



Rev. Dr. Paul L. Maier, professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University and second vice-president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has received numerous questions about the alleged discovery by James Cameron, et al, of the burial remains of Jesus Christ. Dr. Maier offers these comments to help Christians know the real truth.

“The Jesus Family Tomb”

February 27, 2007

Dear Friends and Readers,

Thanks for the profusion of e-mails I've received over the last two days regarding the Talpiot tombs discovery in Jerusalem, a.k.a., “the Jesus Family Tomb” story. Some of you also suggested that “life seemed to be following art” so far as my *A Skeleton in God's Closet* was concerned. Believe me, this is *not* the way I wanted my novel to hit the visual media!

Alas, this whole affair is just the latest in the long-running media attack on the historical Jesus, which I call “More Junk on Jesus.” We all thought it had culminated in that book of falsehoods, *The Da Vinci Code*. But no: The caricatures of Christ continue.

Please, lose no sleep over the Talpiot “discoveries” for the following reasons, and here are the facts:

- (1) Nothing is new here: Scholars have known about the ossuaries ever since March of 1980, so this is old news recycled. The general public learned about the ossuaries when the BBC filmed a documentary on them in 1996, and the “findings” tanked again. James Tabor's book, *The Jesus Dynasty*, also made a big fuss over the Talpiot tombs more recently, and now James Cameron (“Titanic”) and Simcha Jacobovici have climbed aboard the sensationalist bandwagon as well. Another book comes out today, equally as worthless as the previous.
- (2) All the names—Yeshua (Joshua, Jesus), Joseph, Maria, Mariamene, Matia, Judah, and Jose—are extremely common Jewish names for that time and place, and thus nearly all scholars consider that these names are merely coincidental, as they did from the start. Some scholars dispute that “Yeshua” is even one of the names. One out of four Jewish women at that time, for example, was named Maria. There are 21 Yeshuas cited by Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, who were important enough to be recorded by him, with many thousands of others that never made history. The wondrous mathematical odds hyped by Jacobovici that these names *must* refer to Jesus and His family are simply playing by numbers and lying by statistics.
- (3) There is no reason whatever to equate “Mary Magdalene” with “Mariamene,” as Jacobovici claims. And so what if her DNA is different from that of “Yeshua”? *That* particular “Mariamme” (as it is usually spelled today) could indeed have been the wife of *that* particular “Yeshua,” who certainly was not Jesus.
- (4) Why in the world would the “Jesus Family” have a burial site in Jerusalem, of all places, the very city that crucified Jesus? Galilee was their home. In Galilee they *could* have had such a family plot, not Judea. Besides all of which, church tradition and the earliest Christian historian, Eusebius of

Caesarea, are unanimous in reporting that Mary, the mother of Jesus, died in Ephesus, where the apostle John, faithful to his commission from Jesus on the cross, had accompanied her.

(5) The “Jesus Family” simply could not have afforded the large crypt uncovered at Talpiot, which housed, or could have housed, 200 ossuaries.

6) If this were Jesus’ family burial site, what is Matthew doing there—if indeed “Matia” is thus to be translated?

(7) How come there is no tradition *whatever*—Christian, Jewish, or secular—that any part of the Holy Family was buried at Jerusalem?

(8) Please note the extreme bias of the director and narrator, Simcha Jacobovici. The man is an Indiana Jones wannabe who oversensationalizes anything he touches. You may have caught him on his TV special regarding *The Exodus*, in which he “explained” just about *everything* that still needed proving or explaining in the Exodus account in the Old Testament! It finally became ludicrous, and now he’s doing it again, though in reverse—this time attacking the Scriptural record. As for James Cameron, how do you follow the success of *Titanic*? Well, with an even more “titanic” story. He should have known better, and the television footage of the two making their drastic statements on Monday, February 26, was disgusting, and their subsequent claim that they respected Jesus nauseating.

9) Even Israeli authorities, who—were they anti-Christian—might have used this “discovery” to discredit Christianity, did not do so. Quite the opposite. Joe Zias, for example, for years the director of the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, holds Jacobovici’s claims up for scorn and his documentary as “nonsense.” Those involved in the project “have no credibility whatever,” he added. Amos Kloner, the first archaeologist to examine the site, said the conclusions in question fail to hold up by archaeological standards “but make for profitable television.” William Dever, one of America’s most prominent archaeologists, said, “This would be amusing if it didn’t mislead so many people.”

(10) Finally, and most importantly, there is no external literary or historical evidence *whatever* that Jesus’ family was interred together in a common burial place anywhere, let alone Jerusalem. The evidence, in fact, totally controverts all this in the case of Jesus: All four Gospels, the letters of St. Paul, and the common testimony of the early church state that Jesus rose from the dead, and did not leave His bones behind in any ossuary, as the current sensationalists claim.

Bottom line: This is merely naked hype, baseless sensationalism, and nothing less than a media fraud—“more junk on Jesus.”

With warm regards,

Paul L. Maier, Ph.D., Litt.D.
Department of History
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan