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Indiana Jones and the cave of John the Baptist

By Moshe Reinfeld

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by: **Moshe Reinfeld**

The discovery of "the cave of John the Baptist" not far away from Jerusalem was a great journalistic drama. Archaeological news easily lights the imagination. Remember the movie series of Indiana Jones. Is it true that John the Baptist began to baptize his followers in this cave? Let us go over the facts, and find out.

There are not many historical sources of information concerning the whereabouts of John the Baptist. Of these, the Gospels, especially St. Luke, give us the most accurate information. Another source may be "the Antiquities of the Jews" by Josephus Flavius.

St. Luke tells us that Zachary, the father of John, was a priest, who lived with John's mother Elisabeth in "a city of Judah" in "the hill country". No source tells us exactly where it was. But we should assume that people live near their work place. If so, that city was situated in the vicinity of Jerusalem, because priests worked in the Temple. Traditionally, it is believed that Zachary and Elisabeth lived in Ein Kerem, a small town near Jerusalem, but there are no archaeological findings which can prove it.

Some churches have been built in Ein Kerem since the Byzantine era, though we do not know if the earlier churches were dedicated to John the Baptist or related to him. The first ones who did associate Ein Kerem to John were the Crusaders, but it must be emphasized that those Christian conquerors of the Holy land used to adapt the Holy sites to the area they ruled.

When the Crusaders controlled the way to Jerusalem, they said that the village of Emmaus was situated in the village of Abu Ghosh, and built there a beautiful church. A hundred years later, after they were driven away by the Moslems from there, they did not hesitate to identify Kubeiba as the one and only Emmaus. Also there they built a church, a monastery and fortress.

Actually there has been always a town called Emmaus. It is located in the Ayalon valley. The early Christians believed that this is the real Emmaus, mentioned in the Gospels, and magnificent churches

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were built there during the Byzantine era, 1500 years ago. The problem with this identification was that the place is located more than 30 kilometers from Jerusalem, while according to St. Luke the distance was only 11 kilometers.

Back to John the Baptist. We have already considered the location of his birth place. And now let us ask ourselves: where did he preach and baptize? The Gospels tell us mainly two geographical facts. That he did his preaching and religious rituals in the Judea desert, and that he baptized people who came to him from Judea and Jerusalem, in the Jordan River.

St John mentions specifically a place called Aenon, near Salim. He says John the Baptist operated there "because there was much water there". St John mentions another place called "Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing". The only possible conclusion for those who are acquainted with the area should be that John baptized his fellow Jews in the vicinity of Jericho. It was the only place combining the water of the Jordan River, a convenient road from Jerusalem and Judea and a

geographical closeness to a desert, Judea desert.

St. Luke tells us that John was born when Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee. It means John lived when Herod the 2nd, son of King Herod the Great, ruled the northern and the eastern part of the country. Many years later, this tetrarch (Roman prince) arrested John and executed him in a brutal way, by beheading him.

Why was he imprisoned and eliminated? Some of the Gospels tell us that John rebuked the tetrarch publicly for his evil deeds. But the great Jewish historian Josephus tells us another story. John was regarded as politically dangerous. St. Matthew insinuates that this version is reliable, when he says that Herod "feared the multitude, because they counted him (John) as a prophet".

The main contribution of Josephus to our story is telling us where John was imprisoned and murdered. It was in the fortress of Machaerus (Mikhvar, in Hebrew), the remains of which can be seen nowadays in the kingdom of Jordan.

Kibutz Tzuba (the correct Hebrew name is Tzova) where the cave was found, is located only four kilometers from Ein kerem, which probably was the birthplace of John, as mentioned above. But we should recall that John did not operate there. He needed "much water". In Tzuba–Ein–Kerem area water is scarce. The Historical sources put the scene in a different site: the Jordan River, apparently near Jericho. Why not believe them?

A few hundred meters from the Tzuba cave, on the top of another hill, the remains of a small fortress can be seen. The Crusaders built it to control a secondary way to Jerusalem, used by Pilgrims. Those days the Crusaders did not control the main road to Jerusalem any more, and had no choice but to use their productive imagination to "create" new "biblical sites". Nearby Abu Ghosh is one of them. It became Emmaus.

