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# The Social and Political Consequences of Devotion to Biblical Artifacts

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# All the King's Horses

Essays on the Impact of Looting  
and the Illicit Antiquities Trade  
on Our Knowledge of the Past

Edited by Paula K. Lazrus and Alex W. Barker



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# 8

## *The Social and Political Consequences of Devotion to Biblical Artifacts*

NEIL BRODIE and MORAG M. KERSEL

In May 2002, sensational headlines began to appear in the world's media. "The Earliest Known Archaeological Reference to Jesus" (Wilford 2002), "Burial Box May be That of Jesus' Brother" (Kalman 2009), and "Stunning New Evidence that Jesus Lived" (Govies 2002) were among the many. These headlines announced the appearance of a commonplace limestone burial box or ossuary from the first century CE bearing the Aramaic inscription "James, Son of Joseph, Brother of Jesus." An article in the glossy archaeological magazine *Biblical Archaeology Review* (BAR) proclaimed: "After nearly 2,000 years, historical evidence for the existence of Jesus has come to light literally written in stone. . . . The container provides the only New Testament-era mention of the central figure of Christianity and is the first-ever archaeological discovery to corroborate biblical references to Jesus" (Lemaire 2002:24).

Initial attention to the spectacular find focused on the fact that it might constitute tangible proof of the biblical narratives. Most of the Western world was soon caught up in the "James, Brother of Jesus" frenzy, which culminated in November 2002 with a public display of the ossuary at Canada's premier cultural institution—Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). The November exhibition of the ossuary in Toronto was purposefully timed to coincide with the annual meetings there of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), the American Academy of Religion (AAR), and the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), which brought it together with an audience of experts in the same city. Epigraphers, New Testament scholars, and archaeologists all

made the pilgrimage to the ROM to see the box. Discussions surrounding provenience (and by *provenience* we mean “archaeological findspot”) were rare, even though there were conflicting stories about the ossuary’s object biography—about how it came to be in the possession of the long-time Israeli antiquities collector Oded Golan and about why it had only recently surfaced. Yet, although little was said about provenience, the issue of authenticity soon provoked controversy. The ossuary itself is almost certainly genuine (ossuaries of that general type and date are commonly found in rock-cut chamber tombs in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and hundreds have been excavated [Garehouse 2005: 31; Magness 2005]), but with nothing certain known of its archaeological findspot or associations, academic skepticism about its inscription began to mount, and the inevitable questions about authenticity followed.

In December 2004, Golan was arrested and charged with forging artifacts and illicit trafficking in artifacts under the 1978 Israeli Antiquities Law (Burleigh 2008:243–256). As of November 2011, the trial was ongoing, although reports indicated that the charges might be dropped because of conflicting expert testimony as to the authenticity of the inscription (Shanks 2009). Along with the James Ossuary inscription, numerous other objects were named in the indictments, including an inscribed ivory pomegranate said to be the only surviving artifact from the First Temple of Solomon, which had been on display for many years in the Israel Museum, and the Jehoash Tablet, a stone fragment inscribed in Hebrew-Phoenician script recording repairs to Solomon’s Temple carried out by King Jehoash, corroborating a similar account in 2 Kings 12:1–6 and 12:11–17.

The authenticity and, thus, the historical integrity of these important biblical artifacts and their inscriptions has become the subject of much ongoing academic debate, but their exact nature and, thus, historicity is being determined by expert analysis alone. Epigraphers and linguists are studying the formal and grammatical properties of the inscriptions, and natural scientists are examining the physico-chemical properties of the materials and patinas. It is not obvious to us that any concerted effort has yet been made to establish the provenience of any of the artifacts, even though verifiable archaeological findspot remains the most reliable guarantor of authenticity. If we could know exactly where the artifacts were found, and the nature of their associated objects and architecture, we would be more fully assured of their authenticity, and the debate would be settled (we would also be better placed to situate these artifacts in their

appropriate historical contexts). Thus, we wonder, if authenticity is the issue, and if provenience is the ultimate guarantor of authenticity, why it is that provenience is not the primary object of investigation? Why are epigraphers, archaeologists, and natural scientists lining up to offer their subjective opinions on the authenticity or otherwise of these artifacts, when there has not been any serious investigation of provenience?

