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ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY
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A TOMB WITH INSCRIBED OSSUARIES IN EAST TALPIYOT, JERUSALEM

AMOS KLONER

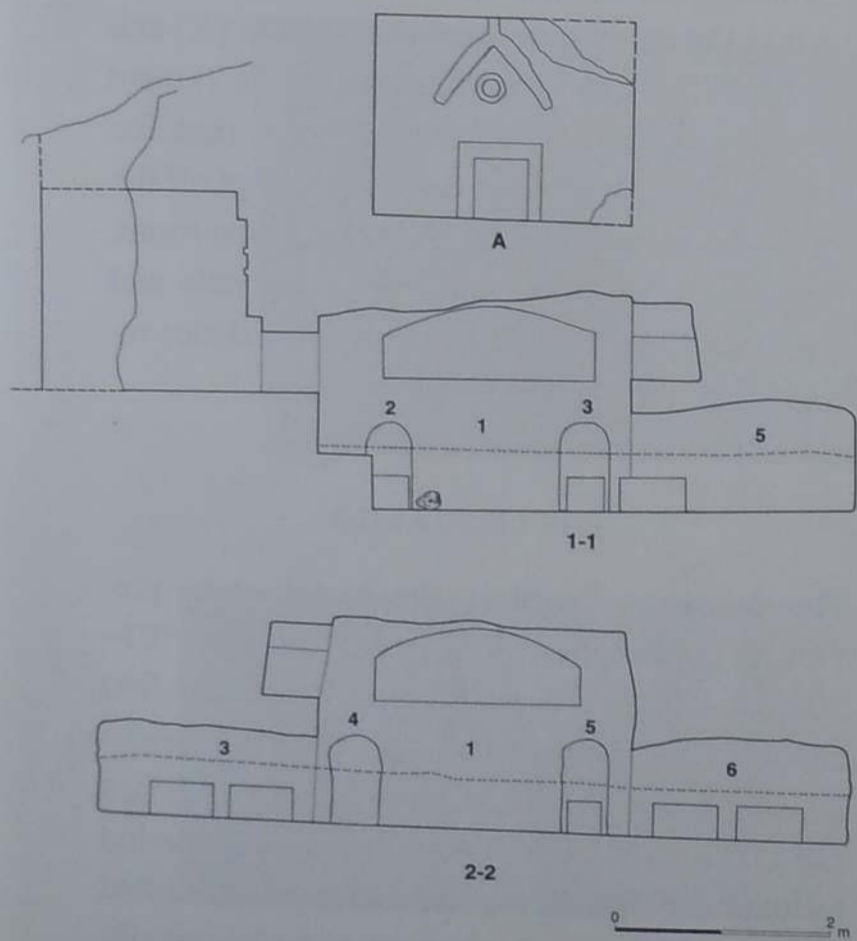
In March 1980 the entrance to a burial cave was exposed on Dov Gruner Street in the Jerusalem neighborhood of East Talpiyot. A salvage excavation was undertaken by the late Yosef Gat of the Department of Antiquities and Museums.

The burial cave (Plan 1) consisted of an outer courtyard, a presumed antechamber and the tomb chamber itself (see plan). It was cut into the soft local limestone (*nari*) and chalk, which showed signs of chisel-dressing. The courtyard's width was approximately 4.2 m east to west. The square cavity (2 × 2.4 m) north of the courtyard appears to have been a roofed antechamber. The southern wall of this room and part of its roof were destroyed by bulldozers, leading to the discovery of the tomb's entrance in the northern wall of the antechamber.

The tomb facade (Fig. 1) is decorated in relief with a pointed gable carved over a circle and an incomplete rosette. The square entrance



Fig. 1. The tomb facade.



Plan 1. Top plan and cross-sections of the tomb.

