

THE EARLIEST RECORDS OF CHRISTIANITY

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PLATES LXXVIII–LXXXVIII

AT the beginning of September 1945 we were informed by the Department of Antiquities of the Government of Palestine that during building operations on ground belonging to Mr. A. David Kiraz, in the vicinity of the Talpioth suburb of Jerusalem (see fig. 1), a Jewish chamber tomb had been discovered containing a number of ossuaries. The Department proposed that the Museum of Jewish Antiquities of the Hebrew University excavate the tomb and examine its contents. The excavation was carried out by us in four days, from the 10th to the 13th of September. Mr. N. Avigad of our Museum Staff assisted the writer in the supervision of the work and in the preparation of the present report and the plans and drawings accompanying it.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TOMB

(See figs. 2–3, pl. LXXVIII)

The plan of the tomb is shown in fig. 2, and cross-section drawings of it in fig. 3.

The tomb is approached through a courtyard or dromos cut out of the living rock, which is from 2.30 to 2.80 meters wide. In the eastern part of the courtyard, which we cleared down to bed-rock, the floor was some 2.30 m. below the level of the surrounding rock. The natural rock surface slopes down toward the west and we may therefore assume that only a few steps were needed to enter the courtyard. This part could, however, not be cleared owing to the height of the accumulated building debris on this spot.

The entrance to the tomb chamber proper is situated on the southern side of the courtyard, close to its eastern corner. In front of the entrance was found a rectangular stone block, 1.00 by 0.82 m., and 0.24 m. thick, which had originally blocked the entrance. Such stones usually consist of a thick rectangular slab with a projection on one side intended to fit into the opening of the entrance and to close it. The stone just described still had a small part of such a projection preserved.

An oblong frame 1.18 m. high, 0.94 m. wide and 0.30 m. deep was cut around the entrance, its purpose being to receive the blocking stone. The entrance proper is 0.58 m. wide, 0.64 m. high and 0.62 m. deep.

The entrance leads into a burial chamber, nearly square in plan, its sides measuring from 3.36–3.42 m. in length; the height of the chamber is 1.14 m. Its floor is 0.30 m. below the level of the courtyard. The floor of the chamber in front of the entrance contains a rectangular pit, 2.15 m. long, 1.14 m. wide and 0.70–0.80 m. deep. Such pits are often found in burial chambers, their purpose being to allow head-room within the chamber, without the labor which would have been involved in cutting the whole floor area to the required depth. Besides, the deceased might be placed on the benches which were left on the three sides around the pit before they were buried inside the loculi. Ossuaries were sometimes placed on the benches. See fig. 4.

In some cases a step was cut into the rock to facilitate the descent from the courtyard into the cave proper. In the tomb in question a loose stone 0.25 m. high was placed in front of the entrance for this purpose.

Into the walls of the burial chamber were cut five loculi (*kōkhim*), two each in the southern

and eastern walls respectively, and one in the western wall. They vary between 2.20 and 2.40 m. in length and 0.47 and 0.50 m. in width, except for one in the southern wall which is 0.84 m. wide; they are all 0.73 m. high. Their floors are 0.08 m. above the benches. The openings of the loculi are roughly rectangular in shape. An additional loculus was cut under the southern bench, opening from the wall of the pit; it is 1.25 m. long, 0.46 m. wide, and 0.74 m. high.

The single loculus cut in the western wall of the chamber differs from all the others in being divided into two stories by means of a number of stone slabs. As may be seen in section CD (fig. 3), the original loculus was deepened to a total depth of 1.65 m., and its lower part was extended 0.45 m. into the area of the bench. Grooves were cut on both sides of the loculus at the level of the floor and seven stone slabs were inserted in them; they are 0.37–0.45 m. wide and 0.13 m. thick. These slabs served as floor for the upper loculus and as roof for the lower one. All the slabs except the second were found *in situ*.

The openings of the loculi were closed with flat stone slabs, which were found during the excavation in the earth which filled the cave. Some of these are shown in pl. LXXVIII. A small hollow was cut in the floor of the bench close to the northwestern corner of the cave, measuring 0.84 by 0.33 m. and 0.50 m. deep. This hollow contained human bones and was covered with thin stone slabs, one of which was found *in situ*.

In the eastern wall of the courtyard there was a cutting where another burial chamber had been started. (See the plan, fig. 2.) The entrance, 0.44 by 0.70 m., was surrounded by a counter-sunk frame measuring 1.58 by 0.93 m. and executed in exactly the same way as the entrance to the main chamber, described above. The rock was cut out for a distance of 1.60 m. from

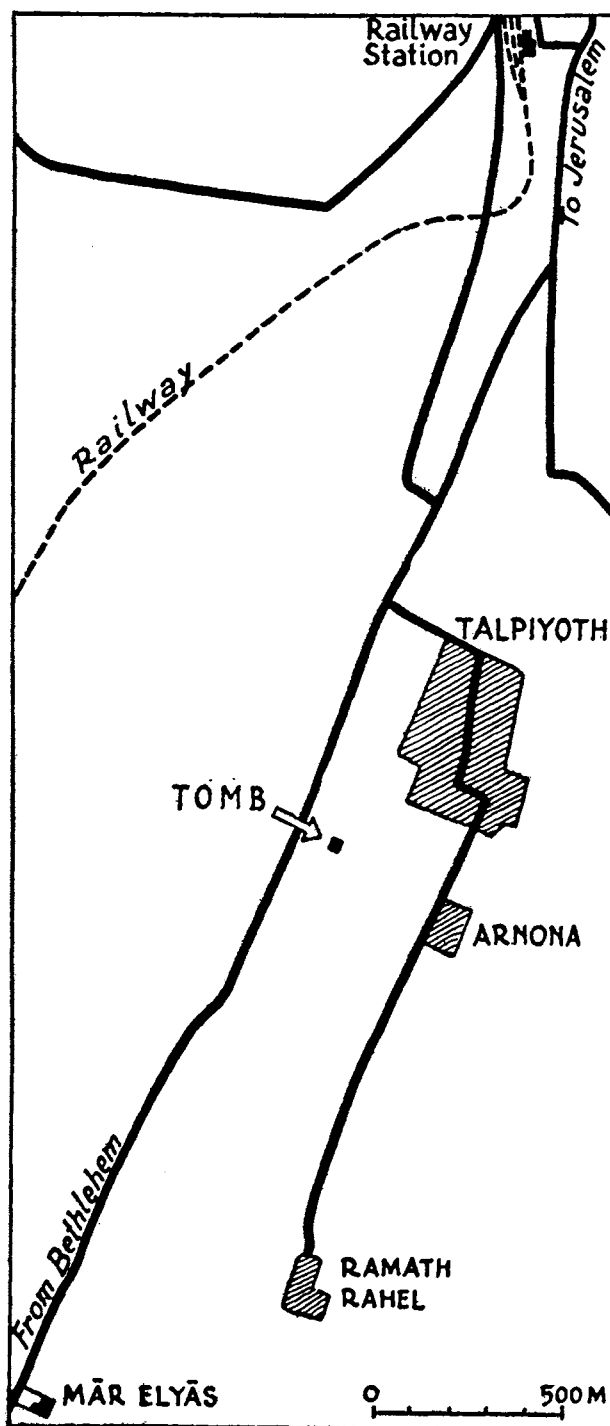


FIG. 1. MAP OF THE TALPIYOTH SUBURB OF JERUSALEM, SHOWING THE POSITION OF THE TOMB

the inner end of the entrance; the limits of the usual pit were outlined in the floor and within these limits the rock was deepened to a depth of about 0.45 m.; the benches on both sides were started but left unfinished.

