Again, a questionable third-century document from a heretical sect is used to establish that Jesus might have married Mary Magdalene—from a missing fragment of the text at that! Besides, the authors

have already stated that the Mary of the Acts of Philip is not even called "Mary Magdalene" in the original language, but simply "Mariamne."

Now, what about that name "Mariamne," or "Mariamene"? Is it exclusive to Mary Magdalene based on nothing more than the conjecture of the authors that the "Mariamne" of the Acts of Philip is she?

The name is not as uncommon as the authors suggest. Mariamne was the name of Herod the Great's second wife, as well as his third wife. It was also the name of Herodias' sister, and that of Agrippa's daughter. Thus, it was frequently used in the Herodian royal household alone.

Behind the Name, the etymology and history of first names, states this about "Mariamne":

Usual English form of Maria, which was the Latin form of the New Testament Greek names (Mariam) or (Maria) (the spellings are interchangeable), which were from the Hebrew name (Miryam). The meaning is not known for certain, but there are several theories including "sea of bitterness", "rebelliousness", and "wished for child". However it was most likely originally an Egyptian name, perhaps derived in part from mry "beloved" or mr "love". This is the name of several New Testament characters, most importantly Mary the virgin mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene. Two queens of England have had this name, as well as a Queen of Scotland, Mary Queen of Scots.²³

So, in the final analysis, "Mariamne" is merely one among a few Greek spellings for "Mary." In the biblical Greek texts the spellings for all the Marys in the Bible are either "Maria," or "Marías."

The fact that there were two ossuaries inscribed "Mary" found in the tomb (one in Latin, "Maria," the other in Greek, "Mariamene") does not prove that the first (Maria) is Jesus' mother, and the other (Mariamene) is Mary Magdalene. The larger issue is who was interred in the ossuary inscribed "Jesus, son of Joseph."

80/504 "Jos'e"

Jacobovici claims that Jos'es (Jos'e) is a nickname for Joseph, Jesus' brother:

Joseph was known by his nickname, Jos'es (Jos'e) or Josi, possibly a Greek version of Yose, or Yosa in Hebrew. Perhaps this Jos'e was named after his deceased father Joseph, or perhaps after an earlier ancestor. Whatever the reason, unlike the father of Jesus, he was known by the diminutive of Yosef/Joseph, a kind of Hebrew Joey.²⁴

This, of course, is pure speculation. It is questionable that Jesus had a brother named Jos'es, although He may have had a near kinsman named Jos'es. And Jacobovici's claim here seems incongruous in light of the fact that he says elsewhere that this ossuary could be that of Jesus' father Joseph.²⁵

This doublemindedness is consistent throughout The Jesus Family Tomb.

There is another misconception, pertaining to "Jos'e" which comes to light in Pellegrino's continued statistical research, and that is the assumption that Jesus had a brother named "Jos'e" or "Jos'es." What does Scripture actually say?

Mark 6:3, quoted by Pellegrino, seems to indicate that Jesus had four brothers and at least two sisters:

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Jos'e, and of Judah, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?

22 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

23 <http://www.behindthename.com/php/view.php?name=mary>

24 *The Jesus Family Tomb, op. cit.*, p. 204.

25 *Ibid.* p. 61.

There are several other places where two of these same children of Mary are mentioned:

Matthew iterates what is found in Mark 6:3:

Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? (Matthew 13:55)

Matthew 27:55-56 names only James and Joses:

And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking from far off, among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

Mark 15:40 also names only James and Joses:

There were also women looking on from far off, among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome.

Luke mentions this same Mary as one in a company of women who told the apostles of having seen the risen Jesus:

It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, who told these things to the apostles. (Luke 24:10)

The circumstances in which these names are related by different writers

are identical, so it is clear that this particular Mary is the mother of all four: James, Joses, Simon and Judas.

It is assumed by many that Salome is Mary's daughter, because she is mentioned in Mark 15:40, but she could have been another woman mentioned by name. Assuming that she is Mary's daughter, are these still the children of Jesus' mother Mary?

It is extremely unlikely that Jesus' mother would be called "the mother of James and Joses," especially by three different writers. Everywhere else, even by these writers, she is called "the mother of Jesus" alone.

Now, those who are blindly anti-Catholic are not going to like what I say here, but please bear with me.