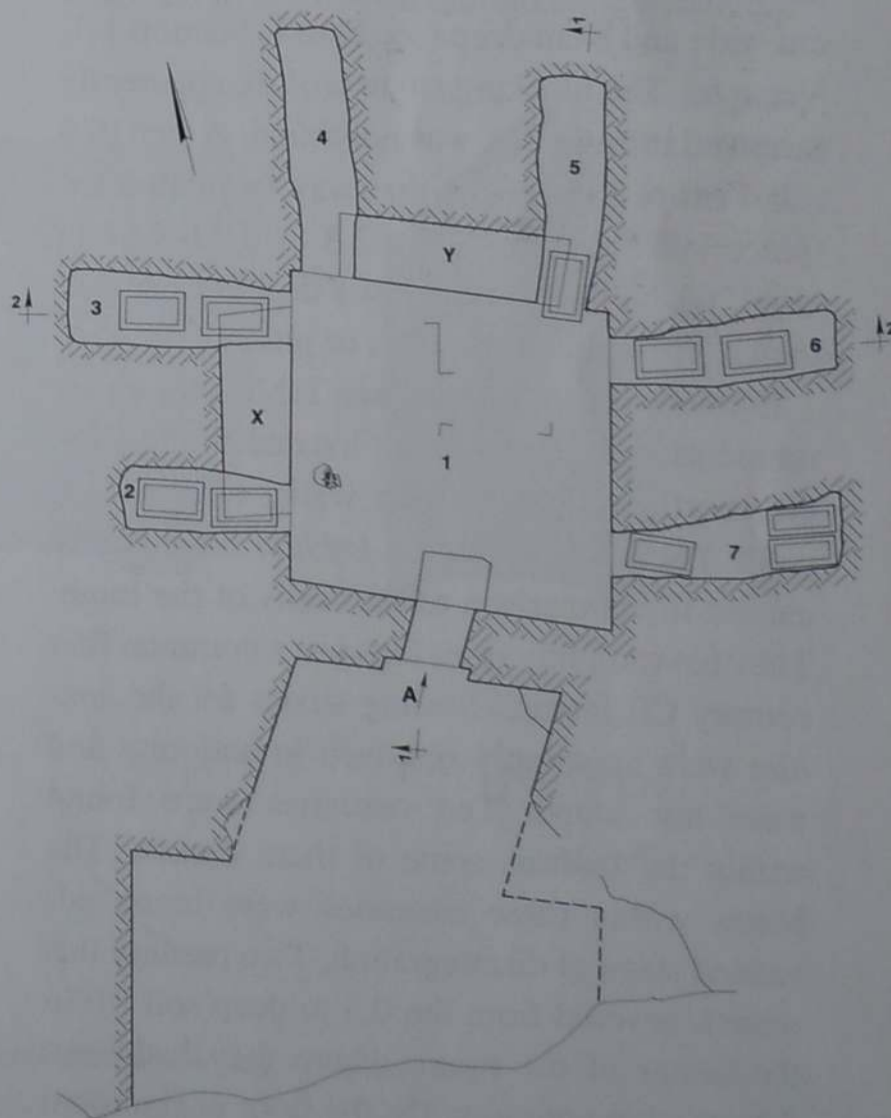


Table 1. *Kokh* Measurements (in m)

| <i>Kokh</i> | Length | Width | | | Comments |
|-------------|--------|--------|--------|------|--------------------------|
| | | Facade | Middle | Back | |
| 2 | 1.24 | 0.36 | 0.47 | 0.48 | Gathering area |
| 3 | 1.62 | 0.38 | 0.52 | 0.52 | |
| 4 | 1.76 | 0.38 | 0.48 | 0.44 | Disturbed primary burial |
| 5 | 1.63 | 0.36 | 0.46 | 0.46 | |
| 6 | 1.60 | 0.34 | 0.43 | 0.42 | |
| 7 | 1.64 | 0.34 | 0.46 | 0.54 | |

Table 2. Arcosolium Measurements (in m) and Finds

| | Span | Height at Center | Depth | Shelf Height | Finds |
|---|------|------------------|-------|--------------|----------------|
| X | 1.54 | 0.53 | 0.50 | 0.96 | Powdered bones |
| Y | 1.58 | 0.55 | 0.47 | 0.96 | Powdered bones |

(0.43 × 0.47 m) is set in a recessed frame, 9–12 cm wide and 8 cm deep (see Plan 1, Section 1-1, View A). The blocking stone (*golal*), apparently removed in antiquity, was not found. A step (0.4 × 0.4 m) just inside the doorway facilitated entrance into the tomb (2.3 × 2.3 m; 1.51–1.56 m high), which was silted-up to a depth of one-half meter. There are no benches or pits.

Entrances to six *kokhim* (see Table 1 for measurements and contents) are located in the eastern, northern, and western walls, two in each wall. The interiors of the *kokhim* are roughly carved in comparison to the walls of the tomb. They have slightly inset facades, a common first century CE feature. Sealing stones for the *kokhim* were apparently removed in antiquity and were not found. Ten ossuaries were found within the *kokhim*, some of them broken. The bones within these ossuaries were in an advanced stage of disintegration. Two ossuary lids were recovered from the 0.5 m deep soil fill in the center of the room, where they had been discarded in antiquity. On the floor of the room

and in the fill a few Early Roman (Herodian) sherds were found.