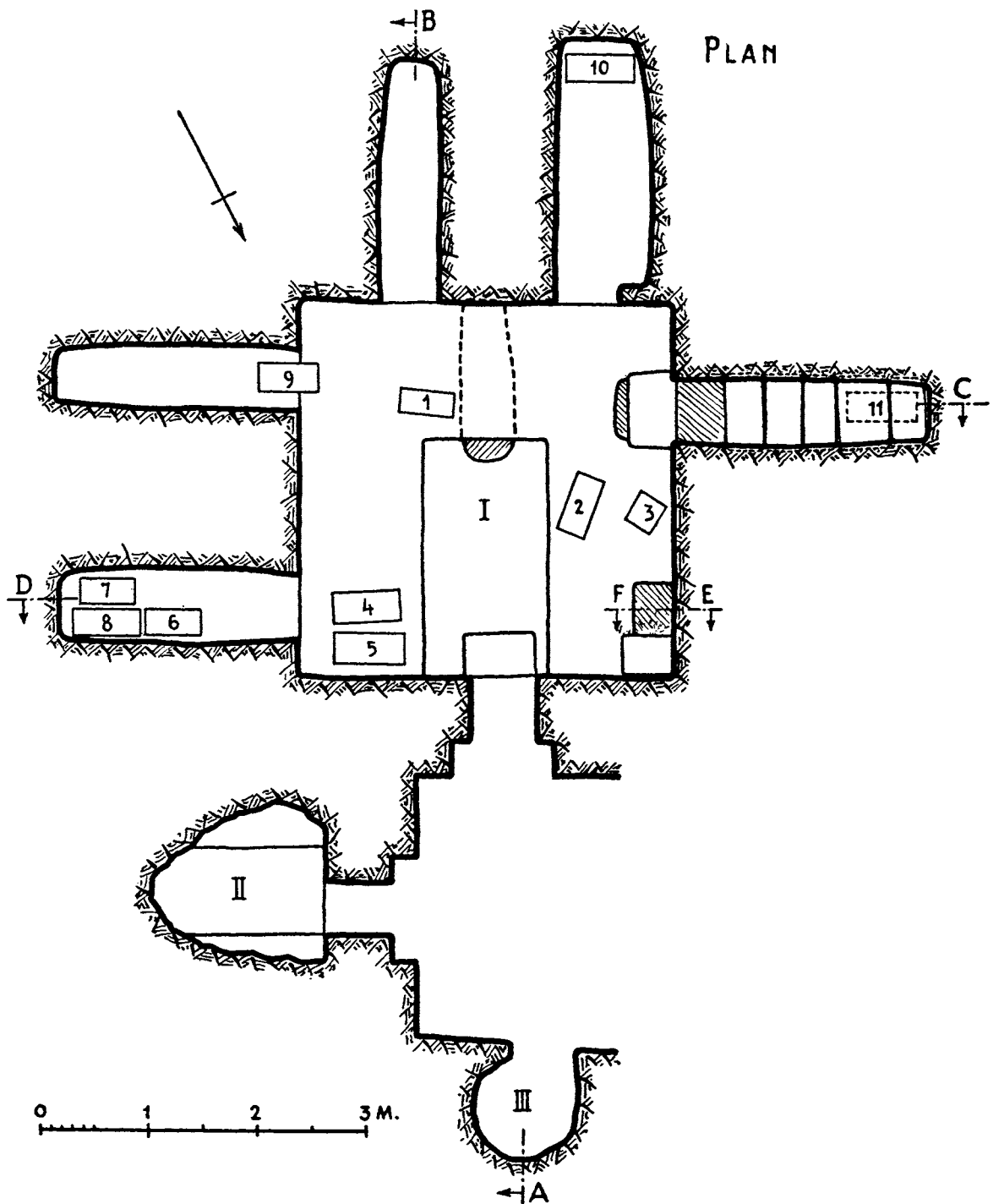


FIG. 2. PLAN OF THE TOMB.

In the northern wall of the courtyard an unfinished roughly vaulted cutting was found, measuring 1.10 by 0.88 m., and 0.76 m. high. It contained only a few potsherds.

The rock in which the tomb was cut consists of soft *nāri* limestone and as a result the workmanship lacks precision. The walls are not smooth, the lines are not straight and the edges are not sharp. The ceiling of the burial chamber was damaged by blasting during recent building operations. There was clear evidence that the tomb was entered once and left open; masses of earth penetrated through the opening into the burial chamber and filled it up to about two-thirds of its height.

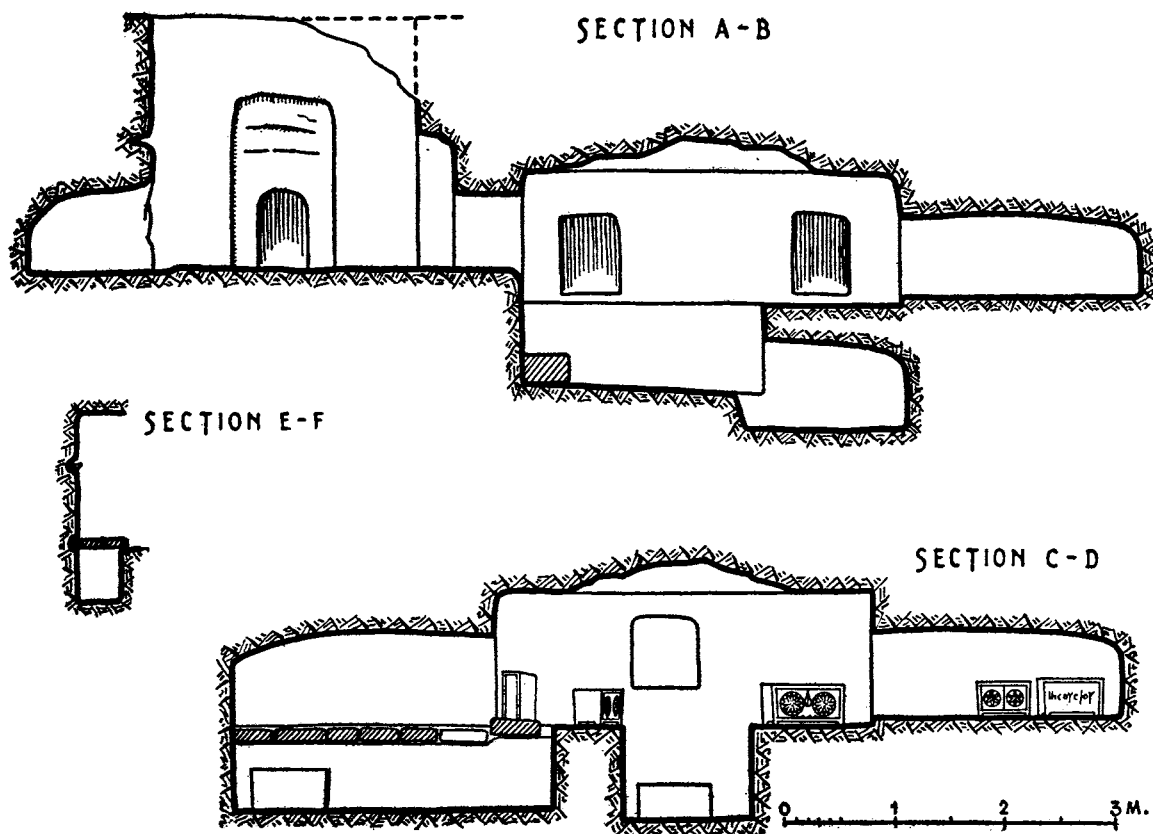


FIG. 3. CROSS SECTIONS OF THE TOMB.

DESCRIPTION OF THE OSSUARIES

All the ossuaries found are made of local limestone called *ka'kūla*. Ossuaries nos. 1-11 were taken out by ourselves during the clearance of the tomb and their position when found is indicated on the plan. Nos. 12-14 were taken out by the workmen before notice was given to the Department of Antiquities.

1. Plain ossuary with flat lid, 0.475 m. long, 0.235 m. wide, and 0.26 m. high. A graffito in square Hebrew letters is scratched on one of the long sides, close to the upper edge (see below, inscription no. 1).

2. Decorated ossuary covered with red paint, 0.52-0.54 m. long, 0.26 m. wide and 0.34 m. high; resting on four small legs. The front side is bordered by double zigzag bands and is

divided by a single vertical zigzag band into two square panels. In each of these panels is engraved a six-pointed rosette surrounded by an incised circle. The four corners of each panel and the spaces between the leaves and the rosettes are filled with small incised circles. This ossuary was found broken and no illustration of it is given here. We shall, however, meet its designs again on some of the following ossuaries.

3. Plain ossuary with flat lid, 0.445 m. long, 0.275 m. wide and 0.305 m. high. Not illustrated.

4. Decorated ossuary covered with yellow paint, 0.555–0.615 m. long, 0.28–0.30 m. wide and 0.38 m. high; resting on four small legs (pl. LXXIX, A). The front is bordered with zigzag bands. Two twelve-pointed rosettes, enclosed within serrated circles which meet at the center, form the principal decoration. A deeply carved leaf, shaped like a spearhead, issues from between the circles and reaches to the upper border. Below the circles runs a row of triangular carvings resting on the middle of the lower border. There seems to be some connection between the upper and lower carvings, as they occur together on some other ossuaries found in this cave and elsewhere (cf. nos. 9 and 13 of this group and another ossuary, now in the Palestine Archaeological Museum, Jerusalem).

On the rear of the ossuary, approximately in its middle, is incised an inscription in Hebrew letters (see below, inscription no. 2).

5. Decorated ossuary with flat lid, 0.67 m. long, 0.29 m. wide and 0.36 m. high; resting on four legs (pl. LXXIX, B). Both long sides are framed by a simple double line. Each field is decorated with two small six-pointed rosettes in its upper part. The petals of the rosettes have raised ribs and are inscribed within a circle consisting of a narrow zigzag band.

A noteworthy feature in the decoration of this ossuary is that two of its sides are adorned with rosettes instead of only one, as is usually the case. Furthermore, the decoration is confined to a small part of each field and the remainder is left plain. On some other ossuaries decorated with similar small rosettes even all four sides are adorned with rosettes.

6. Decorated ossuary, painted red, with flat lid, 0.48–0.50 m. long, 0.25 m. wide and 0.305 m. high; it rests on four somewhat broad and flat legs (pl. LXXIX, C). The front side shows the most typical kind of ornamentation occurring on ossuaries. The entire field is framed and divided into two square panels by horizontal and vertical double and single zigzag bands; each of the two panels contains a six-pointed carved rosette encircled by a similar band. The intervening spaces between the carved petals of the rosettes contain tendril-like incisions, issuing from the centers of the rosettes.

