

**The burial caves of the Dominican monastery in Jerusalem  
ARE NOT the tombs of the last kings of Judah.**

In 1986 the Israeli archaeologist Amos Kloner, in his article published in *Levant*<sup>1</sup>, presented the hypothesis that the Dominican Monastery of Jerusalem is the location of the biblical garden of Uzza and of the burial caves of the last kings of Judah, from Manasseh onwards. In a recent publication he reiterates his assumption.<sup>2</sup>

His argumentation is founded on a wrong translation of a text of *The War of the Jews* written by Flavius Josephus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD<sup>3</sup>. Kloner translates the Greek word *speleion* by “burial cave”, misinterpreting the article of the Greek dictionary *LSJ*, where this word is correctly translated by “grotto, cave”<sup>4</sup>. In fact, in the entire work of Josephus, *speleion* appears 41 other times, all of them without any doubt related to grottos, caves or caverns<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, when he speaks about

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<sup>1</sup> Kloner, Amos. “The ‘Third Wall’ in Jerusalem and the ‘Cave of the Kings’ (Josephus War V 147).” *Levant* 18 (1986): 121-129.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Kloner, Amos and Zissu, Boaz. *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period*. Leuven-Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007: 467.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 5.147 (Thackeray, LCL).

<sup>4</sup> In three cases, where *speleion* is associated with another word implying a burial place, *LSJ* adds the meaning “grave”, evidently because of the second word. In Josephus text, *speleion* is not associated to any “burial”, thus the right translation is “grotto”, “cavern” or “cave”. Cf. Liddell, H. G., R. Scott and H. S. Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. With revised supplement. Oxford, 1996: article sph/laion.

<sup>5</sup> Rengstorf, Karl, Heinrich. *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus*, Leiden, Brill, 2002: article sph/laion.

burials, Josephus employs other words, such as *mnemeion*, *mnema*, *taphos* and *theke*, the latter reserved to the tombs of the kings of Judah<sup>6</sup>.

In his argumentation Kloner quotes some Bible's texts too, but he forgets to recognize that, according to the same texts, the tombs of the last kings of Judah were in the "garden of the palace of Manasseh"<sup>7</sup>. It seems very strange indeed that Manasseh should built his palace in an unprotected region that, according to Kloner himself, was a burial area until the time of Agrippa 1<sup>st</sup>, 41-44 AD. Moreover, no archaeological evidence of Iron Age II building has been found in the area north of the Damascus Gate.

Finally, basing themselves on the biblical texts, Barkay<sup>8</sup> and Na'aman<sup>9</sup> have assumed that the tombs of the last kings of Judah should be located in the southern part of Jerusalem, either on the Mont Zion or its slopes, or around the City of David respectively.

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<sup>6</sup> Josephus, Ant. 8. 264.285; 9. 104.166.172.243; 10. 77; 14. 124; 15. 61; 16. 181.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 2 Kings 21, 18 = 2 Chronicles 33, 20 TM=LXX

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Barkay, Gabriel. "On the Location of the Tombs of the later Kings of the House of David", *Between Hermon and Sinai: Memorial to Amnon Binyaminovitz*. Studies in History, Archaeology and Geography of Eretz Israel. Edited by M. Broshi. Jerusalem: Private publication, 1977: 75-92 (Hebrew). Online version : <http://www.cityof david.org.il/images/pdf//10.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Na'aman, Nadav. "Death Formulae and the Burial Place of the Kings of the House of David." *Bib* 85 (2004): 249-253.