The Greek words translated "brethren" (*adelphoi*) in Matthew 13:55 and "brother" (*adelphos*) in Mark 6:3 mean either "brothers" (from the same parents) or "kinsmen" (even up to the same nationality).²⁶

The Scriptures that speak of Mary as the mother of James and Joses, coupled with John 19:25 indicate that this Mary is not Mary the mother of Jesus:

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁷

Did Mary have a sister named Mary? Not likely. The Greek word for "sister" is *adelphē*, which is the feminine form of *adelphos*, also meaning either a sister

with the same parents, or a close relative. This tells us that Mary had a close relative named Mary as well. There were three Marys at the cross: Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Mary a relation to Jesus' mother.

To insist that James and Joses were the literal brothers of Jesus means we would have to apply the same interpretation to Mary's "sister." This would mean that Mary had a sister named Mary, which would be very strange. If we can accept these two Marys as cousins, then we can accept Joses and James as cousins of Jesus.

Given the language of Scripture that separates "Mary the mother of James," and "Mary the mother of James and Joses," from "Mary the mother of Jesus," and their being called "brethren" of Jesus, it is clear that these two men were not children of Jesus' mother Mary. But they were closely related to Jesus and His mother. We find that Mary, the wife of Cleophas, was related to Jesus' mother Mary. Her children are called "brethren," or "kinsmen," to Jesus.

The authors of *The Jesus Family Tomb* have erred in assuming that Joses was a brother of Jesus from the same mother. But that is a common error even among Christians.

Please do not send letters of protest assuming that I am validating Roman Catholicism. Prayerfully read these Scriptures for yourself and you will see the truth of it. Let's not place as much

26 Vine's Expository Dictionary: *adelphos* ^80^ denotes "a brother, or near kinsman"; in the plural, "a community based on identity of origin or life." It is used of:— (1) male children of the same parents, <Matt. 1:2; 14:3>; (2) male descendants of the same parents, <Acts 7:23,26; Heb. 7:5>; (3) male children of the same mother, <Matt. 13:55; 1 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:19>; (4) people of the same nationality, <Acts 3:17,22; Rom. 9:3>. With "men" (*aner*, "male"), prefixed, it is used in addresses only, <Acts 2:29,37>, etc.; (5) any man, a neighbor, <Luke 10:29; Matt. 5:22; 7:3>; (6) persons united by a common interest, <Matt. 5:47>; (7) persons united by a common calling, <Rev. 22:9>; (8) mankind, <Matt. 25:40; Heb. 2:17>; (9) the disciples, and so, by implication, all believers, <Matt. 28:10; John 20:17>; (10) believers, apart from sex, <Matt. 23:8; Acts 1:15; Rom. 1:13; 1 Thes. 1:4; Rev. 19:10> (the word "sisters" is used of believers, only in <1 Tim. 5:2>); (11) believers, with *aner*, "male," prefixed, and with "or sister" added, <1 Cor. 7:14> (RV), <15; Jas. 2:15>, male as distinct from female, <Acts 1:16; 15:7,13>, but not <6:3>. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words) (Copyright (C) 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

27 There appears to be a discrepancy where Matthew 27:55-56 and Mark 15:40 state that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses "stood from far off" looking upon Jesus on the cross, and John 19:25 which states that Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Cleophas stood "by the cross." However, these are related to different times. Jesus hung on the cross for some three hours. It's possible that the women moved from standing by the cross looking from far off at the time of His actual death and the occurrence of the earthquake. Also, "far off" could mean merely "a distance," not necessarily a long distance.

weight upon Protestant tradition as does the Catholic Church upon its tradition. The insistence that Mary had other children besides Jesus has largely been a reaction to the Catholic doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity. She may well have had other children, but the Scriptures are not clear on this.

This does not in any way mean that the Roman Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary is true. It merely means that the evidence in the Talpiot tomb has been misinterpreted.

This is important, because each family would most likely have had their own tomb, perhaps close to one another, but not necessarily with one another. Because there were only ten ossuaries in the Talpiot tomb they were probably for the immediate family members rather than for close relatives. Therefore, Jos'e should not be in the same tomb as Jesus' immediate family. This Jos'e must be of another family. And just because Scripture names Jesus as a kinsman of Jesus doesn't mean there weren't other Jos'es to be found in Israel at the time.

