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## **Dry Bones - Heavenly Bliss. Tombs, Post-Mortal Existence and Life-After-Death in Ancient Judaism**

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Prof. dr. Jürgen K. Zangenberg

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Universiteit Leiden



# Dry Bones – Heavenly Bliss

## Tombs, Post-Mortal Existence and Life-After-Death in Ancient Judaism

Oratie uitgesproken door

Prof.dr. Jürgen K. Zangenberg

bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar op het gebied van  
het Nieuwe Testament en vroegchristelijke letterkunde  
aan de Universiteit Leiden

op 27 april 2007



Universiteit Leiden

*Mijnheer de rector magnificus, hooggeleerde collega's,  
waarde studenten, zeer gewaardeerde toehoorders!*

Het is mij een grote eer als nieuwe hoogleraar Nieuwe Testament en vroegchristelijke letterkunde vandaag voor u mijn inaugurele rede te mogen uitspreken. Het verheugt mij bijzonder dat zo vele gasten de lange reis uit het buitenland hebben ondernomen - familie, collega's en vrienden - om deze plechtigheid bij te wonen. Omdat niet iedereen hier voldoende met de Nederlandse taal vertrouwd is, zal ik het volgende, wetenschappelijk deel van mijn oratie in het Engels uitspreken.

*Rector Magnificus, dear colleagues, dear students, dear guests*

## Voices from the Underworld

A couple of months ago, a striking discovery hit newspaper headlines and TV stations: "Jesus' Tomb Rediscovered!" The heralds of the new revelation, a professor of religious studies from North Carolina (James Tabor), an Oscar winning producer (James Cameron, master of "Titanic") and an investigative TV editor (Simcha Jacobovici) had a very simple message to tell: A tomb found in the Jerusalem suburb of Talpiyot back in 1980, they say, contains no less than the mortal remains of the family of Jesus. Inscriptions on small limestone boxes found in the tomb not only preserved the name of Jesus himself (in Aramaic: Yeshua bar Yosef), but also revealed that this Jesus had a son named Yehuda (Yehuda bar Yeshua). A certain "Mariamene Mara" on a Greek inscription from the same tomb was quickly identified with Mary Magdalen, and a certain Yoseh with Joseph and here they stand: the holy family happily reunited.<sup>1</sup>

Statistical computations, they said, bolstered the claim and asserted that the likelihood was very small that a second tomb could ever be found which so closely resembles Jesus' family as we know it from the New Testament. What a compelling match: "Objective" archaeology and "objective" statistics, our Tomb Raiders say, leave no doubt: it was THE tomb, and the tomb was full!

Immediately Christianity was back in the headlines, but you can imagine that this "discovery" triggered very diverse, though somewhat predictable reactions. Some members of the educated public were convinced that at least a new chapter in Christian theology must be opened - if not the entire history of early Christianity be rewritten. Notorious skeptics also felt vindicated: archaeology had finally proven that Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection was humbug, because the grave was full. It was now even clear that Jesus was married and had a son. But conservative Christians, of course, were upset about such blasphemous claims and castigated scholars and media for undermining the God-given truth. And in the background you could almost see Dan Brown silently watching, with a mild smile on his face, forgiving the public for -again!- confusing facts with fiction and thanking the Tomb Raiders for adding a new chapter to the continuous debate about his Da Vinci Code. And the Vatican?! The Vatican did nothing but celebrate the Pope's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday! A scandal? Far from it! Responses from academic experts -including myself- were almost unanimously negative. Yeshua from Talpiyot was not Jesus of Nazareth, the team's far-reaching claims are unfounded and the hype a hoax. Again, academics played the bad guy depriving a happy child of its beloved toy. But perhaps such demurrers were also part of the game and did not come as a surprise.

In the meantime the topic has all but disappeared from the media's radarscreen, and only a few people still follow it up. While James Tabor's blog documents the ongoing discussion<sup>3</sup>, unfortunately no serious academic article has so far been published that documents and critically weighs the material, the tests and data the proponents have put forward to bolster their claims. What we have is Tabor's popular book and "The Jesus Family Tomb"<sup>3</sup> and a book by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino, whose humble subtitle "The Discovery that will Change History Forever" does not quite stimulate one's confidence that the book presents a balanced and critical assessment.<sup>4</sup>

So why, then, bother at all?

## Telling a Tomb's Tale

The Talpiyot tomb is much too precious to leave it to sensationalist flurry or religious quarrels about what can, should or must not have happened on that memorable day in April 30 in Jerusalem when Jesus was said to have risen from the grave.

The tomb of Talpiyot has a tale to tell that is worth considering on its own.<sup>5</sup> It brings us in contact with a world far away from ours and with people long gone. The tomb guides us to a necropolis built up of numerous damp caverns hewn into the soft Jerusalem limestone along the roads outside the city. The Talpiyot tomb was only one of a vast number of so-called "chamber tombs" encircling the ancient city to the East, South and North (Fig. 1).<sup>6</sup> Over the centuries before and after Christ, thousands of people have found their final resting place in such rock-hewn chambers, some of them elaborate pieces of architecture adopting the best of Hellenistic and Roman

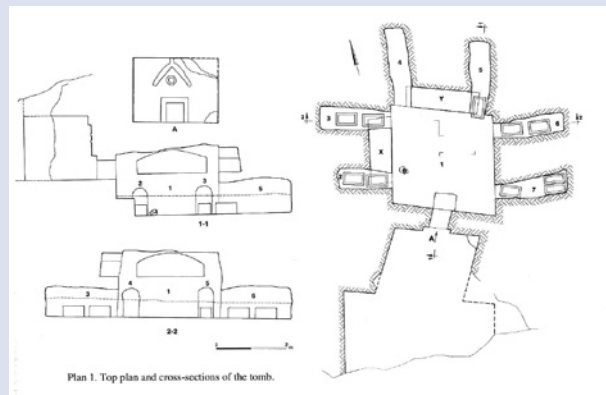


Fig. 1:

Plan and sections of the Talpiyot tomb. Note the overall layout of the chamber tomb and the position of the ossuaries.

