

THE “JEWISH-CHRISTIAN” TOMB
FROM THE MOUNT OF OFFENCE
(BATN AL-HAWA’)
IN JERUSALEM RECONSIDERED

by

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SUMMARY

The so-called “Jewish-Christian” tomb investigated by Dr Thomas Chaplin and Charles Clermont-Ganneau in 1873 on the Mount of Offence, was in fact a typical Early Roman Jewish burial cave which was later reused in the Byzantine period for burial purposes as well.

SOMMAIRE

La tombe, dite « judéo-chrétienne », étudiée par Thomas Chaplin et Charles Clermont-Ganneau en 1873 sur le mont du Scandale, est en réalité typiquement un tombeau juif de l'époque romaine ancienne, réutilisé, toujours comme tombe, à la période byzantine.

In the summer of 1873, a rock-cut tomb containing a large number of inscribed ossuaries dating from the first century A.D. was discovered in the area of Batn al-Hawa' (Israel grid map ref. 1730 1310), or the so-called "Mount of Offence", to the south-east of the Old City of Jerusalem, close to the road leading to al-'Azariya (Bethany) (Fig. 1). The inscriptions on the ossuaries were subsequently published by Charles Clermont-Ganneau who suggested that they were evidence of the earliest Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem (1874: 9-10; 1899: 399, 404; cf. PEF Archives, WS/GAN/1). A single *crux immissa* carved on one of the ossuaries was seen to confirm this assertion.

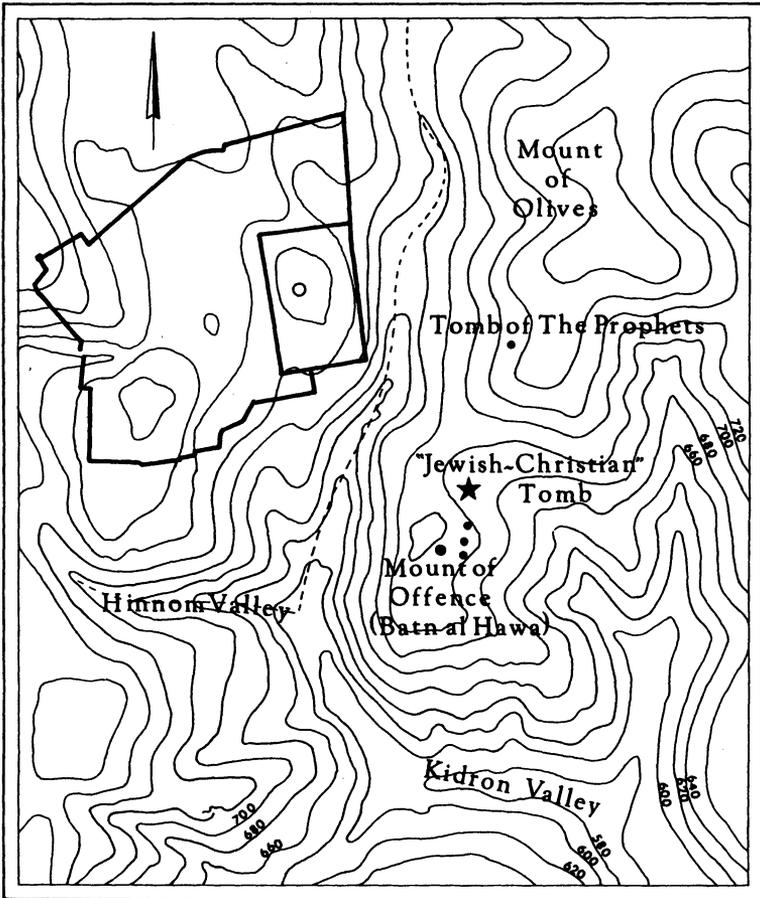


Fig. 1. - Location map showing the area of Batn al-Hawa and the tombs which have been found there.

This article re-examines the tomb and its contents in the light of a written account and original drawings made at the time of the discovery by Dr Thomas Chaplin, which are preserved in the document and map archives of the Palestine Exploration Fund. Chaplin's drawings of this tomb and another nearby are published here for the first time (Figs. 2-3). Clermont-Ganneau's views regarding the interpretation of the contents of this tomb as "Jewish-Christian" are reconsidered and shown to be incorrect. It is suggested that the tomb belonged to a Jewish family of the first century A.D. and that the well-carved cross visible on one of the ossuaries must be a later Byzantine addition and indicates a reuse of the tomb during that period.

