

## INTRODUCTION

The deceased's relation to the grave goods preserved in tombs provide data on mourning customs and burial practices such as offerings, personal possessions, expression of grief, type of receptacle and fittings, the inhumation process, the individual's status in the community, family relations and burial status, monument construction, and the material culture of a given period.<sup>1</sup>

Out of the lists above, this paper examines the individual status in the community of the High Priest, Joseph Caiaphas, his receptacle and fittings, called ossuaries, and his family relations, in reference to his ossuaries.

Caiaphas, according to VanderKam, in his book, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile*, was appointed high priest during the Herodian Age, lasting from 18-36/37 CE.<sup>2</sup> Caiaphas was the son-in-law of the High Priest, Ananus, whom, in addition to Caiaphas, his son-in-law, had five sons that followed him in the role of High Priest: Eleazar, Jonathan, Theophiles, Mattheas, and Ananus.<sup>3</sup>

## THE HIGH PRIEST

### I. The Old Testament

The qualifications for priests can be found in the Old Testament of the Bible. They had to be twenty years old (2 Chron. 31:7, NIV). The position was hereditary, out of the tribe of Levi (2 Chron. 23:24, NIV), who were descendants of Aaron, the first High Priest (Num. 17, NIV). The

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Hachlili, "Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period." xxxv. *Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism*. Leiden: Brill. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.nyack.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=173767&site=eds-live>.

<sup>2</sup> James C. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 2004), sec. List of High Priests, Kindle.

<sup>3</sup> VanderKam, chap.5, sec. 33, Kindle.

priest could marry, but she had to be a virgin and an Israelite (Lev. 21:13-14, NIV). And, finally, it was a lifetime appointment (Exod. 29:9, NIV).

Some of the high priest's responsibilities included the sin offering recorded in Exod. 29:36. The high priest also had the responsibility for the following offerings: (1) the burnt offering recorded in Lev. 1; the peace offering/ consecration (Lev. 7:11-21, NIV), and, the Sabbath offering (Num. 28: 9-10, NIV). And, more importantly, the high priest was the only one who could enter the Holy of Holies, as part of his duties for the Day of Atonement, all recorded in Lev. 16.

## II. New Testament

VanderKam states: "Modern scholars often write that the high priests were not only the religious leaders of the Jewish nation but were also its civil head...in time, the high priests became the heads of state."<sup>4</sup> This was certainly true, according to VanderKam, during the Hasmonean Period (152-37 BCE): "...the Hasmonean family assumed the high priesthood, the offices of high priest and head of state were undoubtedly unified in one person<sup>5</sup>...from 40 to 37 BCE, *Antigonus* was both high priest and king, but after his execution no one ever again combined the two offices."<sup>6</sup>

The Herodian period is the period in which Caiaphas was believed to be a high priest, this is also the Second-Temple period. So, Caiaphas served the priest at the Jerusalem temple. The priests, during this time were either from Herod's family or Roman officials, "ruled the state and appointed high priests, who "held no governmental office."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> VanderKam, sec. Preface, Kindle.

<sup>5</sup> VanderKam, Preface, sec. 3, Kindle

<sup>6</sup> VanderKam, Preface, sec.4, Kindle.

<sup>7</sup> VanderKam, Preface, sec.4, Kindle.

Caiaphas was believed to be appointed as the high priest by *Valerius Gratus*, a Roman procurator, serving during the reign of emperor Tiberius.<sup>8</sup> John 3:1-2, in reference to John the Baptist, states that Annas, believed to be another spelling of Ananas, Caiaphas' father-in-law, and Caiaphas, are both mentioned as representatives of the high priesthood. According to VanderKam, only one priest served at a time Caiaphas so Luke may have just been recognizing the former high priesthood of Annas, while also recognizing the present high priest.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, in John 18, when Jesus was arrested by Jewish officials: "They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people" (John 18:12-14, NIV). This declaration by Caiaphas, the high priest, is also found in John 11: 45-53, NIV, when Jesus is brought before the Sanhedrin: "Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year, spoke up, 'You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.'"

