

Hollywood Hype: The Oscars and Jesus' Family Tomb, What Do They Share? (expanded version)

Submitted by bock on Mon, 2007-02-26 12:06.

Today we have the battle of the hype: the Oscars versus the release of the family tomb of Jesus story. The tomb is an old story now being recycled in an effort to make far more of it than the evidence really requires. I was allowed to see a version of the story to air in March, but had to agree to a non-disclosure, a typical process in a story like this. That non-disclosure simply means I must wait to discuss the topic until the story officially breaks. I also wrote a summary report on it, some of the concepts I will now share on this blog, since I can now talk. There is no need to fear such discussions. The same evidence is there for all of us. We all want to discover the truth. The key claims depend on numerous assumptions, cherry-picked evidence, if you wish. First, there is a suggestion that this is a family tomb of Jesus, when Jesus was in Jerusalem as a pilgrim, not a Jerusalem resident. How did his family have the time in the aftermath of his death to buy the tomb space, while also pulling off a stealing of the body and continue to preach that Jesus was raised BODILY, not merely spiritually. The bodily part of this resurrection is key because in Judaism when there was a belief in resurrection it was a belief in a bodily resurrection a redemption that redeemed the full scope of what God had created. If one reads 2 Maccabees 7. one will see the martyrdom of the third son of seven executed who declares that they can mutilate his tongue and hands for defending the law, because God will give them back to him one day. Here



are the details: As this third son faces death, 2 Maccabees 7:10-11 presents this summary of the martyrdom, "After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, and said nobly, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again." After the sons perish, the mother declares her hope in 7:20-23, "The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honorable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them, 'I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.'" The point is important, because just as with the creation teaching, the difference between the alternative of only having the spirit live and having the entire person be renewed is part of what distinguished the two groups (Christians and Christian Gnostics). The earliest Christianity came out of a Judaism that believed in a physical resurrection, which is why a claim about only needing a spiritual resurrection does not fit with historic Christianity. To lack a bodily resurrection teaching is to teach in distinction from what the earliest church had received as a key element of the hope that Jesus left his followers, a hope that itself was rooted in Jewish precedent. Paul, our earliest witness to testify to this in writings we possess, was a former Pharisee who held to a physical resurrection as 1 Corinthians 15 also makes clear. Paul matches the Maccabean picture noted above. He explicitly denies an approach that accepts only a spiritual resurrection. Second, we have to believe that in a family tomb, some who were not in

the family are included, that is, Matthew. How do we explain his bone box being there? There is no record of a Matthew being a part of the family of Jesus. Other explanations that place him there because he wrote a gospel are simply that, hypothesized explanations with no hard evidence. Does this inflate the statistical numbers in the show to include such "evidence?" Also if Matthew can be there as a non-relative and a significant disciple, then could the same be true of Mary? Third, we have to accept that as the mourning family scrambled to steal the body from Joseph of Arimathea's tomb (where several knew the body was originally placed) and yet they preached an empty tomb and resurrection when they actually knew that Jesus was not raised, doing so at the risk of their own lives as Jesus' half brother's death (James) in AD 62 shows. This scenario for the hypothesis' truth involves several assumptions, the absence of any of which destroys the claim. Let's repeat this: they had to SECRETLY buy the tomb space from someone, prepare an ossuary over a year's period and then choose to adorn this ossuary of Jesus with graffiti-like script to name their dead hero. Surely if they had a year to prepare honoring Jesus, whom they had highly regarded, they would have adorned his ossuary with more than a mere graffiti like description. Note how some of the other ossuaries in this tomb are quite adorned, as pictures from the press conference showed. Not to mention that some of the family died for this belief, when they really knew Jesus had not left the tomb empty. This scenario as a whole seems quite implausible. I have not even raised the issue of Jesus' family being able to afford such a tomb, since they were at best lower middle class and these are upper echelon tombs (If wealthy benefactor gave them this site, then there are people in Jerusalem who know where this site is and the secrecy of the locale is lost). Fourth, there is the name Mariamne, a variation of Maria, one of the most common of names of the time. It is like saying every Susan married to a Richard can only be one family and that finding that Maria and Maria are related names is a surprise (a little like calling

