FORUM

The Suba Cave of John the Baptist

[Gibsonf01] [Gibsonf11]

In August 2004, newswires around the world were buzzing with the incredible news that the very cave in which John the Baptist practised his baptisms had been found just west of Jerusalem close to the village of ʿAin Karem, the traditional home of the Baptist. The artificial cave was dug out sometime in the Iron Age possibly as early as 800 B.C.E. as a reservoir for an extensive water system connected with the local ceramics industry. But by the Roman period, it had been adapted to ritual use, as indicated by the thousands of pottery vessels dating to that time (the later-first century B.C.E.–mid-second century C.E.) that were deliberately broken. A staircase led down into the 24 by 4 meter cave, at the foot of which a large stone with a groove in the shape of a right footprint, was apparently used for ceremonial foot anointing. Beyond this, at the back of the cave, was a baptism pool large enough to accommodate scores of people. Incised drawings dating to the Byzantine period (fourth or fifth century) adorned the cave walls, including the figure of a man holding a staff in his left hand and his right arm raised in blessing, as was typical of Byzantine depictions of John the Baptist. According to the excavators, Byzantine monks carved the images on the cave's walls because oral tradition had long linked the site with the stories of the Baptist. The cave continued in use as a shrine until the Crusader period, when the ceramics all but disappear. But have the excavators interpreted these finds correctly?

John the Baptist or Lazarus, the Patron Saint of Leprosy?

Joe Zias

The Suba Cave, also referred to as the Cave of John the Baptist, is a massive Judean Hills water installation dating from the eighth century B.C.E. that has generated wide media attention since its discovery and recent excavation (conducted between 1999–2003).[1] While it has been firmly established that this cave is not naturally occurring and was created as a large water cistern for collecting runoff, the decision to link the site to John the Baptist (Gibson 2004), and perhaps to Jesus himself (Tabor 2006), was primarily based on the quantity of sherds of small jugs dating to the Roman period and on the graffiti that is crudely inscribed on the cistern walls. However, this interpretation is based on a misanalysis of the archaeological and historical data and is unsustainable.

The Ceramics

Gibson's claim that the cistern was constructed during the eighth century B.C.E. and that later, during the Roman period (late-first century B.C.E.–early-second century C.E.), it served a cultic function is based primarily on ceramic evidence. The excavated fill from the Roman period, containing over 100,000 sherds, primarily of small jugs, suggests that people came to the site for purposes of healing, in the process destroying each juglet as part of a purity ritual (Gibson 2004: 212).

On the basis of ceramic and ^{14}C evidence, Gibson argues that the site at Suba fell into disuse just before the Crusader conquest in 1099 (Gibson 2004: 52). However, despite the lack of ceramic evidence, it is clear that the cistern was important during the Crusader period (1099–1244 C.E.), particularly around the time of the establishment of the nearby Crusader castle of Belmont (Harper and Pringle 2000). This castle, overlooking the water installation, was most likely responsible for administering Hospitaller estates as far away as Abu Gosh (*Castellum Emmaus*), which would have included both castles and fortified manors at Aqua Bella, Qastal (*Belveer*), and possibly Qaluniya (Harper and Pringle 2000: 218).[2] Whereas the absence of ceramics within an archaeological context might normally be a sign that a site was abandoned, its absence at Suba may be due to the changing nature of the cistern's cultic function in later periods.

During the later Byzantine and Islamic periods, the quantity of ceramics found in the cistern dropped dramatically, perhaps an indication that ecclesiastical institutions specifically helping those suffering from leprosy and other dermatological diseases had been established, thus ending the forced societal exclusion and wandering of the afflicted. Those who were formerly ostracized in the Roman period were taken into the care of by Byzantine churches and monasteries (Zias 2002: 263–65) until the sixth century when the Fathers of the Councils of Orleans (548 C.E.) and Lyon (581 C.E.) entrusted their care to local bishops. Bishops were then compelled to provide for them, ceasing the wandering of the afflicted in search of food and alms. This dramatic change from exclusion to inclusion is owing in large part to the New Testament biblical verses dealing with the disease as well as to the power of the Christian churches. Not only does Jesus cleanse the lepers (Dauphin 1996–1997: 63), but he tells his disciples to do so as well (Luke 17:12).

During the Islamic period, societal expulsion, particularly in the extreme form of casting stones known from earlier sources, is replaced by one of increasing public tolerance and acceptance. Although *lepra* is mentioned in the Koran, the fact that it is not associated with sin, as it is in the Bible, lessened the social and moral stigma associated with leprosy during the Islamic period (Dols 1983: 913).

The Graffiti [f01]

An important key for dating, identifying, and understanding the graffiti on the walls of the cistern can be found inscribed on the statute of Hospitaller Roger des Moulins (1182 C.E.), according to which "each of the sick (in the hospitals) is to have a cloak of sheepskin and boots for coming and going to the latrines, and caps of wool" (Harper and Pringle 2000: 218). If one compares the clothing on the unnamed graffito figure that Gibson identifies as John the Baptist (see p. 58), one can see a cloak adorning the body as well as a head covering.[3] This cloak and cap, along with the fact that they are mentioned specifically in the Hospitallers' statute, shows that those suffering from disease, under the protection and care of the Hospitallers, wore this distinctive clothing going to and from the latrines. It is reasonable to assume that while the afflicted were under Hospitaller care and protection, this act of kindness was extended to other facilities under Hospitaller patronage. The specific mention of boots as an item of clothing for the afflicted suggests that true leprosy or Hansen's disease, which severely affects the lower limbs, may have been one of the implied diseases in the graffito. However, it is impossible to tell if the "boots" adorning the figure are the result of a niche carved into the plaster between the legs (apparently for a relic), which obliterated much of the lower limb, or if the they were inscribed intentionally. However, on the opposite wall, there is a crudely inscribed graffito, which may represent a boot as there appears to be nailing represented in the sole ("C11" in the illustration). Furthermore, there are markings on the forehead and cheeks of the individual, which may portray skin lesions associated with true leprosy.[Gibsonf08]

[f03]On the official seal of the Order of Lazarus in Jerusalem, facial disfigurement is clearly visible in the portraiture on the cheeks, chin, and nose similar to those found in the figure on the wall at Suba. According to Gibson, the eyes of the Suba individual have been defaced, which he regards as the work of iconoclasts (Gibson 2004: 218). However, as blindness and nasal disfiguration are two of the clinical features associated with *facies leprosa*, this could symbolically represent the later stages of the disease in which the sufferer had lost both his eyesight and the structural integrity of the nasal aperture (Jopling and McDougall 1988: 22). Had iconoclasts wished to deface the graffito, more damage would be visible, particularly to the face. Aside from the eyes and nose, little defacement is apparent elsewhere on the figure, suggesting that the graffito was intentionally fashioned to depict the ravages of the disease. Moreover, if one looks at leprosy in medieval art, one sees that the victim is nearly always semi-naked, thus permitting the viewer to see the spots and nodules that are clinical manifestations of the disease (Gron 1973: 246).