From: Amos Kloner, "A Tomb with Inscribed Ossuaries in East Talpiyot, Jerusalem," *Atiqot* 29 (1996): 15-22 (15).



Fig. 2:

Ossuary # 2 from the Talpiyot tomb with Aramaic inscription "Yehuda bar Yeshu'a" (Judah son of Jesus). From: Amos Kloner, "A Tomb with Inscribed Ossuaries in East Talpiyot, Jerusalem," *Atiqot* 29 (1996): 15-22 (p. 18, Fig. 3).

fashion, but the majority was only modestly decorated and showed an almost prosaic functionality. In such tombs we see corpses wrapped in linnen and stretched out on their backs to await the natural lot of the body, decomposition. We hear women wail and children weep, hear men pray to God and praise the deceased. We smell the end of life - and hear it when the heavy capstone starts rolling to finally seal the tomb. One or two years after burial, the bones would be collected and solemnly reburied in rectangular stone boxes (“ossuaries”) that sometimes bore the name of the deceased. Ten such limestone boxes were found in Talpiyot, one of them was broken and not kept, the rest was taken to the storage facility of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Six of the ossuaries bore inscriptions mentioning names (Fig. 2). Apart from 17 individuals whose remains were buried in the ten ossuaries, another 18 persons were buried outside. No plan indicates their original position within the grave.

Then, after 2000 years, a bulldozer or the spade of a construction worker disrupts the silence of the underworld and drags the deceased into our lives. The Talpiyot tomb was not the only grave that was discovered per chance during construction of bustling cities as Jerusalem. Suddenly we can read the names of people whose bones were so carefully kept in the damp cave, in the case of Talpiyot: Yeshua, Yehudah, Mariamne who was also called Mara, Marya, Mattat or Yoseh - names that sound so alien, so “biblical”, but once belonged to quite normal men, women and children leading quite normal lives: people working hard, building a house, raising their children, fulfilling their religious duties, paying their taxes, avoiding trouble with the Romans, hoping for a gentle death after a long and peaceful life, and finally awaiting a decent burial in order to be rejoined with their

forefathers and foremothers in a damp and dark underground chamber.

*This is the story of Talpiyot, one like a thousand others - pretty much average, a bit boring and above all: unspectacular. And therefore precious, indispensable and unique.*

### 3. Burial Culture

Funeral culture represents one of the most fascinating and complex chapters of ancient Jewish culture. Many new finds in Hellenistic and Early Roman Palestine (roughly from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. B.C.E. to the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. C.E.) from Jerusalem, Jericho, En Gedi, Qumran and many other places provide us with a wealth of data about how people coped with death and-if carefully interpreted- these data make a unique contribution to understand ancient Jewish life, society and religion.<sup>7</sup> Ongoing work on relevant texts and decades of intensive research in general academic archaeology have furthermore provided the necessary methods to observe and perceive the complex interplay of values, roles and rituals which are so characteristic of funeral remains.

I will explore this topic with you in more detail by proceeding step for step through the same stages that a deceased person also would have to undergo. We can thus gain a clearer picture of the processual character of a burial and the various intellectual and pragmatic impulses that contribute to the complex assemblage of finds that archaeologists eventually would find. Archaeological remains of a grave are only a part of a much larger sequence of actions and the objects used in them.

First, let us approach the threshold of death.

### *At the Threshold of Death*

Death is ubiquitous in a society that knows no help against sepsis and sees diseases either as fate or divine punishment. Death can slowly creep up in the form of sickness or age. Severe illness was often understood as forebears of death. Many Psalms in the Old Testament, therefore, compare the recovery from illness with rescue from the mouth of Sheol, the mythical underworld.

Death can also come quickly through accident or the sudden hand of humans. Especially vulnerable were children. Only every second newborn baby reached the age of ten. Women were married early, bore many children - and often died in childbed. These facts certainly deeply influenced the ancient's attitude to life, too. Nevertheless, despite an average life expectancy of about 30-35 years, ancient societies knew enough old people to make ageing in dignity a desirable blessing. Famous examples were the Biblical patriarchs who had the privilege to die "oud en der dagen zat" (Gen 25:8).

If death had come and claimed the life of a loved-one, a complex sequence of rituals unfolded that bears all typical elements of a *rite de passage*. Of course, many elements of these rituals are irretrievably lost: prayers, gestures, words. But many other elements can be reconstructed on the basis of funeral remains and a careful reading of contemporaneous texts. Both sets of evidence, however, are notoriously fragmentary. Only very few texts refer to mourning and burial in sufficient detail, whereas graves are frequently disturbed and plundered and often not sufficiently published. Even then, our sources provide enough information to risk a journey to the shadows.