7. Decorated ossuary with flat lid, 0.47–0.50 m. long, 0.23–0.24 m. wide and 0.29 m. high; it rests on four small legs (pl. LXXX, A). The front side is bordered by a double frame. The outer, broader, frame is decorated with incised flutings and small squares in its four corners. The inner, narrower, frame is intersected at intervals by double lines. The field enclosed by the inner frame is divided into three panels by two vertical free-standing stripes. The outer panels contain rosettes; the inner one is plain. Such a tripartite division of the field occurs on other ossuaries discovered in various tombs around Jerusalem. The decoration of some of these is almost identical with ours; others have an added element in the central panel, such as a gate, a building, or a shrine. We may assume that all these ossuaries were products of the same workshop.

The rear of the ossuary bears a Greek inscription in a single line, drawn with charcoal (see below, inscription no. 3).

8. Plain ossuary with flat lid, 0.61–0.63 m. long, 0.265 m. wide, and 0.32 m. high, resting on four small legs (pl. LXXXI). The center of each of the four sides of the ossuary contains a large cross drawn in charcoal. The crosses are not very carefully executed: in one instance the bars are of equal length, while others are of irregular length. In parts of them the colour has faded but the faint outlines are still visible. In the middle of the flat lid a Greek inscription is incised in a single line (see below, inscription no. 4).

9. Decorated ossuary with flat lid, 0.53–0.565 m. long, 0.29 m. wide, 0.35 m. high, resting on four small legs (pl. LXXXII, A). The ossuary is covered with yellow paint and its decoration is very similar to that of ossuary 4. Here, however, the rosettes are composed of only six petals each and the circles do not meet. The spearhead-like leaf is broader at the bottom, filling the space between the rosettes; the lower triangular carvings are only three in number.

10. Decorated ossuary with gabled lid, somewhat rounded on top, 0.59–0.63 m. long, 0.25–0.29 m. wide and 0.30 m. high; it rests on four small legs (pl. LXXXII). The lid is 0.08 m. high. The front is bordered by single bands of zigzag carvings and is divided by a narrow decorated stripe into two square panels. Each of these panels contains an inner frame formed by a double line, in which a six-pointed rosette is engraved, inscribed within several concentric circles. The space around the square frame is filled with chains of interlocking semicircles. The central stripe is very elaborately executed: intersecting diagonal lines divide the space into lozenges and triangles. The three lozenges are filled by button-like roundels; the three upper and the three lower triangles contain free-standing half-rosettes, whereas hollow semicircles are carved in the four central ones.

A small cross is incised on the top of one of the short sides of the ossuary. A similar cross may be seen on one narrow side of the gabled lid in pl. LXXXII, C. These signs are undoubtedly intended to mark the proper position of the lid on the ossuary. Masons' marks of this general type are a rather common feature on ossuaries. Three Hebrew letters are scratched on the other short side of the ossuary (see below, inscription no. 5).

11. Plain ossuary with flat lid, 0.61–0.65 m. long, 0.305 m. wide and 0.355 cm. high. Not illustrated.

12. Decorated ossuary with gabled lid, 0.625–0.635 m. long, 0.28–0.305 m. wide, and 0.33 m. high, resting on four small legs (pl. LXXXIII, A). The lid is 0.14 m. high. The front is framed by a single zigzag band; two similar bands divide the field into three panels, a narrow one in the center and nearly square ones on either side of it. The two rosettes filling the lateral panels are treated differently than usual. Their seven petals do not meet at the center but are placed around concentric rings. Small roundels are distributed between the petals and in the corners of the square panels. The narrow middle panel contains semicircles running along its sides, some filled with zigzags, and three roundels along the axis.

13. Decorated ossuary with saddle-shaped lid, 0.395–0.45 m. long, 0.225–0.245 m. wide and 0.295 m. high; it rests on four small legs (pl. LXXXIII, B). The height of the lid is 0.125 m. The ornamentation of the front side is similar to that of ossuary 4. The field is framed by a double zigzag line. Some details are not completed, as shown by the execution of the spearhead motif and by the fact that the row of triangles below the rosettes is missing, although two small vertical incised lines show that a decoration similar to that of ossuaries 4 or 9 was intended.

14. Decorated ossuary, 0.47–0.54 m. long, 0.21–0.24 m. wide, and 0.275 m. high; lid miss-

ing (pl. LXXXIII, C). The zigzag band bordering the front side is carved in a slightly different way than usual. The two six-pointed rosettes decorating it are separated by a panel of parallel, deeply engraved semicircles. It is difficult to guess what was meant by this rudely drawn design, possibly a highly stylized plant.

THE INSCRIPTIONS

1. A graffito in a single line is scratched on one of the long sides of ossuary no. 1, close to its top. Since the surface is roughly worked and shows many scratches, and since the graffito is not deeply incised, it is rather difficult to make out the letters, especially toward the end of the line. Pl. LXXXIV, A shows a photograph of the graffito; pl. LXXXIV, B is a photograph in which the letters have been retouched in accordance with the proposed reading; and fig. 4 is a facsimile of the inscription as I propose to read it.

The first part of the graffito clearly reads שמעון (Simeon). The script is of the character usually found on inscriptions on ossuaries. Special attention should be drawn to the form of the second letter, which in later periods was used solely at the end of the words, *mem finale*. In our period this final *mem* was used in the beginning or in the middle of the word as well.

Following the name Simeon are two letters which are clear; they read בר. Then follow several letters of which the last is undoubtedly an א (aleph). The only difficulty lies in the interpretation of the intervening letters. After several unsuccessful attempts I finally made up my mind to read them as the two letters סב. The proposed reading of the whole graffito is therefore:

שמעון ברסבא

Simeon Barsaba.

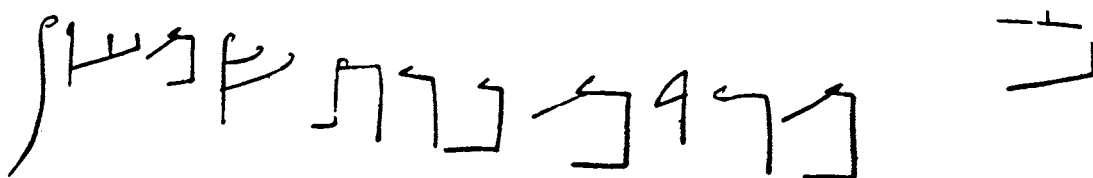


FACSIMILE DRAWING OF INSCRIPTION NO. 1, TRANSLATED: *Simeon Barsaba*.

2. Graffito in one line scratched in approximately the middle of the rear of ossuary no. 4. See fig. 5 and pl. LXXXIV, C. The letters are neatly drawn and their interpretation presents no difficulties. They read:

מרים בת שמעון

Miriam, daughter of Simeon.



FACSIMILE OF INSCRIPTION NO. 2, WHICH IS TRANSLATED TO READ: *Miriam, daughter of Simeon*.

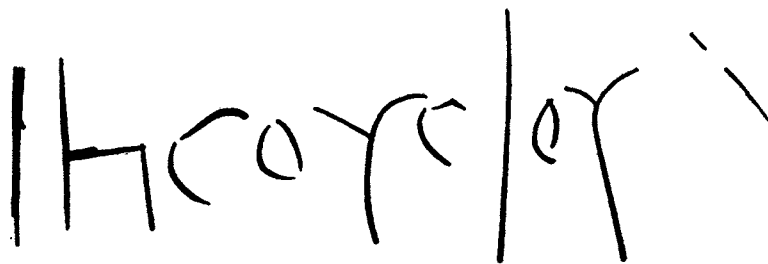
An unsuccessful attempt at writing this name was started previously, as may be seen from the letter מ (*mem*), to the right of the beginning of the present inscription and slightly above it.

The script of this graffito presents a typical example of the letter forms found on ossuaries. Some of them have the usual triangular apices adorning the upper strokes of the letters. In contrast with inscription no. 1, we find here the *mem initiale* instead of the *mem finale* at the end of the word מרים.

3. On the rear of ossuary no. 7 a line of eight Greek letters followed by an oblique stroke is drawn, apparently in charcoal. See facsimile below and pl. LXXX, B. Although the colour of some parts of the letters has faded, their outlines are clearly legible. The inscription reads:

Ἰησοῦς ἰού

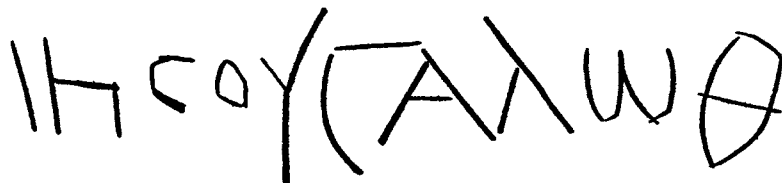
In classical Greek the interjection *ιού*, usually twice repeated, was used to express grief or annoyance. My translation of the whole inscription would be "Jesus, woe!"



FACSIMILE OF INSCRIPTION NO. 3, WITH TWO GREEK WORDS
WHICH ARE TRANSLATED: *Jesus, woe!*

4. On the top of the flat lid of ossuary no. 8 an inscription is incised with a sharp flat edged instrument. See pl. LXXXIV, D. It reads:

Ἰησοῦς ἀλώθ



FACSIMILE OF INSCRIPTION NO. 4, CONTAINING THE TWO WORDS, *Jesus* AND *aloth*.
IT IS SUGGESTED THAT *aloth* MAY BE AN EXPRESSION OF MOURNING.

In the Septuagint translation of the Song of Songs the word אהלֹת (iv, 14) meaning the fragrant aloe plant, is rendered ἀλώθ. The same word אהלֹת in Psalms (xlv, 8) is, however, translated σταντή. In the New Testament we find the word ἀλόη (John, xix, 39). See the further discussion on p. 363.