Is the Tzuba Cave a modern such an adjustment of versions? May be .But it could also be a place where John the Baptist really did some baptizing. Why not? He was born not far away from there. His

parents could still live in Ein Kerem. May be he used the cave when he came to visit them?

We are dealing here with speculations. And these are beyond the scope of our discussion. Most of the Holy sites in Israel are believed to be the original ones without having any firm scientific proof. Does it matter? Apparently the answer is negative. Belief is a matter of the heart, not of science.

What Archaeologists do know for sure is that the Tzuba cave was used by Jews for a long period of time, starting during the reign of the Judean kings some 600 years before John's time. It continued to be used by Christians until 300– 400 years after John's time. There are some carvings from that time on the wall which are symbols related to John the Baptist, including his image, a drawing of his decapitated head and a cross shape.

Inside the cave, archaeologists found many pottery shards, indicating the cave could be used for baptizing. Is it enough for proving anything? The answer is no. Is it worth a visit? The answer is absolutely yes. But for that purpose people should wait. The cave has not yet been opened to visitors.

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Indiana Jones Returns – Too Little, Too Late?

By James Shenton

For those who came of age in the 1980s during a time of sleek consumerism and homogenous globalization, Indiana Jones was something of an idol. Harking back to a time when the jungles of South America and the Pyramids of Egypt were truly a world away, the Indiana Jones trilogy excited in us a feeling of adventure that has been rarely seen before or since.

The popularity of the Indiana Jones movies stems not just from the fact that they were directed and acted by some of the greatest Hollywood talent of the day, but also from the fact that the movies were classic adventures. They were swashbuckling epics that found an ideal mix of adventure, intrigue and mystery, steeped in myth and mysticism.

This formula was clearly successful. The first Indiana Jones movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, was the highest grossing movie of 1981 and was nominated for eight Academy Awards (of which it won four). The following two instalments, *Temple of Doom* and *The Last Crusade*, fared almost as well, each winning an Academy Award and grossing hundreds of millions of dollars.

Since 1989, though, all has been quiet on the Indy front. Despite regular calls for a fourth movie there

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were no developments for years. Rumor and hearsay surrounded plans for the fourth Indiana Jones movie since 1995, when Last Crusade writer Jeffrey Boam was asked to write a script.

Since then, several screenwriters and directors have attempted to take on the project — including Chris Columbus (Home Alone), M Night Shyamalan (The Sixth Sense) and Frank Darabont (The Shawshank Redemption) — without success.

Finally, though, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and Harrison Ford have accepted a script written by David Koepp (Spiderman, War of the Worlds). As of July 2006 Spielberg and Koepp were fine-tuning the screenplay in advance of pre-production, expected to begin in early 2007.

The question that will be repeatedly posed by fans of the series over the next couple of years is this: will it be possible to recreate the magic of the original trilogy? Hollywood has moved on since the 1980s, and audiences have come to demand big budget CGI and dazzling visual effects. Despite winning the Academy Award for Visual Effects with Temple of Doom, the appeal of the Indiana Jones movies was never in their special effects. In fact, Temple of Doom — admitted by Lucas and Spielberg as the most visual effects-heavy of the trilogy — saw the most disappointing box office performance of the three.

The main concern, though, is Harrison Ford's age. Already in his 40s in Raiders of the Lost Ark, Ford will be at least 65 when filming begins on the fourth movie. Even with the use of makeup, camera trickery and stuntmen, how can it be possible to remain faithful to the original trilogy when the star is old enough to draw a pension?

Despite these worries, however, one thing is certain. Come the release date a couple of years from now we'll see a sudden surge in the sales of fedoras and bullwhips. He may be old enough to qualify for a buss pass, but there's something about Indiana Jones that brings out the child in us all.

James Shenton is an entertainment writer and gossip columnist. James can often be found writing about movie trilogies such as Indiana Jones and Star Wars (don't get him started on the last three episodes). For similar articles and film downloads, take a look at

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