Although death immediately interrupts the life of a family and temporarily throws the entire house into a state of severe

impurity, thus drastically limiting all cultic and social activity, to bury a dead is one of the highest duties in Judaism. Denying burial to somebody means to expel that person from society for good and rob him or her of all dignity as a human being. In this respect Judaism shares one of the fundamental tenets of the ancient world.<sup>8</sup>

In a Jewish funeral, no religious functionaries were necessary and no sacrifices were required. Generally, the main agents of burials were family members. Usually, the sons and other close kin of a deceased person were expected to take the initiative and care for a decent burial. Jesus' funeral, however, is a famous exception to this rule. Here, the New Testament tells us, the family was not present. Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy and otherwise unknown sympathizer, takes its place and puts Jesus in a grave. He, and later three women who set out on the third day to anoint Jesus' body and thereby finish the interrupted burial, step in and -in a way- form Jesus' new family of disciples and sympathizers.

Jewish mourning took place in the house, on the way to the tomb and at the tomb. Immediately after death, the corpse was washed and wrapped in linnen or clothed in his garments. Here, archaeology has yielded fascinating evidence in recent years.<sup>9</sup> While unfavourable climate usually prevents the survival of textiles, several sites in ancient Palestine have provided examples of how the mortal remains of a person were shrouded in textiles. The variety of options was wide. Remains of funeral linnen were found in an unrobbed burial niche in the Akeldama necropolis in Jerusalem attesting that the body was wrapped in an elaborate burial cloth. In the New Testament Mark and John provide alternative scenarios of what type of textiles were used to shroud the crucified Jesus.

As an alternative to funeral shrouds, corpses could be clothed with a variety of new or used garments, instructive examples were discovered in Khirbet Qazone on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea (Fig. 3) or in Palmyra. Apart from decently shrouding the dead body, people did not want to remove other personal belongings from the deceased. Many graves, therefore, contained finger rings, earrings, combs and even remains of shoes. All that shows that people did not want to see their loved ones leave life naked.

During wrapping, the arms were either placed alongside the body or crossed over the pelvis. The corpse was anointed with perfumes and wine. The purpose was not to mummify the body or protect it from decomposition, but to honor the deceased and dispel unpleasant odours. Some of the perfume bottles later found their way to the grave and were buried next to the body. The wrapped corpse was then put on a wooden board or laid in a coffin to be transported to the tomb. The way to the tomb offered the opportunity for others to join



Fig. 3:  
Tomb A 1 from Khirbet Qazone with wool textile wrapped around the body. From: Konstantinos D. Politis and Hero Granger-Taylor, "Nabateans on the Dead Sea Littoral," in *Petra Rediscovered: Lost City of the Nabateans* (ed. Glenn Markoe; New York and Cincinnati: Harry N. Abrams, 2003), 106-8 (p. 108, Fig. 90).

in with the mourning. Professional wailers and musicians announced the parade and gave grief an acoustic expression. You could not only see or smell grief, but also hear it.

At the grave, the family laid the body to rest, stretched out on his or her back, as if the deceased was sleeping. In some tombs, cushions made of textiles or straw were found that further emphasize that imagery.

Two types of tombs were in use in 1<sup>st</sup> c. Palestine, both by Jews as well as non-Jews:

First, chamber tombs, consisting of a small room hewn into the rock with a sometimes large number of oblong niches to

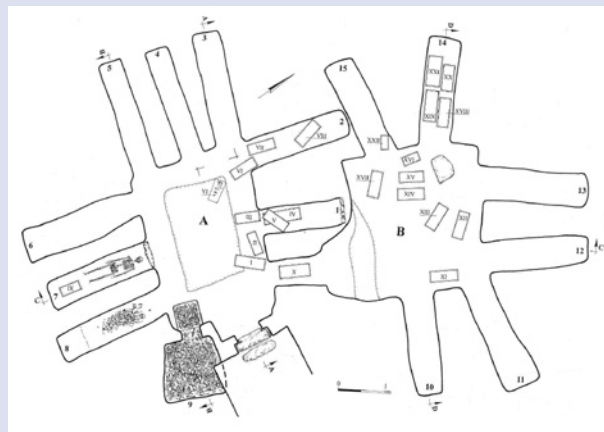


Fig. 4:  
Chamber Tomb from the necropolis in Jericho. Note the single undisturbed primary burial, several ossuaries and the bone deposit for secondary burial. From: Rachel Hachlili and Ann Killebrew, *Jericho: The Jewish Cemetery of the Second Temple Period* (IAA Reports 7; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 1999), p. 41.

receive the dead - one by one of an entire clan. Often the bodies were put in a wooden coffin. It was not uncommon to bury several individuals in one niche or one spot along the benches in the chamber. In all these cases one would speak of “primary burial”. When the available space was used up, close relatives would come and collect the bones of individuals to rebury them in limestone boxes (ossuaries), or one would simply place their mortal remains in a corner or in an extra bone chamber (“secondary burial”) (Fig. 4). The chamber tomb from Talpiyot exactly fits this model.

And second, shaft tombs dug deep into the soil with mostly a single resting place at the bottom (Fig. 5). Both grave forms

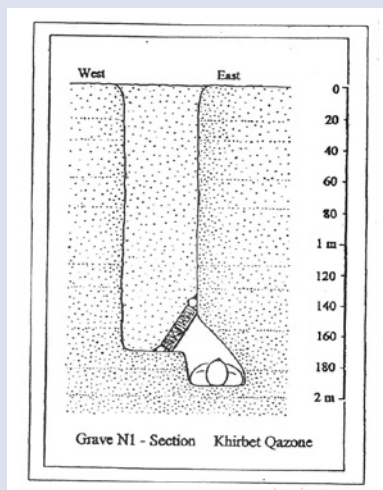


Fig. 5:  
Shaft tomb N 1 from Khirbet Qazone on the southeastern shore of the Dead Sea. From: Konstantinos D. Politis, “Rescue Excavations in the Nabatean Cemetery at Khirbat Qazone 1996-1997,” *ADAJ* 42 (1998): 611-614 (612, Fig. 4).

have a long history and are no Jewish inventions. They connect Jewish funeral culture with the broader Mediterranean habits and Greco-Roman culture.

