

THE EARLIEST ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF JESUS EVER FOUND

LATEST ON THE JAMES BOX
- AUGUST 2009 UPDATE -

THE ISRAELI LEGAL CASE AGAINST IT IS COLLAPSING

The discovery by the world of the James box created a sensation throughout the world. This is due to the fact that *this small stone box, if genuine, contained the first archaeological evidence that Jesus Christ had actually lived on earth in the first century A.D.* This container is technically known as an “ossuary”—a small rectangular casket (carved out of limestone) which, in the first century A.D., was used to store the bones of the dead.

On several earlier occasions, the present writer has summarized news reports on this box. In this present two-part set, a number of articles, dating from early May 2006, down to the end of March 2009, will be presented. There will, of course, be some overlap; but the extreme importance of the subject deserves thoughtful attention.

One fact which the news media rarely mentions is this: The only way the Israeli government can form a majority coalition—is to include the small Orthodox Party in its ranks. But Orthodox Jews have deep feelings against Christians and Christ. Unfortunately, as a result, the James Box quickly became politicized; and charges of fraud were quickly followed by a criminal trial.

Here is the first of these articles:

On May 16, 2006, the Boston Globe printed an article authored by Matthew Kalman, a correspondent based in Jerusalem. The article was entitled “Trial sheds light on shadowy antiquities world.” Here is this article —

JERUSALEM—Testimony in a Jerusalem District courtroom is giving a rare glimpse into the shadowy world of biblical antiquities.

Three of Israel’s most respected experts in ancient archeological treasures are on trial, charged with 18 counts of fraud, receiving money through deception, damaging antiquities, and violations of Israeli antiquities’ laws.

The defendants—collector, Oded Golan; dealer and writer, Robert Deutsch; and former Israeli Museum conservator turned dealer, Rafi Brown (also used is “Braun”)—are accused of faking a range of artifacts which include the burial box of Jesus’ brother, a wine decanter used in Solomon’s Temple, and ancient seal impressions and inscriptions. Some of these were sold

for hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Since the trial began in September 2005, witnesses have described furtive encounters with Arab graverobbers, international smuggling, and transactions involving hundreds of thousands of dollars based on a handshake.

Lawyers involved in the case expect court proceedings to continue for at least another year.

Oded Golan, the first accused, shot to worldwide attention in November 2002 as the man behind a sensational discovery that rocked the world of biblical antiquities: a first-century stone ossuary, or burial box, with an ancient Hebrew inscription identifying it as the last resting place of “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.”

The ossuary was exhibited in Toronto and hailed by scholars as the first physical link ever discovered to the family of Jesus. But when the 2-foot long limestone box returned to Israel in March 2003, it was seized by the Israeli Antiquities Authority and submitted to a committee of experts to determine its authenticity.

Meanwhile, the Antiquities Authority was already investigating Golan in connection with another item, the Joash stone. This was a black stone tablet with an ancient Hebrew inscription that appeared to record the renovation of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem by King Joash in the ninth century BC. If genuine, it would be the first physical evidence of the temple ever recovered.

The committee of experts was asked to rule on both items; and, in June 2003, they announced that both were modern fakes. Golan was arrested on suspicion of violating Israeli antiquities’ laws and repeatedly interrogated while police raided his apartment and two other properties in Tel Aviv. There they seized a range of tools and materials that they said could be used to fake ancient artifacts.

In December 2004, the Israeli police indicted Golan, Deutsch, and Brown. Charges against two others were later dropped.

Shuka Dorfman, director of the Israeli Antiquities Authority, described the charges against Golan and his alleged colleagues as “the tip of the iceberg.”

“These forgeries have worldwide repercussions,” Dorfman said. “They were an attempt to change the history of the Jewish and Christian people.”

Commander Shaul Naim, head of the two-year police investigation, said: “This was fraud of a sophistication and expertise which was previously unknown. They took authentic items and added inscriptions to make them

worth millions.”

Naim said forgers managed to fake inscriptions, decorations, and even the patina—the thin sediment created over centuries by moisture collecting on the item underground or in a cave. “We believe that there are many more items in museums and collections around the world which are yet to be identified,” he said.

The opening days of the trial were devoted to four days of testimony from multimillionaire collector Shlomo Moussaieff of London, a key prosecution witness. He described extraordinary scenes where dealers, experts, and even Israeli diplomats came to his home, produced rare antiquities from their pockets and negotiated sales worth many thousands of dollars.