Two arcosolia were carved in the tomb, one each in the upper portion of the western (X) and northern (Y) walls. The arcosolia (Table 2) were carved with greater attention to detail than the *kokhim*. Disturbed bones, probably swept off the arcosolia, were found on the floor of the room. These included skull and limb fragments and vertebrae. Only broken and powdered bones remained on the shelves of the arcosolia.

THE OSSUARIES

The ossuaries found in the burial cave, previously published by Rahmani (1994: Nos. 701–709), are typical Jewish ossuaries of the first century CE. The number of ornamented ossuaries equals the number of plain ones (Table 3), a ratio common in burial complexes of the period (Kloner 1993:104). Six ossuaries are inscribed (60%), which is a higher ratio than normally found. Five ossuaries are inscribed in Hebrew

Table 3. Distribution of Ossuary Decorations and Inscriptions*

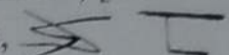
| | | Inscribed in Greek | Inscribed in Hebrew | Mason's Mark Only | No Inscription |
|-----------|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Decorated | 5 (50%) | 1 (No. 1) (10%) | 1 (No. 2) (10%) | 1 (No. 7) (10%) | 2 (Nos. 8,9) (20%) |
| Plain | 5 (50%) | | 4 (Nos. 3,4,5,6) (40%) | | 1 (No. 10) (10%) |
| Total | 10 (100%) | 1 (10%) | 5 (50%) | 1 (10%) | 3 (30%)* |

* Ossuary nos. refer to the catalogue, below.

and only one in Greek; normally the proportion of Hebrew to Greek is 4:3 (Kloner 1993:105).

Catalogue

1. IAA 80-500 (Fig. 2): 68.5 × 26 × 14.5 cm. The facade is ornamented with two six-petalled rosettes asymmetrically aligned within panels. Zigzag frames surround the facade; the center is flanked by vertical rows of three discs. On the narrow right side a six-petalled rosette is misdrawn (Fig. 2b). On the long back side, in the top center, is an inscription in Greek (Fig. 2a; 31 cm

long, 3 cm high): Μαριαμήνου (ή) Μάρα (of Mariamene, [also called] Mara). Small mason's marks, , appear on the ossuary.

The name Mariamene, a variant of the name מרים (Miriam, Maryam) and מריה (Marya), is inscribed on more than twenty ossuaries in the Israel State Collections (Rahmani 1994:14, 115–116). מרים and מריה are the most common feminine names of the Second Temple period (Hachlili 1984:189). Mara, a contraction of Martha, is used here as a second name. This name too is common in the Jewish feminine onomasticon.