5. One of the short sides of ossuary no. 10 bears three Hebrew letters, roughly incised (see pl. LXXXIV, E). They seem to read מתי, an abbreviated form of מתתיה or מתיה, i.e.,

"Mattathias"

THE SMALL FINDS

Among the small finds discovered were pottery vessels and lamps. The vessels comprised jars, pots, juglets and bowls, some of them complete, others broken. Pls. LXXXV-LXXXVI and fig. 6 show the most characteristic pieces of pottery.

1. (Pl. LXXXVI, A, 1) Upper part of jar; ribbed red ware; thin, light brown slip.
2. Fragments of lower part of jar; grey ware, greenish surface.
3. (Pl. LXXXVI, B, 3) Neck of jug with handle; light red ware, light brown slip.
4. (Pl. LXXXVI, A, 2) Fragments of cooking pot, ribbed, neck missing; thin, brownish-red ware.
5. (Pl. LXXXVI, B, 1) Fragment of cooking pot; brownish-red ware.
6. (Pl. LXXXVI, B, 2) Neck of cooking pot with two handles; brownish-red ware.
7. Neck of cooking pot, one handle missing; brown ware.
8. Rim of jar, ridge at beginning of neck; light brown ware.
9. Rim of jar, ridge at beginning of neck; red ware, light brown surface.
10. Rim of jar; red ware, fine white grits.
11. (Pl. LXXXV, B, 1) Part of bowl; reddish-brown ware.
12. Lower part of juglet; thin reddish ware.
13. (Pl. LXXXV, B, 3) Bottle; light brown ware.
14. (Pl. LXXXV, B, 2) Fragments of juglet; red ware, light brown surface.
15. (Pl. LXXXV, B, 4) Upper part of small bottle; red ware.

Nos. 5-7 and 15 were found in the main burial-chamber; nos. 4 and 8-10 in the unfinished chamber in the eastern wall of the courtyard; nos. 1-3 and 14 in the cutting of the northern wall.

The lamps are illustrated on pl. LXXXV, A.

1. (top left) Lamp with line pattern; pink ware.
2. (top right) Lamp with spatulated nozzle; pink ware. Found in a niche above the small hollow close to the northwestern corner of the burial-chamber (see fig. 3, section E-F).
3. (bottom left) Similar but with two small circles incised on nozzle.
4. (bottom right) Similar to no. 2; grey ware.
5. (center) Nozzle of similar lamp; light brown ware.

In the debris filling the cave a coin of Agrippa I was found (pl. LXXXVI, C). The coin is rather worn and the reverse only is partly legible. It shows three ears of barley issuing from between two leaves; the date across the field is L [9] i.e. year 6 (of the reign of Agrippa I) or A.D. 42/3. Better preserved examples of this type show on the obverse an umbrella with fringe and around the circumference the Greek inscription ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΑΓΡΙΠΠΑ (pl. LXXXVI, D, E).¹

CONCLUSIONS

When the ossuary with four crosses on its four sides was removed from the northeastern locus of the tomb, I was immediately reminded of a similar discovery made some seventy years ago on the Mount of Olives, an account of which was given by the famous French scholar Charles Clermont-Ganneau. The following is an excerpt from his report regarding this discovery:²

¹ G. F. Hill, *British Museum Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Palestine*, 1914, pp. 236-237.

² Ch. Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches in Palestine*, vol. i, 1899, pp. 381 ff.

"In the course of the year 1873, some months before my arrival at Jerusalem, an Effendi of that city, Abu's So'ûd by name, as far as I remember, while building himself a country house on the shoulder of the Mount of Olives, which is called Bât'n el-Hawa, the traditional Mount of Offence, not far from the road to Bethany, had broken into a sepulchral cave, full of most interesting little ossuaries. One of my first proceedings was to go and examine this important discovery. I even began to bargain with the landlord for the antiquities which he had found, but had to give it up owing to his exorbitant demands. I was obliged to content myself with getting as accurate reproductions as I could, in the form of squeezes, both of the inscriptions and the ornamentation carved upon the ossuaries. Afterwards these relics were dispersed and passed into various hands. I congratulate myself upon having taken the precaution to make a detailed description of the entire group, which is exceptionally important on account of its forming a connected whole.

"The cave consisted of a simple rock-hewn chamber without loculi; it looked as though strictly speaking it had not been made for a sepulchre, but for a store-house for the ossuaries brought from other unknown sepulchral chambers, which must exist not far from the spot. The ossuaries, thirty at least in number, were literally piled one above another in this narrow space. Unfortunately the cave was ransacked by rough workmen without the least care; they carried off the ossuaries and mixed them together, changed their lids, and broke many of the boxes, which were of a very brittle soft calcareous stone."

After describing ten ossuaries and the inscriptions on them, Clermont-Ganneau proceeds to deal with ossuary no. 11 of this find, the front side of which bears the Hebrew name יהודה (Judah).³ He writes:

"Here again is the name Judah, plainly written, and this time accompanied by a regular cross, with branches of equal length. No doubt can possibly exist about the reality of this symbol. The manner in which it is engraved; its position on the field of the ossuary, and relatively to the proper name; all agree to prove that it is a symbol intentionally wrought, and a symbol connected with the name written just above it, even as the disputed symbol in No. 8 is connected with the name of Judah written above it, and as the same symbol in No. 10 is connected with the name of Salome. Its meaning is questionable; I do not think that it can be anything but the sign of the cross, but I do not overlook the difficulties which beset that view, considering our hitherto received ideas on the one hand as to the earliest period at which the cross was recognised as the symbol of Christianity, and, on the other, as to the latest date commonly attributed to all Hebrew inscriptions in the ancient square characters, in Jerusalem and the neighbourhood. If this cross is really a Christian symbol, we must either admit that the chronological rules upon which all the archaeologists have hitherto justly agreed with regard to Christian monuments in the West do not apply without modification to Christian monuments in the East, or else that the theory that every Hebrew inscription at Jerusalem and its neighbourhood is necessarily earlier than Titus's siege, or at all events than the foundation of Aelia Capitolina, must not be regarded as absolutely true, and that Hebrew inscriptions must exist belonging to a date later than that epoch. Our case, therefore, if proved, would tend either to put

³ This ossuary is at present in the collection of Notre Dame de France in Jerusalem.

back a date agreed on by Christian archaeology, or else bring down to later times one admitted in matters of Semitic epigraphy.

"Personally, I think that the true symbol of Nos. 8 and 10 have much light thrown upon them by the cross on No. 11, and that, on the other hand, these symbols, which in themselves are obscure, do nevertheless confirm the meaning which I am inclined to attribute to the cross. These three points appear to me to be connected with one another, and we shall presently find a fourth (No. 29) which will sweep away all possible doubt, and will give us reason for supposing that (1) all these ossuaries, coming, as they do, out of one cave, must reach over a very long period of time, from the first centuries of the Christian era down to a date certainly later than the reign of Constantine, and to the official establishment of the Christian religion; (2) that many of the Greek or Hebrew-speaking people whose remains are contained in these ossuaries had, at successive indeterminate epochs, under conditions unknown to us, embraced Christianity.

"The appearance of Christianity in the heart of an old Jewish family, with its burial vault at the very gates of Jerusalem, is a thing which I admit is rare, and even hitherto unprecedented. But is this a sufficient reason for declaring it *a priori* impossible? Somewhere or other the new doctrine must have made its way into the Jewish system. If we have stumbled upon one of the places in which it did so, we may indeed call our find lucky, but we cannot call it improbable."

Clermont-Ganneau then discusses other ossuaries from the same cave until he comes to ossuary no. 29 to which he referred above, and describes it in the following words:

"What is altogether surprising is that in this case two Greek letters[ΗΔ] are surmounted by a cross with limbs of unequal length, of the form called *immissa*, which unmistakably belongs to a comparatively late period; it is cut as deeply and as carefully as the accompanying letters. Certainly this last ossuary marks the very last of the series of burials in this vault, and there may be an interval of several centuries between it, and, for instance, the ossuary of Salampsion, the daughter of Simeon the priest. Is it too rash to infer that both of them belonged to the same priestly Jewish family, which at an early date embraced Christianity?"

Archaeologists did not pay sufficient attention to the above discovery for the reason that later finds of Jewish tombs in Jerusalem showed that the latest possible date for them was the foundation of the Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina in the reign of Hadrian, whereas, on the other hand, it was generally accepted that the cross did not appear as a Christian symbol before the end of the second century A.D.

As we have seen above, Clermont-Ganneau himself found it difficult to explain this discrepancy, especially in view of the finding of a Latin cross on one of the ossuaries. He was therefore driven to the unlikely assumption that this tomb was used by a Jewish family which continued to live in Jerusalem from a time previous to the destruction of the city by the Romans until the fourth century A.D. We know, however, that Jews were forbidden to remain in the Holy City after the foundation of Aelia Capitolina, in 131 A.D.

I must confess that in spite of my high esteem for the great French scholar I had some doubts with regard to this discovery: Clermont-Ganneau did not excavate the tomb himself and somebody might have tampered with the ossuaries before they came into his hands.