A Jewish funeral was simple and prosaic. Archaeological remains of graves usually lack any traces of particular attention to the deceased body apart from decent treatment and the clear intention to honor it. Burial did not primarily serve as preparation for the afterlife, nor did the deceased exert any continuing function beyond death: no ancestor veneration took place. Burial was more concerned with the status of the *living* and *their* desire to honor the dead than it had to do with the fate of the dead in the underworld.

Therefore, Jews rejected all artificial treatment of the body and simply let nature follow its course. Neither did they speed up the process of decomposition by cremation as many groups in the West of the Empire did (burning a corpse was considered a horrendous fate by Jews as well as other Semites), nor did they try to preserve the body intact for the afterlife through mummification as the Egyptians practiced it. Nor were Jews interested in preserving the identity of the deceased through portraits as we can observe among Romans and Egyptians. For ancient Jews, death was not the continuation of life under different circumstances, and the tomb was no copy of the dwellingplace of the living.

Apart from the body, its receptacles such as coffins or sarcophagi and a couple of personal belongings, few other objects found their way into the grave. The vast majority of finds are ceramic vessels, mostly cooking pots, flasks, juglets, bowls and small plates. None of these objects seem to have been made particularly for funeral purposes. Most of them have to do with anointing the corpse and funeral meals of the mourners.

Sometimes, graves reveal a bit more about the identity and lifestyle of a person. In some women graves, archaeologists found cosmetic utensils, and in a male grave they discovered a writing rod. These objects were obviously considered so much part of the character of the deceased and marked their social rank so well, that the family was not willing to see the deceased depart without them. I have therefore frequently asked myself if the man with the writing rod might in fact been a Leiden professor who died in exile while finishing up his last publication.

After burial the tomb was closed. The living had fulfilled their duty and returned to their everyday business. - And the dead? What happened to them? For them, a new phase of “life” began. Let us therefore risk a glimpse beyond the threshold of death.

#### *Beyond the Threshold of Death*

The further we depart from the earthly world, the more difficult it becomes to find material evidence that can be interpreted with a sufficient degree of certainty. But one should not too quickly attempt to fill the gap in our material record with information drawn from written sources. Archaeological material can speak for itself if proper methods are applied.<sup>10</sup> Some archaeological finds indeed provide instructive insight into how the existence beyond death was envisioned. The first relevant observation is that some graves contained cooking pots that were carefully deposited directly next to the corpse in a sealed burial niche (and not in the chamber to be used by the mourners). One gets the impression that the dead also required and indeed got their share of food. At least for some Jews, one can conclude, death was no sudden change from life to non-life, but a gradual process of separation in which the deceased -at least for a while- still needed to be cared

for. But in the course of time, the living would eventually say final farewell and the deceased faded away for good.

In other graves, coins were found in the vicinity of the skull, probably an adaptation of the pagan habit of putting a coin on the eyes or in the mouth of the deceased to pay Charon for ferrying the deceased across river Styx into the netherworld.<sup>11</sup> Although it is hard to establish how important these mythological connotations actually were for Palestinian Jews, or if the coins were not simply part of an apotropaic and magical ritual, these finds show that the liminal state between life and death was considered particularly precarious and in need of support.

Most information we have about Jewish conceptions about the afterlife, however, comes from texts. But we need to listen carefully not to miss their point, nor should we blur the multivocal Jewish choir of opinions by approaching them from a Christian perspective. Jewish texts document a large array of differing, sometimes competing and often contradictory ideas about where the dead might be after they had been buried.

For many Jews, the dead were considered to be “somewhere near the grave” at least for a while. Others claimed that, while the body rested in the tomb, the shadow of the dead had already passed down into the underworld to join the other bloodless and feeble shadows. Isaiah 14 is a nice example for this paradoxical simultaneity: while the corpse of the King of Babel rested in his grave, bedded on maggots and worms, his spirit was already greeted in the underworld.

Others envisioned the otherworld not as *underworld*, but as *upperworld* in heaven and claimed the dead would be taken

up to the stars. Both the earthbound, chthonic and the astral concepts of afterlife have a long prehistory in the ancient Near East. For a long time, Jews favoured the chthonic concepts such as they are particularly prominent in the Hebrew Bible, but from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. B.C.E. onwards, the celestial strand became increasingly influential and supplemented, replaced or altered the older traditions.

No matter how this complex bundle of concepts might finally be brought in order, it is clear that for ancient Jews the dead were not simply gone. Death is not non-existence. The dead have simply changed their place and altered their mode of existence.

It is also interesting to note that material culture did not one-by-one reflect the diverse range of textually attested positions about post-mortem existence. There is no indication that a person believing in the future resurrection of the body was buried any different from somebody who denied the hope that death could ever have an end. Other factors, such as affiliation with a particular social group or regional traditions, were far more influential for burial culture (and funeral rites?) than doctrinal differences about post-mortem existence.