Prosecutors said Moussaieff was swindled out of hundreds of thousands of dollars for fake items by all three defendants.

Moussaieff’s purchasing power is legendary. He once paid \$1.5 million for a single clay impression of a royal seal used by one of the early kings of Israel. No one has questioned the authenticity of that item; but a collection of 28 seal impressions he bought for \$200,000 is now said by the Israeli police to be mostly fakes, fabricated by Golan and Deutsch.

Moussaieff, 82, told the court he bought the temple decanter from Deutsch for \$150,000. Police said it was an authentic item; but the inscription was faked with the help of Golan, who received half the money. Moussaieff also described buying several inscribed pieces of pottery from Golan and Deutsch for \$200,000 and similar pottery from a dealer acting for Rafi Brown for \$180,000. Police said those items were also fakes.

Moussaieff told the court he stood by the authenticity of every item in his collection but said, if he had been fooled, he only had himself to blame.

“I’m not stupid. I don’t throw money away just because someone has come to sell me something,” Moussaieff said in an interview during a break in the trial. “I’m suspicious of everything and everybody, particularly when there are large amounts of money involved. I still believe these items are genuine. I think the James ossuary is genuine.”

Moussaieff said he had spent millions of dollars on his collection of antiquities intending to prove the truth of the Bible.

Both Golan and Deutsch reject all the charges against them and accuse the Israeli authorities of a witch hunt, insisting that all the items are genuine.

“There is not one grain of truth in the fantastic allegations relating to me,” Golan, who has been under house arrest at his parents’ home for more than a year, said in an interview.

Deutsch also denies ever faking antiquities. “The authorities have ruined my reputation and I have lost my university teaching position because of the baseless charges,” he said during a break in the proceedings.

The court will have a hard time deciding between the experts who are due to give evidence. The findings of the

committee appointed by the Antiquities Authority have been questioned by geologists, epigraphers and archeologists.

In his defense, Golan is planning to call Dr. Wolfgang Krumbein, a world expert in ancient stone from Carl von Ossietzky University in Germany. Krumbein carried out extensive tests on the items in Jerusalem and said in a written report that he found “no indisputable evidence confirming the claim that any or all of the items had been produced in the last several decades.”

On February 26, 2007, Jeremiah Gregier wrote the following article about the findings of a special investigative panel regarding the James Box. Here is this article —

NEW YORK—A panel of experts, as well as producer and Oscar-winner James Cameron and Jewish archaeologist Simcha Jacobovici, met Monday at a press conference at the New York Public Library on 42nd Street to discuss the discovery of boxes that they allege carried the remains of Jesus of Nazareth and his family, including a possible son to Jesus named Judah.

While at the conference, the group presented evidence to support their claims and unveiled the ossuaries, boxes that they believe hold bones of Jesus and Mary Magdalene for the first time to the general public.

The full research has been documented in a new production called *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, which will be aired on the Discovery Channel on Sunday, March 4.

The discussion brought up two key questions. First, is the evidence credible and can the remnants be conclusively from Jesus? And second, if the bones are indeed from the Christ, does this destroy Christian theology that says Jesus resurrected from the dead?

“My expertise is investigative journalism,” said Jacobovici. “What we do as journalists and filmmakers are connect dots and go to experts. Our job, like detectives, is to connect the dots and uncover the big picture.

“Every fact was checked, double checked, triple checked, quadruple checked.”

Critics of the investigations have noted the commonness of the names found in the tomb. A large portion of people during the first century had the names found inside the tomb. For instance, the name “Mary” was shared by 25 percent of all women back then.

The panel, however, pointed out the uniqueness of the names, such as “Yeshua bar Yosef” (Jesus, son of Joseph), which they say is not ordinary.

“There’s never been a ‘Jesus, son of Joseph’ ossuary found in a provenance,” explained James Tabor, chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. “Those claims (that there are others) are false.”

The panel also noted the name “Matia” (Matthew), who is thought to have been Jesus’ brother because the name is frequent in Mary’s lineage. They also believe “Yose” (Joseph) was another brother. “Yose,” the panel

noted, is much like “Joey” in English.

Many have said that these names happen to be simply coincidence, but Cameron said what set the investigation in motion was the name inscribed upon the second Mary’s ossuary. On the side, it reads “Mariamene e Mara.”

“Mariamene is the name of Mary Magdalene,” said the *Titanic* director.

Statistically, it appears that these names, although common back then, would have small probability when looked at all together.