In our case, however, there was not the slightest possible doubt with regard to the antiquity of the crosses, because it was clear that although the tomb-cave was opened once,

these ossuaries had not been touched from the moment they had been placed inside the loculus until the day we took them out. Our impression was that the tomb-robbers had entered the vault, opened several loculi and taken out the ossuaries hoping for valuable loot. They were, however, disappointed at finding that they contained nothing but bones

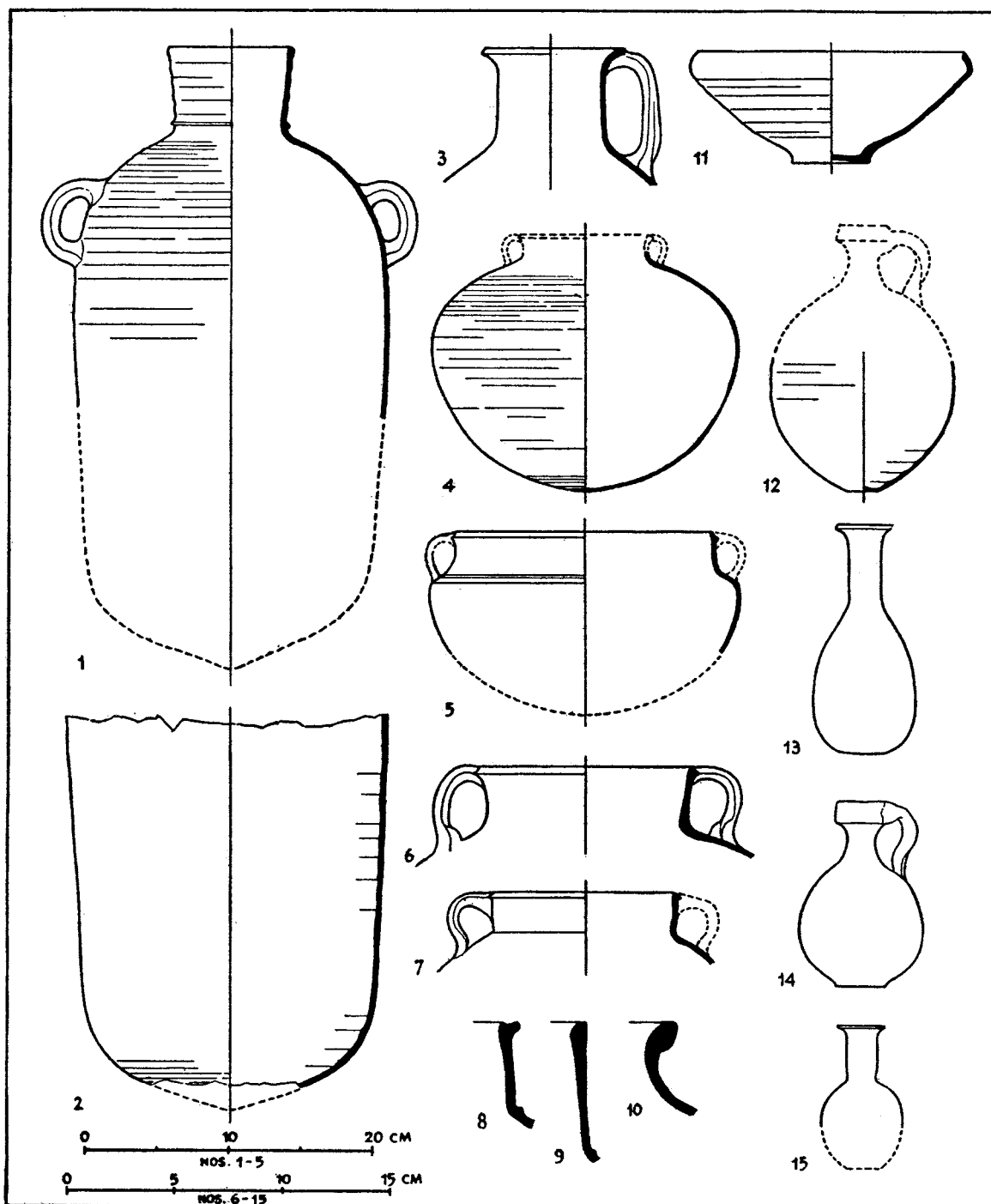


FIG. 6. THE POTTERY.

and they therefore left them inside the tomb. When they opened the last loculus, they decided that it was not worth while to take out the ossuaries and left them as they were.

Beside the crosses I immediately noticed the graffiti on the ossuaries, but did not pay particular attention to them as I considered them as irrelevant to the crosses. Graffiti on ossuaries usually record the names of the persons whose bones were deposited within them. True, the name Jesus was followed on both ossuaries by words which I could not decipher at once, but I decided to postpone their study till the excavation of the tomb was completed.

What puzzled me in particular was the presence of the same name on two ossuaries placed side by side. As is well known, these chamber tombs represent family graves, and within a Jewish family the same name could be borne by grandfather and grandson, or in some rare cases, by father and son. Their bones would not have been collected simultaneously and therefore it would be surprising to find two such ossuaries placed within the same loculus. Having this in mind, I started at once the study of the graffiti.

As can be seen above, my reading of the graffiti written in charcoal is 'Ιησοῦς Ιού. Although some of the letters are partially faded, the contours are still visible and a close examination, immediately after the discovery, showed no traces of other signs, except the diagonal stroke to the right of the inscription. If this inscription recorded the name of the person buried in the ossuary, we should expect after the name Jesus, the name of the father, but I cannot find any name corresponding to the form ΙΟΥ. It is true that the Septuagint usually transcribes the name Jehu, prophet or king of Israel by ΙΟΥ, which might seem to justify translating the graffiti as "Jesus son of Jehu", but Josephus always transcribes the name Jehu as 'Ιηοῦ. Besides, this name is not known to have been used at that time.

It can hardly be assumed that the second word represents the name Judah, since there are absolutely no letters after the ΙΟΥ. In the Jewish catacomb on the Monteverde in Rome a tombstone bears the inscription 'Ενθάδε κείμε 'Ιού, but here the inscription was undoubtedly left unfinished.⁴ We must therefore assume that the word "Jesus" is followed here not by a name but by the exclamation Ιού, meaning "woe." In classical Greek this exclamation is usually doubled, but there is a slight possibility that the diagonal stroke to the right may have been intended to indicate the repetition of the word.⁵

We are faced with greater difficulties when attempting an interpretation of the second Greek inscription, no. 4, incised on the lid of ossuary no. 8. As stated above, the word is found once in the Septuagint as a translation of the Hebrew מלח, meaning aloe. This might conceivably be a nickname, since such nicknames taken from the names of plants do occasionally occur. In this case, however, we would expect to find the Greek word ἀλόη used, since this is the usual Greek name for the aloe plant. The form of the word מלח seems to suggest a Semitic root but I could not make out the form. It was suggested to me that ἀλώθ might be a place-name, but in this case we would expect an adjective formed from the place-name rather than the place-name itself. With great reserve I venture to suggest that ἀλώθ may have its origin in the Hebrew and Aramaic נס, which means among other things "to wail," "to lament." But as I have already said, this interpretation is only tentative.

It is not surprising to find classical Greek used by the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem before the destruction by the Romans. As evidence of the widespread knowledge of Greek

⁴ As pointed out by N. Müller and N. A. Bees, *Die Inschriften der jüdischen Katakomben am Monteverde zu Rom*, 1919, p. 137, no. 147.

⁵ I owe this suggestion to Dr. M. Runnes.

we may cite the numerous inscriptions on ossuaries containing many Greek names. We also know that Herod built a theater in Jerusalem.⁶ We may assume that classical Greek plays were produced in this theater and that they supplied a source from which the inhabitants of Jerusalem learned classical Greek expressions, which were not commonly used in the contemporary spoken Greek.

An interesting proof of the knowledge of classical Greek is found in one of the disputations between the Sadducees and the Pharisees preserved in an old portion of the Mishnah:⁷

The Sadducees say, "We cry out against you, Oh ye Pharisees, for ye say, 'The Holy Scripture render the hands unclean,' [and] 'The writings of Homer do not render the hands unclean.' " Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai said, "Have we naught against the Pharisees save this!—for lo, they say, 'The bones of an ass are clean, and the bones of Johanan the High Priest are unclean.' " They said to him, "As is our love for them, so is their uncleanness—that no man make spoons of the bones of his father or mother." He said to them, "Even so the Holy Scriptures: as is our love for them so is their uncleanness; whereas the writings of Homer which are held in no account do not render the hands unclean."

The mention of the books of Homer in such a disputation shows clearly that his books were widely known in Jerusalem.

There can be no doubt that the presence and the size of the crosses on ossuary no. 8 suggest that they were placed there with some definite purpose. They were apparently drawn by the same person who wrote the words *Ἰησοῦς ἰού* on the other ossuary.

Our knowledge of the use of the cross in early Christianity was recently enriched by a striking find in the ruins of Herculaneum. In the house of the "Bicentennario," a sumptuous building on the southern side of the *decumanus* (pl. LXXXVII), a small chamber in an apartment on the second floor of the western part of the building contained a cross (pl. LXXXVIII). Of the four walls of the room, the one containing the entrance and that on the left hand or southern wall were soberly decorated; the two others were left white. In the middle of the back wall there was a square covered with very fine plaster, in which is deeply engraved the sign of a Latin cross, occupying nearly the whole of the square surface. The cross is 0.43 m. high and 0.365 m. wide; its vertical branch narrows conspicuously toward the top and the transverse branch widens slightly at the ends. A careful investigation of the plaster showed that a wooden cross was fastened to the wall by two nails, the holes of which are still visible along the vertical branch.