As archaeologists, we find this absence of enquiry surprising, and we suspect it might reveal much about the social and cultural contexts of the artifacts’ reception, and we think there might be political considerations too. That is why, in this essay, we want to ask, for inscribed biblical artifacts and for artifacts from the Holy Land more generally, why it is that issues of authenticity have come to overshadow and outweigh those of provenience, and we want also to determine what the social and political consequences of prioritizing authenticity over provenience might be. To answer these questions, we consider how archaeological artifacts are transformed into “relics,” and how that transformation relates to their reception and consumption. At the very least, it entails spiritual and historical revelations, and we go on to discuss how those revaluations have an economic outcome. Next, we consider some political ramifications and investigate how demand for these spiritually, historically, and economically charged relics might affect the historical and thus political landscape of Israel. Finally, we return to the ROM and reexamine the economic and ethical contexts of its decision to display the James Ossuary and consider what it might reveal about museum governance in the twenty-first century.

### Authentic Experiences

Pious pilgrims have long gathered archaeological artifacts from the Holy Land as religious relics, and tourists continue to do so today. Gift shops in Jerusalem and other centers offer for sale ceramic oil lamps, coins, and other small artifacts (Kersel 2006:99–108). Imbued with sacred aura, these artifacts are seen as material facts testifying to the literal truth of the Bible, facts that can be witnessed and that are understood to embody a kind of ancient immediacy. At first sight, it might seem incongruous to consider these small quotidian artifacts as relics in the same way as artifacts that have a direct association with a biblically attested person or event, such as the James Ossuary or ivory pomegranate, but we are attracted to the idea that all these artifacts share a metonymic quality, in that they are all perceived to

be pieces of the Holy Land—pieces of the past in the present through which the past can be experienced (Gordon 1986:141; Wharton 2006:22). Thus, while the James Ossuary, the ivory pomegranate, and Jehoshaphat's Table might be encountered in museums, and small artifacts might be bought in gift shops, what the objects have in common is that they are believed to have been manufactured and used in biblical times, a fact that endows them with a religious or spiritual aura for the owner or viewer.

An authentic experience of the past presupposes an authentic object. For any artifact to possess the necessary sacred aura, for it to be considered a true relic of the biblical past, it must be genuine. Or, at least, it must be believed to be genuine. Fakes or replicas will not do. During archaeological ethnographic research conducted in 2003–2004 as part of Morag M. Kersel's (2006) doctoral investigation into the managed antiquities market in Israel, tourists were interviewed about their acquisitions in licensed antiquities shops. In Israel, it is legal to buy and sell artifacts from pre-1978 collections, and licensed dealers have archaeological material readily available for sale (although most has probably only recently been looted). One tourist stated, "I was just in Syria and Lebanon where I saw a lot of interesting archaeological artifacts for sale, but I didn't buy them there because no one could give me a *Certificate of Authenticity*. I knew that in Israel if I purchased from a licensed shop I could get a certificate and then I would know that the artifacts were real" (Kersel 2006:119). Even though most certificates of authenticity are created by shop owners on their computers and photocopied for multiple uses, most tourists and collectors do believe that the copied certificate assures the authenticity of the purchased object, whether or not its archaeological findspot is stated. For most customers, knowing that something is from "the time of Jesus," as one tourist related, is enough to satisfy them, and there is no real need to know exactly where the object came from. Purchasers of biblical artifacts rarely examine, question, or reflect on actual archaeological origins unless they are specifically germane to the historical underpinnings of a piece. Questions like "Does it come from the 'time of Jesus'?" suffice when the answer is in the affirmative. The perception that the genuine artifact not only confirms the historicity of the Bible but also materially connects with biblical times satisfies the consumer. Complex historical reconstructions achieved through archaeological research are of no immediate concern and perhaps even thought to be irrelevant.

