

The Lost Tomb of Jesus -02 - Details about the Talpiot Tomb

Details about the Tomb

With a lot of hype surrounding what appears to some to be the burial place of Jesus of the Bible, it is important to begin the investigation with the facts about the place. What was found there? When did they find it?

A Timeline

What is known today as the Talpiot Tomb, dates from the fifth century B.C. to the first century A.D. It was discovered in 1980 and excavated by an IAA archaeological team led by Amos Kloner that same year. The entrance to the tomb was discovered by construction workers who were laying the foundations for an apartment complex, the Talpiot Apartments. Dynamite blasting and bulldozing had accidentally revealed the entranceway to the antechamber of the tomb.

Photo of the entrance to the Talpiot Tomb (source: Nehemia Gordon)

Diagram of the Layout of the Talpiot Tomb

The IAA provided Amos Kloner three days to examine and document their findings. The tomb was then resealed by the IAA in 1982, and remained closed until 2005, when Simcha Jacobovici's film crew opened it again to create their movie *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*. Since Jacobovici and his crew had neglected to obtain permission from the Israeli Antiques Authority to enter the site, they promptly resealed it.

Characteristics

Inside the tomb were found ten ossuaries containing bones, with six of those bearing epigraphs. The archaeological team determined the ossuaries to be of little note even though they contained the names of Joseph, Mary, James and Jesus. The reason being is that these names were extremely common in the first century. The ossuaries were put into storage at the Rockefeller Museum.

A tomb of this type would be assumed to have belonged to a wealthy Jewish family. Three skulls were discovered in the tomb. Some of the bones had been scattered in the tomb providing evidence that the tomb had been previously disturbed. About 900 similar tombs have been unearthed in the same area.

The tomb is carved from the solid limestone bedrock. The tomb's antechamber leads to six other smaller rooms called locules

The tomb is located in a courtyard on 273 Dov Gruner Street, reached from a flight of stairs opposite the corner of Olei HaGardom and Avshalom Haviv Streets. After a documentary movie was filmed there, the site was resealed and is not open to the public.

The Ossuaries, their Bones and the Names

The ossuaries are small coffins made out of limestone. Traditionally, bodies of a dead relative were left in a tomb for a year to decay. Then the remaining bones were gathered together and placed in a small ossuary. Sometimes several sets of bones from different generations were placed together into a single ossuary. No record was kept of how many skeletons were in the ossuaries. Following the discovery of the tomb, the bones contained in the ossuaries were buried in unmarked graves in accordance with Orthodox Jewish beliefs.

According to Simcha Jacobovici, James Cameron, and James Tabor, one of the unmarked ossuaries later disappeared when it was stored in a courtyard outside the museum. This claim has been criticized by both Joe Zias, former curator of the museum, and Amos Kloner, one of the archaeologists who studied the tomb personally.

Six of the ten ossuaries have epigraphs carved into them. The names on these ossuaries were considered nearly irrelevant to the 1980 exploration team led by Amos Kloner since they were common names from the first century. However, the team for The Lost Tomb of Jesus considered the names as too great of a coincidence. The names are their motivation for re-examining the tomb.

The Tomb Itself

Some of the walls of tomb have carvings on them, including several chevron symbols. A "chevron and circle" pattern is visible above the entrance of the tomb. It is also clearly visible as a depiction of the facade of the Nicanor gate of the Temple of God in Jerusalem, as is visible on coins that were minted in their times. The Nicanor gate marked the end of a pilgrimage. The last fifteen steps are still marked by the "Psalms of Ascent," or better, "the Psalms of the ascending ones." The entrance to the tomb also marked the end of a pilgrimage.