To the left and right of the plastered square traces of two nails are clearly visible, on which lamps may have been hung. The cross which had been embedded in the plaster was violently torn out of its place before the destruction of Herculaneum. A small wooden chest was found leaning against the wall directly under the plastered square containing the cross.

Professor A. Maiuri lectured on this discovery before the Pontifical Academy of Archaeology in Rome in November 1939. After several attempts to find an explanation of this discovery he came to the conclusion that it was a Christian cult place and that the chest below the cross may have been an altar connected with the cult.⁸

Herculaneum was destroyed, together with Pompeii and some other places in that vi-

⁶ Josephus, *Ant.*, xv, 8, 1.

⁷ *Yadaim*, iv, 6.

⁸ Maiuri's lecture was published in *Rendiconti della Pont. Accad. Rom. d'Arch.*, xv, pp. 193-218. I am

deeply obliged to Prof. Maiuri for his kindness in sending me photographs from Herculaneum and allowing me to publish them.

cinity, by the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79. This discovery thus shows that the cross had become a symbol of veneration for Christians by at least A.D. 79, contrary to the view previously held. Moreover, the cross of Herculeum was a Latin cross, which was previously considered to have made its first appearance in the fourth century A.D. If this new material had been available to Clermont-Ganneau, he would not have felt himself forced to construct his unlikely hypothesis that the tomb on the Mount of Olives, in which a Latin cross occurs on the walls of an ossuary, was used by a Jewish family which remained in Jerusalem from before the destruction by the Romans until the fourth century A.D.

With regard to the crosses of our tomb, it would be unwise to insist that the cross had already become a venerated symbol of Christianity; these may be a pictorial expression of the event, tantamount to exclaiming, "He was crucified."

My suggestion, therefore, is that the crosses and the graffiti on ossuaries nos. 7 and 8 represent a lamentation for the crucifixion of Jesus by some of His disciples. This suggestion was strengthened by the decipherment of the graffito on ossuary no. 1, several months after the excavation of the tomb.

The family name Barsaba is known only from the New Testament. We meet a *Ἰωσήφ Βαρσαβᾶς* (*β*)*βās* in *Acts*, i, 23. We read there that after the crucifixion Peter stood up and asked to ordain one of those who had accompanied Jesus during His life and until His crucifixion, to replace Judas Iscariot. The community appointed two from among them, one of whom was Joseph called Barsabas. Another Barsabas, "Judas surnamed Barsabas," was one of the two disciples who were sent by the apostles and elders to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch (*Acts*, xv, 22). Our graffito thus bears the name of a Jewish family of Jerusalem, some members of which are known to have been among the first disciples of Jesus, on the evidence of the New Testament.

A few words remain to be said with regard to the date of the tomb. Although it is theoretically possible that some of the Jewish tombs around Jerusalem may be dated as late as the foundation of Aelia Capitolina, the bulk of the tombs found at Jerusalem belong to the period before its destruction by the Romans in A.D. 70.

The pottery found in this tomb is typical of the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods. Similar types occur in practically all the tombs containing ossuaries discovered at Jerusalem. With the exception of the lamp decorated with the line pattern, which is still earlier, all the others are of a type with spatulated nozzles called "Herodian." No later types were found in the tomb.

The character of the Greek letters (especially the shape of the H) points to a date not later than the first century A.D. To this should be added the evidence of the coin of Agrippa I which dates from A.D. 42/3.

My general impression is that the tomb contains nothing later than the first half of the first century A.D. The tomb was apparently in use from the first century B.C. until the middle of the first century A.D.

All our evidence indicates that we have in this tomb the earliest records of Christianity in existence. It may also have a bearing on the historicity of Jesus and the crucifixion.

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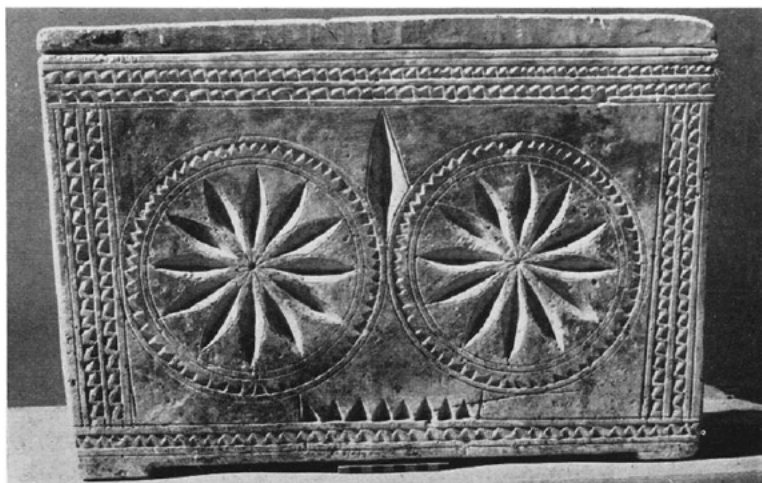
E. L. SUKENIK



A. BURIAL CHAMBER, LOOKING SOUTH, SHOWING LOCULI AND SLABS WHICH CLOSED THEM.



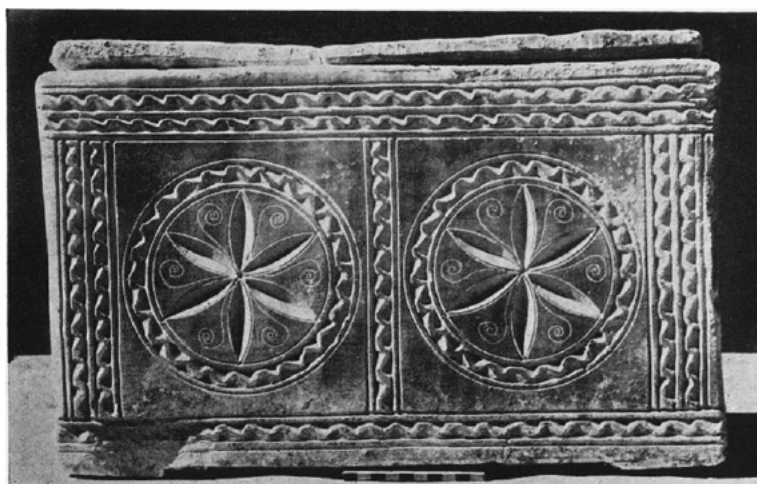
B. BURIAL CHAMBER, LOOKING NORTH, AND SHOWING THE ENTRANCE AND PIT. [Sukenik]



