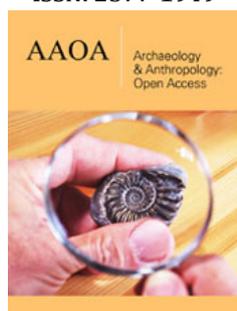


The Ossuary of Yeshua (Jesus) Identified in Caiaphas' Family Tomb, Jerusalem

Zeev Lewy*

GeoArchaeolog; Geological Survey of Israel, Israel

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Abstract

Critical reading of the New Testament Four Gospels discovered several citations and descriptions differing from the common views presented by Christian theologians. Yeshua's healing abilities convinced him that he might have divine qualities as if of the long-awaited Messiah, described in Isaiah 53. It required the humiliated and suffering person should be officially false accused, sentenced to death and buried with the rich. Yeshua asked his alleged rival the High Priest Caiaphas to arrange the trial and the death sentence leading to his crucifixion. To assure Yeshua's awaited resurrection Caiaphas secretly transferred the body from the temporary grave to his illustrious family tomb as demanded by Isaiah's prophecy, convincing Yeshua's followers of his resurrection and becoming the Messiah, as well as Jesus Christ. Yeshua's soul rose to heaven, but after a year his bones were placed in an ossuary decorated with a carving characterizing his personality. The identity of the ossuary was identified from a picture in an archaeological report nearly 28 years ago.

Keywords: Yeshua followed Isaiah 53; Judas coordinated the arrest; Caiaphas carried out the prophecy; Yeshua's body transferred to Caiaphas family tomb; Body disappearance substantiated becoming Messiah (Jesus Christ).

Introduction

The Holy Sepulcher Church in the old quarter of the city of Jerusalem is believed to stand on the crucifixion site of Yeshua (Jesus), comprising his temporal burial site. During the First Temple Period this area was located outside the city and was a cemetery. During Yeshua's times (Second Temple Period) Jerusalem extended and encompassed the old cemetery, which remained unbuilt in the center of the city, where the Roman rulers carried out the crucifixion of criminals and enemies of the regime. Some of the graves yielded bones and skulls, for which the site became known as the place of the Skull, in Aramaic, Golgotha (John 19: 17). Therefore, the possibility that Yeshua was buried close to his crucifixion site is historically impossible. However, the Holy Sepulcher Church is supposed to be situated on or near Yeshua's crucifixion site where his body was cleaned and prepared for burial and taken to a site outside the city. Nevertheless, a shrine (Holy Aedicule) was constructed in the center of the church above the traditionally believed temporary burial site of Yeshua. Material degradation and some earthquakes endangered its stability. Therefore, intensive renovation was recently undertaken to stabilize the Holy Aedicule, involving experts and modern techniques to avoid its collapse [1]. During the renovation of the foundations of the structure, the grave was opened and cleaned reaching far down to the basal burial bed, providing mortar samples for dating. They yielded an age around 345AD, indicating its construction during the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine [1]. Though historical and scientific data contradicted the traditional belief regarding the temporary burial and resurrection site of Yeshua below the Holy Sepulcher Church, it is located where Yeshua was crucified and prepared for burial, thus preserving its holiness for Christian believers.

Living in Jerusalem I frequently walk throughout the old quarter along the famous Via Dolorosa where Yeshua passed to his crucifixion. It always puzzled me how this humble, religious person, who devoted himself to helping his people, initiated the beginning of a new religion, which gradually differentiated from Yeshua's legacy, resulted in disastrous consequences for his people, the Jews. I looked for explanations in the Four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) beginning with the New Testament, which record the activities of Yeshua, the events leading to his crucifixion, and the following transformation of the "son of Man" (Luke 18: 31) into the Christian "Son of God, God and the Holy Spirit". I found evidence

*Corresponding author: Zeev Lewy, GeoArchaeolog; Geological Survey of Israel, Israel