Tourists and collectors are not alone. In the epilogue of a special issue of the *Society for Biblical Literature Forum* on problematic artifacts from the Holy Land, Christopher Rollston and Andrew G. Vaughn (2005) state that "so intense was our desire to see and hold our religious heritage that it was not uncommon, even for people with archaeological training, to elevate such an object from the antiquities market to a status high or higher than objects found in controlled excavations," thus admitting that even professionals can be blinded by an object that appears to be reaffirming faith and offering a direct experience of the past. Thus, we would argue that this desire for an authentic spiritual encounter with the biblical past is one reason why the authenticity of the James Ossuary and other biblical artifacts is at issue, but provenience is ignored. For many people, faith-based approaches to the past are as relevant, important, or as satisfying as scientific (archaeological) ones. The spiritual value of these artifacts can be as important as their potential historical value.

### Economic Realities

Scholars who work in the politically fraught subject area of Near Eastern studies have long sought a standpoint of political neutrality from which to conduct their research. Susan Pollock (2008) attributes this endeavor to a mistaken belief in scientific exceptionalism. We believe that a similar claim of exceptionalism could be made in relation to economics. Academics are rarely disposed to consider the economic outcomes of their studies, nor do they countenance the influence of money on their work. They believe that academic research proceeds outside the commercial domain (despite some very obvious reminders to the contrary, such as the 8 cm [3.25 in] high limestone lioness sold at Sotheby's New York for \$57.2 million in 2007). Collectors and museum visitors concur; they do not want their spiritual or aesthetic experience tainted by the profanity of money. Nevertheless, despite the economic myopia of academics and much of the public, biblical artifacts can function both as capital and as commodities, and for those with a pecuniary disposition they can generate large sums of money.

The commodity value of one of these artifacts is best demonstrated by the case of the ivory pomegranate. The pomegranate was first noticed by epigrapher André Lemaître in an antiquities dealer's shop in Jerusalem in 1981, when he recognized that its inscription might identify it as a piece of ritual regalia from the First Temple of Solomon. The pomegranate is

thought to have been sold soon after Lemaire noticed it (although before he published it) for something like \$3,000. Once he had published his identification in 1983, the pomegranate's value sky-rocketed. In 1987, an anonymous donor allowed the Israel Museum to buy the piece for \$550,000 (Burleigh 2008:16–17; Shanks 2005:62). This prodigious increase in price over a period of six years was entirely due to Lemaire's reategorization of the pomegranate from artifact to relic.<sup>1</sup>

Golan has not sold the James Ossuary since its original purchase, but people have drawn profit from it anyway. Again, Lemaire was involved. Golan first informed Lemaire of the ossuary in May 2002 and allowed him to inspect it two weeks later (Burleigh 2008:14–15; Garehouse 2005:30). Lemaire recognized the possible biblical association of the inscription and asked Golan if he could publish it (Burleigh 2008:18). Lemaire also brought the ossuary to the attention of Hershel Shanks, who is proprietor of the Biblical Archaeology Society (BAS). Lemaire was consequently able to announce the ossuary as an authentic artifact in an “exclusive” article in the November/December 2002 issue of the BAS publication *BAR* (Lemaire 2002).

But if it is Lemaire who deserves credit for recognizing the biblical significance of the ossuary, it was Shanks who moved quickly to realize its commercial potential. By September 2002, he had assured himself of the ossuary's authenticity, and by October 10, 2002, when he contacted the ROM about the possibility of placing the ossuary on display, he had already sold the film rights to producer Simcha Jacobovici and arranged a book deal (Burleigh 2008:34–35; Garehouse 2005:30). The exhibition lasted for six weeks from November 15, 2002 to January 5, 2003 and attracted 95,000 visitors. The ROM announced it had made a \$270,000 profit, of which \$28,000 went to Shanks (Garehouse 2005:35). Shanks and Ben Witherington III were quick to follow up, publishing *The Brother of Jesus: The Dramatic Story and Meaning of the First Archaeological Link to Jesus and His Family* later in 2003 with an initial hardback print run of 75,000 copies followed by a paperback edition (Moreland 2009:74). The television documentary program *James: Brother of Jesus, Holy Relic or Hoax*, written, directed, and produced by Jacobovici, was screened on Easter Sunday 2003 (Jacobovici and Golubev 2004) in the United States and, altogether, shown in 80 countries (Moreland 2009:74). It was released on DVD in 2004. The commercial exploitation of the ossuary continued with Shanks maintaining coverage in *BAR*, and in 2008, another book *Unholy Business: A True Tale of*

*Faith, Greed, and Forgery in the Holy Land* was published, this time by author Nina Burleigh (2008) investigating the background to Golan's trial. What, if any, money Golan made from these projects is not clear. Shanks claims that Golan has earned “not a penny” (Burleigh 2008:200).