Tomb 1

Chaplin was the first European to examine the tomb not long after it had been opened in July 1873. At that time he was the surgeon in charge of the Sanatorium of the London Jews Society located just north of the Old City of Jerusalem. Chaplin took a great interest in all matters antiquarian in Jerusalem and from the mid-1860s frequently assisted expedition members of the Palestine Exploration Fund with their archaeological work in the city. Plans of this tomb and another nearby (labelled N^{os} 1 and 2) were prepared by Chaplin and sent with a letter to the Fund's offices in London, where they were placed into the hands of Professor Edward H. Palmer (PEF Archives, PAL/25/4: letter dated 1 August 1873). A very brief notice on the discovery of the tombs was published by Chaplin that same year (1873: 155-156). However, Chaplin's plans and drawings of the inscriptions remained unpublished. Following Palmer's death, Charles Wilson wrote a letter in November 1893 to Walter Besant, Secretary of the Fund, urging him to have Chaplin's drawings (these and others) published (PEF Archives, PAL/23). A similar suggestion was made two years later by W. Wright to Besant's successor, George Armstrong, but to no avail (PEF Archives, PAL/26/7). Although Chaplin did not provide the plans with scales, their approximate measurements have been worked out using as a yardstick the loculi (*kokhim*) which are generally no more than two metres in length.

The tomb with the ossuaries was entered from the east (Fig. 2:1) and had a triple-recessed entrance which Chaplin depicted in a rough sketch but not on the plan. It was cut into the soft *ka'akuli* limestone and had a rectangular central burial chamber (3.7 × 2.8 m) with a central standing pit (1 × 0.7 m) which Chaplin believed descended to a lower chamber (Fig. 2:2). On Chaplin's plan, the standing pit is shown

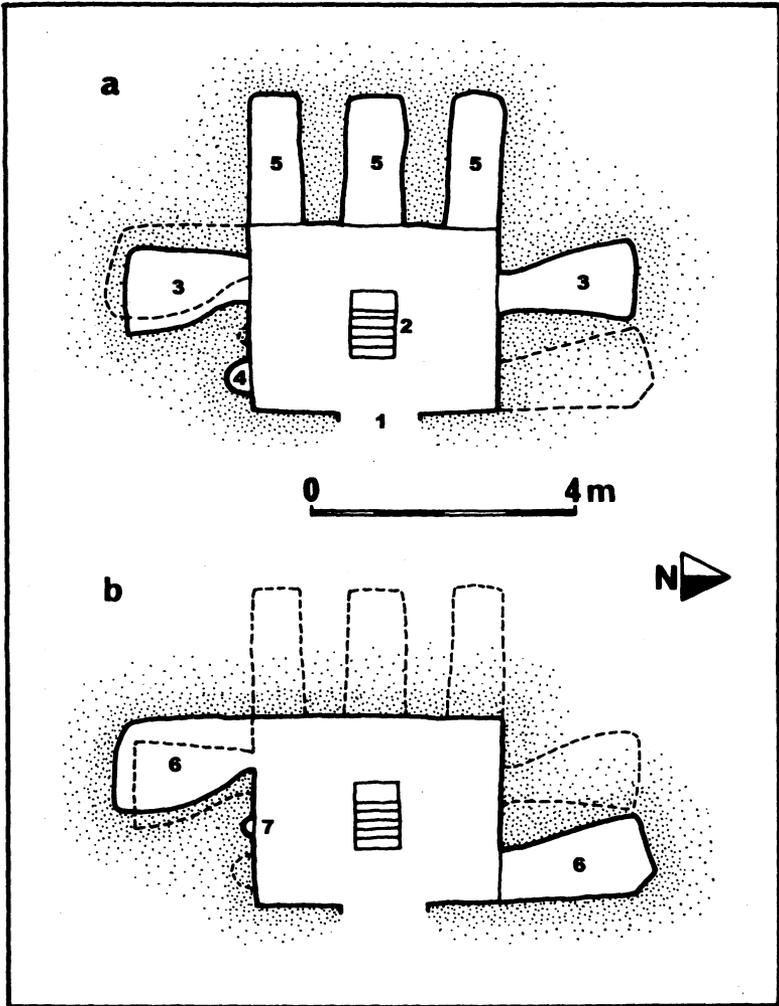


Fig. 2. - Plan of Tomb 1 (after Chaplin in PEF Archives, PAL/25/4).