“Based upon the assumptions I’ve made, I see numbers that should make you stop and pause,” described Andrey Feuerverger, Professor of Mathematics and Statistics at the University of Toronto.

Still, theologians have pointed out that historical evidence itself makes the filmmakers’ claims hard to believe. George Guthrie and Benjamin W. Perry, Professor of Bible at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., noted that bodies in first century Jerusalem were typically buried temporarily for a year and then their bones gathered and placed in the ossuary in the family tomb. These ossuaries were often marked with names, as in the Talpiot discovery. “The filmmakers are therefore suggesting that the body of Jesus lay decaying in a family tomb in Jerusalem at the same time the early Jerusalem church was expanding because of its belief in a resurrected Messiah,” Guthrie said in a statement released by Union following the Monday press conference. “Yet, we have no evidence from any ancient document, Christian or non-Christian, that points even to rumors that the body or bones of Jesus were there in Jerusalem.”

Guthrie added that both biblical and extra-biblical sources point to the brothers of Jesus, most notably James, as among the Christians of the first century.

“Yet, would James and the others not known of this family tomb and the body of Jesus there?” Guthrie asked. “As believers, his family members confess the resurrected Jesus. No opponent of Christianity points to the tomb. No followers of Jesus revere the tomb. There is no evidence—beyond the circumstantial evidence of exceedingly common names—that points to this as being the tomb of Jesus’ family. The name associations are interesting, but the evidence does not bear the weight of the proposition.”

At the press conference Monday, the panel also discussed their DNA research which was taken from Jesus’ and Mary Magdalene’s ossuary. From the mitochondrial DNA, they deduced that the two are not related to each other on the maternal side.

One may conclude that these two were married then, the panel continued, because only family members are allowed to be put inside the family tomb. Since they are not blood relations, they would have had to have been wedded.

However, there can still be a paternal link between the two that would rule this void. More research must be done on this case.

While the research cannot completely prove the tomb to be Jesus’ or that he had a marriage to Mary Magdalene

and son named Judah, the panel believes it could provide evidence that would point towards that.

“Christians affirm that Jesus was fully God and fully human,” said Carney Matheson, Professor of Anthropology at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. “Don’t forget the ‘fully human.’ ”

The filmmaker and panelists asserted that they were not trying to discuss theological issues, but simply bring up facts that they had uncovered.

Some even brought up positive religious aspects that could result of the supposed discovery.

“We are not trying to undermine Christianity,” stressed Cameron. “What this film is that it celebrates the real life existence of these people, of this man who had a vision and communicated it in a virile way.”

Greg Thornbury, dean of Union University’s School of Christian Studies, however, questioned the motivation of the documentary’s producers, saying they may have been more motivated by financial gain than by a commitment to historical and archeological integrity.

“Trying to disprove the facts of Christianity has become a cottage industry,” Thornbury commented in the released statement by the university. “Take ‘The Da Vinci Code,’ for example, and the money it made for author Dan Brown. I’m sure that fact is not lost on James Cameron or the people at the Discovery Channel.”

More future research will be done in an attempt to strengthen the argument for Jesus’ family tomb, including more DNA analysis, excavation of the original tomb, and historical fact-finding about Jesus’ life. “There’s a lot more science to be done,” explained Jacobovici.

Many Christians still doubt the significance of the evidence. Many have argued that it is biased, and that it is not convincing enough.

“James Cameron showed his inability to handle real history in regard to the *Titanic*—less than a century ago,” commented Ray Van Neste, associate professor of Christian studies at Union, in the university’s released statement. “Why should we take him seriously with respect to events two millennia ago?”

Stephen Pfann, a biblical scholar at the University of the Holy Land in Jerusalem who was interviewed in the documentary, also doubts that latest claims will sway believers.

“I don’t think that Christians are going to buy into this,” he concluded. “But skeptics, in general, would like to see something that pokes holes into the story that so many people hold dear.”

As 2007 was drawing to a close, the James Ossuary was becoming highly controverted outside of Israel. Here is an article that appeared late in that year —

About seven years ago, the discovery of a 2,000-year old bone box (or ossuary) which is engraved with the words James, Son of Joseph, brother of Jesus, was announced, setting in motion a scholarly media and judicial frenzy.

There is not much doubt that whether the 20-inch long box can be dated to the period in which Jesus lived. The controversy has to do with whether the inscription was added later.