It is perhaps one of the ironies of the case that as the erstwhile owner of the ossuary, Golan has ended up facing criminal charges in court while others have profited in his stead. Perhaps his luck will change if he is acquitted or if the charges brought against him are dismissed. An acquittal would validate the authenticity of the ossuary's inscription together with Golan's ownership, and its sale value would presumably be significant. Lemaire, who seems to have set the commercial bandwagon rolling, was paid \$1,000 by the BAS in 2002 in the form of a “travel scholarship” (Garehouse 2005:35).

Money then, or the promise of money, might be another reason why provenience is often ignored. While provenience might establish beyond doubt the authenticity of an artifact, it might also call into question ownership and in so doing eliminate the potential for personal financial gain. If, for example, the James Ossuary was in fact excavated after 1978, it could be claimed as the legitimate property of either the state of Israel or the Palestinian Authority, depending on where it was found, an outcome inimical to the financial interests of Golan, the BAS, and its various business associates. Establishing its authenticity by expert consensus, even if it is a less reliable method, does not challenge those interests. The same argument applies to the small artifacts sold in gift shops. Authenticity is a necessary prerequisite for sale. Provenience—which if it is post-1978, is illegal—might simply precipitate seizure or arrest.

### Political Contexts

So far, our discussion of biblical artifacts on the market has illustrated two things. First, that perceived authenticity is necessary for spiritual engagement with a historico-religious object or relic. Many Judeo-Christian people seek a non-intellectualized experience of the biblical past through spiritual engagement, and authentic archaeological artifacts fulfill this role by offering a piece of the past in the present—a tangible memory. Knowledge of provenience is not important for this experience, but assurance of authenticity is. Second, we have demonstrated that people are making good money satisfying this public appetite for relics. It is tempt-





rometer satisfaction." The lamp, while labeled incorrectly, is genuine, and the customers are being offered what they demand—an artifact from the time of Jesus. These same tourists no doubt visit archaeological sites and would queue up in museums to view artifacts such as the James Ossuary and the Jehoash Tablet.

When artifacts undergo the spiritual revaluations that are necessary for their transformation into relics, they are rendered accessible to the collective memory as tangible facts of narrative history, and when this collectively remembered history reinforces or underwrites an official version of political legitimacy, as it does with the Jewish claim to Israel and the concordant Christian tradition of a Holy Land, then these same artifacts as relics also become charged with political significance. Those who decide what artifacts are valuable also decide what history is valuable. Thus, although the market in Israeli antiquities is to all appearances politically disinterested, driven as it is by faith and commerce, it might still have political outcomes. Demand places a monetary value on artifacts, and that monetary value causes them to be illegally excavated or faked, and then passed onto the market, whence they enter museums, private collections, the academic literature, and ultimately the public and political consciousness, as the material confirmation of history. Whether small bronze coins from the time of Bar Kochba or an inscribed ossuary from the time of Jesus, they "concretize" history, but it is a specific, Judaeo-Christian history. Islamic artifacts are not encouraged to "appear" in the same way. Christians and Jews do not buy them, so they are worth less than their Judaeo-Christian equivalents, and there is no real monetary incentive to fake them or to dig them up. Islamic history is not concretized. The market in holy artifacts may not in itself be discriminatory, but the consumers are, and through their cumulative acts of acquisition and devotion, they encourage the materialization of one historical narrative at the expense of another.

### Museum Ethics

In Byron McCane's (2009:20) discussion of the James Ossuary, he asserts that "an artifact with no known archaeological context or provenance was presented to the SBL and to ASOR by persons with no scholarly credentials or academic affiliations." We might ask how this can have happened, particularly, as McCane continued, the same persons "stood to profit sub-

stantially by displaying the artifact," as we have shown. Prior to the ossuary's display at the ROM, Shanks had obtained private assessments of its inscription's authenticity from Lemaire and the Geological Survey of Israel (Burlleigh 2008:34–35; Gatehouse 2005:30), but the ROM did not subject it to rigorous and transparent academic scrutiny and scientific testing or even an assessment by the Israeli governmental body—the IAA—charged with the oversight of artifacts of national importance. Not, crucially, did it establish provenience. "Due diligence" of this sort is standard museum practice, but in this case, it appears not to have happened. McCane suggests—and all the published evidence supports him—that economic considerations were paramount for the exhibition broker (Shanks) and, more importantly, for the ROM itself. Led astray by the lure of the profit margin and the possibility of material verification of the existence of Jesus, they ignored the skeptics.