The figure holds in his left hand an object that Gibson describes as possibly a cross,[4] even though it is unlike any other cross depicted on the eastern as well as the western walls. What is discernible here is that the object is deliberately fashioned in such a way that the arms of both the vertical as well as the horizontal do not touch so as to avoid any misinterpretation that this is meant to be a cross. This object appears to be a wooden warning clapper, which those afflicted were obliged to carry in public, warning passers-by that a leper was in their midst. In Christian art, this object is one of the defining attributes of those suffering from leprosy, even appearing on the seal of the Order of Lazarus leprosarium in Jerusalem during Crusader times.

The Animals

[f11]On the western wall of the cistern, to the right of the main figure, there is a small, three-legged animal.[5] Gibson identified this animal as a "very schematic representation of a lamb, with its neck and head raised to the left as representing John the Baptist proclaiming that Jesus was the Lamb of God" (2004: 60). He believes that this constellation of features, namely, the crooked staff, the lamb, and the garment, are in accordance with the portrayal of John the Baptist in the Byzantine period. However in the parable of Lazarus according Luke 16:19–31, it is written: "And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores … even the dogs were coming and licking his sores" (vv. 20–21). In addition, Lazarus is generally depicted as being accompanied by two or more dogs, usually milling around the infected lower limb. Here we can see two dogs doing just as described in the biblical parable.Thus, by analyzing the iconographic context as a whole, the identification of the animal as a dog becomes more probable than Gibson's lamb. Moreover, the graffito shows clear signs of the short erect tail and erect ears that are common among dogs, as opposed to the tail and ears of a Palestinian sheep, which hang downward. To the right of the dog near its tail is a vertical line extending upwards to the arm of the individual who stands in typical orans fashion, that is, with the arms extending skyward. Gibson regards this line as a staff or a cane (Gibson 2004: 58), which is a plausible identification. However, combined with the dogs and clapper, it is better understood as a staff, the third main attribute of St. Lazarus in Christian art.

[f04]The second dog that is always portrayed to accompany Lazarus in Christian art was missing from Gibson's writings and drawings,which troubled me initially, as the parable of Lazarus speaks of dogs in the plural and not in the singular. But after visiting the site on several occasions in 2006, I was able to observe an additional animal facing away, to the left of the standing figure, near his right foot. Gibson only briefly discussed this as it was barely visible in comparison to the computer-enhanced standing figure that dominates the scene (Gibson 2004: 60). He provides several possibilities for this enigmatic animal, including the possibility that it could be the biblical Lamb of God from John 1:36. Evidently the fact that there are only three vertical strokes beneath the object was bothersome to Gibson, as he felt that it could also be interpreted as a chalice or a bowl on a tripod (Gibson 2004: 60). While this would appear logical, what he describes as a sheep standing to the left of the figure is also three-legged. This is most likely due to the artist's difficulty of depicting an animal from the side. Evidence that this animal is also a dog comes again from the fact that it is

clearly drawn with erect ears.

After considering the position of the dogs in relation to the central figure, this enigmatic graffito becomes clear and the misnaming of this cistern as the Cave of John the Baptist should be corrected to the Cave of Lazarus.

The Arm

[f05]Several meters to the right of the standing figure, incised on the western wall, there is an arm with all five digits of the right hand extended. Gibson attempts to explain this in several ways, calling it a relic from John the Baptist's tomb at Sebaste, which pagans sacked in 363 C.E. (2004: 61–62). The key to understanding this particular segment of the graffito can be found in a continuation of the same Lukian parable of the Lazarus and the Rich Man cited above. In Luke 16:22, both have passed away and the angels have carried Lazarus to Abraham's side whereas the Rich Man was condemned to hell. Suffering tremendously from the eternal fire, the Rich Man dramatically cried out to Abraham to have pity on him: "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame" (Luke 17:24). Thus, the identification of this figure as the Rich Man enhances the identification of the central figure as Lazarus, who is inscribed but a few meters away.

The Eastern Wall Graffiti

On the opposite eastern wall, at approximately the same level, are a series of roughly incised graffiti, varying in interpretation. Gibson identifies the crudely drawn and vandalized object—"B5" in the illustration— as the head of John the Baptist (2004: 62). This problematic interpretation excludes many possibilities, and in my opinion depicts a commonly worn Crusader helmet called the Great Helm. [f02]

The next inscribed object, "c," is an enigmatic representation of what appears to Gibson to be a crude rendering of the *caduceus*, attributed to the pagan god of healing, Asclepius (2004: 63). It is more probable that this was an attempt to depict a quite familiar Crusader motif appearing mainly on seals and to a lesser extent on coinage; a cross superimposed on or above a dome that takes many forms and represents one part of the Royal Seal of Jerusalem, capital of the Latin Kingdom. As to whether this is a rendering of the cross superimposed over the Church of the Holy Sepulcher or the El-Aqsa mosque (*Templum Salomonis*), which was used as Templar headquarters in Jerusalem, is open to debate; on the Royal Seal itself both are shown. Theologically and politically, one can understand why this symbol of the superiority of Christianity over Islam, along with the appropriation of Islamic holy sites for the sake of Christianity, would have led later to the partial defacement of the graffiti in the cistern. There are however, other architectural possibilities. For example, the Crusader Chapel of the Ascension atop the Mount of Olives and the Dome of the Rock, which was an Augustinian priory in the twelfth century, is structurally very similar in form. Examples of this familiar motif can be found in contemporary Crusader seals from Jerusalem and other strongholds in the Latin Kingdom. This could also be an attempt to depict the central figure on the seal of the Jerusalem Hospitallers.[f06][f07]

On the opposite wall there is a cross—"C13" in the illustration—common to the Crusader period called a Cross Fitchee, in which the lower end is pointed. This cross can take many forms and is said to have been used by the Crusaders who carried crosses with a pointed, lower end so that they could be thrust into the ground easily at the time of devotions (Monk of St. Tikhon's Monastery 1986).

Gibson mentions that all six crosses in the complex were intentionally defaced, perhaps in the period of the iconoclasts (726–842 C.E.) or in the Ottoman period by those objecting to Christian symbols (2004: 65–66), seemingly unaware that crosses were the one motif acceptable to Byzantine iconoclasm. Furthermore, what he mistook to be a cross in the left hand along with a cross to the right of the figure of the second dog and one below and to the left of the dog, were all complete and showed no signs of defacement (2004: 58).