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providing new insight to these historical events, contradicting the entrenched views of the Catholic Church. It was the prophecy of Isaiah 53, which inspired Yeshua and guided him towards becoming Messiah as he repeated the prophecy in a concise version, as well as in modern language before his disciples. The last prerequisite of the prophecy was that the body should be buried with the rich as if belonging to nobility. The idea sparked that the body of Yeshua might have been transferred from the temporary burial site to the family tomb of the rich and distinguished High Priest Caiaphas. This assumption was corroborated by the identification of Yeshua's ossuary unearthed from the tomb of the Caiaphas family and illustrated in an archaeological report [2]. The Christian believers, which have been disappointed by the loss of Yeshua's traditionally believed grave at the Holy Sepulchre Church, are now accepting his actual final burial site comprising his ossuary, the most significant artefact belonging to Yeshua, and thus the "Holy Grail".

Yeshua believes that he will become messiah

The Gospel according to Matthew begins with the New Testament citing the genealogy of Yeshua as descending from Abraham via King David, from whom Messiah shall come. Thereafter Matthew (1: 21) informs us that God's angel ordered Joseph, Mary's husband, that her son," conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" should be named Yeshua (in Hebrew salvation), "because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1: 21). Luke (2: 21) indicates that following Yeshua's birth (attributed to December 24th; Christmas), "on the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Yeshua, the name he had been given before he had been conceived." Thereby Yeshua officially joined the Jewish nation according to the prescribed religious laws. The boy became a learned Jewish patriot who travelled throughout the country preaching to his countrymen, encouraging them to follow Jewish religious laws in the spirit of mutual love and justice. He was concerned with the welfare of individuals and endeavored to ease the suffering of the local population suffering from Roman oppression. He healed the sick and performed miracles, gaining people's gratitude and admiration. Gradually he became convinced that he was gifted with divine powers to provide help to his people only, refusing to heal a non-Jewish child saying that "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15: 24). As a learned and pious person, he had knowledge of the Bible and quoted from its Hebrew scripts when preaching. He protested the commercialism of religious services, confronting priests and teachers of the law in religious matters. He emphatically believed in the "God of Israel" and that everyone should primarily obey his commands in their human spirit (Matthew 5: 17-20; Mark 12: 29-30) rather than glorify the rituals. His followers addressed him as a scion of King David's family, from whom Messiah was to come as written in the beginning of the New Testament (Matthew 1: 1-17). The Four Gospels allude to the impression of Yeshua pertaining to the prophecies of Isaiah 53 and 61 about the intended Messiah (Luke 4: 18-19). The miracles he performed while helping his people convinced him that these divine abilities are part of his mission to become the longed-for Messiah after having fulfilled the requirements presented by the prophet Isaiah (53: 3-9; New International Version) some 700 years earlier:

"He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; by oppression and judgment, he was taken away. For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people, he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth."

Yeshua decided to follow the prophecy step by step as he informed his disciples at the end of his preparations: "everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again" (Luke 18: 31-32). Yeshua understood that becoming the Messiah required him to leave the earthly world of the mortals, whereby his soul should rise to the heavenly domain (see Luke 9: 51). The killing of the righteous person must be carried out in an official procedure by the unjust regime ('Gentiles'). Thereby it will receive wide publicity and affect the people awaiting their intended savior. This 'life transformation', through a temporary death, was at that time by crucifixion. The cross on which he intended to sacrifice himself for the salvation of his people was chosen by him long before as a symbol of self-devotion to his mission and ideology: "anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10: 38). "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9: 23).

Yeshua asked the high priest caiaphas for help in his mission

To achieve the fulfilment of the prophecy Yeshua would have to be charged by the Roman governor for threatening the security and stability of the regime. The powerful and influential people criticized by Yeshua in public were the priests and teachers of the law, who governed religious life. He faithfully believed that the High Priest Caiaphas might successfully charge him with blasphemy that might lead to national unrest, which the Romans would prefer to avoid. Therefore, Yeshua secretly appealed to Caiaphas to have him arrested and firmly accused that would result in his death penalty, as revealed in the discussion between Caiaphas and the priests about their required support for Yeshua's death sentence. John (11: 49-52) cites Caiaphas instructing the priests: "you know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man dies for the people than that the whole nation perishes. As high priest that year he prophesied that Yeshua would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation, but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one". This authoritative command to the priests to approve the death sentence of Yeshua, who might be the awaited Messiah of the Jewish nation, evidence that Caiaphas did not hate Yeshua or intended to retaliate for his demonstrations against the religious establishment. The High Priest Caiaphas was persuaded by Yeshua to endanger his religious status and commit what might be one of the most serious sins, that of lying and murder for the sake of Yeshua's divine mission. Though Caiaphas believed that Yeshua will become Messiah, he aggressively