#### *At the Threshold of New Life*

Let us go one more step further and risk a glimpse beyond the threshold of new life.<sup>12</sup>

For many ancient Jews traditional concepts about the afterlife were sufficient to make sense of what happens after death.<sup>13</sup>

They were happy with the assumption that a dead person was reunited to his ancestors through burial - and that he or she continues to live through his lifetime achievements, most important through children and a favourable memory among the living.

For some authors, however, these ideas were not enough.

That the dead simply rest among their fellows left questions unanswered. Would the unjust meet the same fate as the just? Experience demonstrates that more often than not the unjust and wicked fared well in life and enjoyed a decent burial, while the just suffered and often enough were even deprived of this last honor. How could that be reconciled with the notion of divine justice?

Therefore, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. B.C.E. onwards, speculations appear in a number of texts that for some, for many or for all dead the time of being dead might once be over, and that the dead would be transferred into a new state of existence. Interest was primarily directed not towards the *kind* of post-mortem existence (life as “shadows” or otherwise) or focussed on the *abode* of the deceased (in the “underworld” or elsewhere), but towards the *circumstances* under which the state of being dead would end and “new life” begin.

In scattered passages of Old Testament literature from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.E., authors have already used funeral language and imagery to describe a rescue from personal disease or the reversal of the miserable existence of the community (Ez 37:1-15; Is 25:8, 26:19).<sup>14</sup> Sometimes during the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. B.C.E., such metaphorical language more and more became “objectified” to express hope of a *real*, final end of death and a return of the dead. Several factors, all already indigenous to later Old Testament literature, supported this trend:

a) First, developments within Biblical *monotheism* played a particularly prominent role. While older texts saw no connection between the Biblical God Yahweh and the underworld and its inhabitants, many later OT texts started to expand Yahweh’s power to the extremes of Biblical

geography (among which the underworld took a prominent place) and human experience (death and suffering) (see e.g. Ps 139:8; Job 14). Yahweh -so to speak- began to “care” about the dead.<sup>15</sup>

- b) In contrast to older periods, later *wisdom literature* increasingly dealt with discrepancies between human experience (the good suffer and the bad enjoy themselves) and God’s divine order of things (according to which the good should be happy and the bad be punished).
- c) Finally, *prophetic literature* since Deutero-Isaiah in the late 6<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.E. increasingly treated the fate of Israel in the context of cosmic and global events.

These developments, including the unresolved imbalance between behavior and recompense and the cosmic perspective on things with its growing interest in “global solutions” inspired speculation about the end of the dead’s postmortal existence. Again, these speculations resulted in all but a systematic theory about the end of being dead and the transition to not being dead anymore. The texts differ considerably about who was affected by this transition and how this transition should be envisioned: as a return to the world (altered or unaltered), as transposition among the stars, or as regaining a body of whatever kind - just to name a few. Nothing would be further from the truth than to consider these texts simply as exchangeable variants of one and the same conception or “theology of resurrection”.

Let us briefly look at some details.<sup>16</sup>

1. Especially complex are the conceptions within the **First Book of Enoch** (1Hen), a collection of visionary texts whose different parts originated in Palestine some time between the 3<sup>rd</sup> c.

B.C.E. and the 1<sup>st</sup> c. C.E. 1Hen is part of a larger corpus of traditions associated with the antediluvial hero Enoch who did not die but was taken up by God to heaven (Gen 5:21-26). Today, 1Hen is preserved in an Ethiopic translation, but fragments from Qumran show that large parts of it were originally written in Aramaic. Already in the oldest layers of the Enochic tradition, the so-called Book of Watchers, two things are particularly prominent:

- a) Speculations about the resting-place of the dead are combined with visions about the heavenly temple, the stars and the celestial world. It is clear that although the place of the dead is still somewhat part of the cosmos, it is transcendent in terms of time and space and inaccessible for normal humans. For 1Hen, the otherworld is not a topic of anthropology and eschatology alone, but an integral part of cosmology, as well.
- b) The crucial motif for all parts of the Enochic tradition is the question of reward and punishment, or to put it differently: of divine justice *post mortem*. Especially pressing is this problem with regard to those who died a premature death for the obedience of the law. These martyrs, the Book of Enoch says, are resuscitated and transported into a sphere of heavenly bliss (1Hen 102; 108:11-12). The wicked, however, are threatened with punishment in fire or darkness (1Hen 10:13-15; 92:3-5; 100:4-9).
- c) The consequences that such a transposition had *for the body* were only rarely reflected. The fact that the newly resuscitated being *must* have a body seemed clear, but nobody really bothered about defining precisely how this body should be envisioned. One has to keep in mind, that all sorts of “entities”, including stars, were called “body”, so the term provided a wide frame for different interpretations. “Body” was a flexible term to express continuity as

recognizable individuum, and at the same time for change in its appearance and consistency. Nobody, however, expected a simple reconstitution and resuscitation of the same premortal body that had been buried in the tomb. The body had to be different, transformed (perhaps shining, perhaps incorruptible), and not a “naked” soul. “Resurrection means a transformed body, not a walking corpse or a disembodied spirit”.<sup>17</sup>

With these fundamental elements, Enochic tradition set the agenda for a broad stream of literature that, although it mostly did not become part of the Biblical canon (exc. Dan) was of utmost importance for ancient Jewish and later for early Christian cosmology, eschatology and anthropology.