In what Gibson refers to as Group C ("C9" and "C10" in the illustration), inscribed on plaster to the left of the outside entrance, there is an animal ridden by a rider facing toward a tower or a fortified wall (Gibson 2004: 52). He identifies this animal as a camel, one of the symbols of John the Baptist, with the rider employing a stick to steer the animal (Gibson 2004: 56). The so-called camel appears to be a horse with a clearly drawn mane ridden by a knight (Taylor 2005: 178). The prominent ears and mane of the horse clearly distinguish it from a camel. What Gibson referred to as a stick used to steer the animal are most likely the reins used by the rider to control the horse and the line crossing the face of the rider is his sword or lance. It is difficult to tell from the graffito, as the simple drawing lack many features however it appears that the rider may be wearing a Crusader helmet with slits for the eyes, as the eyes are prominent. This motif of a knight atop a horse is one of the Crusaders' defining symbols and appears in several forms known from Crusader seals as early as 1167 C.E. The most convincing example of this well-known motif of a knight galloping on a horse with sword in hand can be seen in the seal of Garsie Alvarez, Signore di Caifa. What Gibson identifies as a tower, ladder or column with cross hatchings, actually represents the fortifications, which were incorporated into the regional defensive landscape during the Crusader period (Gibson 2004: 57). Again, the best example of this motif can be seen on the reverse of the seal of Garcia Alvarez. Another twelfth-century dramatic example of a Crusader knight astride a galloping horse, lance in hand with city fortifications on the reverse is the seal of Baldvini from the city of Ramleh. A ceramic parallel to this fortified wall motif also appears in the Crusader pottery from the recently excavated fortress at Safed (Avissar and Stern 2005: pl. 5, fig. 1). [f08][f09][f10]

The Anointing Stone

Gibson posited that the large rock with the "footprint," found in the entrance of the cistern as well as simple living surfaces on

the floor were proof that the cistern was used, on occasion, for activities other than agriculture. The fact that the rock therein was transported into the cave and geologically not part of it infers that it had some important function during the Roman-Byzantine period. Gibson believed that it may have been associated with a foot washing ceremony, as we have other sites in the region where "footprints" are known to occur. Yet there are difficulties in accepting his thesis that acts of healing along with baptism were carried out here, foremost the lack of any object, such as oil lamps (like those found at the Hamat Gader hot springs) or votive objects (such as those found in Bethesda) that would clearly confirm his belief that it was indeed a place of healing during the Roman–Byzantine period (see Vincent and Abel 1926: **237–38**). Secondly, the large stone that was brought in from outside the cave, which Gibson believes was used for washing the feet of the faithful is problematic, despite references to the practice in the New Testament, because the tradition was never specifically associated with John the Baptist (Taylor 2005: 178). As the stone sits near the bottom of the steps in a somewhat difficult archaeological context, dating it is problematic, and whereas Gibson dated it to the Roman period, it is far more likely to be from Crusader times if my interpretation is correct.

Washing the feet of those suffering from leprosy was apparently a sign of religious devotion as well as medically correct, as described in Crusader pilgrim accounts. For example, a certain Alberic was described by Gerard of Nazareth as not only carrying lepers on his shoulders, but washing their feet as well (Kedar 1983: 66). The reference to Alberic in the medieval texts however appears to be a classic case in which (in)sanity was confused with sanctity. Alberic, who worked in a leprosarium in Jerusalem, wore a goat-hair shirt, cut his hair and beard asymmetrically, performed flagellation, drew blood, and cursed passers-by. Washing the feet of the infirm also appears specifically as one of the tasks of the caretakers in the Order of St. John, that is, the Knights Hospitaller (Mitchell 2000: 22) Leprosy severely affects the lower limbs, particularly the feet, which, in time, become severely infected due to a secondary infection related to the loss of nerve sensation. Thus, understood in this context, the stone in the entrance, which Gibson ascribed to foot washing, may indeed have been used in washing of the feet, particularly of those individuals suffering from the infirmities of Hansen's disease, but never in connection with a cult of John the Baptist. There is an earlier fifth-century tradition for washing the feet in the nearby site of Emmaus whereby pilgrims believed that Christ and his disciples bathed their feet and thereby imparted curative powers to it. This tradition is again mentioned by a pilgrim some three centuries later but it must be emphasized that the tradition is not related in any way to John the Baptist. Emmaus was eventually destroyed by the Arabs and according to the Abbot Daniel in 1106–1107 C.E., the place laid to waste (Pringle 1998: 52). Could it be that this tradition of washing the feet along with the stone had been transferred to the cistern at Suba in the twelfth century, as the Crusaders believed that today's Abu Gosh was the true Emmaus mentioned in the New Testament (Benvenisti 1970: 350)? As Abu Gosh, Aqua Bella, and the areas surrounding the castle at Belmont were under Crusader control, it would appear to be entirely conceivable.

The Order of Lazarus

The geographic location of the Suba Cave also contributes to the association of the cistern with St. Lazarus. In Western Christendom in the mid-twelfth century (the height of the epidemic), the social effect of being identified as a leper resulted in loss of civic status; the accused, regarded as a sinner, was removed from public office and not allowed to inherit property or to make legacies (Douglas 1991: 732). They were excluded from the Church by a funeral mass and a symbolic burial was enacted in which they were deprived of their possessions (Martène, *Ant. Eccl. Rit.* 3.x). By contrast, in the Eastern Kingdom of Jerusalem during the same period, the civic rights of lepers were somewhat protected, no association with sin or immorality was attached to the disease, and medical diagnosis was accurate by modern standards (Douglas 1991: 733).

Despite this legal protection, there appears to have been an ambivalent attitude toward leprosy sufferers as seen in the Jerusalem Seal of Lazarus. There, an individual is carrying the wooden clapper to warn others of his presence. The Crusaders most likely brought with them many of the harsh societal attitudes present in Europe, which also penetrated into the Latin Kingdom in the East. For example, we know that "they were forbidden to enter inns, churches, mills, or bakehouses, to touch healthy persons or eat with them, to wash in the streams, or to walk in narrow footpaths" (Souvay 1913: 182). Forbidding them to wash in streams and springs, particularly in the Holy Land, where such amenities are few, would have forced them to use alternative places for bathing, somewhat isolated from the populace. The water cistern in the orchards of today's Suba could have provided for their spiritual and physical needs as well as having the protection of the nearby castle at Belmont.[6]

In early biblical times, as in the story of Na'aman in the Old Testament (2 Kgs 5), bathing was an important spiritual practice for those suffering from many diseases, especially leprosy. In fact, the traditional location for the washing of a leper, at the River Jordan east of Jericho, operated from the early Byzantine period until the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, according to a monk at nearby Deir Hagila (personal communication). However, the prohibition against them bathing in streams undoubtedly came later, and may have forced them to use bathing facilities in somewhat isolated places. A typical example is found at the well-known site of Herodian, which virtually disappeared from written history following its abandonment in the second century C.E. Excavations revealed that during the Byzantine period, there were four churches, but sparse archaeological and architectural evidence of human habitation.

Perhaps this isolated site, located on the western end of the Judean Desert, became the leprosarium established by the Empress Eudocia in the fifth century C.E. (Zias 1986: 182–83). As in Suba, the desolate setting on the edge of the Judean Desert not only served the immediate physical needs of those

suffering from the disease, but its large water pools and the aqueduct bringing water in from the southwest would have provided for the needs of those individuals dwelling there in huts or tents who left left little or no archaeological evidence. The parallels between the Suba and Herodian cisterns, despite the time difference, are unmistakable: both are geographically isolated; neither is directly mentioned in the sources; both enjoy a plentiful water supply from runoff and aqueducts; and both are located near institutions that offered physical protection as well as spiritual care.