Matt. 26:3, also refer to the Caiaphas as the high priest and this time without mentioning his father in law: "Then the chief priest and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas" (NIV).

In addition to the high priest's cultic duties, it is believed that the high priest had a role on the Sanhedrin Council. Therefore, in the Book of Acts, when Peter and John are arrested, after healing a beggar lamed from birth, they are arrested and brought to the Sanhedrin Council and

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<sup>8</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Valeria Gratus," accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/valerius-gratusdeg>.

<sup>9</sup> VanderKam, chap. 5, sec.33, Kindle

Caiaphas is again included among the priests, a part of the priestly family of his father in law, Annas (Acts 4:1-6, NIV).

Caiaphas' role in the Sanhedrin, particularly asking questions, relates back to Deut. 17: 8-9, NIV, which shows judicial authority given to priests:

If cases come before your courts that are too difficult for you to judge—whether bloodshed, lawsuits or assaults—take them to the place the Lord your God will choose.<sup>9</sup> Go to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is in office at that time. Inquire of them and they will give you the verdict.

Unlike the Old Testament, the Sanhedrin reached a verdict but it was the prefect, Pontius Pilate, who had the responsibility for sentencing Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

Later Vitellius becomes the Syrian legate and replaces Pilate with Marcellus and removes Joseph Caiaphas as high priest and Tiberius, the emperor is now dead.<sup>11</sup>

### **JEWISH BURIAL PRACTICES AND OSSUARIES**

Given Caiaphas' prominence in life as a high priest, marrying into a prominent family, and having such a critical role in the capital punishment of Jesus, you can imagine the excitement, in 1990, when archeologists found the ossuaries of Caiaphas' family. First, however, to really appreciate the discovery, I must first explain ossuaries and its theological significance during the Second Temple period.

An ossuary is “a depository for the bones of the dead.”<sup>12</sup> Ossuaries were used as part of the secondary burial. The first burial, however, included ancient Jewish practices:

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<sup>10</sup> VanderKam, chap. 5, sec. 37, Kindle.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> *Miriam-Webster Dictionary*, “Ossuary,” accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ossuary>.

According to Jewish law, burial of the deceased had to occur within 24 hours of the individual's death (Deuteronomy 21:23), because of climate factors, in order to maintain ritual purity.

Soon after death, family members of the deceased would mourn and prepare the body for burial. The deceased's body was washed and anointed with various oils and spices. The body was then wrapped in unique linen clothing that contained spices and placed on a stone shelf that was carved into the bedrock wall of the tomb.

After the body was prepared, it was carried to the cemetery in a procession of lamentation and grief. The body was to be buried soon after death and the burial was required to take place outside of the village where the individual lived, according to a Jewish law still in practice today (Baba Bathra 2, 9). The grieving period lasted from three to seven days.

One of the most important tenets of ancient Jewish burial practices was that the individual be buried just outside of the village in which the individual had lived. A second essential tenet of ancient Jewish burial practices was that the individual be buried in the same tomb as his family.<sup>13</sup>

The Baba Bathra reference in the quote is referring to the Babylonian Talmud, Chapter 2, verse 9, Folia 17a, where it states: "Moses, Aaron and Miriam because it is written in connection with them [that they died] By the mouth of the Lord."<sup>14</sup> The footnote references Num. 33:38, Aaron's death and burial on Mount Hor, and Deut. 34:5, where Moses dies and is buried in Moab. In both instances, Aaron and Moses die by the mouth of the Lord.

The second burial, involves the ossuary, "This burial practice involved collecting the deceased's bones after the flesh had been left to decompose and desiccate, and placing them inside an ossuary."<sup>15</sup> A theological reason was offered concerning Romans 7:24, where sin is

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<sup>13</sup> "Burial Practices: Ancient Jewish Laws Concerning the Burial of the Dead," [jesusfamilytomb.com](http://jesusfamilytomb.com), accessed April 20, 2020. [http://jesusfamilytomb.com/back\\_to\\_basics/burial\\_practices/jewish\\_law.htm.l](http://jesusfamilytomb.com/back_to_basics/burial_practices/jewish_law.htm.l)

<sup>14</sup> Maurice Simon, *Baba Bathra*, Folio 17a, ed. Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein, accessed April 20, 2020, [http://come-and-hear.com/bababathra/bababathra\\_17.html#chapter\\_ii](http://come-and-hear.com/bababathra/bababathra_17.html#chapter_ii).