William, Bill) Here are the details on names provided to me by Prof Richard Bauckham of St. Andrews and sourced in a famous catalogue of ossuary names that has been out since 2002 with the information known about this locale since c. 1980 (In fact, in a quite helpful move, the Discovery Channel web site has a page where one can look at the inscriptions that are on these ossuaries): “Out of a total number of 2625 males, these are the figures for the ten most popular male names among Palestinian Jews. The first figure is the total number of occurrences (from this number, with 2625 as the total for all names, you could calculate percentages), while the second is the number of occurrences specifically on ossuaries. 1 Simon/Simeon 243 59 2 Joseph 218 45 3 Eleazar 166 29 4 Judah 164 44 5 John/Yohanan 122 25 6 Jesus 99 22 7 Hananiah 82 18 8 Jonathan 71 14 9 Matthew 62 17 10 Manaen/Menahem 42 4 For women, we have a total of 328 occurrences (women's names are much less often recorded than men's), and figures for the 4 most popular names are thus: Mary/Mariamne 70 42 Salome 58 41 Shelamzion 24 19 Martha 20 17 You can see at once that all the names you're interested were extremely popular. 21% of Jewish women were called Mariamne (Mary). The chances of the people in the ossuaries being the Jesus and Mary Magdalene of the New Testament must be very small indeed.”

Fifth, there is the DNA showing that Mariamne and Jesus DNA residue do not match. Now with how many women in Judea would Jesus' DNA not match? Even women named Mary/Mariamne? This proves nothing. That a match would take place is a one in several thousand likelihood. This is like my asking, how many people in your town or city do you have a DNA match with? This evidence does not prove she is a wife. It simply says that A Jesus and A Mary are not biologically related. The questions one could raise include which male in the tomb is she attached to, if to any of them? In fact, the fact that only two boxes were tested means that we do not even know if this is a family tomb, since the two tested show no relationship. The DNA could prove the exact opposite of what is being

claimed. Sixth, to get Mariamne to match Mary Magdalene and not a host of any other Mary's, one has to appeal to an apocryphal Acts in a fourth century manuscript. Without that, there is not even a possibility of a connection. The Acts of Philip and the Gospel of Mary Magdalene to show that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene is old evidence that was already vetted in the DaVinci Code discussion (See my Breaking the DaVinci Code). In other words, we do not know Mary/Mariamne is Mary Magdalene, a very key point that has to be true for this claim to work. Seventh, if one pays close attention to the special when it airs over the weekend, one will see that when the subject of the connection is raised with the most well known of these experts, they all say the connection is NOT credible because the names are so common. These experts have known about this locale for decades. NONE of the most well known experts are actually cited as embracing the claim of the special. Surely they asked them this question about a specific connection, did they not? In other words, the silence on such a lack of endorsements for the figures brought in to corroborate certain details is deafening. Eighth, the remark about "Mara." Here are the words of Prof. Bauckham, "Mara' in this context does not mean Master. It is an abbreviated form of Martha, probably the ossuary contained two women called Mary and Martha (Mariamne and Mara)." Ninth, there are claims about an ossuary of Peter, even though there is a rich tradition that he died in Rome that has to be wrong for that claim to work. Finally, there are the statistics. To get to the high numbers, all the assumptions made above about the identifications have to be put into the numbers pot, including Matthew, a name simply called "consistent with the family." How? Where is the evidence for this? So what we have is a special, making a claim about an old finding, cherry-picking the evidence to hype it as more compelling than it actually is. It ALL has to fit in place to work. The statistics for that, given just what I have raised above, would be fun to calculate. Now let me say this about the special. There is much here about first century sites

and practices that is informative. The resource pages on the web site have some helpful information. The process of investigasting a site is nicely revealed here. It is the "frosting" of this hypothesis, full of assumptions, that is the key problem. That part of the show is like a slide show where each slide raises a question that has to be answered in a single way on each slide for the hypothesis to stand and all of the slides have to work in a particular way for the hypothesis to stand. There are just too many questions and holes for those claism to line up and work. When we watch the Oscars, the golden medallion is passed out for acting that is praise worthy. Movies are about stories that look real but are not. This special matches up with that depiction of reality. Compelling TV and dramatic, but in the end, complete historical fiction. Hopefully our times have not slid to the point where we can no longer tell the difference between Jerusalem and Hollywood.

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