Where these individuals were housed is an interesting but somewhat difficult question to answer as there is no evidence of facilities in the castle for the infirm. It is possible that they were under the care and protection of the nearby site of Aqua Bella, which was originally believed to be a religious institution due to its name in Arabic *Dair al-Banat* "the convent of the nuns." However, recent research questions the accepted theory that it was a nunnery or monastery as there is no mention of this place in Crusader sources (Benvenisti 1970: 350). Secondly, as Pringle points out, houses for the sisters of St. John are known only from 1219 in the Kingdom of Jerusalem (1998: 250). A survey of the site suggests that Enlart's idea may have been correct, that it was an infirmary hall not for sick pilgrims as found along major routes, but for the chronically sick, aged members of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem (Enlart 1925–1928). Thus the afflicted could have lived in the area where there were natural springs, away from the main population, under the protection of the nearby castle at Belmont (Pringle 1998: 250), which administered the region, along with Abu Gosh and Aqua Bella. This could be compared to the European-style *hospitalia* occuring decades later in the Latin East, which provided care but not active medical treatment (Mitchell 2000). In my opinion, the key to understanding the Suba cistern lies with the Crusader infirmary at Aqua Bella, approximately one kilometer to the north, and not the castle at Belmont or the monastery at ʿAin Karem. This would solve the complex historical issues surrounding the site

Summary and Discussion

The identification of the Cave of John the Baptist is controversial at best given the current state of archaeological and historical research. Gibson's stated conclusion that the cistern "was not a place for a set form of daily liturgical activities intended for large groups of people and pilgrims, but was used instead as a place of solitude, as a place of ritual seclusion, by individuals or groups of individuals" may be correct (Gibson 2004: 53). However, his other conclusions as to the date and identify of the main figure are not convincing in light of archaeological and iconographical reanalysis.

The identity of the man wearing the cap and the animal clothing, which Gibson believes depicts John the Baptist and dates to the Roman–Byzantine period, is rather, according to the iconographic evidence, St. Lazarus, the patron saint of those suffering from true leprosy during the Crusader period. According to the New Testament, there are two men named Lazarus. The first is the lesser-known Lazarus from Luke 16:21, described in a parable of a poor man, covered with infection in which "even the dogs came and licked his wounds," begging for crumbs from the table of a rich man. The second, and perhaps the better known, is the man who had been dead for three days and was brought back to life (John 11:1–43). While the original drawings published by Gibson only showed one animal in the lower portion of the figure, the fact that there is a second dog to his right confirms that the figure is Lazarus, as the New Testament reference mentions dogs in the plural, not the singular. In the twelfth century, when the nearby castle of Belmont was built, Lazarus became the patron saint of those afflicted with the leprosy and the Jerusalem Order of St. Lazarus was then established. Originally, it was purely a Hospitaller order, but in the 1130s, the Order of the Knights of St. Lazarus was formed, comprised mainly of knights suffering from the affliction.

The graffiti on the western and eastern walls as well as the outer entrance do not provide conclusive evidence to support Gibson's interpretation that the cistern was connected to the cult of John the Baptist. To begin with, the height of graffiti would have made it technically difficult for anyone to have incised it on the walls during the late Roman–Byzantine period (Taylor 2005: 177).[7] Stratigraphically, the level upon which it appears is consistent with the fill from the Crusader period. Moreover, the iconography, as I have argued, correlates to what is found elsewhere during the Crusader period.

As the region was terraced in the Iron Age, the cistern must be understood contextually as a water source providing for the agricultural needs of the valley and immediately surrounding terraces (Faust 2005: 206–7), which would explain the paucity of large ceramic vessels to transport water from the cistern. Furthermore, at higher elevations near modern-day Kibbutz Tzova, there are springs of fresh water that easily would have provided for the needs of the inhabitants of the area. The enormous quantity of pottery from the Roman period found in the cistern, broken and comprised mainly of small vessels to hold water, rather than large ones, led Gibson to infer that the cistern may have been converted for use as a cult of healing some eight centuries later (Gibson 2004: 157).

Based upon the evidence both inside and outside the cistern, a coherent set of Crusader attributes emerges, suggesting that the main figure represents hope to those visitors who came for physical healing in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Symbolically, the parable of Lazarus as depicted later in Christian art may also represent a composite of several ideas: the long forgotten Greco-Roman Asceplian rite of healing as expressed by the attributes of the cane or staff that could also represent a serpent, and the two dogs. Christian art is known for adopting pagan symbols as Christian ones—the Roman god, Pan, into the Devil being one example (Boardman 1997: 40–43). The possibility that the parable of Lazarus may not actually represent a clearly identifiable, historical figure is quite conceivable. Thus, it is possible that this parable was patterned after the cult of Asceplius, in which a dog or a snake miraculously visits the afflicted during their dreams as a sign

of healing. The similarity of their identifying attributes would appear to be more than coincidental.

The evidence suggests that the cistern had a long if intermittent tradition of healing, which ended with the Crusaders. On the basis of the graffiti alone, I propose that the site be identified with St. Lazarus, the patron saint of those afflicted with true leprosy during the Crusader period, and not John the Baptist as has been argued. As there is meager evidence supporting the theory that forms the basis for Gibson's popular book, *The Cave of John the Baptist: The First Archaeological Evidence of the Historical Reality of the Gospel Story,* I submit it should have been titled *The First Direct Archaeological Evidence for the Parable of Lazarus, Patron Saint of Leprosy Sufferers.*

Notes

1. Due credit must be given to the excavators for the professional manner in which the excavation was carried out. Excavating water cisterns, devoid of few if any archaeological features, is a daunting task, which usually is more of an earth moving operation than a scientifically-controlled excavation. I am grateful to Dr. Gibson for permission to reproduce here drawings of the graffiti.
2. The fact that the water cistern is not mentioned in medieval sources should not be of any serious concern. Crusader sites, with impressive churches, mosaics and other installations are discovered from time to time quite by accident in the region and yet there is no written record of their existence. For example, A. Boas and Alexander On excavated what may be a Crusader place of pilgrimage near Ramot in nearby Jerusalem, which does not appear in any source materials for the period. I would like to thank Dr. A. Boas for providing me with this information.
3. After identifying the graffito atop the head as "hair, arranged in a series of buns," Gibson suggests that the person may have been wearing a hat (Gibson 2004: 59). The hat that the main figure is wearing could perhaps be a halo as one sees a copper engraving of Lazarus in the Biblioteque Nationale in Paris (Gron 1973: 254–55). Gibson describes the garment adorning the waist as made of camel's hair. If correct, it should be possible to see the same markings on what Gibson believed to be a camel at the entrance to the cistern, but they are absent. However, according to one anonymous reviewer, plain and spotted camels do appear in mosaics. Gibson failed to note that the two identifying symbols, the obligatory hat and the cloak, were specifically mentioned in the volume on Belmont castle, to which he contributed an article (Pringle 2000).
4. Gibson acknowledges that there may be problems in this interpretation when he describes the object "*there appears to be* a small X-like cross" (Gibson 2004: 58; emphasis added).
5. Gibson has trouble interpreting this graffito and suggests that this could be a cup or a bowl on a tripod, a censer, a foot washing basin, or a laver. (Gibson 2004: 60). However, if one looks closely at the graffito, one can see the beginning of a second hind leg and the upright tail of a four-legged animal, similar to the animal to the right of the figure, the latter of which he failed to document.
6. Tabor (2006) cites the cave's proximity to ʿAin Karem, the birthplace of John the Baptist (Luke 1:39), as additional proof for associating the site with John the Baptist. However, he ignores the fact that the two sites are 4 km apart and the journey from one to the other would have taken several hours due to the difficult terrain and the condition of the afflicted. Several natural springs in ʿAin Karem would have precluded the necessity for such a long and arduous journey.
7. Taylor arrived at a similar conclusion in her review of Gibson's book. Ironically she suggested that the graffiti may have been scratched on the wall near the ceiling by Hospitallers from Belmont during the Crusader period. However she accepted Gibson's interpretation that the figure was John the Baptist (2005: 177).