accused Yeshua of interfering in the divine process, which is regarded as a defamation of God (Mark 14: 61-62). "The chief priest and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for the false evidence against Yeshua so that they could put him to death" (Matthew 26: 59). False accusations were thus a prerequisite to find the innocent and righteous Yeshua guilty and sentenced to death to carry out his noble mission.

The traumatic crucifixion that Yeshua intended to carry out would have shocked his disciples, having informed them not to worry when he suddenly disappears because he will shortly return. The forecast of Yeshua's resurrection indicates that his death as a human being was inevitable for the fulfilment of this transformation into a divine entity, which he accepted with deep conviction, and rational planning. He symbolically scheduled his public trial and crucifixion to fall on Passover, the feast of liberation of the people of Israel from Egyptian oppression. During these religious holydays numerous pilgrims to the Temple in Jerusalem would witness his painful sacrifice in becoming their longed-for Messiah to redeem them from Roman oppression. The symbolic date of the crucifixion together with his demand from his followers to carry a small cross symbolizing their devotion to his ideology, were planned long before his death on the cross, rendering a divine control on the whole process. On several occasions before Passover Yeshua and his disciples arrived at Jerusalem "entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves" (Matthew 21: 12), publicly exhibiting the alleged conflict between him and the priests. During the Passover festive evening meal ('Last Supper') Yeshua revealed his disciples that Judas is his beloved and most loyal one, telling Judas "what you are about to do, do quickly" (John 13: 27), and Judas immediately left the room. Yeshua and the disciples left as well toward Gat Shemanim (Gethsemane), to where Judas arrived with Roman soldiers, officials from the chief priests and Pharisees for the arrest of Yeshua. "Yeshua knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, who is it you want? Yeshua of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Yeshua said" (John 18: 4-6). Judas must have realized that by handing over his beloved master (as per his request) to the Romans, he leads him to die. It seems reasonable that Judas, struggling with pain, embraced and kissed Yeshua in deep agony. Thereafter Judas had an agoraphobic attack and next morning hung himself in great despair (Matthew 27: 5).

Yeshua's arrest, false trial, conviction, crucifixion, and temporary burial

After the arrest of Yeshua on Passover evening (Thursday) he was transferred to the house of the high priest for interrogation. On Friday morning, Yeshua was brought before the Roman governor Pilate for an official trial. After long debates between the governor and the priests who accused Yeshua of blasphemy, Pilate approved their demand of a death sentence. Yeshua was led to the public crucifixion site in the center of the city, which remained unbuilt because of the graves from the First Temple Period. There Yeshua was crucified together two wicked persons. After several hours,

the Roman soldiers assumed that Yeshua died. "One of the soldiers pierced Yeshua's side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water" (John 19: 34) finally killing Yeshua. According to the detailed planning and precise execution of Isaiah's prophecy, there is no doubt that Yeshua would not have jeopardized the whole mission by neglecting the last phase that his body must be buried with the rich. It meant that after death on the way to become a divine entity he already is part of the nobility like the 'rich' on Earth. This symbolic 'status transformation' hinted to the temporal burial of Yeshua in Caiaphas' 'rich' family tomb. Yeshua faithfully trusted Caiaphas that he will hide his body in his family burial site where no one would look for it and detain the body until he shall rise again as Yeshua promised his disciples (Luke 18: 33). The required burial with the rich was known to Yeshua's followers, among them the distinguished Joseph of Arimathea. He appealed to the Roman governor Pilate to receive the body of Yeshua for burial in his new tomb close by because Shabbath (Saturday) was approaching (Matthew 27: 57-58). The tomb was cut into the rock, exposed in a garden outside the city wall not far from the crucifixion site. Pilate approved the request and after the body was treated according to Jewish tradition it was placed in the new tomb to be transferred on Sunday to Yeshua's family for final burial.