with a flight of steps but in his description, written in the margin of the drawing, he wrote that "whether stairs have been cut (here) is not ascertained." Loculi and other recesses were found cut into the walls of the cave on two levels. Three loculi (2×0.8 m) were located in the west wall and these contained primary burials *in situ* and a number of ossuaries. The loculi in the north and south walls (2×1.2 m) differ in shape from those in the west wall and were cut at two different levels

(Fig. 2:3, 6). These widen considerably from the entrances towards the back walls, and may have been used solely as repositories for secondary burials. Alternatively, they may have been cut during the later Byzantine reuse (see below) of the tomb. Chaplin reports that all four cavities contained human bones and ossuaries, but does not mention primary burials having been found there. In the south-eastern corner of the chamber were two small recesses on two levels (Fig. 2:4, 7). The upper one (0.40 m in diameter) is described on the plan as a "circular hole with bones and a slab over the entrance." The lower recess (0.20 m in diameter) also contained some bones. It is unclear whether these recesses were intended to be used for bone-collecting purposes. Their small size suggests that they may originally have been cut as niches for lamps but were later adapted as bone-collecting recesses, perhaps during the Byzantine reuse of the cave.

Tomb 2

Another burial cave was found in the near vicinity of the first and it too was mapped by Chaplin (Fig. 3). It was entered from the south and had a central burial chamber (4.5 × 4.2 m) with three loculi on a single level in each of its three walls. Each loculus measured approximately 2 × 0.6 m. In the wall of one of the loculi was a semi-circular recess (0.30 × 0.15 m) which Chaplin indicates contained human bones (Fig. 3:4). Chaplin says little more about this chamber except that in the corner of the same loculus was a small passage entering it "like a canal (*sic*) running up 8 inches (= 20 cm)". No mention is made of any ossuaries having been found in this tomb.

Various other tombs dating from the Early Roman period are known in the vicinity of the tombs visited by Chaplin and Clermont-Ganneau, and these include a monumental tomb with loculi arranged on two levels (Vincent 1904: 430, 590-591), and a single-chamber tomb with loculi containing twelve ossuaries (Kloner 1980:31).

The Finds

The ossuaries and other finds from the first tomb were only shown to Clermont-Ganneau by the land owner three months after they had been discovered. Clermont-Ganneau wrote that "it is deplorable that this interesting family tomb should have been opened by unintelligent and rude hands, which have carried away the sarcophagi (i.e. ossuaries) without taking any kind of precautions, mixing up the lids, breaking the bones and the vases of terra-cotta." (1874: 10). According to Clermont-