<sup>15</sup> Burial Practices, 2002

housed in the body, the flesh; therefore, when the resurrection takes place, the soul will rise freely from the bones.<sup>16</sup>

Hachlili describes ossuaries as being made from limestone, by hand, in the shape of a rectangular box. Stonecutters would use a mallet, hammer and chisel. It stood on four feet and the size could vary based on the deceased being an adult or a child. There could also be decorations and engravings on the front and sides of the ossuaries<sup>17</sup>

Although some ossuaries have been found with altar and libation, sun, and moon, Hachlili argues that this would be an indication that the deceased worshipped pagan gods and would not be an indicator of a second Temple Jew.<sup>18</sup> Scholars, for the most part, don't all agree with what ornaments and decorations mean on the ossuaries. Some of the theories are: (1) they were indications of a belief in an afterlife; (2) Christian beliefs; (3) funerary art, based on tombs and the surrounding area of the tombs, both inside and out, during the Second Temple period and architecture.<sup>19</sup>

Hachlili believes, "Since ossuaries bearing different designs are found in the same tomb, the ornamentation seems to have been chosen by the family, and frequently a different design was used for each family member....ornamentation should probably be seen as a response to the deep psychological needs of the living and the ideas current at that time about death and resurrection."<sup>20</sup>

Ossuaries of different family members of different generations were placed in the same tomb together. In some cases, bones of different

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Hachlili, 94-95

<sup>18</sup> Hachlili, 109.

<sup>19</sup> Hachlili, 110

<sup>20</sup> Hachlili, 110.

individuals were placed in the same ossuary and were inscribed with the names of more than one individual.

Generally, the family name of the individual was inscribed on the side of the ossuary. In some cases, the ossuary was also decorated with geometric designs that held symbolic religious value. The individual's status and his notable accomplishments were also sometimes carved into the side of the ossuary.<sup>21</sup>

### **CAIAPHAS' OSSUARIES DISCOVERY**

November 1990, near Jerusalem, a tomb cave was discovered with 12 ossuaries, containing skeletal remains totaling sixty-three individuals<sup>22</sup> Six of the ossuaries had Aramaic inscriptions, in Hebrew script, indicating the names of the people buried inside, with ossuary 3 having the name: Caiapha, with a decorative pattern of six-petal rosettes.<sup>23</sup> However, the sixth ossuary had two names: *Joseph bar Cipha*, on one side and the other side, *Joseph bar Caipha*. It has the same decorations as ossuary three, but is described as being, “the most richly decorated”<sup>24</sup> and contained the skeleton of a 60 year old man.<sup>25</sup> The other names were: “Shem, Shalom, and Miriam daughter of Simon.”<sup>26</sup>

Several factors were considered in analyzing if this tomb belonged to Caiaphas, the High Priest: (1) the double name, with Cipha being the family name, found in the Talmud and the Greek version, being Caiaphas; (2) where the tomb was located, citing that it was

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<sup>21</sup> “What is an Ossuary.” [jesusfamilytomb.com](https://jesusfamilytomb.com/back_to_basics/ossuaries.html), accessed April 20, 2020.  
[https://jesusfamilytomb.com/back\\_to\\_basics/ossuaries.html](https://jesusfamilytomb.com/back_to_basics/ossuaries.html).

<sup>22</sup> Domeris, W.R., and S.M.S. Long. “The Recently Excavated Tomb of Joseph Bar Caipha and the Biblical Caiaphas” edited by. Z. Greenhut and W. Horbury. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 89 (1994); 50-58, Doi: NTA0000010588, p.50.

<sup>23</sup> Domeris, 51.

<sup>24</sup> Domeris 51.

<sup>25</sup> Domeris, 52.