Hershel Shanks, the editor of the *Biblical Archeological Review* (BAR) first headlined the find in 2002 in an essay written by the Sarbonne scholar André Lemaire. Shanks has since written a book defending the authenticity of the find. **He says this is one of the greatest archeological discoveries of all time, since it would provide the only contemporaneous evidence that Jesus lived and that the New Testament naming of his stepfather and brother is accurate.** By contrast, Nina Burleigh has a new book out (*Unholy Business: A True Tale of Faith, Greed and Forgery in the Holy Land*) arguing the whole thing is, as the title implies, a gigantic hoax.

The antiquities collector who sprang the find on the world is Oded Golan, who says he was sold the box by an Arab antiquities dealer; he can't remember who the man was. An investigation was subsequently undertaken by the *Israeli Antiquities Authority* (IAA), which pronounced the inscriptions a fraud. Soon thereafter Golan and three others were arrested (although not jailed) and, for the last almost four years, have been on trial for taking valuable historical artifacts and adding fake lettering in a scheme to make them massively more valuable. Golan denies the charges.

The case is obviously complicated, as well as remarkably interesting. Golan is accused of also faking a tablet he claims came from the first Solomon Temple. The James ossuary, if confirmed, might rock the world of Christian scholarship, while the Joash tablet, if confirmed, might shake the world of Judaism by proving the existence of Solomon's Temple on the historically contested Al Aqsa Temple Mount.

Much of the skepticism derives from the fact that the finds just seem too good to be true. The tablet contains sixteen full lines of text, when similar finds from the time of Solomon usually only include a smattering of textual fragments.

The Israeli Antiquities Authority sees the case as open and shut. While some have argued that scientifically valid tests of the stone patina (the natural darkening with age in certain places) verify the authenticity of the engraved lettering, the panel of experts convened by IAA judged the inscription a fraud. In part, their argument was based on a finding that the inscription cut through the old patina (implying it was of recent origin). Parts of the inscription, they argued, were recently baked on; in that more recently applied inscription patina (the part that seems to connect the box to someone named Jesus), they found trace elements that wouldn't have existed in ancient Jerusalem but are found today in chemically treated tap water.

But under intensive question-and-answer in the lawsuit, the IAA (Israeli government) case has weakened. One expert from Germany said the IAA had contaminated the key evidence, and another (Ada Yardeni) is so convinced the James box is genuine that she has said she would leave her profession if the ossuary turned out to be a fake.

Opponents of the IAA conclusions argue that IAA's objectivity cannot be trusted, given its strong opposition to artifacts brought to light through the commercial antiquities trade. The testimony has been so conflicted that several months ago the judge actually suggested the prosecution drop the charges against Golan; he said it seemed unlikely to him a conviction could be achieved (which in turn led Hershel Shanks, the BAR editor, to issue a report that the find had been "vindicated").

The whole thing got even wilder in 2008, when a documentary film produced by James Cameron was released. Directed by Simcha Jacobovici, *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* has by now been shown around the world. Jacobovici has also co-authored a book on the subject called *The Jesus Tomb* and the documentary aired under the title *The Jesus Family Tomb* on the Discovery Channel.

Jacobovici argues that the James ossuary and others found nearby establish (at a high level, they say, of statistical probability) that what had been found was the final burial grounds of Jesus' family.

These statistics are intriguing. The expert quoted in the film did calculations, given a series of contingencies laid out by the film's director. The statistics, produced by Andre Feuerverger from the *University of Toronto*, are credible. These calculations have been judged serious and methodologically sophisticated by a peer-reviewed forum in a leading statistics journal.

Here is an official statement about the James Ossuary, made February 6, 2008 by Hershel Shanks, head of the Biblical Archaeological Society —

The criminal case in a Jerusalem court against what was ballyhooed as a major ring of forgers and forgery dealers has now had its third birthday. And it is about to reach a climax of sorts.

The indictment lists 124 witnesses. So far, the prosecution has called only about 70, but has indicated that it will rest after a few more witnesses.

That will trigger a critical point in the trial. The remaining defendants will almost certainly file a motion to dismiss the indictment on the ground that the government has failed to make even a *prima facie* case; if the judge agrees, there would be no need for the defendants to put on their case.

The one to watch is defendant Robert Deutsch.

Continued on the next tract

LATEST ON THE JAMES BOX - AUGUST 2009 UPDATE -

**PART TWO
OF TWO**

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

The 27-page indictment charges five defendants, in various combinations, with either forgery or conspiring to sell artifacts they knew to be forgeries. Among the defendants is Robert Deutsch, one of Israel's leading antiquities dealers. Other defendants include a former chief conservator at the Israeli Museum, Rafi Braun (or Brown); antiquities dealer Shlomo ("Momi") Cohen; a Palestinian worker named Faiz El-Amlah, and antiquities collector Oded Golan.