The idea that Jos'e is a nickname for Joseph may or may not be true. But we know that in Joseph's (Mary's husband) genealogy there was Jose, the son of Eliezer (Luke 3:29). So Jos'e is not necessarily a nickname for anyone, although it may be a contraction of the name Joseph. Since there was no other ossuary inscribed "Joseph"—or any variation of that name in the tomb, then where is the ossuary of Mary's husband?

The authors suggest that Joseph died in Nazareth and was probably buried there. But the custom then would have been to bury the rest of his family with him, not in Jerusalem. The truth is that no one knows when Joseph died, or where. Just because he is not mentioned after Jesus is grown does not mean he wasn't around for awhile then.

In any case, Jos'e should not be reckoned as a literal brother of Jesus, and therefore should not be found in any tomb in which Jesus would be found. Thus, taking Jos'e out of Jesus' family tree seriously weakens Pellegrino's statistical model further, based upon his own words:

Some names, such as Jonah and Daniel, would have led us to question the entire assemblage because they did not appear in either Joseph's or Mary's family tree as provided in the Gospels. Assuming that the genealogy in Luke 3 describes that of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as many scholars believe, "Matthew" was a common name in her family. It is, as James Tabor has argued, a priestly name, and Mary, by her relationship with Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, had a priestly connection. Also, Mary's grandfather was called Matthew, so it is entirely possible that, for example, a first cousin called Matthew, after the grandfather, might be buried in the family tomb....Statistically, it didn't invalidate anything, but neither did it validate anything. I discounted it.²⁸

Applying this same principle to the Jos'e ossuary, they should have discounted it also, rather than assign any value at all to it.

80/502 "Matthew"

While Jesus' mother Mary did have a grandfather named Matthat (the father-in-law of Joseph, Luke 3:24), and Joseph had a grandfather named Matthan (Matthew 1:15), it is not a given that Jesus would have had another close relative named similarly as "Matthew." Lacking any evidence of such a relative, close or not, the "Matthew" ossuary should not have been merely discounted, but a negative "P factor" should have been applied there as well. This, too, would have seriously impugned the final odds.

80/509 "James"

Oded Golan, the antiquities dealer who claims to have acquired the "James son of Joseph – brother of Jesus" ossuary in 1978 (ostensibly because any antiquities found or purchased after 1978 are considered the property of the Israeli government) allowed Simcha Jacobovici, among others, to examine it. One other was Professor James Tabor, chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Tabor believes the "James" ossuary came from a different tomb—the "shroud tomb"—in which the oldest known fragment of a burial shroud was found. He still remains at odds with Jacobovici about where this ossuary came from. Jacobovici details a conversation he had with Tabor in 2002:

"Why do you think it's from your tomb?" I asked.

"Several ossuaries were stolen from there, so he could have bought it from whoever broke into the shroud tomb. There was a Maria in the tomb, and this is only one of a handful of Marias ever found inscribed on an ossuary. If James also came from the same tomb, then maybe the shroud tomb is the Jesus family tomb."

I didn't buy Tabor's theory. The timeline was too short. Golan couldn't have bought the ossuary just a year before. It was all too fast. Golan buys it. Lemaire sees it. They make the connection to the brother of Jesus, and suddenly it's front-page news. Even if Golan hadn't bought it before the antiquities rules changed, I believed that he'd had the ossuary for a long time. If not 1978 then maybe the early 1980s. Besides, I had gotten to know Golan. Maybe he fudged things a little, but as near as I could tell, he didn't make things up out of thin air. Tabor was wrong, I

28 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

thought: the James ossuary didn't come from his shroud tomb.²⁹

Jacobovici told Tabor that he believed the James ossuary came from the Talpiot tomb. Tabor wanted to perform DNA tests on the remains in the "James" ossuary to see if they matched the DNA in the other ossuaries from the shroud tomb. However, it appears as if those tests were never made. In his book, *The Jesus Dynasty*, published in 2006, Tabor says about the "James" ossuary:

Just recently I noticed that the dimensions of the missing tenth ossuary [from the Talpiot tomb] are precisely the same, to the centimeter, to those of the James Ossuary. Is it remotely possible that Oded Golan did acquire his ossuary many years ago—maybe not in the "mid-'70s" as he now says, but not that long after—in 1980 or thereabouts, when the Talpiot tomb was discovered? Was that tenth ossuary stolen after it was catalogued but before the excavation of the tomb was completed?...

