

THE EARLIEST ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF JESUS EVER FOUND

BATTLE OVER THE JAMES BOX - FEBRUARY 2005 UPDATE -

DESPERATE MEN ARE MAKING CHARGES

The Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) had a problem on its hands: The whole world knew about the so-called “James Box”—and all the experts outside of Israel declared the writing on it to be genuine.

As discussed in the last update, the problem was that the small stone burial box (called an “ossuary,” or bone box) had that one-line inscription, “*James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.*”

How unfortunate! Evidence of Jesus! Something had to be done!

So “Shuka” Dorfman, a retired Israeli general without a job and any background in archaeology, was hired as head of the IAA for this project, to destroy confidence in the James Box and to obtain a court conviction, entitling Israeli police to seize and destroy it.

When one senior IAA archaeologist on staff objected, saying that a highly experienced archaeologist should be appointed to that position, instead of Dorfman, that archaeologist was summarily fired and told he would not be given excavation permits for any future digs.

A tough, battle-hardened veteran of many years, Shuka, it turned out, was just the man for the job. Cooperating fully with Yuval Goren, he set to work with a vengeance to discover all kinds of “frauds” which could help the case against the James Box.

Yuval Goren has been the key Israeli archaeologist willing to unswervingly label the James Box as a fake—in defiance of the authoritative conclusions of inscription experts in Israel and throughout the world. Goren is a professor at Tel Aviv University and chairman of its department of archaeology.

It was decided by Shuka and Goren that, in order to make the case against the James Box stronger, they would also declare an astonishing number of other archaeological finds to be fakes! This would give the impression that some kind of grand conspiracy was taking place. And, they

would charge the private collector who owned the James Box as being at the center of it!

Goren needed such diversionary tactics, since, after months of examination and discussion, he and his associates could produce little evidence against the authenticity of the James Box inscription, other than something he called “a coating.”

That coating happened to be oxide traces of a cleaner which the mother of the box’s owner, Oded Golan, had earlier used to clean the inscription. Of course, she should not have done that; but, in her ignorance, she did. Those traces of cleaning solution are all that Goren and Shuka can find as “evidence” that the James Box is a fake. They can find nothing else on the box or inscription, absolutely nothing.

And that brings us to Oded Golan, the man who owns the humble appearing stone box, which once contained the bones of the older brother of Jesus Christ. He has one of the largest, if not the largest, private collections of antiquities in Israel. He has been collecting them since he was a youth. He buys them, but does not sell them.

But in order to make the case strong against the James Box, Goren and Shuka have trumped up a charge that Golan is the head of a forgery ring, responsible for a number of attempts to sell fraudulent antiquities.

In late December 2004, four Israelis, including Golan, and one Palestinian Arab were indicted in Jerusalem on charges of running a massive forgery ring over several decades.

The IAA and the Israeli police claim the ring has created a large number of Biblically related fakes, involving millions of dollars; some of these are currently on exhibit in the prestigious Israel Museum.

One of the many, so-called “fakes” is a piece of ivory carved in the shape of a pomegranate fruit, which has the inscription, “*Holy to the priests, the Temple of [Yahwe]h*” (with “Yahwe” missing). This was once thought to be the only relic from

Solomon's Temple, and was purchased by the Israel Museum in 1988 for \$550,000.

But now, on little evidence, it has also been declared to be a fake—in order to bolster evidence of a conspiracy ring charge, which is supposed to involve the James Box.

Men are becoming so desperate, they are willing to condemn a major antiquity owned by their own national museum!

The other indicted Israelis are Robert Deutsch, Rafael Brown, and Shlomo Cohen.

Deutsch is an antiquities dealer who has shops in Jaffa and in two hotels in downtown Tel Aviv. Since becoming an antiquities dealer, he has obtained a master's degree from Tel Aviv University and is studying for two Ph.D.s, one at Tel Aviv University and the other at Haifa University, where he teaches while continuing to operate his antiquities shops, which hold twice-yearly auctions of important antiquities. Deutsch has written scholarly books and articles on epigraphy (ancient writing) and archaeology.

Rafael Brown was the chief conservator at the Israel Museum for years; and he left to become a licensed antiquities dealer in Jerusalem. He is no longer a dealer. In recent years, he sold his business and retired to Switzerland.

Shlomo Cohen purchased Brown's dealership, when he retired to Switzerland. But Cohen later closed the shop and retired to Switzerland.

As of this date, no specific charges have been brought against Deutsch, Brown, or Cohen. None of these men are specifically charged with being involved in the James Box forgery, but only in other alleged antiquities frauds as part of the general "conspiracy."

Oded Golan, the owner of the James Box, is charged with tampering with that box and destroying a seal. What seal?