2. Another famous passage is **Dan 12:1-3**, dated to the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> c. B.C.E. By speaking about the dead as “those who sleep in the dust”, Dan 12:2 follows the common image of death as sleep and objectifies traditional metaphorical language adopted from passages like Is 26,19. The sleep-metaphor is not only ideal for making death comprehensible, but also enables one to express how the end of death might be envisioned, namely through “waking up” and “getting up”. With such terminology, Dan 12:2 set the agenda for much literature to come and supplemented the impulses triggered by Enochic traditions. Especially the Greek translation of Daniel (LXX: *anastesontai*; Theodotion: *exegesthesontai*) was tremendously influential for the way the NT would later speak about the return of the dead. Nevertheless, the “waking up” terminology is only *one* way among many to speak about the unspeakable.

Dan 12:1-3 is also important for a couple of other developments:

- Dan 12:1-3 is a good example for the expectation that by no means all dead will “get up from sleep”. Here and in many

other texts only the just will raise to everlasting life, while “others” will get up to perennial reprehension and ridicule. An innumerable multitude, however, will not get up at all, but continue their sleep in the “land of dust”.

- Dan 12:1-3 also shows that different conceptions can be freely combined and taken to mutually supplement and interpret each other: here, the imagery of “resurrection” is joined with the idea of transposition of the just into the celestial world.

3. One of the most “theological” treatments of the topic comes from the Greek-speaking Jewish diaspora in Egypt: **2Macc** (ca. 1<sup>st</sup> half of 1<sup>st</sup> c. B.C.E.). In chapter 7, 2Macc describes the seven sons of a Jewish mother who are tortured and cruelly brought to death by king Antiochus because of their faithfulness to Jewish tradition. Each martyr’s death is countered by the hope of swift vindication through resurrection. Wicked Antiochus, in contrast, will not “raise” after his death (2Macc 7:14). The fate of all other humans is not in sight, nor is, apart from evil Antiochus, the fate of the sinners.

Here, for the first time, the resuscitation of the martyrs is explicitly connected with the power of God as creator who is able not only to bring back the dead to life, but also to revert the cruel dismemberment of their bodies. The text thus gives a drastic answer to the question how life after death might have to be understood with respect to the anthropological aspects of the return of the dead. One can imagine that this text and the entire Jewish martyr tradition was an influential model for understanding the fate of Jesus and other Christian martyrs.<sup>18</sup>

Other texts attest alternative ways of talking about future life that were more inspired by Greek thought than by Near Eastern concepts. An extremely influential example is the so-called **Wisdom of Solomon**, a text also from the Jewish

community in Egypt and written sometime in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. B.C.E. Instead of using the “getting up” metaphors, the text operates with platonizing terminology, including the typical distinction between “body” and “soul” and the concept of “immortality”. The motivation to consider life after death, however, is the same as in Dan 12 or 2Macc 7: the expectation to be compensated for present suffering through future reward. Stimulated by Greek philosophy, the author starts speculating about the incorruptible character of the primordial creation and the breaking in of evil, and even ponders about theodicee.

Despite all these different scenarios and concepts about the return of the (or at least some) dead and speculations about the character of future life, one should not forget that this idea always was controversial, popular only in some circles, and by no means common intellectual good to all Jews (see the debates attested in Mk 12:18-27parr; Act 17:18,31-33; 23:6-8; 24:15-17,25; 26:6-8.23; Josephus, *Antiquitates* 18:14-16; Babylonian Talmud, *Sanh.* 90b; Qohelet Rabbah 5:10; Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 9:29; Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 22:23-33). We know about groups that flatly rejected the idea that dead people could ever come back to life after having been in the underworld: Sadducees and Samaritans were among them. Early Christianity, however, followed the apocalyptic and pharisaic tradition that did expect new life after death. It was early Christian authors who felt compelled to think about many of the anthropological and intellectual problems that the expectation of a future life after death posed, because Christianity –unlike Judaism– believes in a real man of flesh and blood who had been dead and come back to life, and confesses him as the saviour of the world and model for the fate of all believers. But that is another story.

## Consequences

Let me conclude with an outlook, taking burial culture only as example for a much more fundamental issue. In the humanities, especially those that are entrusted with the preservation and interpretation of the foundational documents of our culture, innovation comes from approaching old material with new questions, and from collecting new data that create such new questions.

If the sensationalistic headlines about the Talpiyot tomb are good for one thing, then it is to remind us that we cannot understand the history of early Judaism nor of early Christianity without studying both: textual witnesses *and* material culture.

Over the past decades, academic archaeology has immensely contributed to a better, because more differentiated understanding of the ancient Mediterranean, not only by providing methods of documentation and data collection, but also by stimulating an open dialogue with other disciplines such as ecology, sociology and – not the least – by a renewed interest in textual sources.

I am convinced that these developments are important for my own discipline which has all too often been conceptualized as a purely textual and theological discipline. Philology, I agree, still remains the basis for all work: one has to understand what the sources say, and I am grateful that my faculty has a long and venerable tradition of sound philological and historical work. But to approach old sources from new perspectives, to raise new questions and formulate new answers we need a new, integrative concept that takes the fact seriously that no culture, be it Christian, Jewish or Muslim, only lived in a world of texts,

but also of pots and pans. Material culture is a source equal to texts, especially when it comes to reconstructing ancient cultures such as early Christianity, and, therefore, transcending disciplinary boundaries is what our sources demand. Success is only possible on the basis of a methodological platform that is wide enough to allow interdisciplinary cooperation and precise enough to enable each discipline to keep its own profile.

I see my task as new professor of New Testament and Early Christianity here at Leiden to contribute to this ongoing exploration and be part of an interdisciplinary dialogue. I look forward to many conversations in the coming weeks about how we can breathe life into that program. I cannot say this without gratefully acknowledging the help, support, encouragement, guidance and stimulation of so many people to whom I owe so much.