For now, pending further evidence, whether through DNA tests or retrieval of the missing ossuary, this is where the Tale of two Tombs must end.³⁰

Tabor originally believed the "James" ossuary to have come from the Shroud tomb because it has an incised border running around the side panels identical to that of the ossuary that contained the burial shroud. So according to Tabor, the "James" ossuary may have been in either tomb, but no one can know for certain. Perhaps it belonged to neither tomb.

This is important because of other factors concerning the possibility of forging part of the name on the "James" ossuary. The IAA believes that the first part of the inscription—"James son of

Joseph"—is authentic, but that the latter part—"brother of Jesus" was forged by Oded Golan:

...Later, the Israeli police charged that by adding those words to the inscription, Golan intended to change a \$500 ossuary into a priceless religious artifact. The problem with the IAAs isotope test, which was conducted by a cowboy-boot-wearing geologist from the University of Tel Aviv by the name of Yuval Goren, is that the only part of the inscription that passed was the last letter (the Hebrew "Ayin") in the word "Jesus" ("Yeshua"). According to those freewheeling isotopes, if any part of the inscription was authentic, it was the second half and the forger had to have added the first part ("James, son of Joseph"). Clearly, this was impossible. But nobody seemed to notice. The story raced around the world: an isotope test had revealed that the patina in the inscription was not consistent with temperatures in a burial tomb and that the second part of the inscription (the Jesus part, the part that had passed) was a forgery. In the public's mind, it wasn't just that the inscription was now considered a forgery—the box itself became suspect.³¹

Golan is currently on trial for allegedly forging part of the inscription. Nevertheless, Jacobovici's claim that the IAA bungled the test is a valid one. However, there is no empirical evidence to support either position.

Summary of Statistical Analysis

By the authors' own admission, there is still doubt as to the meaning of their findings. While they say that a 1 in 600 chance that the Talpiot tomb is not that of Jesus and His family, the reality is that, had they applied the "P factor"

to the ossuaries of Jos'e, Matthew, and James, as they should have, that 1 in 600 would not hold up. This, plus the fact that much of their reasoning is speculation based on the Gnostic "gospels," and erroneous understanding of Scripture, leads us to conclude that the statistical analyses were terribly flawed and did not yield near the much lower odds they should have.

DNA SAMPLING

In spite of the perceived impossible odds against the Talpiot tomb not being that of Jesus of Nazareth, Charles Pellegrino felt that if he could get some DNA sampling from the ossuaries it might be determined how related to one another the people interred there might have been.

He claims to have taken great pains to make sure they were not jumping to conclusions. They wanted every study to be conducted with the utmost care. Charles Pellegrino was especially in awe of the possibility that, although not a Christian, he was on sacred ground. Concerning the "Jesus ossuary" he states:

I had hoped for a sample of "Jesus" patina attached to stone matrix, but unlike the Matthew and Mariamne ossuaries, there were no preexisting clean breaks in the Jesus ossuary, with matching shards lying in the bottom of the box. I couldn't just pick up a flake. The IAA attendant said that if I really needed to take a sample in order to reconstruct accurately the two-thousand-year chemical history of a tomb, I should do so.

But I could not do this. None of the IAA personnel knew what we knew. None of them really suspected how truly important this ossuary might be. I could not bring myself to remove the necessary tools from my bag, to chip away at a tiny cross-section of stone. Even a

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

30 James Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 32.

31 *The Jesus Family Tomb*, op. cit., p. 54.

two-millimeter-wide sample was too much for me to cut off, even if my not doing so meant leaving behind an important piece of the scientific puzzle.

To even think of chipping the Jesus ossuary felt like an act of vandalism.³²

As it turned out, Pellegrino didn't have to chip at the ossuary. An IAA employee dropped it while moving it and it broke apart, leaving small shards that Pellegrino was able to take for DNA sampling of the human residue inside.