The case was dismissed; the charges were simply dropped. The government induced a third defendant (El-Amlah) to plead guilty to a minor charge that had nothing to do with forgery; in exchange for leniency, he received a fine. So he, too, is out of the case.

That leaves two defendants left in the case—Robert Deutsch and Oded Golan. Deutsch may be the more interesting. A Romanian immigrant to Israel, Deutsch is a successful antiquities dealer with shops in some of the most exclusive hotels and areas of Tel Aviv. But Deutsch is—or at least before this case was—also a respected scholar. He has written a bundle of books on seals and inscriptions, some with highly regarded Haifa University professor Michael Heltzer and another with internationally renowned Sorbonne scholar André Lemaire. Deutsch himself taught at Haifa University—at least he did before this case. He is also an archaeologist. He served as an area supervisor in the excavation of Megiddo—before this case. In short, this case has been devastating for Deutsch. In many ways, it has destroyed his life.

According to observers of the trial, in three years the government has really produced no evidence against Deutsch. Or has it? We may soon know.

The government is said to be two or three weeks away from concluding its case. When that happens, it will be time for motions to dismiss the indictment. The government will then file its opposition to the motions to dismiss. Then we will have a better idea of the case, if any, against Deutsch. If the indictment against him is dismissed, only defendant Oded Golan will be left.

The case against Golan is different. He is charged with actually forging something—the famous ossuary, or bone box, inscribed "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." The government claims it found in his apartment forgery instruments and materials to make forgeries, as well as some partially completed forgeries. On the other hand, some very prominent paleographers, including André Lemaire and the highly regarded Israeli paleographer, Ada Yardeni, are convinced that the James ossuary is authentic. No expert paleographer has testified otherwise. Normally, the testimony of Lemaire and Yardeni would come as part of the defendants' case. But, for some strange reason, the government called them as its witnesses. Their testimony that the inscription is authentic would in itself

seem sufficient to raise a "reasonable doubt" concerning the government's allegation that the inscription is a forgery, thus requiring dismissal of the charge.

Experts who have insights into the trial or the alleged forgeries are invited to submit their comments to BAR's website. This case has been called "the forgery trial of the century." Why has it taken so long to try? Why is the government failing to call so many of the witnesses listed in the indictment? Are the items charged as forgeries in the indictment authentic or not? What, if anything, lies behind this case; why was it brought? —H.S.

On October 29, 2008, the *San Francisco Chronicle* headlined a story by Matthew Kalman, written from Jerusalem, entitled "Case Involving Jesus' Brother Burial Box Hoax on Verge of Collapse."

The next day the *Biblical Archaeology Society* issued the following press release. It is here reprinted from the January-February 2009 issue of *Biblical Archaeological Review* —

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 31, 2008)—The reputation of the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) is in shambles. After a nearly four-year trial (and still counting), 75 witnesses and more than 5,000 pages of testimony, what has been billed as the "forgery trial of the century" is about to collapse. The Israeli judge who will decide the case has advised the prosecution in open court to consider dropping the case. The evidence isn't there.

The story was reported by Matthew Kalman in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and from there around the world. He described Judge Aharon Farkash's evaluation as a "humiliating collapse" of the government's case and "a major embarrassment . . . for the [Israeli] Antiquities Authority."

The principal target of the case has been the bone box inscribed "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus" that was brought to the world's attention in 2002 by *Biblical Archaeology Review* in an article by Sorbonne epigrapher André Lemaire. The inscription, it was charged in the criminal indictment, was a forgery, engraved on an authentic stone box of the kind that Jews used 2000 years ago to rebury their dead—after a year following the initial burial when the flesh had decayed and desiccated.

The government's principal witness was Professor Yuval Goren, a former chair of Tel Aviv University's archaeology department, who testified that the forger had used a fake covering to conceal evidence of his forgery. But other witnesses suggested other ways this covering could have formed.

More importantly, on cross-examination Goren was forced to admit that after the police had removed this covering, he could see original ancient patina in the critical word "Jesus." With that, the case blew up.

This should not have been surprising. One of the

members of the IAA's committee (that long ago had declared the inscription a forgery, supposedly by a unanimous vote) had also written the IAA, that she saw this original ancient patina in the engraving of the inscription.