## Dank

Het is daarom nu tijd om enige woorden van dank uit te spreken. In de eerste plaats zeg ik allen mijn oprechte dank, die aan de totstandkoming van mijn benoeming naar Leiden hebben bijgedragen. De leden van het search committee, het facultair bestuur en het College van Bestuur.

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Mijn bijzondere dank gaat uit naar mijn promotor Klaus Berger, die mij sinds mijn studietijd in Heidelberg, later toen ik

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Mijn Leidse geschiedenis is eigenlijk begonnen diep in het zuiden van Nederland, in het Brabantse Tilburg. Ik ben bijzonder dankbaar dat ik vanaf 1 januari 2005 als halftijds aangesteld onderzoeker verbonden heb mogen zijn aan de Universiteit van Tilburg. Wim Weren en Huub van de Sandt zijn goede vrienden geworden en nog steeds mijn collega's in het onderzoek aan Mattheüs, Jacobus en de Didache, en daar ben ik erkentelijk voor. Dank ook aan zuster Mariëtte Kinker, in wier huis ik in mijn Tilburgse tijd zo gastvrij en hartelijk opgenomen ben geweest. Mariëtte was ook mijn geduldig lerares Nederlands.

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Mijnheer de rector magnificus, dames en heren!  
Graf en dood hebben mensen altijd aangezet om over de onzekerheden van hun eigen leven na te denken. Maar er is geen reden om in melancholie of treurigheid te vallen. Wie over de dood goed heeft nagedacht, kan meer van het leven genieten. Ik wil daarom deze rede over botten, graf en hiernamaals niet afsluiten zonder enkele zinnen te citeren van een auteur die in de tijd waarover wij hebben gesproken geleefd heeft (Sir 41:1-4 NBV).

Dood, hoe bitter is de gedachte aan jou  
voor een mens die vreedzaam leeft te midden van zijn  
bezittingen,  
die geen zorgen heeft, in alles voorspoed kent  
en nog volop van het leven kan genieten.

Dood, hoe goed is je vonnis  
voor een mens die gebrek lijdt en wiens kracht afneemt,  
voor een hoogbejaarde die zich over alles zorgen maakt,  
opstandig is en geen geduld meer heeft.

Vrees niet het vonnis van de dood,  
denk aan wie je voorgingen en aan wie je zullen volgen.  
Of je nu tien, twintig of duizend jaar geleefd hebt,  
in het dodenrijk kun je niet klagen over de duur van je leven.

Ik heb gezegd.

## Notes

- 1 The original publication of the material from Talpiyot is published in Amos Kloner, "A Tomb with Inscribed Ossuaries in East Talpiyot, Jerusalem," *Atiqot* 29 (1996): 15-22; the inscribed ossuaries were republished in Levi Y. Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority / The Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), 222-224 (Nrs. 701-709). I emphasize that this lecture text in no way intends to be a complete assessment of the new interpretation of the Talpiyot material which cannot be done before a full, academic publication. A preliminary assessment can be found in Jürgen Zangenberg, "Yeshua aus Talpiyot und Jesus von Nazareth: Bemerkungen zum angeblichen Grab Jesu und seiner Familie," *Welt und Umwelt der Bibel* 44/12 (2007): 2-7.
- 2 See the ongoing controversial discussion on James Tabor's Blog <http://www.jesusedynasty.com/blog/>.
- 3 James Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); on this book e. g. see the very critical review by Bert Jan L. Peerbolte in RBL 06 (2007) on [www.bookreviews.org](http://www.bookreviews.org).
- 4 Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery that Will Change History Forever* (London: HarperCollins, 2007).
- 5 Detailed references for much of what follows can be found in Lothar Triebel and Jürgen Zangenberg, "Hinter Fels und unter Erde: Beobachtungen zur Archäologie und zum kulturellen Kontext jüdischer Gräber im hellenistisch-römischen Palästina," in *Zeichen aus Text und Stein. Studien auf dem Weg zu einer Archäologie des Neuen Testaments* (ed. Stefan Alkier and Jürgen Zangenberg; TANZ 42; Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 2003), 447-87; Jürgen Zangenberg, "Körper, Grab und Jenseits: Beobachtungen zu den geistigen Grundlagen jüdischer Bestattungspraktiken in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit," in press for *Körpergräber des 1. bis 3. Jahrhunderts in der römischen Welt: Internationales Kolloquium Frankfurt am Main 19./20. November 2004* (ed. Peter Fasold et al.; Schriften des Archäologischen Museums Frankfurt 21; Frankfurt: Archäologisches Museum, 2007); Jürgen Zangenberg, "Trockene Knochen, himmlische Seligkeit: Todes- und Jenseitsvorstellungen im antiken Judentum," in press for *Tod und Jenseits im Alten Israel und in seiner Umwelt. Theologische, religionsgeschichtliche, archäologische und ikonographische Aspekte* (ed. Angelika Berlejung and Bernd Janowski; FAT 25; Tübingen: MohrSiebeck, 2008).
- 6 On Jerusalem in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods see Lee I. Levine, *Jerusalem: Portrait of the City in the Second Temple Period (538 BCE-70 CE)* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002); on the necropolis in particular see Amos Kloner and Boaz Zissu, *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period* (Jerusalem: Yad Yizhak Ben-Zvi / The Israel Exploration Society) (Hebr.); on one particularly well documented part of the Jerusalem necropolis see Gideon Avni and Zvi Greenhut, ed., *The Aceldama Tombs: Three Burial Caves in the Kidron Valley, Jerusalem* (IAA Reports 1; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 1996).
- 7 For a comprehensive study of the material see my forthcoming monograph *Jüdische und frühchristliche Bestattungskultur in Palästina. Studien zur Literatur und Archäologie* (WUNT; Tübingen: MohrSiebeck, 2008) as well as Rachel Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period* (JSJSup 94; Leiden: Brill, 2005).
- 8 See e.g. Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2:205.
- 9 See Jürgen Zangenberg, "'Buried According to the Customs of the Jews': John 19:40 in its Material and Literary Context," in press for *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense LIV*, 2005 (ed. Gilbert van Belle; BETHL 200; Leuven: Peeters, 2008): 873-894 with further references.
- 10 On the relationship of textual and material culture data in my own discipline New Testament studies see Jürgen Zangenberg, "Von Texten und Töpfen: Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von literarischen und materiellen Relikten antiker Kulturen bei der Interpretation des Neuen Testaments," in: *Texte - Fakten - Artefakte: Beiträge zur Bedeutung der Archäologie für die neutestamentliche Forschung* (ed. Max Küchler and Karl Matthias Schmidt; NTOA 59; Freiburg/CH: Universitätsverlag and

Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 1-24.

- 11 Rachel Hachlili and Ann Killebrew, "Was the Coin-on-Eye Custom a Jewish Burial Practice in the Second Temple Period?," *BA* 46 (1983): 147-153.
- 12 Here mostly texts come into play. For an overview see John J. Collins, "The Afterlife in Apocalyptic Literature," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity. Part IV: Death, Life-After-Death, Resurrection and the World-To-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity* (ed. Alan Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner; HdO I/49.4; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 119-139; Casey D. Elledge, *Life after Death in Early Judaism: The Evidence of Josephus* (WUNT II/208; Tübingen: MohrSiebeck, 2006).
- 13 Shannon Burkes, *God, Self, and Death: The Shape of Religious Transformation in the Second Temple Period* (JSJSup 79; Leiden: Brill, 2003).
- 14 Angelika Berlejung, "Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Israeliten: Ein ausgewählter Aspekt zu einer Metapher im Spannungsfeld von Leben und Tod," in *Das biblische Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontexte* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Beate Ego; FAT 32; Tübingen: MohrSiebeck, 2001), 465-502; Bernd Janowski, "De profundis: Tod und Leben in der Bildersprache der Psalmen," in: id., *Der Gott des Lebens. Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments* 3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2003), 244-66; Kathrin Liess, *Der Weg des Lebens: Psalm 16 und das Lebens- und Todesverständnis der Individualpsalmen* (FAT II/5; Tübingen: MohrSiebeck, 2004).
- 15 Gönke Eberhardt, *JHWH und die Unterwelt. Spuren einer Kompetenzausweitung JHWHs im Alten Testament*, (FAT II/23; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2007 ).
- 16 See the literature listed in footnote 12; still invaluable is George W.J. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (HThS 26; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).
- 17 Ed P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 30.
- 18 Henk Jan de Jonge, "De opstanding van Jezus: De joodse traditie achter een christelijke belijdenis," in *Jodendom en vroeg christendom. Continuïteit en discontinuïteit* (ed. Tjitze Baarda,

Henk Jan de Jonge en Maarten J.J. Menken; Kampen: Kok, 1991), 47-61; Jan Willem van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviors of the Jewish People* (JSJSup 57; Leiden: Brill, 1997).

In deze reeks verschijnen teksten van oraties en afscheidscolleges.

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[Leidsewetenschappers.Leidenuniv.nl](http://Leidsewetenschappers.Leidenuniv.nl)

## PROF.DR. JÜRGEN K. ZANGENBERG



- 1996 Promotie in Heidelberg
- 1996-2004 Wissenschaftlicher Assistent for New Testament in Wuppertal
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Graves are often considered as “mirrors of life”. Closer study of material remains from graves, however, demonstrates that the relation between daily life and funeral culture of a given society is complex at best, not to speak of correlations between what people thought about the “afterworld” and how they buried their dead. Ancient Judaism with its seeming abundance of texts and growing wealth of archaeological data offers unique

opportunities to explore a piece of “mentality” of an ancient culture. And if TV headlines come forward with an alleged candidate for the “tomb of the family of Jesus”, serious work is even more urgent. The study of ancient Christianity in its cultural context can not only take place on the basis of texts alone. Already as a student I was fascinated with archaeology, and when my Doktorvater in Heidelberg once suggested combining textual and archaeological research for my New Testament dissertation, the dam was broken. Villages in ancient Galilee, the famous burials under St. Peter in Rome, the religion of the ancient Samaritans, the function of the Qumran settlement and other topics have kept me busy ever since. Archaeology does not only bring indispensable data to light, it can also protect us from becoming too positivistic about what we can and what we possibly cannot say about a given ancient culture. The quest continues. I am now building up my own research project in cooperation with archaeologists from Leiden in order to find out more about cultural influences and living conditions in Hellenistic and Roman Galilee, the Leiden University Project on Rural Eastern Galilee (LUPoREG). Interdisciplinary cooperation with colleagues from textual, including New Testament, studies, archaeology and history from various international institutions should contribute to better understanding of the cultural profile of a small region in the eastern Mediterranean that came to write history through Jesus of Nazareth and the Rabbis.



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