His approach was to determine whether or not the individuals that had been interred in the "Jesus son of Joseph" and "Mariamene e Mara" ossuaries were related. If not, he reasoned, then there was a good likelihood that they must have been married since they were entombed together.

If these two ossuaries truly belonged to Jesus of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene, DNA tests would reveal that the two people buried within were not related. All scriptural records—whether canonical or apocryphal—were clear on one genealogical point: Jesus of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene, if their DNA could be read, would be two individuals who had no family ties. But what are the alternatives? People buried in the same tomb were related by either blood or marriage.³³

For his tests he took samples from both ossuaries to the paleo-DNA laboratory at Lakehead University in Ontario:

Paleo-DNA labs specialize in getting DNA from "human residue" that would stump any regular DNA facility. James Tabor is friends with Dr. Carney Matheson, who is one of the directors of the Lakehead lab....

The samples were not identified by their name, but by two numbers: "80-500" and "80-503." Simcha and Tabor wanted a "blind result" from the testers. For this reason, they told Dr. Matheson only that the accretion bed and the bone samples had come from an ancient Jerusalem tomb. Of course, this was not the whole story, but it was the absolute truth.

"We are trying to reconstruct the family relationships of a royal lineage," Tabor had said. For his part, Matheson was up for the task of attempting to extract DNA from bits of ancient residue taken from the bottom of the ossuaries. The idea was to create a DNA profile of each of the two individuals so as to establish any familial relations between them. The samples were sent by courier, and everyone waited anxiously for the results.³⁴

After several months, Matheson called Tabor to tell him the lab had successfully extracted DNA. Simcha and Tabor both told Matheson not to tell them the results because they wanted to be present at the lab with a camera crew when they heard them.

When they arrived at the lab they were told that the samples were both from people of Middle Eastern stock. The samples were very desiccated and fragmentary, making analysis difficult. Because of the damage the DNA incurred over the centuries, Matheson explained that after extraction, the nuclear DNA in the bones—the broader genetic blueprint copied in the nucleus of every cell—had proven impossible to recover given 2006 technology.

"However," Matheson said, "we did not quit. Instead, we shifted our focus to the mitochondrial

DNA—which is, of course, the DNA inherited maternally, from mother to child. This means that we can identify maternal relationships. Meaning, we can only address questions such as "Are these two individuals—one male and the other female—mother and child? Are they brother and sister? Or are they two unrelated individuals?"³⁵

After rigorous tests to amplify and sequence the damaged DNA fragments, and then by cloning the DNA to be able to compare many copies, which increased the validity of the work, the results were displayed for Jacobovici and Tabor on a computer monitor showing two graphs:

80-503; Marker 140: CTACCC...

80-500; Marker 140: ACCTAG...

Other comparisons of markers from the DNA fragments displayed similar results: "Jesus" and "Mariamene" did not have the same mother.

"So," Matheson continued, "when we see a number of polymorphisms between two sequences, we can then conclude that these two individuals are not related—or, at least, not maternally related."

Simcha and Tabor were now both smiling broadly, though Dr. Matheson did not yet know why.

"And," said Simcha, "this means—?"

"That this man and woman do not share the same mother," Matheson said quickly and conclusively. "They cannot be mother and child. They cannot, maternally, be brother and sister. And so, for these particular samples, because they come from the same tomb—these two individuals, if they were unrelated, would most likely have been husband and wife."³⁶

32 *Ibid.*, p. 161.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 167-168.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 168.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 172.

The authors then piece the puzzle together for us by reminding us of the clues given in the Gnostic “gospels”:

The woman known to every reader of the King James Bible as Mary Magdalene was, according to the Gnostic Gospels, “the companion of Jesus.” In these texts, as in the Church-approved Gospels, it is to Magdalene that Jesus first reveals himself after the Resurrection. In fact, in the Gnostic Gospel of Mary Magdalene, it is she to whom Jesus appears a year and a half after the Crucifixion, and to whom he entrusts his final revelation of the world to come. Mary Magdalene is also identified in the Gospel of Mary as the woman whom “the Savior loved more than the rest of women.... Surely the Savior knows her very well.”

In the biblical world, to “know” had a very special and very intimate meaning: “Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bore Cain” and “Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bore Enoch” (Genesis 4:1-17).³⁷

Jacobovici wanted next to take a DNA sample from the “Judah son of Jesus” ossuary, but the bone material was no longer available. He says that no one was being particularly clear about what had happened to it, but one account was that the accretion bed had been scoured as part of a cleaning in preparation for a museum display.