A Response to Joe Zias

Shimon Gibson

Joe Zias's essay is fraught with difficulties regarding the actual substance of the archaeological results derived from the excavation of the Suba Cave west of Jerusalem. As an archaeologist with more than thirty years of field experience, I would say that interpretation in archaeology must at all times be based on informed judgment and hard incontrovertible evidence. Unfortunately, this is not the case with Zias's essay, which is replete with speculation and hasty conclusions lacking in any archaeological or historical basis.[1]

On the positive side, as one of the excavators of the Suba Cave, I am pleased to see a discussion of these very special and unique finds, but it is unfortunate that Zias ignores the actual archaeology of the cave. For this reason, let me begin by saying a few words about the *facts*, before proceeding on to issues of *interpretation*. One has to remember that we spent six years (2000–2006) investigating this cave. I, with James Tabor, and in collaboration with Egon Lass and Rafi Lewis, conducted the work under the auspices of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.[2] We spent considerable time and effort during the excavations on stratigraphic recording procedures and pottery seriation, flotation and micro-artifact analysis, and on interdisciplinary scientific work conducted with experts on matters relating to geomorphology, hydraulic plaster, and on the use of radiocarbon and thorium-uranium dating methods.[f02] Our conclusions, therefore, are not based on random speculation but on the analysis of hard archaeological evidence combined with substantial historical research.

The cave was one component of a much larger monumental water system that was put into use during the Iron Age, probably during the eighth century B.C.E, or earlier.[f03] The water system was hewn into the lower slope of a hill on two levels and it comprised tunnels and corridors, a vertical shaft, pools, and a conduit. The cave served as the reservoir for the water system.[f04] Contrary to what Zias claims, the water system had nothing whatsoever to do with agriculture but rather was used for industrial purposes, apparently for clay-preparation procedures connected with the flourishing pottery industry of that period (Gibson 2009). The water system as a whole was abandoned later on in the Iron Age, but the cave itself continued to be used as a reservoir as late as the end of the second century B.C.E. (Finkielsztejn and Gibson 2007: 00).

Following a period of abandonment lasting a century or so, the cave was reused in the early Roman period but this time no longer as a reservoir since the plaster on the walls had

evidently not been renewed and layers of soil and debris were allowed to accumulate quite substantially in the front of the cave.[f05] The source of the water in the cave was rainwater, which mainly collected there during the winter seasons. Our excavations demonstrated quite clearly that the cave was not used for agricultural or domestic pursuits, as one might expect at a countryside site such as this. Such activities will produce disparate assemblages of pottery vessels, discarded animal bones, plant remains, tools, and hearths, but none were found. What we did find were superimposed tamped-down clay surfaces in the front of the cave, sloping down to the water in the interior of the cave, on which there were unusual stone installations, many curvilinear in form, and some extremely small and evenly paved. The earliest of these surfaces dates from the very end of the first century B.C.E. and the latest to the mid-second century C.E. Large quantities (thousands in fact) of ceramic jugs and also smaller quantities of jars were recovered, and it is our judgment that they had all been purposefully shattered.

Right at the bottom of this stratigraphic sequence, in a layer dating to the early-first century C.E., was a large stone fixed in the floor, and cut into its upper surface was a cupmark and a groove in the shape of a right foot; we think this stone was used for anointing feet with oil. Contrary to Zias, this stone could not date to the Crusader period because it was found sealed beneath a very thick three-meter deposit of soil and rubble with intervening surfaces dating from the Early Roman and Byzantine periods.[f06]

Although the cave was abandoned in the mid-second century C.E., it was reused once again in the Byzantine and early Islamic periods, between the fourth and tenth centuries C.E. Floors and hearths are attributed to this period of time, but the overall fills had now accumulated to such a height that water no longer collected in the cave. People inhabited the cave for relatively short periods of time, perhaps on only one or two occasions every year. A drawing of a Christian cross was prominently cut in the wall in the porch in the front of the cave. Two sets of six drawings were incised on the interior walls of the cave—not randomly but purposefully—and opposite each other. The drawings would have been at eye-level for anyone visiting the cave during the Byzantine period onwards.[3][f07] The first set of drawings consists of a rendering of a figure in a frontal posture, an upraised arm, and a cross (see the illustration on p. 00).The second set of drawings is of a head or skull, a stylized cross or staff, and three small crosses. Schematic though these drawings are, one can attribute them to the Byzantine period based on iconographic parallels. In any case, just before the time of the Crusaders (in the late-eleventh century) the cave was abandoned and rubble fills began accumulating within. Not one potsherd from the Crusader or medieval periods was found inside the cave.

Let us now turn to matters of interpretation. In the late-first century B.C.E. or at the turn of the century, the partly silted-up reservoir, belonging to the abandoned Iron Age water system, was taken over by a group of people—evidently Jews based on the character of the material evidence—and subsequently used for ritual purification procedures with water, as in a very large *miqveh*. We were able to ascertain quite definitely by a process of elimination that the cave could not have been used for agricultural or domestic purposes. This was evident from the lack of hearths and cooking apparatus, seeds and animal bones, and other domestic detritus. Indeed, the repetition of the same archaeological features in the cave over a period of some 100 to 150 years, infers a pattern of activity that must have been highly specific in character and one that was followed by people with similar goals in mind. These include the establishing of banked surfaces (perhaps every couple of years or so) over silted layers of soil in the front of the cave; the building of small curvilinear stone features on these same surfaces and of stone basins on one side of the cave; and the discarding of roughly the same amounts of broken jugs and some jars across these surfaces whenever they were used.[4] The presence of a stone installation for the anointing of the right feet of those bathing in the cave must suggest that a cultic activity was being performed here; otherwise one would expect to find a stone for the anointing of *left* feet as well.[f09]

