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Review

The Tomb of Jesus and His Family? Exploring Ancient Jewish Tombs near Jerusalem's Walls. Edited by JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH.

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James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Tomb of Jesus and His Family? Exploring Ancient Jewish Tombs Near Jerusalem's Walls.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. Pb. Pp. xx + 585. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6745-2.

The discovery in March 1980 of a Jewish family tomb in the Talpiot district of Jerusalem largely went unnoticed. Uncovered in the course of construction work, 10 stone ossuaries were taken to the Rockefeller Museum for safekeeping, and the tomb was quickly investigated and sealed. Few took much note of the names on the ossuaries: Jesus son of Joseph, Mary, Joses, Judas and Mariamene. Some years later, however, the tomb found itself in the media spotlight, first in BBC's *The Body in Question* (BBC, 1996; made by CTVC's Ray Bruce) and then, much more sensationally, in *The Tomb of Jesus* (Discovery Channel, 2007; produced by S. Jacobovici and J. Cameron, Associate Producers). It was now claimed that this was the tomb of Jesus and his close family; that the inscription 'Mariamene, who is Mara' should be identified with Mary Magdalene (Mariamene being the form of her name in a couple of late texts and 'Mara' being the feminine form of 'Lord'), and that Judas/Yehuda was her son by Jesus. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the burial cave would now be known as the 'Jesus Family Tomb.'

The present volume contains the proceedings of an international symposium organised by James Charlesworth in Jerusalem in 2008. Thirty scholars from a wide range of disciplines – biblical scholars, archaeologists, epigraphers, forensic anthropologists, experts on onomastics and statisticians – were brought together to clarify the facts about the Talpiot tomb, to set it in the context of second Temple burial practices and views of the afterlife, and to maintain a dialogue between various (and often entrenched) positions.

As might be expected, the contributors represent a wide range of views. Some are convinced that the tomb did indeed contain the mortal remains of Jesus and his family (for example, Claude Cohen-Matlofsky and James Tabor). On the basis of a common patina, Amnon Rosenfeld, Howard Feldman and Wolfgang Krumbein argue that the well-known James ossuary originally belonged with the Talpiot tomb, which (they argue) would raise the likelihood of this being the Jesus family tomb to a 'compelling level of certitude'. And Eldad Keynan offers an ingenious (though rather far-fetched) explanation of why Jesus the *mamzer* might have had a child with a Gentile Mary Magdalene.

By far the majority of contributers, however, are sceptical of the media identification (including Charlesworth himself, p. 551). Mordechai Aviam argues that *ossilegium* was a specifically Judaean practice, maintaining that it would be very odd for a Galilean family to adopt an unfamiliar practice far away from home (Passover pilgrims who died at the feast would have been returned to their ancestral plots). Rachel Hachlili suggests that Jesus was most likely to have been known as 'Jesus of Nazareth,' rather than 'Jesus son of Joseph,' and finds no evidence for a son named Judas/Yehuda. Stephen Pfann notes that the Jesus ossuary (CJO 704) seems to have been overwritten (a common practice, and one which suggests previous use) and doubts whether Jesus' disciples, who were already claiming great honours for their leader, would have treated his mortal remains with such carelessness. Christopher

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Rollston notes that only one ossuary gives any kind of relationship ('Jesus son of Joseph') and cautions against assuming that Jesus and 'Mariamene' were a married couple, or that Judas/Yehuda was their son. Ancient DNA analysis might have helped here, but Mark Spiegelman highlights the shortcomings in the original analyses, and laments the fact that the results of the initial experiments have never been published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Of particular interest to this reviewer was the chapter on the original excavation by two participants, Amos Kloner and Shimon Gibson (neither of whom support the sensationalist identification). Also of note are several discussions of the 'Mary Magdalene' ossuary (CJO 701), the second largest of the group and the only one to have a Greek inscription (which some have identified with a wealthier individual from an urban settlement). The inscription was originally read by Rahmani as '(Little) Mary, the Master.' Jonathan Price argues that the first word cannot be reconstructed as 'Mariamene,' and is more likely to be the common 'Maria(me).' The inscription would then either read 'Mary who is called Mara,' with Mara being an abbreviation for Miriam (so André Lemaire) or 'Mariame and Mara,' i.e. two people, written by two different hands (so Stephen Pfann; Price is open to either of these alternatives, noting also that Mara may be a man). The volume also contains a number of statistical analyses. While the Discovery Channel film claimed that there was a 99.4-99.94% probability that the tomb belonged to Jesus' family, Mark Elliott and Kevin Kilty suggest a 47% probability (on the assumption that the unusual 'Yoseh' is to be identified with Jesus' brother Joses). April DeConick and Jane Schaberg offer analyses of Mary Magdalene from a social memory and feminist perspective respectively. And in the final section a number of contributions discuss beliefs in Second Temple Judaism regarding burial and the afterlife (Martin McDonald, Casey Elledge, K. Th. Zarras, and Petr Pokorný).

Occasionally, other 'celebrity ossuaries' come to the fore. André Lemaire, for example, raises the possibility of identifying the ossuary containing the Simon and Alexander of Mk 15.21. Focussing on the James ossuary, Joseph Fitzmyer suggests that there is a 'high degree of probability' that the entire inscription is authentic, but that it is to be understood as 'James, son of Joseph, the latter being a brother of Jesus' and so is not likely to be the James known to us from the NT. Charlesworth adds a postscript offering a preliminary reflection on the recently found 'Patio Tomb,' another Talpiot tomb which may be inscribed with a fish, and which some have identified as containing the remains of Jesus' first followers. Examination of the tomb is made difficult by the fact that it is underneath a housing complex and analysis has to be done through a camera on a robotic arm. This is clearly the tomb to watch: Associate Producers, it seems, are now identifying it as belonging to Joseph of Arimathaea, and so the *first* resting place of Jesus' mortal remains (before they were moved to Jesus' own tomb). No doubt the story – and media interest in it – will continue for some time.

Overall, this is a useful and informative book, providing an excellent example of the way limited evidence can be read in varying ways and lead to divergent results.

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