Although the IAA advertised the committee's forgery decision as unanimous, it never was. Many members of the committee expressed no opinion, but the IAA registered them as "yes" votes. Others committee members relied on the commanding standing and reputation of Professor Goren. One member of the committee who would have found the inscription authentic said he was "forced" to change his mind because of Professor Goren's scientific analysis. In short, the committee, which included no non-Israeli, not even Professor Lemaire who had originally published the inscription in *Biblical Archaeology Review* and vouched for its authenticity, was bum-rushed into a supposedly unanimous decision.

At the trial, not a single expert in the Semitic script of the period testified that the inscription was a forgery. Nor did a single scientist back up Professor Goren's scientific testimony—and several scientists testified otherwise.

But it took several years to prove that the emperor had no clothes. This is a painful example of how the judicial process can be manipulated by unscrupulous bureaucrats. The Israeli Antiquities Authority hates the antiquities market, which is where this inscribed ossuary came from. This supposedly drove the prosecution. Until now, it has been widely assumed by almost everyone who has mentioned the inscription publicly, based on the IAA committee's supposed unanimous decision and the ongoing forgery trial, that this inscription is a forgery. Now that will end.

But this is not the end of the matter. All the court can decide is that the prosecution has not proved its case beyond a reasonable doubt. Logically, the inscription can still be a forgery. It is never possible to prove to a 100 percent certainty that an inscription is authentic. Theoretically, there is always one more test that might reveal it to be a forgery. Even inscriptions found in professional archaeological excavations can be salted.

And there is still another question: Is the "Jesus" of this inscription the "Jesus" we know from the New Testament? All three of the names in the inscription—James (rather *Jacob* or *Yaakov* in its Hebrew form), Joseph and Jesus (*Yehoshua* in the Aramaic of this inscription) were very common among Jews at this time. Scholars are already discussing and writing about whether or not this inscription refers to Jesus of Nazareth. This is where the discussion should be—not in the hands of an official committee or in a criminal indictment.

The following news release by Hershel Shanks, head of the Biblical Archaeological Society is dated November 10, 2008. It is entitled "Supporters of James Ossuary Inscription's Authenticity Vindicated." Here is this article —

The "forgery trial of the century" has all but blown

up. The trial judge who will decide the case (there are no juries in Israel) has told the prosecution to consider dropping the case. "Not every case ends in the way that you think it will when you start," Judge Aharon Farkash told prosecutor Adi Damti in open court. "Maybe we can save ourselves the rest," the judge told her.

The story was reported by Matthew Kalman in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and from there around the world. He described Judge Aharon Farkash's evaluation as a "humiliating collapse" of the government's case and "a major embarrassment . . . for the [Israeli] Antiquities Authority."

The government's star witness, Yuval Goren, former chairman of Tel Aviv University's institute of archaeology, was forced to admit on cross-examination that there is original ancient patina in the word "Jesus," the last word in the inscription that reads "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus."

Recent events have also proved humiliating for the IAA in connection with the committee it appointed that supposedly came to a unanimous decision that the inscription is a forgery. In fact, several members of the committee expressed no opinion—but the IAA counted them as "yes" votes. Several other members of the committee based their vote, not on their own expertise but, on Yuval Goren's supposed expertise, which they were in no position to evaluate. One member of the committee who would have found the inscription authentic said he was "forced" to change his mind based on Goren's scientific arguments.

No paleographer expert in the script of this period has found any paleographical problem with the inscription. And several scientists at the trial have undermined Goren's scientific arguments. No other scientist has supported Goren's arguments.

BAR [the *Biblical Archaeological Review*] has consistently supported the authenticity of the inscription, as have leading paleographers André Lemaire of the Sorbonne and Ada Yardeni of Hebrew University. All appear now to be vindicated.

Matthew Kalman is a news correspondent, based in Jerusalem. Here is his June 11, 2009, report —

An Israeli antiquities collector accused of faking the burial box of Jesus' brother and other priceless historical items says he is confident that new scientific evidence will prove that he is innocent.

Oded Golan, 58, has been on trial at the District Court in Jerusalem for the past four years, charged with forging an inscription on a Roman-era burial box or ossuary that says it contained the bones of "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus."

The discovery caused a sensation when it was first announced in 2002 and displayed at the Royal Ontario Museum. But on its return to Israel, the ossuary was seized by Israeli police and Golan was arrested.