It did not seem to matter. As the ossuary inscriptions told it, if Jesus was the son of Joseph, and if the younger Judah was the son of Jesus, then of course (If Jesus’s and Mariamne’s mitochondria are proper and truthful guides) the mother of young Judah and the wife of Jesus could have been no one except Mariamne ... “also known as Master” ... also known as Mary Magdalene.³⁸

Another step taken was to compare the patina characteristics of the “James” ossuary with samples from the Talpiot tomb. The results seemed to reflect a perfect match. The evidence is strong that the “James” ossuary came from the same tomb that held the “Jesus” ossuary.

ANALYSIS OF DNA SAMPLING

At first blush the samplings from the “Jesus” and “Mariamene” ossuaries seem to produce conclusive evidence that these two must have been married. But let’s not jump to conclusions. The authors have cleverly guided the reader to believe first that “Jesus son of Joseph” must be Jesus of Nazareth, and that “Mariamene e Mara” must be Mary Magdalene. Much of their reasoning, however, is based on their trust in the Gnostic “gospels.” Those writings were not created until centuries after the Lord walked the earth. There are many reasons they are not considered canon Scripture, not the least of which is their philosophy—a philosophy that is in direct conflict with the Scriptures, both the ancient Hebrew prophets (the “Old Testament”), and the writings of the apostles (the “New Testament”). Modern scholars do often question the authorship of the Gospels, but they have offered no empirical evidence to support their claims. And even if that claim were true—that the Gospels were not authored by those to whom they’ve been attributed—they cannot dispute that they are all first-century accounts. This puts them at least one hundred years prior to the Gnostic “gospels” and their contrary teachings.

Common sense and normal reasoning tells us that the Scriptures must be more trustworthy than the writings of a peculiar sect whose deviations from the writings contemporary to Jesus expose them as unreliable.

Now, the reference to Jesus “knowing” Mary Magdalene: this cannot be interpreted to mean they had sexual re-

lations, even using the Gnostic “Gospel of Mary.” Who would say, “the Savior knows her very well”? What would that mean? That they were in a steamy sexual relationship? What was this, the first written soap opera? If “know” meant “sexual relations” the language would certainly be more like, “The Savior has known her.” Besides this, “know” is an antiquated English word, no longer used in that sense. The translators of the Gnostic “gospels” would not have used that term in that way.

Jacobovici can’t even properly use the Gnostic “gospels” to establish his point. It’s enough to try to read into Scripture what is written, but to not even be able to stretch the Gnostic “gospels” to fit demonstrates how far from truth his premise lies. And lie it does.

Concerning the DNA samples themselves, the authors have set up a straw man and cleverly knocked him down. They tell us that if the DNA samples do not match, then they cannot have been related; therefore, they must have been husband and wife.

So Mariamene and Jesus did not have the same mother. That does not mean they were married. The authors have already stated that close relatives might be buried in the same tomb. What if Mariamene is a cousin of this particular Jesus? They wouldn’t have the same mother, but they probably wouldn’t be married to one another either.

What if Mariamene was the wife of James? Or what if Maria was the wife of this Jesus? Suppose Judah had been the son of Maria? And what about the unnamed ossuaries? Might these have been the spouses of Mariamene and this Jesus? There are just too many unknown and unchecked factors to be able to say with even near certainty that the Gnostic “gospels” must be true, and that this Mariamene e Mara is Mary Magdalene, and that this Joshua is Jesus of Nazareth.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 173.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

FACTS VS. CONJECTURE

While The Jesus Family Tomb presents some compelling scientific data, it is also rife with conjecture. Much of that conjecture is based on questionable sources.

Jesus' Body Stolen

The old Jewish canard that Jesus' body was stolen by His disciples and that His resurrection was fabricated finds its way into the book. The authors begin by saying that there was great concern among Jesus' followers about placing His body in the tomb before the Sabbath:

The Gospels also say that on Sunday, before he could be moved, Jesus conquered death, left the tomb empty, and later, on several separate occasions and in several forms, appeared before His disciples.