Fayez al-Amaleh (the only Arab charged in the indictment) is a West Bank Palestinian who brought the Menashe (Manasseh) seal and 17 bullae to Oded Golan. The seal had the name of King Manasseh on it. But neither Golan nor any of his wealthy friends purchased the bulla, fearing it might be a forgery. Because the bulla later disappeared, Golan is charged with having destroyed it!

(A *bullae* [plural, *bullae*] is a small lump of wet clay that is impressed with a seal and is usually placed over string that has been tied around a document. Once the bulla hardens, it serves to seal the document—until the bulla is broken and the

document opened.)

The official Israeli indictment involves four counts (four criminal acts). The indictment begins with Count No. 1, which concerns the James Box. Only Oded Golan (Defendant No. 1) is named as the forger in Count No. 1. The other four defendants are only named in one or more of the other counts.

The forgery on the James Box is said to have been done by Golan "alone or with the assistance of others." But no one else is named in this count.

There are several strange things about this official indictment about the James Box.

First, although it has involved an investigation lasting two years, costing thousands of dollars, and involving hundreds of witnesses,—the government cannot produce a single co-conspirator with Golan on the supposed James Box forgery.

Second, all sides agree that the box itself is authentic and dates to the first century, A.D.; it is the inscription on the box which is being called in question by the government. Yet there is even official confusion over that.

At first, the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) committee that studied it declared that the entire inscription was a forgery. Yuval Goren and Avner Ayalon, his associate, said that both the first part of the inscription ("*James, son of Joseph*") and the second part ("*brother of Jesus*") were both etched on the box recently.

But in the indictment, filed in late December, only the last part of the inscription is alleged to be fraudulent! Here is the wording on this part of the indictment:

"To execute [produce] his scheme, Defendant No. 1 [Oded Golan] used an ancient ossuary from the Second Temple period that bore an engraved inscription of '*James, son of Joseph.*' Defendant No. 1 added to the ossuary, either alone or with the assistance of others, the words '*brother of Jesus.*' "

Let us examine all the "evidence" against Golan more closely:

The first "evidence": There is the "forged inscription." Not one experienced paleographer (expert on ancient writing), who has studied inscriptions from the first century A.D. has questioned the genuineness of that engraved sentence on the James Box. Not one.

André Lemaire, at the Sorbonne in Paris, is one of the world's leading paleographers. The first to carefully study the James inscription, he steadfastly maintains it is genuine.

1 Ada Yardeni, a prominent Israeli paleographer,
2 firmly declares the writing to be a genuine first
6 century A.D. inscription.
5

The only other leading Israeli paleographer, Joseph Naveh, who in the past has often spoken loudly against fraudulent inscriptions, has thought it best to remain publicly silent on the James Box.

Two geologists of the Geological Survey of Israel (Shimon Ilani and Amnon Rosenfeld) also carefully analyzed the James Box and its inscription. They continue to maintain that the inscription and box are authentic and date back to the first century A.D.

Edward Keall of the Royal Ontario Museum, in Toronto, Canada, who had several months to study the inscription, carefully agrees with that assessment.

James Harrell, an officer with the ASMOSIA (Association for the Study of Marble and Other Stones in Antiquity), is in full agreement with the other authorities.

All unite in declaring that the efforts of Goren and Ayalon, to disprove the genuineness of the inscription, are deeply flawed. Indeed, not one other scientist, inside or outside Israel, has expressed agreement with the work performed by Goren and Ayalon or their announced conclusions.

The second "evidence": There is the so-called "inscription coating." The IAA declares that it was placed there in order to conceal a modern forgery. But, of course, it could have been applied to clean the inscription (although they admit that it may be a possibility).

Independent groups tested several cleansers and found that any of them could be the cause of the oxide evidence for the "coating." It is known that, without his consent, Golan's mother cleaned the inscription one day on the balcony of the family apartment in Tel Aviv.

The IAA's Goren and Ayalon have been unable to satisfactorily explain what purpose such a coating would accomplish in producing a forgery! Nor have they even shown how the coating was applied. They have given several successive explanations, but all have proven incorrect.

Goren and Ayalon have even admitted that the "inscription coating" can be removed by a toothpick! Any real "coating" would require special solvents or a metal scalpel.

The third "evidence": At an earlier time, the IAA brought forth two scholars, Joe Zias and Emile Puech, who said that they thought they had seen that same ossuary in Mahmoud Abushakra's an-

tiquities shop in the mid-1990s—without the last part of the inscription on it. If true, that would be significant evidence.

In response, careful analysis of interviews with both men revealed that their reports conflicted with one another and with their own statements.

Since then, both men have backed away from these claims, have gone to the Israeli police, and have retracted their statements.

Puech told the police, "I am not sure I saw the ossuary in Mahmoud's shop. I remember it had a rosette on it. I did not see any inscription on it."