He was accused of faking the ossuary and other items in order to trap gullible collectors. In December 2004, he

1 was indicted with four other defendants and accused of
5 being at the center of an international antiquities forgery
8 ring.

“They took original antiquities and added inscriptions and decorations, which turned the artifact into something valuable. —And some of the antiquities we’re talking about are worth millions of dollars. One example is the ossuary of Jesus’ brother,” said Commander Shaul Naim of the Jerusalem police.

“We have the basis to believe that there are many more fake artifacts circulating, both in private collections and museums in Israel and abroad that we haven’t found yet,” Naim said.

“We know there are antiquity forgeries. It’s not a new thing. But the extent and the drama in attempting to fake history didn’t allow us as a government body not to become involved,” said Shuka Dorfman, head of the Israeli Antiquities Authority.

“I believe we have revealed only the tip of the iceberg. This industry encircles the world, involves millions of dollars,” said Dorfman.

Golan and his co-defendants went on trial in the summer of 2005; but, after more than 70 prosecution witnesses and 8,000 pages of testimony, Judge Aharon Farkash warned the prosecution that he was not convinced they had proved their case and advised them to consider halting the trial.

“After all the evidence we have heard, including the testimony of the prime defendant, is the picture still the same as the one you had when he was charged?” Judge Farkash pointedly asked the prosecution in October 2008. “Not every case ends in the way you think it will when it starts. Maybe we can save ourselves the rest.”

“Have you really proved beyond a reasonable doubt that these artifacts are fakes as charged in the indictment?” Judge Farkash said. “The experts disagreed among themselves. Where is the definitive proof needed to show that the accused faked the ossuary? You need to ask yourselves those questions very seriously.”

In an exclusive interview with The Media Line at his Tel Aviv home, Golan said he was confident that new scientific research undertaken by defense experts would finally exonerate him. Prosecution scientists had accused Golan of faking patina—a thin layer of biological material covering ancient items in order to make the inscriptions on the artifacts seem old.

“No, I never faked any antiquity,” Golan told The Media Line. “During the last several years there were several tests and examinations of those items by prominent experts from different countries in different laboratories; and I think we succeeded to prove that these inscriptions could not have been inscribed in the last century. There is a thin layer of patina. It’s a thin layer of crust made actually by a micro-organism that was developed inside the grooves of the inscription and this product made by the micro-organism could not have been developed in less than a hundred years.”

“It’s impossible to generate artificial patina, which takes a long, long time to be developed. It normally takes

a hundred years in nature to be developed. Technology has not developed yet any technology to make it in a short time in a way that you will not be able to recognize it. You may do something similar, but this is not a forgery. This is like reconstruction of a building with similar materials,” said Golan.

“I am sure that most of the people who originally claimed that it’s a forgery recognized later on (just look at the articles and the researches that were done later on) that it should be ancient. I cannot guarantee that it belonged to the brother of Jesus Christ but it’s definitely ancient. I have no doubt about it,” he said.

The Israeli Antiquities Authority and Justice Ministry refused to comment.

Here is a March 31, 2009, news report by Matthew Kalman, in the Jerusalem Post. It is entitled “Jesus ossuary trial stalled after more than three years.” —

One of Israel’s best-known antiquities dealers said this week he was the innocent victim of a “witch-hunt” initiated by the Antiquities Authority aimed at destroying his career and reputation.

Robert Deutsch, 58, has been on trial at the Jerusalem District Court since September 2005 on six charges of faking and selling priceless antiquities. He is the owner of the Archeological Center, with shops in Tel Aviv and Jaffa, and runs twice-yearly antiquities auctions that attract the world’s top collectors of ancient Judaica.

Deutsch’s co-defendant, leading antiquities collector Oded Golan, is charged with faking the burial box of Jesus’ brother and an inscribed stone attributed to King Joash that once adorned the First Temple, plus dozens of smaller items.

As Deutsch took the stand this week for the first time after more than three years in court, 120 witnesses and 8,000 pages of testimony, he said the charges against him were “lies and hallucinations.”

Golan, Deutsch, and three others were indicted in December 2004 on a total of 18 counts of forgery and fraud. The indictments were announced amid great fanfare, with the police and Antiquities Authority officials claiming they had uncovered a grand conspiracy on an international scale in which fake items had been unwittingly bought by museums around the world. They said the five accused were just the beginning.

Shuka Dorfman, director of the Antiquities Authority, described the charges against Golan as “the tip of the iceberg.”