What the evidence suggests is that people came to the cave to take part in a water-ritual purification procedure differing from that normally undertaken in typical Jewish ritual baths (*mikva'ot*) of the time, in the sense that this was a group activity and was associated with other cultic activities performed in the front of the cave (including foot anointing and jug/jar shattering). Interestingly, it recalls the baptism practices performed by John the Baptist at the Jordan River with repentance and prayers by groups of people on the banks of the river that were conducted as a separate activity from the immersion process conducted in the river. Clearly, people initially gathered in the front of the Suba Cave, perhaps to undergo some form of rite or prayers (not for healing purposes, as Zias mistakenly thinks), before eventually entering into the water as part of water-ritual purification or baptism procedures, and then, finally, on emerging from the water they would have had their right feet anointed. They may even have taken part in the shattering of jugs/jars on the floor of the cave as a symbol of the rite of passage. [f10]

Before discussing the later archaeological remains at the site, one must be clear that the remains uncovered at the Suba Cave dating from the first century C.E.—including the anointing stone—cannot be redated (as Zias does) to a later period of time, simply so that an interpretation relating to Lazarus and healing (see below) might be sustainable. This does not work and is bad scholarship. The early Roman level containing the anointing stone was in due course covered up and hidden by later deposits of fills and rubble sealed beneath floors, and so nothing of it could have been visible in the Byzantine period and definitely not at the time of the Crusaders.

Archaeological evidence uncovered in the Suba Cave suggests occasional visits were made by Christians to the cave as early as the fourth century and as late as the eleventh century. The question is, Why? The site was evidently never used as a pilgrimage chapel and the finds on its earthen floors—bits

of pottery, animal bones, and hearths—suggests the cave was used only very infrequently. The answer must be sought in the two sets of drawings on the interior walls of the cave.[5] On iconographic grounds, the images are easily paralleled in artistic representations dating from the Byzantine period. One could argue that the standing figure depicted in frontal fashion cannot by itself be identified with any specific saint or holy man since the iconography of a person in an *orans* pose (i.e., with arms raised in prayer) is very common in Byzantine iconography. However, seen together with the drawings of a head/skull and upraised arm, it seems likely that we do after all have a depiction of John the Baptist.[6] His camel-hair garment is especially well represented. The head/skull motif would mark his decapitation at Machaerus in Perea at the hands of Herod Antipas, a story well-known in the Byzantine period. The drawing of the arm must mark the pagan desecration of the traditional Tomb of John at Sebaste (circa 363 C.E.); visiting pilgrims are said to have saved his relic arm or hand from destruction. Since then relics of John the Baptist are always represented by a skull or arm/hand. A well-known relic arm of John the Baptist exists in the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul.[f12][f13][f14]

[f15]Another important fact to take into account is that the Suba Cave is located only a very short distance (1.5 km) to the north of the traditional Monastery of John in the Wilderness (a Franciscan monastery situated just below the modern village of Even Sapir), and a cave of John the Baptist has been pointed out there since Crusader times. The Suba Cave is also situated in the western hinterland of the village of ʿAin Karem, which has been regarded as the birthplace of John the Baptist at least since the fourth or fifth centuries C.E. We suggest, therefore, that the Suba Cave was used as a retreat by monks from the Monastery of the Nativity of St. John in ʿAin Karem at times when his memory was celebrated in the Byzantine calendar, that is, his birth and beheading. One thing is certain: the ʿAin Karim district is strongly related in Byzantine tradition to John the Baptist, not to the Lazarus of the parable related in Luke (16:19–31). The fact that the drawings are of Byzantine date precludes their being somehow related to the order of the Knights of St. Lazarus founded at the time of the Crusaders with the special duty of protecting and tending lepers. Indeed, there is no evidence that the drawings in the cave had any thaumaturgical virtue whatsoever. There is nothing to connect a tradition of Lazarus with the area of our cave at any point in time. This makes Zias's arguments on this subject a non-starter.

The discoveries made in the Suba Cave are important not only because they shed light on how John the Baptist was perceived by local Christians in the Holy Land from the fourth century C.E. onwards, but also because the cave was undoubtedly being used for ritual purification purposes of an unusual character (i.e., some form of baptism) at the *time* of John the Baptist in the early-first century C.E. Whether John the Baptist himself used or visited the cave is anyone's guess, but one cannot discount this as a possibility.

Notes

1. The article by Zias is unfortunately riddled with an enormous amount of inaccurate information, so much so that I think it would be tedious for me to point out all the errors. Hence, I shall deal with only matters of substance.
2. Gibson 2004; Gibson and Tabor 2005; and Tabor 2006: 129–37.
3. Taylor in a review of my book *The Cave of John the Baptist* expressed the incorrect view that the drawings were too high on the walls to have been made in the Byzantine period (2005). This view is mistakenly repeated by Zias.
4. In his critical review of our findings, Shanks completely ignores the use of the Suba Cave in the early Roman period (Shanks 2004). As far as Shanks is concerned, the cave was hewn in the Iron Age and then was later reused in the Byzantine period. This is bad journalism and Shanks clearly sets out to mislead his readers. No archaeologist would be allowed to get away with such a manipulation of data. See also Shanks' rather gossipy and inappropriate remarks on the results of the cave excavation in his foreword to our article (Gibson and Tabor 2005: 37).
5. The drawings were very carefully copied onto plastic sheeting at the time of the excavations. One should point out that the original Iron Age plaster has many folds and creases in its surface and this has led some viewers (such as Zias) to identify supposedly drawn features that are simply not there.
6. At the foot of the figure are a few marks that may represent a schematic rendering of an animal: perhaps that of a sheep though Zias thinks it is of a dog. The second "dog" identified by Zias further to the left is the result of a number of creases in the plaster and they are not purposeful.

A Response to Joe Zias

Adrian J. Boas

Like history, archaeology is largely about interpretation and, like historical sources, archaeological artifacts are sometimes of very fragmentary nature, vague and reticent, and consequently open to a wide range of interpretations. This is perfectly legitimate as long it is made clear that that is what it is, namely, interpretation and nothing more. It is unfortunately a common failing that the words that define a statement as interpretation are sometimes omitted and the reader is misled into believing that what is actually mere speculation is indeed fact.

Zias has reassigned the site of the cave at Suba to the cult of St. Lazarus and the lepers. He does not merely suggest this as an alternative to Shimon Gibson's identification of the site to the cult of John the Baptist, but presents his case as one that is solidly founded on facts. For example, he writes, "The identity of the man wearing the cap and the animal clothing, which Gibson believes depicts John the Baptist and dates to the Roman–Byzantine period, is rather, according to the iconographic evidence, St. Lazarus. . . ." The trouble with this statement is that there is no solid case here for reinterpretation, quite the opposite in fact. In order to justify putting forth new interpretations, arguments must be based on persuasive evidence, hopefully more persuasive than those put forward

by the original author whose ideas are being challenged. In this, I believe Zias has failed. The core of Zias's argument is his understanding of the iconography of the graffiti found in the cave chamber and it is on this that I wish to concentrate. He has presented a series of new interpretations for each of the drawings in the cave to support his ideas, but not one of them is more persuasive than Gibson's original identifications. If we take, for example, the figure Gibson suggests as representing John the Baptist, now identified by Zias as St. Lazarus, the case for this reidentification is in: 1) what Zias interprets as evidence of disease in the figure's face; 2) a costume consisting of a cloak, cap, and boots; 3) an apparent clapper held in his right hand; and, 4) the presence of two dogs at his feet, apparently licking his wounds. Let us take a look at each of these elements.