The prophetic burial with the rich

Caiaphas' commitment to hide Yeshua's body in his opulent family tomb denotes that protecting the body of Yeshua was of utmost importance to the High Priest because he sincerely cared for the successful completion of Yeshua's noble mission. However, in case of a failure, the disappearance of the body would be accepted by the public as Yeshua's resurrection and relieve Caiaphas and the priests from being accused of lying and murdering an innocent person. The deep conviction that Yeshua might become Messiah was probably shaken by the painful death of Yeshua as a human being. The priests probably wondered whether they were misled to support the death sentence, fearing retaliation of the people for losing the hope of salvation promised by Yeshua. Thus, they decided to enhance the effect when the temporary burial site would be found empty and preserve Yeshua's promised resurrection and divinity, whether genuine or false. Caiaphas and the priests immediately asked Pilate for soldiers to guard and seal the tomb which Pilate approved, supporting their request with the possibility that the disciples might steal the body and tell the people that Yeshua rose from the dead (Matthew 27: 62-66). The disappearance of Yeshua's body was noticed on Sunday morning, attesting Yeshua's resurrection and becoming Messiah, relieving the conscience of the priests. However, the promised redemption from Roman oppression had not ended. The disappointed public intensified the internal political unrest, which the Roman army brutally suppressed in 70AD, destroying Jerusalem and the Temple, thus the second exile resulted. Several believers in Yeshua's legacy remaining in the country congregated in small communities outside Jerusalem. A few keen followers envisioned his instruction "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28: 19).

The discovery of Yeshua's burial site and ossuary

The last prerequisite of Isaiah's prophecy (53), that the intended Messiah should be buried with the rich, must have been carried out by the High Priest, Caiaphas, who was concerned about the reconstruction of the prophecy. This logical deduction hinted to the possible location of Yeshua's body in the family tomb of the High Priest Caiaphas. It was corroborated by reports of the archaeological excavation of the tomb in southeast Jerusalem [2,3]. This incidentally discovered tomb contained twelve ossuary boxes (six damaged), mixed bones of five persons, two iron nails and a Roman coin pointing to the first century AD. One highly ornate ossuary bearing numerous, densely arranged, diverse, small rosettes and floral symbols were inscribed in free-hand Aramaic letters by the name Jehosef Bar Qaifa [3]. The high quality of the ossuary's ornamentation attributed it to a distinguished person as hinted by the inscribed name of the High Priest Caiaphas [3]. It was soon exhibited at the Israel Museum as of historical and religious significance and remarkable artistic decoration. Another intact ossuary inscribed with the name Qafa (Caiaphas) did not impress the archaeologists, who transferred it to the ossuary collection. Fortunately, it was photographed, and the small picture appeared in the archaeological report [2]. The peculiar ornament on its front consists of two simple rosettes and a small circular feature on both upper corners carved by mechanical means in contrast to a central free-hand carving in between the rosettes (Figures 1 & 2). The base consists of four stepwise-shortening platforms. An elliptical-elongated feature rises from the center embracing a narrower one and a central vertical line while narrowing upward, curving laterally resembling a flower vase topped by a horizontal line. It bears seven small half circles and two open spirals on each end. Six arrows rise from in between the half-circles approaching the top of the ossuary. Despite the inaccurate spires and slightly wavy lines, this carving must have been done without tools by a professional artist outside his workshop. The tall structure rising from the stepped platforms seem to replace carvings of columns and symbolized palm trees found on the ossuary fronts and tomb walls (Figure 3). The Bible reveals that "the righteous flourish like the palm tree" (Psalms 92: 13) referring to its tall and stable trunk, evergreen leaves, and fruitfulness. The palm-like decoration on tomb walls Figure 3 and on the ossuary fronts Figure 3 from the Second Temple period has a truncated top bearing a pyramid-like structure, symbolically containing the memory of the deceased, hence the total entity (Nephesh or Nefesh; soul in Hebrew) of the deceased [4-6]. The tall, vase-like illustration in the front center of ossuary lacks the firm, stable base. It is more likely a palm scion (shoot) rising from the palm trunk close above the surface as Isaiah (11: 1) described the Messiah who "shall grow from the stock of Jesse" (Yishay, King David's father). The pair of spirals are found on symbolized palm trees Figure 3 referring to date branches. The lack of a pyramid-Nefesh suggests that the person is not dead in the usual meaning and thus will not be remembered as a deceased human being. The upward pointing arrows may symbolize the rise and dispersal of the soul in its divine domain. This unique illustration was composed according to what Yeshua symbolized.