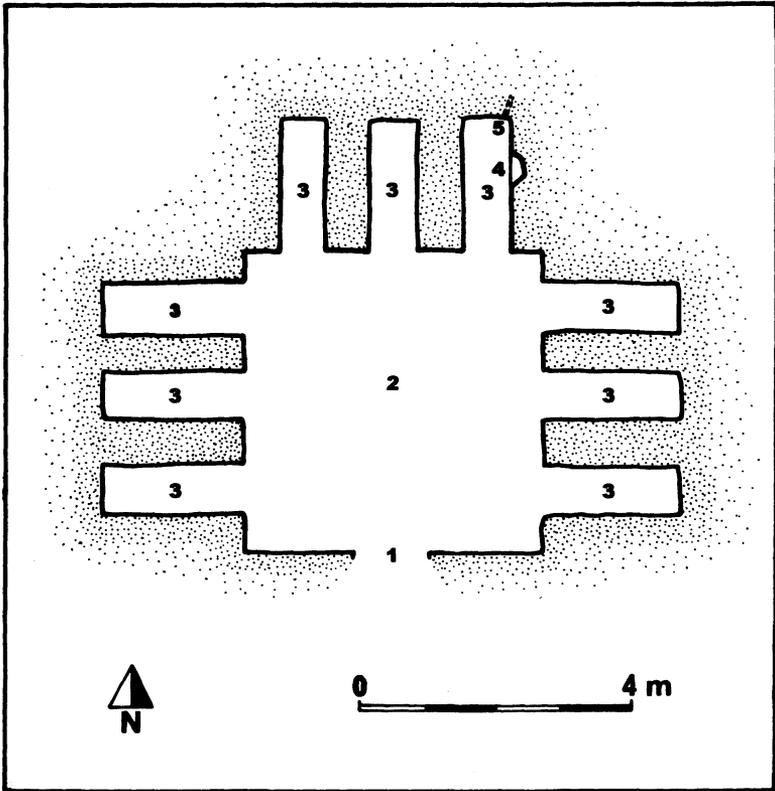


Fig. 3. – Plan of Tomb 2 (after Chaplin in PEF Archives, PAL/25/4).

Ganneau, the ossuaries were originally found piled one on top of the other in “a simple rock-hewn chamber without loculi” (1899:381; cf. Kloner 1980: 28-29). This description of the tomb is inconsistent with Chaplin’s plan of the tomb, and it would appear that Clermont-Ganneau was misled concerning the true findspot by the local land-owner. The chamber mentioned by Clermont-Ganneau was probably an additional tomb chamber where the land-owner temporarily stored the ossuaries before they were sold. Clermont-Ganneau mentioned picking up some pieces of broken ossuaries with inscriptions from inside this cave. Despite the differences between the descriptions of the tomb presented by Chaplin and Clermont-Ganneau, the inscriptions on the ossuaries do match up indicating that we are undoubtedly dealing with the same assemblage. Chaplin’s description of the tomb is clearly the

more reliable of the two accounts, since he visited the site at the time of the discovery and reported examining the ossuaries *in situ*.

Understandably, very few artefacts were reported from these tombs. Chaplin made drawings of two objects but without specifying where they were found: a typical Herodian type lamp of the first century A.D. (Fig. 4:1) and a piriform juglet with a rounded base and missing rim and handle (Fig. 4:2). Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 382) reported "vases

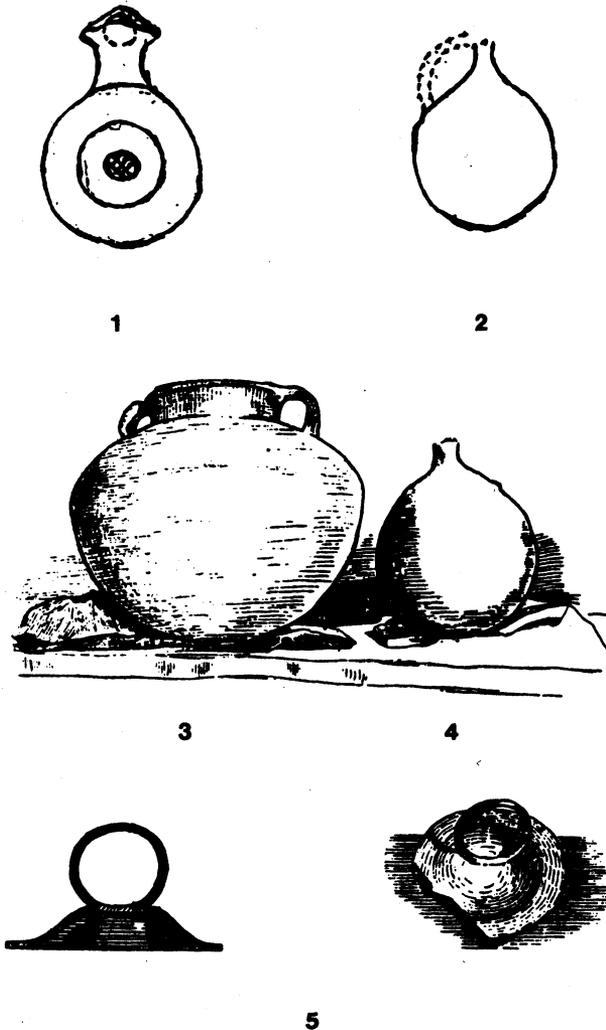


Fig. 4. - The finds (1-2 after Chaplin in PEF Archives, PAL/25/4; 3-5 after Clermont-Ganneau 1899)