1) The suggested evidence for disease on the figure's face consists of a few pierced marks and a general distortion of features. On a crudely drawn grafitto rendition such as this, moreover one that has clearly suffered from subsequent damage, such marks and distortions cannot be regarded as reliable evidence for blindness and nasal disfiguration associated with the later stages of leprosy.

2) Zias writes, "one can see a cloak adorning the body as well as a head covering." The author has in mind Statute 4 of the Statutes of Fr. Roger des Moulins (published in English translation by King [1934: 35]), which mentions the cloaks of sheepskin, boots, and caps given to the patients (not, one might point out, lepers) in the Jerusalem hospital. No matter how hard one looks at this figure, either in the photograph or the enhanced in the drawing, it is simply not possible to see a cloak. The body is marked at waist height with a horizontal line, quite possibly intended to represent a belt or simply the upper edge of what appears to be skirt-like apparel that is pierced with numerous small marks. As no such marks appear above the line at waist height and there are no other features on the upper part of the figure to suggest that this dress covers the torso as well, I can see no reason for seeing the drawing of this piece of clothing as being intended to represent a cloak—so, not a cloak, but perhaps a loincloth?

What of the head covering? It does indeed appear that the creator of this graffito figure intended to present a head covering of some type or perhaps a halo. However, looking at this rendition, the word "cap" is not the first one that comes to mind.

As for the boots, Zias writes: "The specific mention of boots as an item of clothing for the afflicted suggests that true leprosy or Hansen's disease … may have been one of the implied diseases in the graffito." Here too Zias is relating to Statue 4 and to the mention of boots as one of the items provided to the sick in the Hospitallers' Jerusalem hospital. However, it is doubtful if those who suffered from Hansen's disease would have been hospitalized in that institution. Most likely, sufferers of any skin-related affliction identified at the time as leprosy would have been placed in the leper hospital in the northwest, outside the city walls. This being the case, the references to boots, or indeed to any items of dress that were provided to inmates in the Hospitallers' institution inside the city, is irrelevant. Unfortunately there does not exist, to the best of my knowledge, any reference to items of dress provided in the leprosarium of St. Lazarus.

In any case, can we really see boots here? The lines of the legs do not appear to be much thicker than other lines on the figure. One should also keep in mind that, as Zias points out, this part of the figure has been badly damaged. To overcome this difficulty he notes that on the opposite wall, there is a crudely inscribed graffito design ("a" in the illustration on p. 00), which may represent a boot. He notes what appears to be nailing in the sole. This again, at best, is a dubious identification and does nothing to strengthen a very weak argument, indeed only emphasizes the overall failing of this paper. One might, if one wishes, identify this as a boot, but it bears no similarity to the form of the figure's legs and, as a boot, it is certainly very oddly shaped; abruptly cut at the end of the foot. If the short strokes incised in the supposed sole represent nails then perhaps similar lines in the upper back side of the boot are also nails!

3) Another item that the figure appears to be holding in his right hand is considered by Zias to be a clapper used by lepers to warn people of their presence. This is nothing more than a few short lines at the end of the arm that Gibson suggested may represent a cross. One could argue that this might merely be a rather clumsy representation of the figure's right hand. Zias, however, is quite certain about what it represents. He argues, "What is discernible here is that the object is deliberately fashioned in such a way that the arms of both the vertical as well as the horizontal do not touch so as to avoid any misinterpretation that this is meant to be a cross." It is not so much the weakness of this and the other attributes that I criticize here as the conviction with which they are presented.

4) Another example is a representation next to the figure that Gibson identified as a sheep and that Zias claims to be a dog (he also notices a second dog on the opposite side). This fits in with his reidentification as, he notes, dogs appear in representations of St. Lazarus. However, to say that this is a dog rather than a sheep because "the graffito shows clear signs of the short erect tail and erect ears that are common among dogs, as opposed to the tail and ears of a Palestinian sheep, which hang downward" is impossible to justify in such an extremely crude rendition. One might, perhaps, on the basis of additional factors agree that this is quite probably intended as a representation of an animal and not, for example, a steaming cauldron on a tripod; but to say it is a dog rather than a sheep because what might possibly be interpreted as its ears being raised rather than flopping down is, if not less satisfactory than Gibson's explanation, certainly no better.

The other reinterpretations by Zias are no more satisfactory (e.g., the suggestion that figure B5 in the illustration on p. 00 is the banner of the Order of St. Lazarus or that figure B6 is the *Templum Salominis*, which would in any case add nothing to the theory as this building was the Royal Palace and later the headquarters of the Templars, but was never connected to the Order of St. Lazarus). Nothing is more disastrous for

an argument of this nature than the presence of erroneous statements. Inaccuracies and outright errors will undermine the bravest attempts at interpretation. The al-Aqsa Mosque, which the Franks identified with the *Templum Salomonis* (Palace of Solomon), does not appear on the Crusader Royal seals.

A Response to Gibson and Boas

As I stated in my critique, Gibson is one of Israel's foremost field archaeologists today; however his interpretation of the Suba cave graffiti leaves one perplexed. In fact, aside from those directly involved, few scholars have unequivocally accepted Gibson and Tabor's John the Baptist interpretation (Adler and Underwood 2004). As for Gibson's claim that I have neglected dealing with the archaeology in my critique, I have done so despite the fact that the final report of the excavations is still in the process of being completed.

One of our many points of disagreement is with what Gibson calls the "anointing stone" found in the Early Roman strata. I place it much later, with the period of the Crusades. What Gibson has failed to take into account is that this massive stone, possibly weighing several hundred kilos (one square meter of limestone is roughly one metric ton) has, over time, subsided from a higher elevation until it reached bedrock. While found in Early Roman strata, one has to realize that by placing a stone this size in unstable, water-logged silt, sheer gravity will eventually bring the stone to lower levels. One only has to view the stone along with another large stone both resting precariously on the hewn steps to see that they are not resting in an ideal setting. (Gibson 2005: 38). By interpreting it as such, the problematical vertical gap between the graffiti high on the cistern walls and the lower level of the stone is thereby eliminated. Furthermore, there is no historical evidence whatsoever for the washing of penitents' feet during the early Roman period. To relate this cistern to baptism or to suggest that Jesus may have baptized in the cave is geared to show speculation and not serious archaeology (Tabor 2006: 150–52). Gibson, by concentrating solely on the idea of John the Baptist, glosses over other sites from the Crusader period whereby a foot, the last footprint of Jesus, can be seen even today in a chapel on the Mount of Olives. In the museum of Jerusalem's Church of Saint Anne, one finds another foot (unpublished). In addition, the Dominicans in 1249 gave the Church of Westminster in England another footprint of Christ (Folda 1995: 207). Like the head of John the Baptist, there are many "holy" footprints datable to Crusader times in the Old World.