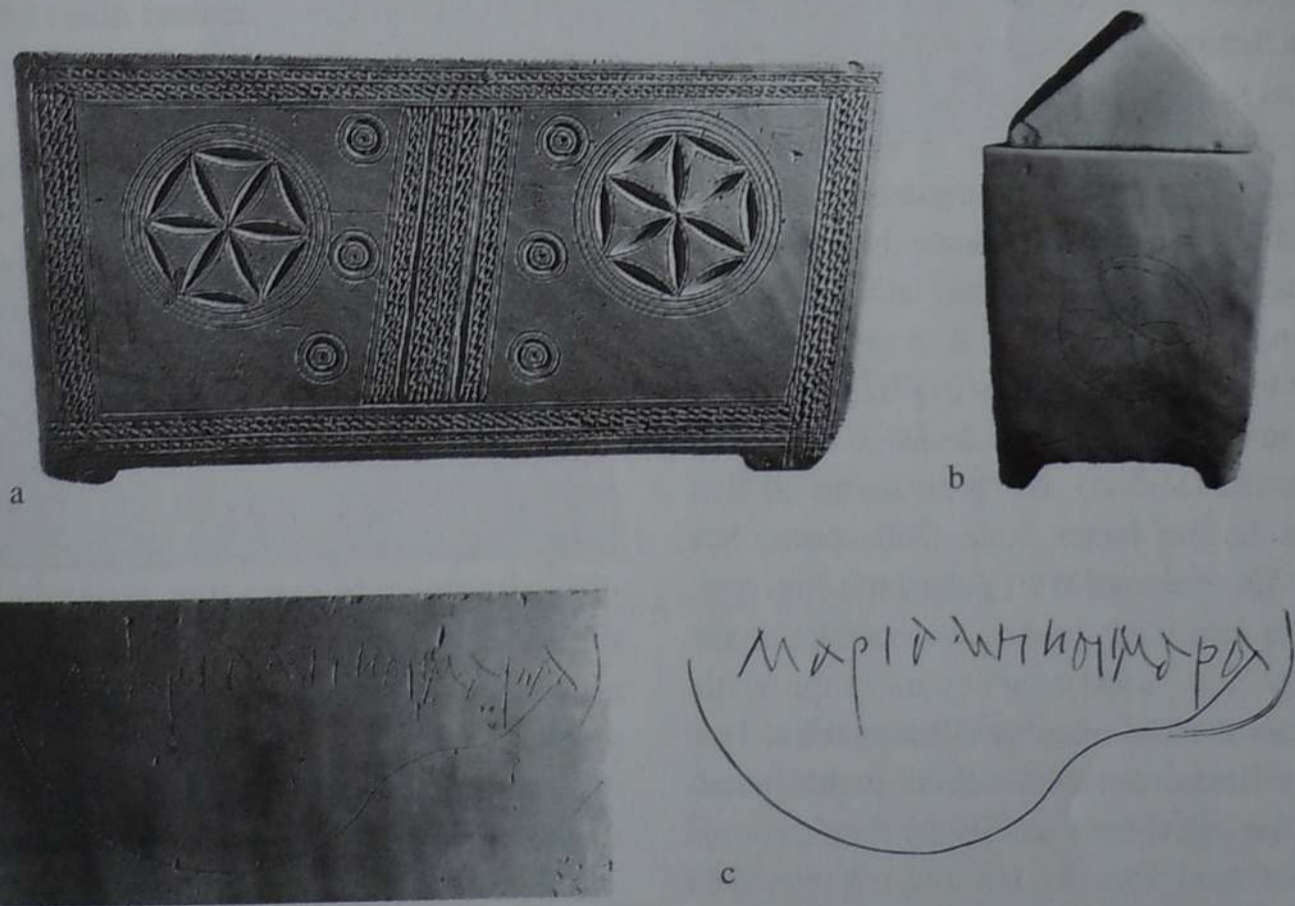


Fig. 2. Ossuary 1: (a) facade; (b) decorated narrow side; (c) inscription.



Fig. 3. Ossuary 2: (a) facade; (b) inscription.

2. IAA 80-501 (Fig. 3): $55 \times 23 \times 27$ cm. The facade is ornamented with two six-petalled rosettes and a zigzag frame. On the left upper side of the right rosette is a well executed Hebrew inscription (Fig. 3b; 6.7 cm long, 0.8 cm high), in small letters: יהודה בר ישוע (Yehuda son of Yeshua).

The name Yehuda (Judas) is the third most popular name in the Jewish onomasticon of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. In a study of 1,986 names of the Hellenistic and Roman period, conducted by T. Ilan, 128 persons were found to bear this name (Ilan 1987:238).

The name ישוע (Yeshua = Jesus), a derivative of Yehoshua (Joshua), has been found on five ossuaries in the Israel State Collections, ישו (Yeshu) on one, יהושע (Yehoshua) on one, Ἰησοῦς on four, and Ἰησους on one (Rahmani 1994:293–295). Yehoshua/Yeshua is the sixth most common male name used during the Hellenistic and Roman periods in Eretz Israel, borne by 71 of the individuals studied by Ilan.

3. IAA 80-502 (Fig. 4): $55 \times 28 \times 34$ cm. Plain. On the narrow side, at the top and slightly off-

center, is an inscription (Fig. 4b; 9.5 cm long, 2.5 cm high) in large letters: מתיה (Matya). Scratched inside the ossuary was the name מת/ה (Mat(y)a) (Fig. 4c). Both are shortened forms of מתתיהו (Matityahu = Matthew). Ilan (1987:238) identified 46 Jewish males with this name.

4. IAA 80-503 (Fig. 5): $65 \times 26 \times 30$ cm. Plain. On the narrow side, just below the rim, the name ישוע בר יהוסף (Yeshua (?) son of Yehosef) is inscribed (Fig. 5b; 16.5 cm long, 2.5 cm high). It is preceded by an X—the mark of either the mason or the bone-collector (cf. No. 7; Kloner 1993:91 No.8, 97, No.25). Additional mason's marks, \succ \ast , appear on the lid of the ossuary. The first name following the X mark is difficult to read. In contrast to other ossuaries in this tomb, the incisions are here superficial and cursorily carved. Each of the four letters suggesting ישוע is unclear, but the reading is corroborated by the inscription on Ossuary 2, above (Rahmani 1994:223).