“These forgeries have worldwide repercussions,” Dorfman said when the indictments were filed. “They were an attempt to change the history of the Jewish and Christian people.”

“This was fraud of a sophistication and expertise which was previously unknown,” said the Israeli Police’s Commander, Shaul Naim, who headed a two-year investigation. “They took authentic items and added inscriptions to make them worth millions.”

But more than four years later, no one else has been charged and no one has been prosecuted over a single fake item from any museum. Charges against two of the five original defendants were dropped, and one man was found guilty on a minor charge.

“They fabricated this entire indictment, the whole thing, from A to Z,” said Deutsch, who tried to dismiss his lawyer earlier this year because of spiralling trial costs.

Deutsch is one of the world’s leading experts on deciphering ancient Hebrew and other semitic inscriptions. Of the 1,000 known seal impressions from ancient Israel, he has published about half.

According to the Antiquities Authority, Deutsch and Golan conspired to forge an ancient decanter, several inscribed pieces of pottery, and dozens of seal impressions—known as *bulae*—some bearing the names of Israelite kings mentioned in the Bible. They are accused of publishing scholarly papers on the items to enhance their value, and then selling them for thousands of dollars to unsuspecting collectors.

After Deutsch was indicted, he was fired from a teaching post at the University of Haifa and dismissed as a supervisor at the Megiddo excavations.

“I have never faked anything in my life,” said Deutsch. “I’m the first person to call something a fake, because it pollutes the profession that I have made my expertise.”

On the witness stand, Deutsch said he knew Golan, his alleged co-conspirator, only through business. He said the Antiquities Authority and police had failed to find a single e-mail between the two men, or any evidence linking him to forgery despite repeated raids on his home and shops.

Deutsch said the trial was an attempt to shut down the licensed trade in antiquities in Israel, even though it is legal and he has held a license from the authority for the past 30 years.

“The Antiquities Authority thinks we are no better than antiquities thieves,” he said. “They believe that our legal trade is worse than theft because we are encouraging the robbers.”

“They went to the Knesset and tried to pass legislation banning trade in antiquities and they failed. Now they are using this trial to destroy our business,” he said.

“I don’t know how much lower they can get, the people who cooked up this trial,” he said. “They misled the prosecution, they misled the press and came up with all sorts of stories with no basis in reality.”

One charge against Deutsch and Golan is that in

1995 they conspired to inscribe an ancient decanter with a text linking it to the Temple service and sell it to billionaire collector Shlomo Moussaieff.

“To increase the significance of the decanter and enhance its price,” the indictment charges, “Defendant No. 2 published the decanter in a volume of archeology which he authored on the subject of Hebraic inscriptions from the First Temple period.”

But Deutsch produced the book in court—exhibit No. 4—and showed that it was already at the printer in 1994, by which time the decanter was already in the Moussaieff collection. The book cannot have been used to enhance the sale price.

In addition, Deutsch and Golan have both produced compelling evidence to show that the decanter, like the rest of the items, is authentic.

The prosecution, which took nearly three years to present its case, has had difficulty proving the alleged conspiracy. When Oded Golan took the stand last year, he produced plausible explanations for all the apparent evidence of forgery found in repeated raids on his home, business premises and storage facilities.

Expectations that the prosecution would produce an Egyptian craftsman it alleges actually faked most of the items were dashed when he refused to come to Israel to give evidence.

The star prosecution witness, Tel Aviv University’s Prof. Yuval Goren, was forced to recant some of his testimony based on scientific tests that showed the patina—the encrustation that adheres to ancient objects—to be a modern concoction. Further scientific evidence based on isotopic analysis of the patina looked increasingly unconvincing after other scientists tested the same items and came to the opposite conclusion.

Last October, the trial appeared close to collapse after Judge Aharon Farkash advised the prosecution to consider dropping the proceedings.

“After all the evidence we have heard, including the testimony of the prime defendant, is the picture still the same as the one you had when he was charged?” the judge pointedly asked the prosecutor. “Maybe we can save ourselves the rest.”

“Have you really proved beyond a reasonable doubt that these artifacts are fakes as charged in the indictment? The experts disagreed among themselves,” Farkash said.

The trial continues.

It is highly significant that just now, as we approach the final crisis in which the whole world will be involved,—new information is surfacing that powerfully adds to the evidence that

Christianity is true and that Jesus Christ actually existed in the First Century A.D., just as the New Testament teaches. Soon Sabbath-keepers will be brought into prominence. —vf