<sup>26</sup> Domeris, 51.

near the palace of the High Priest on Mount Zion; (3) the name Caiaphas being a rare name, in comparison to the Jewish names Shem, Shalom, and Miriam; and (4) the dating of the tomb.<sup>27</sup>

The dating of the tomb, the pottery was found to be too broad to be decisive since some included The Second temple Period, but some pottery could also be dated to the Byzantine and Iron Age.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, a piriform bottle, associated with first century BCE, a Herodian lamp, a small glass bottle, also from the first century, and finally, a coin found in the skull of one of the women, that belonged to Herod Agrippa I, were all used to analyze and conclude the date of the tomb, as the last century BCE and the first century CE.<sup>29</sup>

The coin in the skeletal head of the woman, in Ossuary 8, “attests the observance of the Greek practice of placing a coin in the mouth of the deceased to pay Charon for safe passage to the underworld.”<sup>30</sup> The coin, more associated with the Sadducees, is why some scholars question this being the ossuary of Caiaphas, the High Priest, additionally citing no mention of the word high priest on any inscriptions in the ossuaries and no direct mention of a priestly family; and, finally, doubts that a distinguished high priest would be in an ossuary with so many women and children.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Domeris, 51-52.

<sup>30</sup> “Editorial: ‘Mariam Daughter of Yeshua, Son of Caiaphas, Priest of Ma’aziah from Beth ‘Imri’, eds. *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 144, I (2012), I 4. DOI: 10.1179/003103212X131772205555640

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

The inscription of the ossuary with the inscription has been interpreted as: “Mariam (or Mriam) daughter of Yeshua son of Caiaphas, priest of Ma’aziah from Beth “Imri””<sup>32</sup> Some scholars that Beth Imri refers to “the place of residence of the deceased (or of the wider family”<sup>33</sup> o it “might be the name of a priestly family, the sons of Immer Ezra 2:36-37; Neh 7:39-42), whose descendants Could conceivably have included members of the Ma’aziah course.”<sup>34</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

I have examined Caiaphas’ status in the community as high priest, reported on the findings of his ossuaries and his family relations, in reference to his ossuaries. Other than his name and names of family members, the ossuaries found do not tell a lot about his role as priest. I agree that one wouldn’t expect a man of his status to have his bones mixed in with many women and children. However, I think the artifacts found in the ossuary were compelling in establishing the time period. And, additionally, I thought is was compelling evidence that his name was not a very common, Jewish name, like the other Jewish, traditional names. I agree it was a family,. with a similar name, as Caiaphas, but I’m not so sure, if it was the high priest, Caiaphas’ family.

### **REFLECTION**

One’s theology, concerning the afterlife, and one’s status in life, seems to have quite a bearing on how one perceives their death. It appears that one’s belief system does not stop at the grave but continues with you. That’s one thing, however, but to actually work, professionally, as an archeologist, excavating and discovering ossuaries, so we can validate and get a clearer picture of history and people’s lives during a given period of time, is something totally different. It

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

certainly makes people come to life, though dead, giving them a historical context. This way, we do not study and read history, especially Biblical history, and impose our modern-day thoughts on people of the past.

I think it is also intriguing that those in power, and the wealthy, want to continue being so even in death. We often hear and say that death is the great equalizer, but there appears to be a need to even gather bones together in ossuaries, so you can continue to remain with your own kind. It is like maintaining a privilege, even in death. But, looking at it from another perspective, why would someone, who has been oppressed, or a slave, want to continue their role in death? One of the reasons the Gospel is so appealing is that we are promised robes, shoes, and streets of gold, a crown etc., all indications that life, finally, is going to be better, even if it is in the afterlife.

Maybe, in some ways, ossuaries are a way to be memorialized, in the hopes that one day some one will come digging or looking for you. Thus, one leaves pottery, inscriptions, and symbols, i.e., intentional, clues of who you were, and why you mattered. However, if one is concerned about the resurrection of their souls and meeting God, why would any of this matter? I think, Hachlili, is correct, perhaps it has more to do with the psychological values of the family, rather than the deceased.<sup>35</sup> And I would add, psychological need to not accept death as final.

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<sup>35</sup> Hachlili, 110.

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