There are, not one, but two rosettes on the James Box, but both are on the back side where the inscription is not located; and they can only be seen close-up and in excellent, contrast lighting because both are barely visible. Zias also has expressed strong doubts about having seen the ossuary.

As for Mahmoud Abushakra, who has moved to Germany: He told the police the James Box was never in his shop.

In summary, there is no evidence of any kind of forgery.

But there is some interesting evidence on the other side: Two different lady friends of Golan have affirmed that, about 20 years ago, they saw the inscription with three names on it. Their memories are quite clear about the details; and they identify other oddities about the ossuary.

If the inscription was on the box that long ago, it must be authentic. A forger would not wait 20 years to try to sell it. Indeed, Golan has never tried to sell the box at any time.

Do not imagine that the IAA has just sat around for two years, during the time that they are supposed to have been investigating the James Box. They have paid the salaries of several men to search for evidence in the box, on the box, and away from the box—which would show the inscription to be a forgery.

For example, Amir Ganor is a 36-year-old graduate student at Hebrew University, where he has been studying for a master's degree in his spare time. But, as head of the IAA's Fraud Unit, he has spent the last two years trying to figure out ways that the James Box is a fraud. With this purpose in mind, he has made one raid after another on antiquities dealer shops and files.

The name of Christ must be declared fraudulent!

Then there is Yonatan (Yoni) Pagis of the Jerusalem police. A hard man to deal with, he has

questioned more than a hundred people and compiled thousands of pages of reports, transcripts, interviews, etc.

He and Ganor have interrogated Golan more than 50 hours! They have taken him to police headquarters in shackles to question him. Then they have released him. Apparently, in Israel, people are assumed guilty until proven innocent. And this includes their best citizens, such as Oded Golan, who is a prosperous engineer living in Tel Aviv.

When one arrest does not shake Golan into confessing, they arrest him again and again. Hoping to get a confession of guilt, on one occasion they jailed him for four days. When that accomplished nothing, they released him without charging him.

The fact is that they have no evidence to charge him with anything. Yet in late December, they did anyway.

Then there is Dan Bahat, a lawyer assigned to the case, who has helped guide its legal aspects throughout all the years of hopeless efforts to prove the inscription to be a fraud. Bahat would supply the IAA and police interrogators with questions, and try to keep everything looking like a good case when it arrived in court. He will lead the prosecution, in an attempt to jail Golan and possibly others.

Keep in mind that Golan is charged with being the ringleader in a fraud conspiracy, involving other antiquities—most of which he has never had anything to do with.

On the other side stand the antiquities and handwriting (paleography and epigraphy) experts.

André Lemaire is recognized as one of the world's leading specialists in ancient Semitic writing (which includes Hebrew script of the first century A.D.). He is an expert in epigraphy, paleogra-

phy, linguistics and philology, and is a professor at the Sorbonne in Paris, France.

Lemaire was the first one to examine the ivory pomegranate inscription, declare it genuine, and write a report published in French in the *Revue Biblique*. That is the pomegranate which, in an effort to bolster their case against the James Box, the IAA now declares to be a forgery.

Ada Yardeni is one of the top two or three paleographers in Israel. She studied the James Box inscription carefully and made the initial drawing of it. She continues to be adamant that the inscription is authentic. The IAA has been unable to shake her decision.

Amnon Rosenfeld and Shimon Ilani are two geologists with the Geological Survey of Israel. They were first from that department assigned by its director, Amos Bien, to examine the James Box inscription. Rosenfeld and Ilani found nothing suspicious about the inscription; and both continue to maintain its genuineness, in spite of the allegations of fraud since brought forward by the IAA. The two men also authenticated two other antiquities, now declared forgeries by the IAA.

Do not forget Edward Keall, senior curator at Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum. He studied the James Box and its inscription during the lengthy time it was on exhibit there.

Keall was also the only person who was able to study a cross section of the inscription! This is because the box cracked in transit to Canada; and, before it was patched, Keall was able to closely examine the inscription from the side, at the place the break went through it. Keall has never wavered in his conclusion that the inscription is genuine.

Two sets of attorneys represent the defense. Lior Bringer is Oded Golan's attorney. Arnold Spaer and Haggai Sitton represent the defendants Deutsch and Brown. All three are excellent attorneys, well-versed in antiquities cases.

Although an indictment is simply an accusation. The proof must still be presented. Yet, whether or not it wins its case in court, the IAA is causing many people to think that the James Box must be a hoax.

And this must certainly be a cause for rejoicing among certain people in Israel.

All the while, innocent men are being slandered and accused of criminal activity.

THE COMPLETE SET OF REPORTS TO DATE

Burial Box of James, Brother of Jesus

[WM-1118] December 2002.

Battle Over the James Box [WM-1169-

1170] October 2003.

Battle Over the James Box: December 2004 Update [WM-1264]

Battle Over the James Box: February 2005 Update [WM-1265]