But the Gospels also hint at an alternative explanation for Jesus's empty tomb. Matthew says there was another story circulating in Jerusalem after the Crucifixion of Jesus. Although Matthew calls it a lie, according to the rumor, Jesus's disciples secretly came by night and stole away with their master's body. As Matthew tells it, the story persisted among the Jews for a very long time (Matthew 28:11-15).

If the disciples took the body, there is only one thing they could have done with it. They would have reburied it.

If Jesus was reburied, his family would have waited for his flesh to disappear and then stored his bones in an ossuary, sealed away forever deep in the recesses of his family tomb.³⁹

Again, nothing but conjecture. But it is stated in such a way as to cast doubt upon the Scriptures, making it appear as if Matthew was the one telling the lie, and the enemies of Christ were the ones telling the truth. Yet they have nothing concrete upon which to build their case.

Jesus Plotted Sedition Against Rome

Any student of Scripture knows that Jesus was charged by the Jewish authorities with plotting against Caesar. The authors of The Jesus Family Tomb also convey the idea that Jesus was crucified for plotting sedition:

According to most scholars, Jesus was crucified around 30 C.E. Christianity became an official state religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine in 312 C.E. Roughly three hundred years separate the Crucifixion of Jesus, as a Jew guilty of sedition against the Roman Empire, and his elevation as a supreme deity—if not the Supreme Deity—of that same empire.⁴⁰

This is one of several statements in which the authors imply that Jesus was seditious, and that is why the Romans crucified Him. In truth, it was the Jewish leaders who brought the charge of sedition against Jesus, but He was declared "without fault" by Pontius Pilate. He did not want to crucify Jesus, and sought a way out of having to do so.

Impugning Scripture

Throughout the book Scripture is impugned as a reliable source of truth, even from the very first words in the Foreword by James Campbell:

What if Jesus didn't exist at all? Today many experts are saying exactly that. The theory is that he was a conflation of pagan god-man and death/Resurrection myths with first-century Jewish messiah traditions and that he had no more historical substance than Zeus.

In various pagan mystery religions predating the first century C.E. (A.D.), Osiris, Attis, and Dionysus were all god-men who died around the time of Easter (the spring equinox) and were resurrected after three days. And all three of these deities pre-

dated Jesus by centuries. Christmas itself is thought by most scholars to be an adoption of the pagan tradition of celebrating the winter solstice. With many of the basic narrative points of the Jesus story, such as the virgin birth and the Resurrection, predating his supposed existence by hundreds of years, a compelling case has been made that he never existed at all but was a myth created to fulfill a specific need. In the absence of a single particle of physical evidence that Jesus Christ actually lived, this recent movement among historical scholars could not be factually refuted.

But now, with this stunning book, Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino have delivered not just a particle of evidence but a veritable avalanche of it. Their investigation proves, I believe, beyond any reasonable doubt that a first-century Jewish tomb found in Talpiot, Jerusalem, in 1980 is the tomb of Jesus and his family. What's even more electrifying is what the physical evidence from within the tomb says about Jesus, his death, and his relationships with the other family members found in the same burial site.⁴¹

Most of what we know, or think we know, comes from the four great Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But what exactly are these Gospels? To the deeply and unquestioningly faithful, they are the direct and absolute word of God, recorded by the most saintly of men. Historians, however, now view them as composite works, each created by several authors and based in turn on oral traditions carried on for decades, possibly half a century, after Christ's actual ministry. There is no historical evidence that any of the authors, if in fact they were individuals, actually heard the words of Jesus from his own lips.⁴²

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

41 *Ibid.*, p. vii.

42 *Ibid.*, p. ix.

In these few paragraphs, Campell has cleverly impugned the veracity of Scripture, cast doubt upon the belief in Jesus as the Word of God in the flesh, in his virgin birth, and in His resurrection (all essential tenets of the Faith), and suggested that the only thing we can believe in is the physical evidence that suggests He never rose from the dead. All this despite the glaring errors and presuppositions inherent to the story the authors of the book tell.

Yes, there were many pagan myths that preceded and paralleled Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection. But the Gospel was first given among men who held to the expectations of their redemption since the time of Adam. Many truths have become perverted by fallen men throughout the ages. This does not negate those truths.