Gibson's attempt to relate on iconographic grounds the main standing figure with John the Baptist is entirely misleading. First of all, John the Baptist was regarded by the Christian community as being a Nazarite due to his abstinence from alcohol. Thus, as an adult, he is depicted with long flowing hair, a cloak, and a leather girdle. Here one finds in the graffiti none of these readily identifiable iconic attributes. Furthermore, the very similar graffito to the right, which I identify as a second dog and Gibson originally suggested as a chalice or a bowl on a tripod (2004: 60), he now reinterprets as a "number of creases, which are not purposeful." In Gibson's book, the drawings of the graffito are digitally enhanced, thus clarifying the animal to the left. However, in person, one can readily see that the graffiti to the left and to the right are clearly incised and not formed by creases in the plaster as Gibson now proposes.

Regarding Boas's response, I would like to address the following: On the subject of footwear, Boas seems unaware of his own work on Crusader clothing in which he wrote, "leper knights of St. Lazarus wore boots, pointed boots and shoelaces were forbidden" (Boas 2001: 28). Thus the graffito depicted on the eastern wall which I interpret as a boot may be for him "oddly shaped" and not footwear. However it conforms exactly to that which he himself describes as being worn by the leper knights of Saint Lazarus.

As far as the head covering that I referred to as a cap, I am quoting Gibson, who mentions it as a possibility (Gibson 2004: 58–59) while Boas's suggestion in his response published here that it may be a halo was rejected by Gibson himself as being too late.

My interpretation that the object in the left hand is a clapper, one of the three attributes of Saint Lazarus and not a cross, is challenged by Boas as perhaps a "clumsy representation of the right (sic) hand." Actually it is the left hand. If one compares the right hand in the standing figure along with the right arm just a few meters to the right, it is hard to imagine how such a statement could be uttered. In fact, not only do the lines in the left hand not cross, in all extant crosses in the cave they do cross! One can also see the closed hand grasping the clapper, obligatory for those suffering from leprosy in the Crusader period.

While Boas's statement that my explanations of the graffiti are "if not less satisfactory than Gibson's explanations, certainly no better," I would like to draw the reader's attention to the graffiti at the cave's entrance, which represents in my opinion a knight, lance in hand, charging a fortified city (one of the defining symbols of Crusader domination). Gibson interprets this as "a man on a camel facing a ladder, tower or a column." If there is any doubt that Gibson's interpretation is clouded by his *a priori* naming of the cave as "The Cave of John the Baptist," I would ask the reader to compare with the graffito that Gibson identifies as the decapitated head of John the Baptist with the image of a knight's helmet of the Crusader period shown here. The reader can decide.

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Zias Captions

[f01] Drawing of the figure identified as John the Baptist: 1) hair arrangement or a cap; 2) upraised right arm; 3) upraised left arm holding staff; 4) belt; 5) hairy garment; 6) depression to hold relic; 7) incised lines; 8) lamb? *Drawing by F. Amirah.*

[f02] A knight's helmet of the Crusader period. In Zias's view, the "decapitated head" of John the Baptist engraved on the cave wall is better understood as a rendering of such a helmet.

[f03] Official seal of the Jerusalem Order of Lazarus showing facial disfigurement similar to those on the figure on the wall at Suba.

[f04] Additional animal standing to the right of the main figure on the western wall.

[f05] Right arm with hand extended, several meters to the right of the main figure. ZIas believes this is the arm of the rich man in Hades asking Lazarus for water, according to the parable in Luke 17:24.

[f06] Crusader seal of the Militia of the Temple of Solomon which probably represents the Templar headquarters in Jerusalem. *Drawing by Joe Zias.*

[f07] Crusader seal of the Jerusalem Hospitallers. *De Sandoli (1974: fig. 94).*

[f08] Two Crusader knights in full military attire astride a horse. *De Sandoli (1974: fig. 37).*

[f09] Crusader seal of García Alvarez in full military attire astride a horse with fortifications of a city on the obverse. *De Sandoli (1974: fig. 109).*

[f010] Seal of Baldwin of Ramleh stylistically similar to the seal of García Alvarez. *De Sandoli (1974: fig. 105).*

[f11] This icon of St Lazarus (17th or 18th century) in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher depicts the complete parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. In the center???, Lazarus can be seen begging. In the lower right-hand corner he is shown again with a dog, staff, and possibly something in his right hand. Below the main scene, the Rich Man is depicted in hell asking Lazarus to put his hand in the water for a drink. *Photo by Joe Zias.*

Gibson Captions

[f01] General view of the Suba water system at the time of the excavation, with the entrance to the main cave or reservoir in the lower part of the picture. *Photo by S. Gibson.*

[f02] The dig in progress within the main cave or reservoir. *Photo by S. Gibson.*

[f03] Aerial view of the Suba water system. *Photo by Skyballoon.*

[f04] Isometric drawing of the lower part of the Suba water system showing the reservoir. Note the one set of ancient drawings on the east wall of the cave and the anointing stone on the steps. *Drawing by F. Amirah.*

[f05] General view of the interior of the main cave at the end of the excavation. *Photo courtesy of MPH.*

[f06] The stratigraphy of the fills within the main cave: Late Hellenistic, Early Roman, Byzantine-Early Islamic, and Ottoman periods. *Photo by S. Gibson.*

[f07] A reconstruction of the interior of the cave in the Byzantine-Early Islamic periods. *Drawing by S. Gibson.*

[f08] Groups A–C of incised ancient drawings from the cave. Groups A and B are situated opposite each other inside the cave, whereas Group C drawings are located in the porch area of the cave. *Drawing by F. Amirah.*

[f09] The anointing stone with a depression in its upper surface in the shape of a right foot. *Photo by S. Gibson.*

[f10] A reconstruction showing how the anointing stone would have been used in the first century C.E. *Drawing by F. Amirah.*

[f11] Photograph of the figure carved into the wall of the cave identified by the excavators as John the Baptist. The figure is located close to the mouth of the cave. *Photo by S. Mendrea.*

[f12] The head or skull image in the Suba Cave. *Photo by S. Mendrea.*

[f13] The upraised arm and cross image in the Suba Cave. Note the harm made by iconoclasts to the image of the cross. *Photo by S. Mendrea.*

[f14] The relic arm of John the Baptist encased in a gilded metal case at the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul. *Drawing by F. Amirah.*

[f15] On the left, the Bobbio *eulogia* depicts the flight of Elizabeth with her baby son John (the Baptist) to a cave in the mountains, more clearly defined as a cave approached by a flight of steps in the *eulogia* fragment found in the Temple Mount excavations at Jerusalem (right). *Drawing by F. Amirah.*