and vials of terra-cotta" in the ossuaries, and three copper or bronze objects, 4 cm in diameter and much oxidised, which are to be identified as small cymbals (Bayer 1963, 8: 26-28) (Fig. 4:5). Similar metal objects are known from a number of burial assemblages dating from the Byzantine period, including a tomb from Gezer (Macalister 1912, III, Pl. 59:10) and tombs from Luzit (Avni and Dahari 1990: 311). Importantly, Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 383) notes that the cymbals were discovered *within* one of the ossuaries and this perhaps suggests the later reuse of this Jewish ossuary during the Byzantine period. Clermont-Ganneau illustrated two ceramic objects, the first a cooking pot (Fig. 4:3) which is typical of the first century A.D., and the second (Fig. 4:4) a piriform juglet which may have been the same as the one drawn by Chaplin. Except for the bronze objects, which most likely date from the Byzantine period, artefacts such as these are frequently found in burial caves of the Early Roman period around Jerusalem (cf. Kloner 1980, Pls. 30-36).

The Ossuaries

Chaplin reported that the first tomb contained more than 20 plain and decorated ossuaries made of soft limestone with flat and raised lids (1873: 155). Bones were found in these ossuaries and Chaplin mentioned that they disintegrated on being touched. The bones in one of the ossuaries (N^o 18, below) in Chaplin's words "stank and had to be thrown away". Clermont-Ganneau examined the ossuaries, which he reports as some 30 in number, not long after his arrival in Jerusalem early in November 1873 (1899: 381). He tried to buy the ossuaries from the land-owner but had to desist because of the exorbitant financial demands which were made. They were eventually dispersed and passed into different hands. Clermont-Ganneau published drawings of the main types of ossuaries from the tomb (1899: 383-385). They were all roughly 50 cm in length with flat bottoms or with short stub-like feet in the lower corners. Many of them were decorated with rosette designs, and several of them still retained traces of red paint. The lids were either flat, triangular or semi-circular in section. Detailed drawings of the decorations on the ossuaries were not published by Clermont-Ganneau, except for one ossuary with rosettes carved within two circles which was a typical decoration on Jewish ossuaries from the Early Roman period (Clermont-Ganneau 1899: 397-398). Between the two circles was an incised depiction of a tree branch or a palm tree, a motif which is paralleled on an ossuary from Mount Scopus (Rahmani 1994b:

201, N. 573). Clermont-Ganneau's suggestion that this motif represents a seven-branched *menorah* is unlikely.

The Inscriptions

Copies of the inscriptions appearing on thirteen of the ossuaries and their lids were made by Chaplin and sent to Palmer in London in 1873 (PEF Archives, PAL/25/3). Chaplin recognised that some of the inscriptions were written in Greek and Hebrew characters but did not attempt to translate them. Clermont-Ganneau made squeezes of the inscriptions and of some of the ornamented surfaces of the ossuaries. He reported that the inscriptions appeared mainly on the sides and ends of the ossuaries, but sometimes also on their lids. Some were painted or traced with carbon, but most of them had been incised with a sharp pointed instrument. Clermont-Ganneau also noted rough scratched crosses on some of the ossuaries and interpreted these as being of a Christian significance. Recent scholarship, however, has shown that such cross-like signs, as well as others, were simply markers made by the stone-working craftsmen while fitting the ossuaries with their lids (Rahmani 1994a, 196).

Chaplin copied nineteen of the inscriptions and most of these are included among those published by Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 386-412; cf. PEF Archives, WS/GAN/31). However, some of the details which appear in Chaplin's drawings are quite useful in clarifying problematic readings (especially those with Hebrew letters). Furthermore, two of the inscriptions (N^{os} 4 and 14, below) were not published at all by Clermont-Ganneau.

(1) A Greek name (Μοσχας) incised into the side of an ossuary. It was published by Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 410, N^o 24).

(2) A Jewish name (מרתא בת פצחי) *mrt' bt pshy* incised into the side of an ossuary. It was published by Clermont-Ganneau (1899:395, N^o 7). Chaplin's drawing helps confirm that the last character of the third word is a *yod*; Clermont-Ganneau was uncertain about this (1899: 396).