And while it's true that there is no physical evidence to support the Gospel accounts of Jesus, the fact remains that the writers of those accounts, as well as many others who witnessed them, went to their deaths rather than recant what they knew to be the truth. This is historical fact. The odds of so many doing so, with no record of any refutation, bespeak odds far greater than those offered to support the idea that the Talpiot tomb is that of Jesus and His family. Such a witness would stand up in a court of law under all rules of evidence.

One thing the authors fail to address is why, if the early Christians were trying to deceive the world by claiming that Jesus rose bodily from the grave, they would inscribe His name on an ossuary. If they were really as deceptive as the skeptics tell us, they would certainly have kept His name off any evidence that His bones were in the tomb.

It cannot be argued that they knew the tomb would be sealed over time and would likely never be found. The tombs were above ground at the time, and were readily accessible to family and friends of the deceased.

It's probably unlikely, but if anything, His detractors might have inscribed His name on an ossuary to counter the claims of the Resurrection.

As an aside, Jacobovici's description of the IAA's isotope tester as "a cowboy-boot-wearing geologist" demonstrates a condescending attitude toward those with whom he disagrees. What one wears has nothing to do with one's qualifications. Jacobovici's detractors could describe him as a bandana-wearing pseudo scientist. But that would do nothing to advance the search for truth either.

The Gnostic Gospels

Much of the conjecture in The Jesus Family Tomb is based upon the writings found in some of the Gnostic "gospels." Many of these "gospels" were found in the Nag Hammadi Library among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The various "gospels" attributed to the Gnostics were written no earlier than the middle of the second century and as late as the late fourth century.

Skeptics and modern biblical "scholars" tell us that gnosticism was an early sect of Christianity, but that is simply not true.

Gnosticism existed in diverse forms of religious and speculative culture even prior to the time of Christ, especially in the theology of the Alexandrian Jews and in influences from the old Persian or Zoroastrian religion as well as Buddhism. Some forms of gnosticism are pantheistic, and had ties to the secret doctrines of the Jewish Kabbala.

After Christ came, some Gnostics adopted the concept of redemption into their otherwise non-biblical ideologies. Modern "scholars" refuse to consider gnosticism as a discipline outside the Christian "church." As a result, they attribute great sanctity to the so-called Gnostic "gospels" that offer "truths" that are contrary to the Bible. And they insist that these "gospels" should have been included in the canon of Scripture, but were surreptitiously "removed" by the early "Church Fathers" such as Irenaeus and Origen.

However, they were rejected long before the Roman Catholic Church came on the scene. And since these books differ considerably from the Gospels written by the eyewitnesses to Jesus' life,

and since none of them exhibit the prophetic nature of Scripture, we can see why they would have been considered untrustworthy.

It seems now, as if every "Christian" season, they are trotted out in the media in attempts to further destroy faith in Jesus Christ, all in His name.

More Conjecture

The entire "Jesus Family Tomb" story is rife with conjecture. Some of it revolves around theories of the Crusaders invading the Talpiot tomb and leaving three skulls in a triangular pattern on the floor, and the Knights Templar gleaning their "skull and crossbones" symbols from the configuration of the bones in the ossuaries.

Another involves the mysterious symbol of a circle carved within an inverted chevron that graces the front of the Talpiot tomb. This, the authors suggest, could have been the progenitor of the Masons' pyramid and all-seeing eye found on our one-dollar bill today.

These and many other conjectures serve only to fill pages and lend a sense of intrigue to the story of the Talpiot tomb. They provide no information one way or the other as to whether or not this is "The Jesus Family Tomb."

If we do not accept their faulty conclusions we are "the deeply and unquestioningly faithful" (read gullible). We should, I suppose, throw off all blessings that Scripture has provided us, lose all hope of salvation, and plunge ourselves into the dark, miserable void of human skepticism.

Such statements expose the low view of Scripture possessed by these people. Obviously they have more regard for false "gospels" and other questionable rumors than they do for the Scriptures that have stood the test of time and been responsible for the civilizing of mankind beyond the barbarism that characterized all of humanity prior to the coming of Jesus Christ.

But it makes for a good story for the gullible, and certainly brings in the bucks. Jacobovici, Pellegrino, and Campbell are counting a lot of pyramids and all-seeing eyes on the way to the bank. ✓