

Ossuary writing a forgery

Judith Sudilovsky/CNS

JERUSALEM — Two special archaeological committees said the inscription on an ancient limestone ossuary said to be the burial box of the brother of Jesus is a fake.

The Israel Antiquities Authority, a government agency, set up the committees to examine the so-called James Ossuary and another ancient tablet with an inscription referring to an ancient king.

"The committees concluded without a doubt that the two inscriptions are forgeries," said Shuka Dorfman, director of Israel Antiquities Authority, in a June 18 press conference. "The conclusion by the committee members that they are forgeries was unanimous."

The ossuary bears the inscription "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." An inscription scholar originally dated the box to 63 A.D. The inquiry led by the authority said the ossuary was indeed ancient, but the inscription was fake.

Catholics regard the word "brother" to mean "close relative." Protestants believe James was the son of Joseph and Mary. The Eastern Orthodox Church regards James as Joseph's son from a previous marriage.

The ossuary's owner, Oded Golan, is currently under investigation by the Israel Antiquities Authority and Israeli police.

The use of the ossuary was a common Jewish burial practice from the first century B.C. to about 70 A.D. At the time of Jesus and James, it was common among Jews to conduct two burials. A corpse would be laid out in a burial cave until the

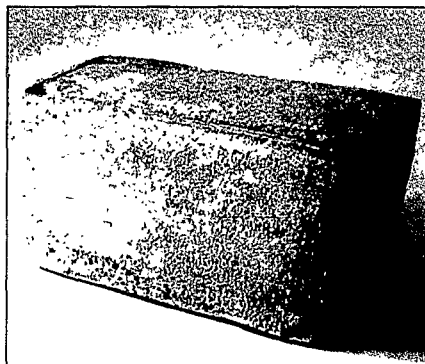


Photo courtesy Biblical Archaeology Society/CNS

Further investigation into the writing found on the so-called James Ossuary, which refers to James, the brother of Jesus, has determined it to be a forgery.

flesh decayed, then the bones would be placed in an ossuary and reburied.

The magazine Biblical Archaeology Review, which announced the finding of the burial box last year, quoted a French inscription scholar and former official at the Dominican-run L'Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Francaise in Jerusalem as concluding that the inscriptions probably were authentic.

Researchers at the Israel Geological Survey agreed that the inscription was authentic.

However, the new team of researchers, through chemical and microscopic analyses, said the inscription cut through the patina, a thin coating acquired with age.

In addition, the committees concluded that the inscription appeared to be new, written by someone trying to reproduce ancient written characters based on existing exam-

ples of ancient writing; they found a mixture of writing styles.

However, they said, it is possible that the word "Yeshua" — Jesus' Hebrew name — is authentic. The ossuary is also authentic, they said.

Yuval Goren, director of the Department of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, said that through testing he was able to determine that the patina within the carved letters was not authentic, but was a forged substance consisting of chalk.

In addition, he said, it was quite easy to scrape off bits of the forged patina which was found inside the letters while the authentic patina on other parts of the ossuary adhered very well to the burial box.

Avner Ayalon of the Israel Geological Survey said the patina in both inscriptions consisted of material mixed with tap water and chalk heated to a temperature not found in the Judean Hills during the last 3,000 years.

"It is accepted scientific practice for researchers from the same institute to come up with different conclusions based on the different methods used," said Ayalon, explaining the differences between his findings and the Geological Survey researchers' earlier conclusions.

"They didn't have the same research results in front of them as I did. They worked more from the view of the formation of the letters," he said.

The Israel Antiquities Authority also announced that a second find, an ancient tablet purporting to be 2,800-year-old Hebrew instructions for maintaining the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, was also a forgery.

Avigdor Horowitz, a biblical language expert at Ben Gurion University, said the 10-line fragment was a "very charming" but nevertheless forged passage.

RECOGNIZING

• John W. Crowe was recently elected chairman of the board of trustees at McQuaid Jesuit High School, Rochester, succeeding Thomas N. Trevitt, who completes his term as chairman June 30. Crowe served on McQuaid's board from 1989-95 and from 1997-2003, and chairs its strategic planning committee.

• The following Finger Lakes Catholic schools students were winners in the annual DeSales High School oratorical contest in April. The winners in the fifth- and sixth-grade competition were first place, Kaileigh Flynn, a sixth-grader from St. Mary School in Waterloo; second place, Curtis Tompkins, a fifth-grader from St. Patrick School in Seneca Falls; and third place, Ryan Caster, a fifth-grader from St. Michael School in Penn Yan. Winners in the seventh- and eighth-grade competition were first place, Caran Deal, an eighth-grader from St. Patrick School; second place, Gavin Karski, an eighth-grader from St. Francis-St. Stephen School in Geneva; and third place, Philip LeBrun, a seventh-grader from St. Patrick School. First-place winners received \$100, second-place \$75 and third-place \$50.

• Brittany Schutrum and Danny Berg, second-graders at Holy Family Primary School in Elmira, were winners in a poster contest for the Chemung County Anti-Alcohol & Drug Council. Schutrum won a \$100 mall gift certificate and Berg won a \$50 savings bond. The winning posters will appear on place mats for local restaurants, on book covers given out at local schools and will be displayed at various locations.

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Sister Marion Costello, SSJ, 93

Sister of St. Joseph Marion Patricia Costello, 93, died at the congregation's motherhouse on May 21, 2003.

Sister Costello entered the congregation from St. Patrick Cathedral Parish in 1927 and received bachelor's degrees from Geneseo State Teachers College and Nazareth College and a master's degree from LaValle University.

She taught at Holy Rosary and St. Agnes High School, Rochester; St. Mary, Canandaigua; St. Paul, Os-

wego; DeSales High School, Geneva; Elmira Catholic High; and Mt. Carmel High School, Auburn. She then taught French at Nazareth Hall for seven years before serving as receptionist and on the treasurer's staff at the motherhouse.

She is survived by nieces and nephews and her sisters in the congregation.

Her funeral liturgy was celebrated at the motherhouse on May 24 with burial in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery. Memorial contributions may be made to the Sisters of St. Joseph, 150 French Road, Rochester, NY 14618.