(3) Cut into the short end of the above ossuary (N^o 2) was a wavy mark (Fig. 5:a) similar to a mark on a triangular-shaped lid published by Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 412, N^o 30b).

(4) A Jewish name (יהודה בר חנניה) *yhudh br hnnyh* painted on one of the long sides of an ossuary (Fig. 5:b). This inscription was not published by Clermont-Ganneau.

(5) An additional identical Jewish name (יהודה בר חנניה) *yhudh br hnnyh* painted on the other long side of the above ossuary (N^o 4)

a



b

דוד ה בר חתיה

c

ידועה בר חתיה

d

זאעל

e

וכ לתא
חנשה

(Fig. 5:c). Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 407-408, N° 19) published this inscription but found it difficult to read. Chaplin's drawing confirms Clermont-Ganneau's tentative reading of this inscription.

(6) A Jewish name (שמל) *šmʿl* incised into the side of an ossuary (Fig. 5:d). Chaplin's drawing is not very helpful in clarifying the identity of the first and third characters of the name. Clermont-Ganneau was unable to propose a reading for this inscription (1899: 405-406, N° 14; cf. Puech 1983: 501, Fig. 2:3b; 522, Fig. 6:31a).

(7) Scratched on to the other side of the above ossuary (N° 6) are two Jewish names. Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 405, N° 13) published this inscription but found it difficult to read. Chaplin's drawing does not help in elucidating the names in this inscription.

(8) A Jewish name (שלום אשה יהודה) *šlwm ʿšt yhwdh* incised into a flat ossuary lid (Fig. 6). Chaplin's drawing helps to clarify some of the characters which were unclear in Clermont-Ganneau's drawing, such as the *aleph* and the *taw* of the second word and the *waw* of the third word (1899: 400, N° 9).



Fig. 6. – Inscription from ossuary in Tomb 1 (after Chaplin in PEF Archives, PAL/25/3).

(9) A Jewish name (יהודה) *yhwdh* incised on the side of the lid of the ossuary above (N° 8). Below the inscription is a cross-like mark. Chaplin's drawing confirms Clermont-Ganneau's reading (1899, 397, N° 8).

(10) A Greek name (Μαριαδος), incised into the flat lid of an ossuary. It was published by Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 410, N° 26).

(11) A Greek name (Μαριαδος), incised into the short end of an ossuary. A similar name was found incised into the flat lid of an ossuary (see N^o 10, above). It was published by Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 410, N^o 25).

(12) A Greek name (Κυρθαζ), incised into the side of an ossuary. According to Chaplin the lid for this ossuary is N^o 10 (see above), however the latter is more likely to have been the lid for No 11 (see above). It was published by Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 411, N^o 27).

(13) A Jewish name (שְׁלֹמֹסֶן) *šlmsyn* painted on the side of a small ossuary. Chaplin's drawing suggests Clermont-Ganneau's reading of *šlmsywn* is incorrect (1899: 408, N^o 20).

(14) Two Jewish names (מרת) *mrt'* (חַנְיָה) *hnyh* painted in two lines one above the other on the long side of an ossuary (Fig. 5:e). Both names appear on other ossuaries from this tomb (see N^{os} 2, 4, and 5, above). This inscription was not published by Clermont-Ganneau.

(15) A Jewish name (קרקס) *qrqs* (perhaps a nickname) incised into the short end of an exceedingly small ossuary (presumably for the bones of a child). This inscription was published by Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 406, N^o 15).

(16) A Jewish name incised into the short end of an ossuary. Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 405, N^o 12) read this name as (פדא) *pd'* but the first and second letters appear to be a *mem* followed by a *resh* (Fig. 7:a). Hence, it should perhaps be read as (מרא) *mr'* which was an accepted abbreviated form for the name "Martha" (מרת). A similar inscription appears on the lid of an ossuary from Mount Scopus (Rahmani 1994b: 181-182, N. 468), with the full name "Martha" on the ossuary itself. Hence, one is clearly an abbreviated form of the other. A shortened version of this name is similarly also known in Greek (Μάρρα) (Rahmani 1994b: 222, N. 701; 258, N. 868).