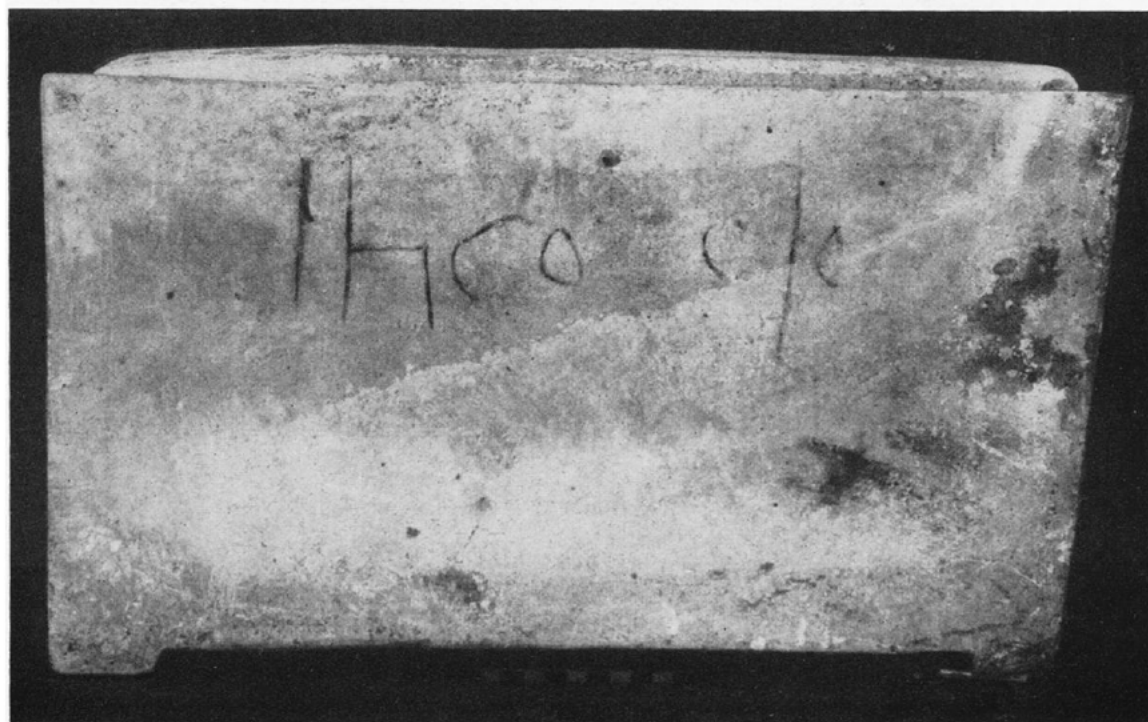
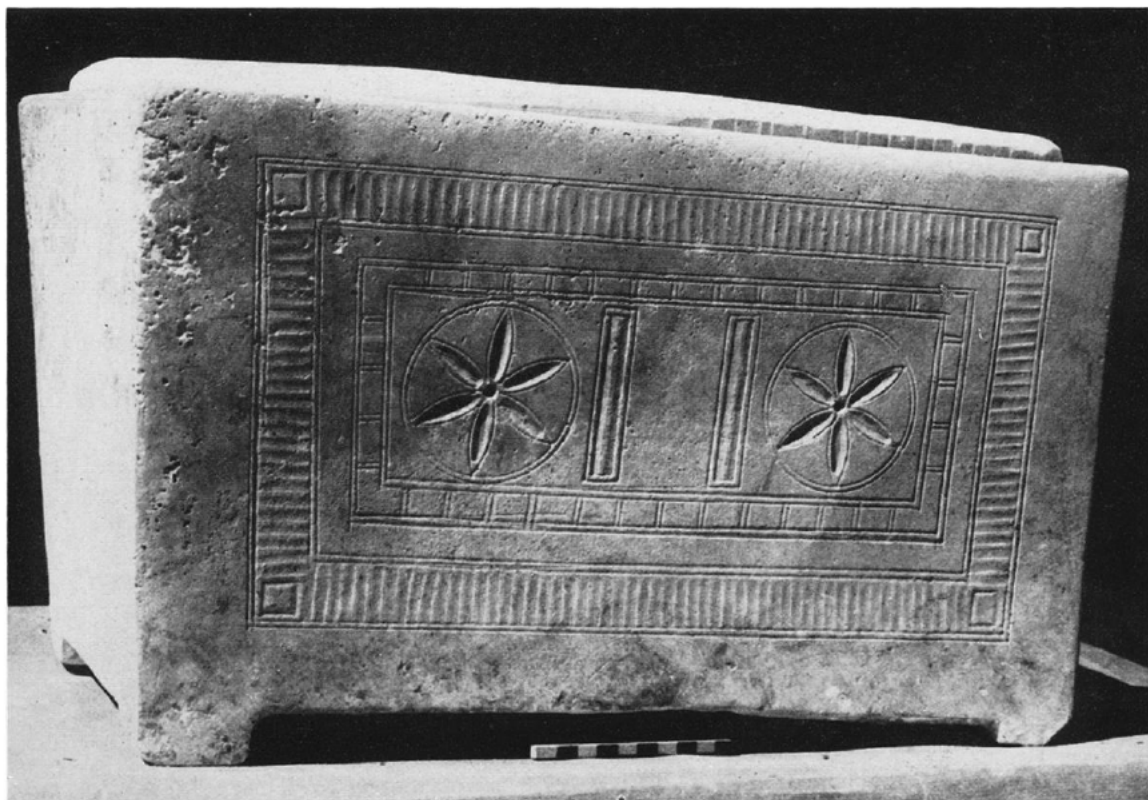
A. OSSUARY No. 4.



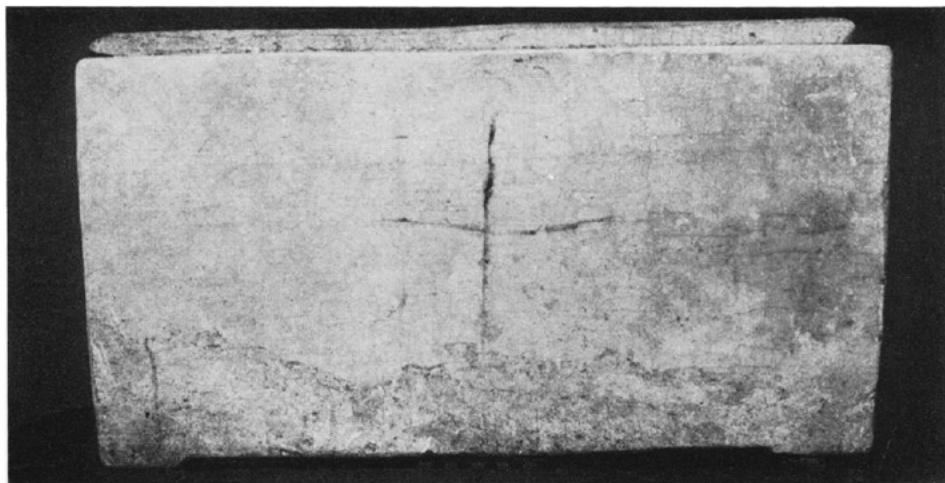
B. OSSUARY No. 5.



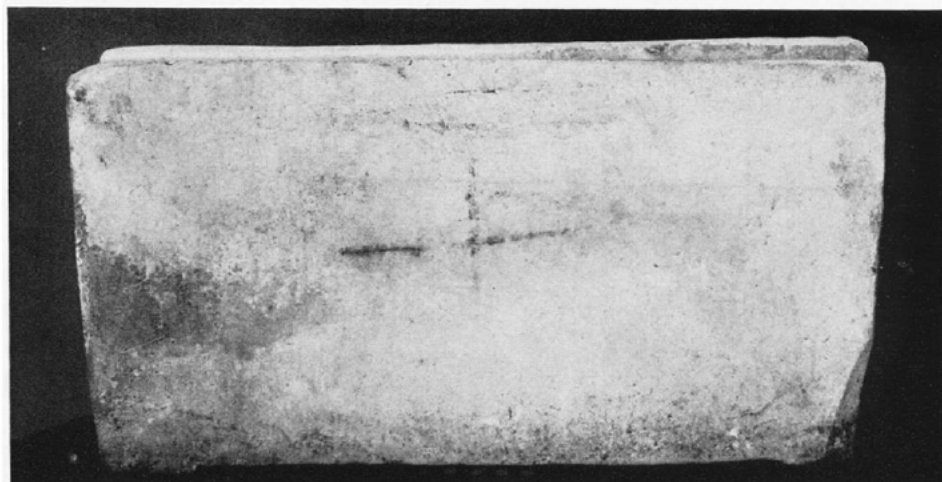
C. OSSUARY No. 6.
[Suknik]



OSSUARY No. 7.
[Sukenik]