5. IAA 80-504 (Fig. 6): $54.5 \times 26 \times 34.5$ cm. Plain. On the upper half of the front panel the



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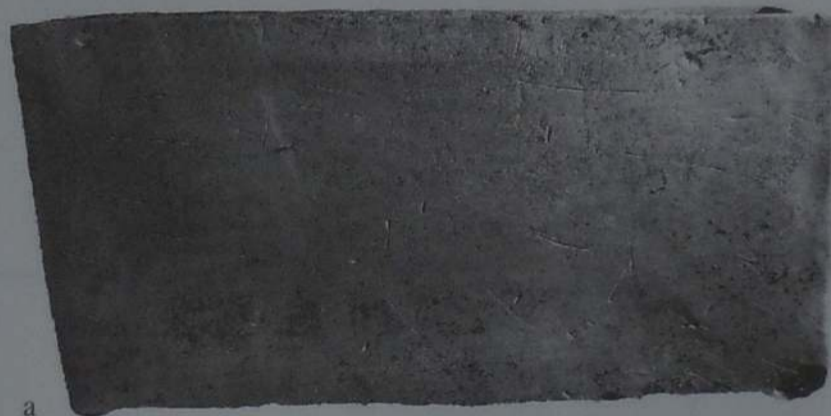


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Fig. 4. Ossuary 3: (a) plain facade, with chisel marks; (b) inscription on narrow side; (c) inscription inside ossuary.



a



b

Fig. 5. Ossuary 4: (a) plain facade; (b) inscription.

name יוסה (Yosé) is inscribed. Yosé is a contraction of Yehosef (Joseph), the second most common name in the Second Temple period (Ilan 1987:238; see Hachlili 1984:188–190). Some 35% of all known Jewish males of the Hellenistic and Roman periods in Eretz Israel bore “Has-

monean” names: Matthew (Ossuary 3, above), John, Simon, Judas (Ossuaries 2 and 4, above), Eleazar, and Jonathan. Joseph was the sixth brother in the family (2 Maccabees 8:22), and the similar popularity of this name may be explained by this fact (Ilan 1987:240–241).

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6. IAA 80-505 (Fig. 7): $52 \times 27 \times 33$ cm. Plain. Centered on the upper half of the front panel, the name מריה (Marya) is inscribed (12.5 cm long, 4.5 cm high; see Ossuary 1, above).

7. 80-506 (Fig. 8): $67 \times 31.5 \times 38.5$ cm. Facade ornamented with two six-petalled rosettes and zigzag frames. The rear panel bears another

large mason's mark (Fig. 8a) and the narrow side has some illegible incisions (Fig. 8b). In the corners and between the petals small discs are drawn.

8. IAA 80-507 (Fig. 9): $51 \times 27 \times 31.5$ cm. Ornamented with two six-petalled rosettes and double zigzag frames.



Fig. 6. Ossuary 5, front panel with inscription.

מריה



Fig. 7. Ossuary 6, front panel with inscription.

מריה



a



b

Fig. 8. Ossuary 7: (a) rear panel with mason's mark; (b) narrow side with incisions.

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Fig. 9. Ossuary 8, facade.



Fig. 10. Ossuary 9, facade.

9. IAA 80.508 (Fig. 10): $61 \times 26.5 \times 31.5$ cm. Ornamented with two six-petaled rosettes in zigzag frames, doubled at the top.

10. IAA 80.509: $60 \times 26 \times 30$ cm. Plain.

DISCUSSION

Based on the accumulated evidence from hundreds of tomb caves in Jerusalem and its vicinity, the sequence of quarrying and interment in the burial cave is reconstructed as follows:

1. The quarrying of the cave, the preparation of the *kokhim* and primary interment within them.
2. The collection of bones and the placing of ossuaries in some of the *kokhim*, which were thus invalidated for primary burial; the practice of

primary burial continued in the remaining *kokhim*.

3. The carving of arcosolia either contemporaneously with or subsequent to the previous activities. The arcosolia were originally intended to accommodate ossuaries.

4. The primary interment in *Kokh* 4 and the conversion of arcosolia from their original function of housing ossuaries to receiving the recently-interred for primary burial.

This burial cave was probably used for three or four generations.² The finds, which included a small quantity of sherds, allow for a Second Temple period dating, i.e., from the end of the first century BCE or the beginning of the first century CE, until approximately 70 CE.

NOTES

¹ The discovery, made prior to construction activity, was reported by K. Mandil and A. Shohat of the Solel Boneh Construction Company. The site was initially examined by E. Braun. Salvage excavations were conducted from March 28 to April 14, 1980 (Permit 938). S. Gibson surveyed the site and drew the plan. Ossuary inscriptions are reproduced from the initial publication of the ossuaries by Rahmani

(1994:222-224, Nos. 701-709). After the completion of the excavation, the bones were reburied.

² The number of interments may be estimated at 35: 17 in the ossuaries (based on an average of 1.7 individuals per ossuary), and 18 outside the ossuaries. These figures are based on demographic data compiled by the author (see Kloner 1993:105).

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