(17) A Jewish name (יהודה) *yhwdh* incised into the long side of an ossuary, with a cross-like mark beneath it (Fig. 7:b). Chaplin's drawing helps to clarify the fourth character in the name as a *daleth*. The inscription was published by Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 403, N^o 11).

(18) A Greek name (Ἡδῆα) deeply carved in lapidary fashion into the long side of an ossuary. It was published by Clermont-Ganneau (1899: 411, N^o 28).

(19) Scratched into the rim of the above ossuary (N^o 18), according to Chaplin (contrary to Clermont-Ganneau 1899: 412, N^o 30a), were three unclear (perhaps Greek) characters.

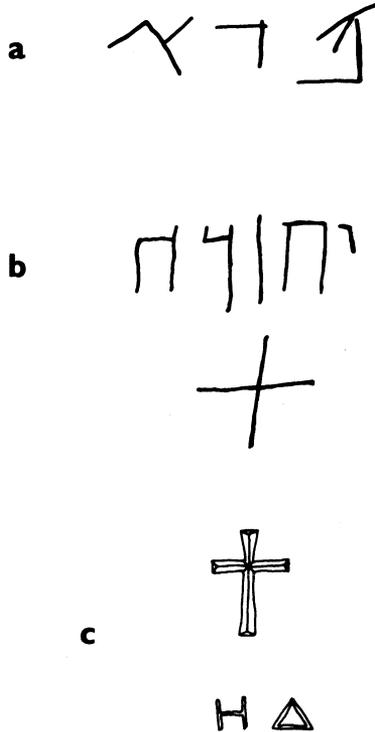


Fig. 7. – Inscriptions from ossuaries in Tomb 1 (a-b after Chaplin in PEF Archives, PAL/25/3; c after Clermont-Ganneau 1899: 211, N° 29).

The *crux immissa* carving

According to Clermont-Ganneau one of the ossuaries had two Greek letters (ΗΔ) deeply carved in lapidary fashion (very different from the other Greek ossuary inscriptions) and a small *crux immissa* incised above it on one of the long sides (1899: 411, N° 29) (Fig. 7:c). Clermont-Ganneau suggested that these letters represent an abbreviation of the word or name (ΗΔΗΑ) which appears on another ossuary (see above, N° 18). The cross, which is clearly of Christian type (Fig. 7:c), is not at all like the lightly-scratched cross-like marks which sometimes appear on ossuaries. Chaplin, who was the first to examine the ossuaries, did not make a drawing of the incised cross while making copies of the inscriptions from the tomb. Indeed, in the short notice published on the discovery of the tomb

Chaplin specifically remarked on the "absence of Christian emblems" on the ossuaries (1873, 156). However, since Chaplin's record of the inscriptions from the tomb was not in any way exhaustive we may assume that he simply overlooked the drawing of the cross. It is unlikely to have been a forgery since Clermont-Ganneau would have noticed the lack of patina on the carving of the cross. Indeed, he was very much aware of forgeries and later even wrote a book on the subject (1885).

Conclusions

Clermont-Ganneau (1874: 9-10) in publishing most of the finds from the burial cave with the ossuaries (Tomb 1), supposed that it had belonged to members of the early Jewish-Christian community of Jerusalem, a suggestion which was accepted by a number of scholars (Conder 1896: 259-260; Mancini 1970: 13-18) and dismissed by others (Taylor 1993: 5; for additional bibliography, see Bieberstein and Bloedhorn 1994: 266). However, there is nothing in the contents of the tomb nor in the inscriptions on the ossuaries to suggest that it was anything but a typical Jewish family tomb of the first century A.D. similar to many others found in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

The appearance of a stylized Christian cross on one of the ossuaries, suggests that some of the Jewish ossuaries within this Early Roman tomb were reused by Christians during the Byzantine period (cf. Kane 1971: 108; Taylor 1993: 9). This is also supported by the discovery of bronze cymbals within one of the ossuaries, which are normally found in Byzantine burials in Palestine and not in Jewish burials. The finds from this tomb further support the interesting phenomenon of Jewish tombs in Jerusalem from the Early Roman period being reused in the late Roman and Byzantine periods (Avni 1993). Consequently, the interpretation put forward by Clermont-Ganneau which regards these finds as proof of the existence of Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem during the first century A.D., now seems highly unlikely.

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