A



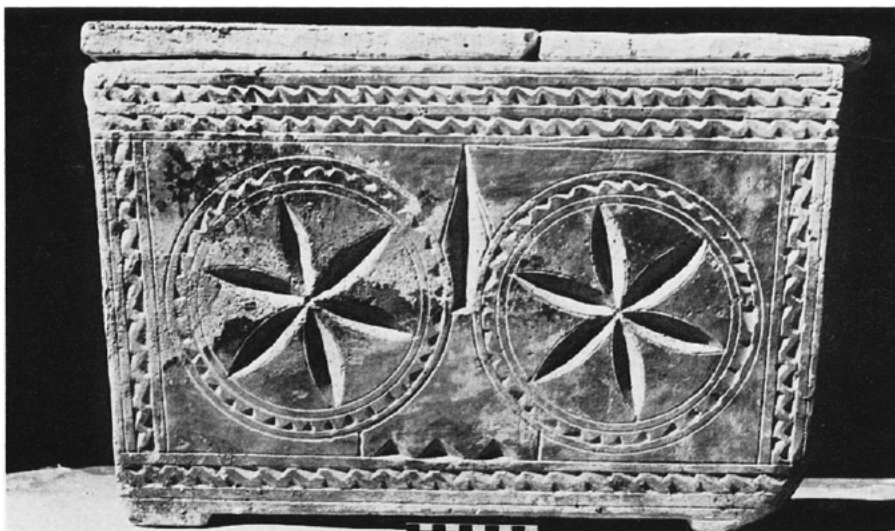
B



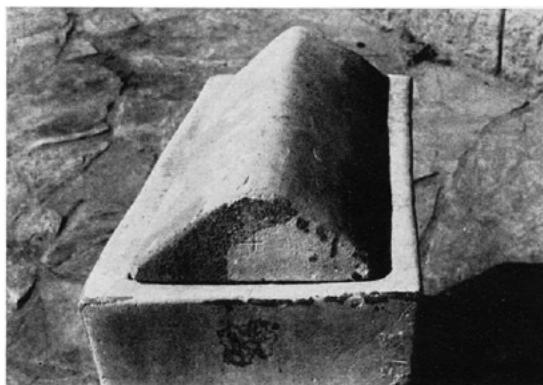
C



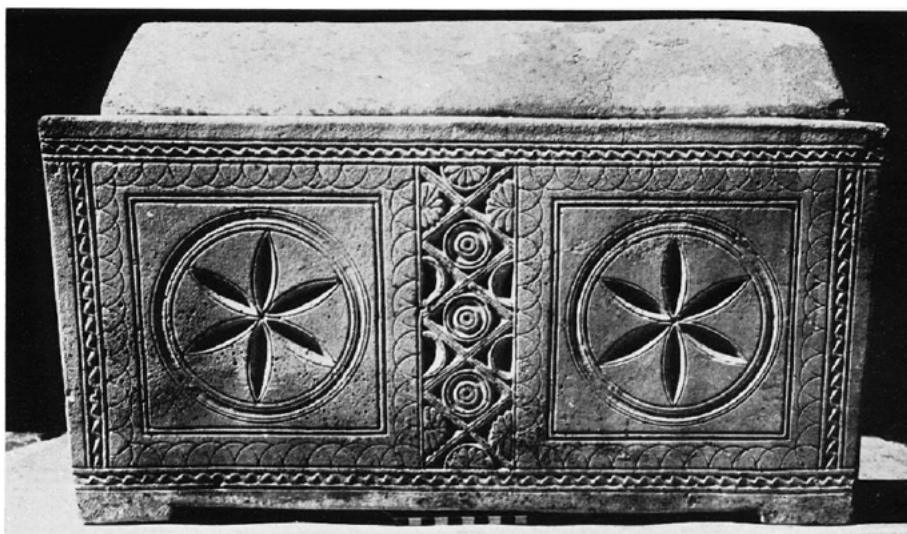
D



A. OSSUARY No. 9.



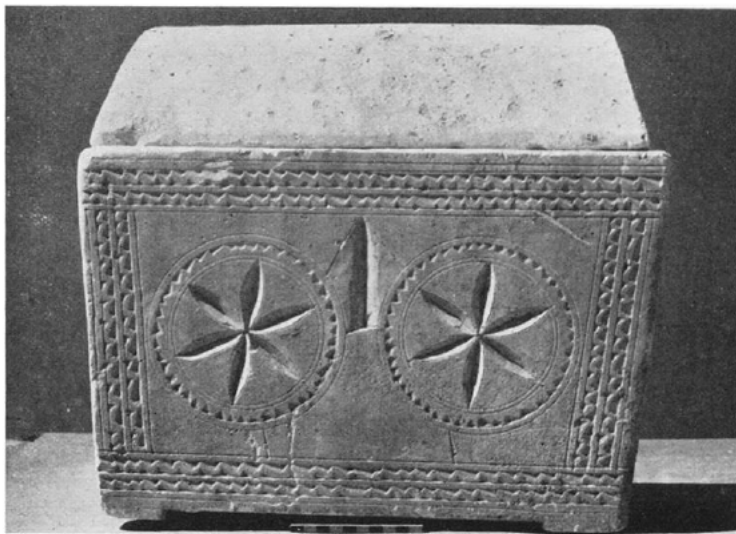
B. MASON'S MARKS ON RIM AND LID OF OSSUARY No. 10.



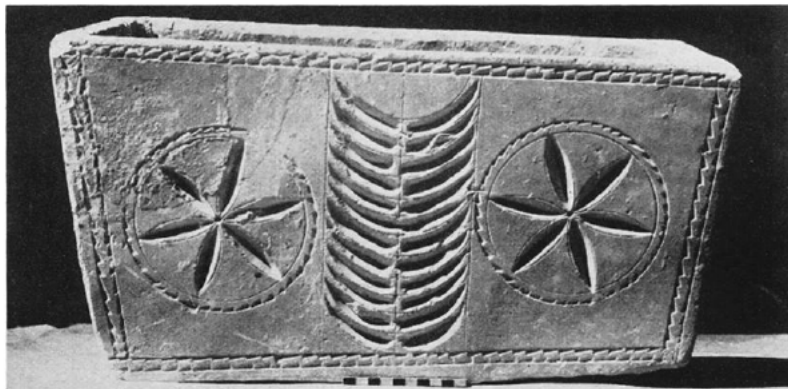
C. OSSUARY No. 10: FRONT.
[Suknik]



A. OSSUARY NO. 12.



B. OSSUARY NO. 13.



C. OSSUARY NO. 14.
[Suknik]



A. INSCRIPTION NO. 1.



B. INSCRIPTION NO. 1, RETOUCED ACCORDING TO PROPOSED READING.



C. INSCRIPTION NO. 2.



D. INSCRIPTION NO. 4.



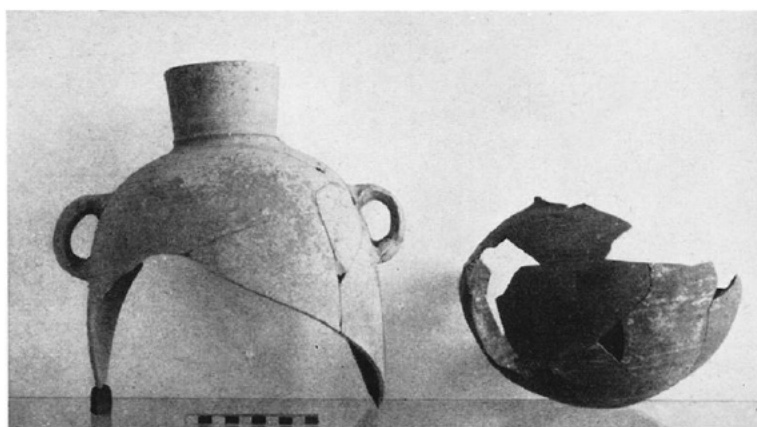
E. INSCRIPTION NO. 5. [Sukenik]



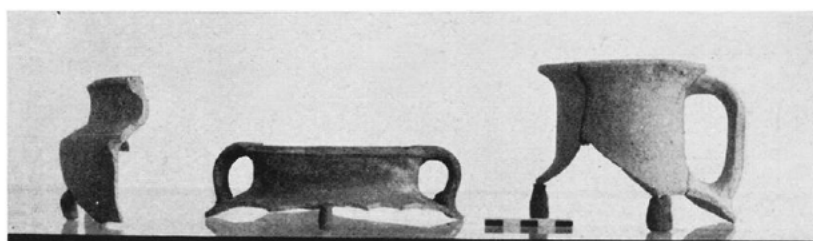
A. THE TERRACOTTA LAMPS.



B. VASES NOS. 11, 14, 13, 15. [Sukenik]



A. VASES NOS. 1 AND 4.



B. VASES NOS. 5, 6, 3.



C. COIN FOUND IN TOMB.

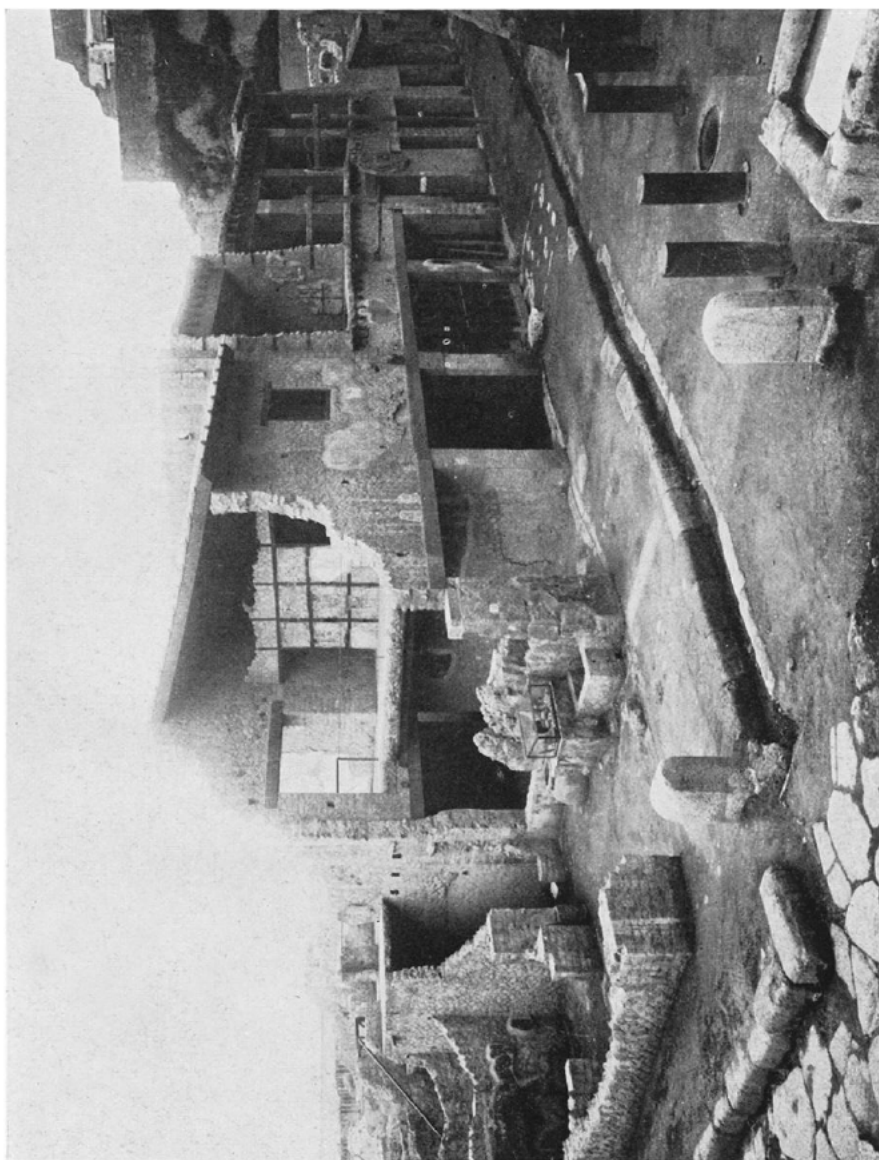


D



E

SIMILAR COIN OF AGRIPPA I. [Suknik]



GENERAL VIEW OF HOUSE IN HERCULANEUM.
(Courtesy of Soprintendenza alle Antichità, Naples)
[Sukerik]



CROSS AND ALTAR AT HERCULANEUM.
(Courtesy of Soprintendenza alle Antichità, Naples)
[Sukenik]