Hence, a partly ornamented ossuary was ordered by the High Priest Caiaphas (marked with the name Qafa) for the bones of Yeshua. The broad knowledge of the biblical text and burial customs of that time incorporated in the carving suggest that the High Priest Caiaphas designed the illustration and secretly instructed the artist to add it on the simply ornamented ossuary. This illustration is an outstanding characterization of Yeshua, as a righteous scion of King David's Jesse family (palm) tree, whose soul rose to heaven to serve God as Messiah on Earth. This is the first artefact directly related to Yeshua (Jesus) based on archaeological and biblical criteria, which presents to all Christians their holiest 'Holy Grail'. It corroborates the logic of the historical reconstruction, and attributes to Caiaphas the eventual transformation of Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah, as well as to Jesus Christ: Son of God, God, and The Holy Spirit according to Christian belief. The Catholic Church should carry out educational campaigns in all the churches over the world to improve Jewish-Christian relationships in the spirit of Yeshua (Jesus): "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).



Figure 1: The front of ossuary No. 1991-465 (about 2 feet long) from the family tomb of the High Priest Caiaphas (Photo by Israel Antiquities Authority).

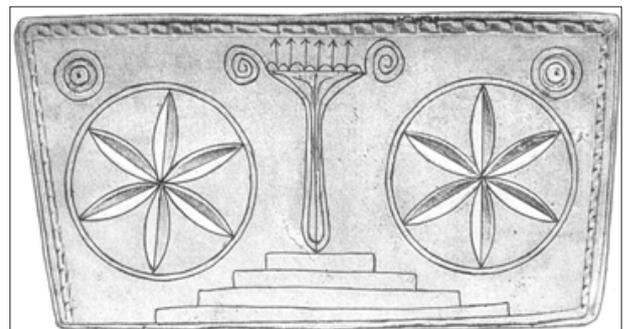


Figure 2: The fine carving of the central illustration is emphasized to show the delicate features hinting to Yeshua as the (palm) scion of King David's family. Drawn upon the photo [3].

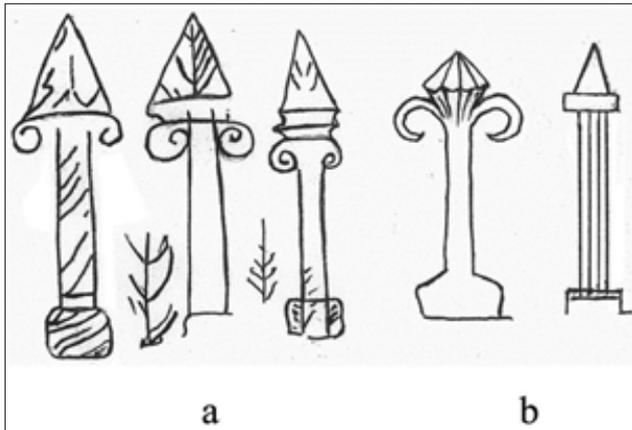


Figure 3: Symbolic palm trees with the 'Nefesh' pyramid on top: a. Decoration on tomb wall in Jericho (copied from illustrations [5]; b. 2nd Temple Period carving on ossuaries [6].

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