The role of the ROM in this affair deserves more than a little attention. In many ways, a museum acts as a gatekeeper, occupying a position that allows it to decide what artifacts should be accepted as culturally important and on what grounds they should be accepted. The public invests authority in the museum for that purpose and expects in return that the museum should be diligent in its practice. As museum professionals are keen to emphasize, museums enjoy the public trust (Cuno 2004). By the time an artifact is presented at exhibition as genuine, the public expects that all necessary checks have been performed by the appropriate experts. By prematurely and perhaps mistakenly presenting the ossuary as genuine, the ROM failed in its gatekeeping duty—it opened the gate to a man brandishing dollar bills without first conducting the necessary baggage inspection.

But this characterization might be treating the ROM unfairly. The reality of the situation is more complex. In displaying the James Ossuary, the ROM took on several roles at once. It became the custodian of a sacred relic, a suspected collaborator in the illegal trade in antiquities, a shaper of public interpretation, a fiduciary institution, and the promoter of a saleable item. Not surprisingly, this mixing of roles was confusing, sometimes contradictory, and ultimately perhaps damaging to the museum's mandate of public service. It exposed very publicly a discordance between different strands of the ROM's mission—between obligations to the material curated and obligations to the museum's public.

The strategic objectives of the ROM's mission are available online.<sup>3</sup> They include the following:

- To produce nationally and internationally outstanding and innovative programs of agreed research and collections management.
- To use the highest ethical standards in all aspects of museum operations, including human resource management, and to have policies which are understandable, meaningful, and consistently and fairly applied.

These objectives might be characterized as expressing the ROM's obligation to curated material. The ROM undertakes to acquire, curate, and research material to the highest applicable standards. But the strategic objectives also include the following:

- To exceed visitor expectations for engagement and a meaningful experience.
- To produce surpluses to fund operations and aspirations as defined in business plans, while increasing the proportion of self-generated revenues each year.

These objectives express a different aspect of the ROM's mission and establish its obligation to the public that supports it. Both of these mission obligations are laudable, but in the case of the James Ossuary, they came into collision.

ROM press releases issued at the time of the exhibition (ROM 2002a, 2002b, 2002c) clearly expose the dilemma posed by the ossuary to its strategic objectives. The press releases were keen to emphasize that the ROM was the first museum to display "the world-famous James Ossuary, which has been described as the most important find in the history of New Testament archaeology" (ROM 2002c), but they were also careful to introduce an element of scholarly doubt and caution, promising to "bring forward the various expert theories regarding its religious significance and archaeological history" and to present "a balanced view of some scholars' recent, and to some, controversial claims about the container's authenticity, history and meaning, from both the scientific and social perspectives." Sup-

porting material on display at the exhibition espoused similar themes (Bremer 2009). This intention to explore controversy fits well with the strategic objectives of promoting meaningful visitor engagement and increasing self-generated revenue. But it would only be possible by abandoning another objective, the desire to operate according to the highest ethical standards.

The amended 2001 ROM policy on ethics and conduct states that all employees must:

... observe the principles established by the Canadian Museum Association's Ethics Guidelines (1999) and the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) Code of Ethics (revised edition, 2001) [Royal Ontario Museum 2001].

As regards unprovenanced archaeological artifacts, the 1999 Ethics Guidelines of the Canadian Museums Association are not very specific. Article E states:

Museums should be particularly conscious that material acquired in an illicit, unethical or exploitative manner may be offered for donation, loan, or identification. They should therefore develop procedures to avoid such situations [Canadian Museum Association 1999].

But at the time of the exhibition, the ICOM ethics were explicit and offered the highest ethical standard. According to the then-current 1986 ICOM code, a museum should not accept excavated material on loan:

... where the governing body or responsible officer has reasonable cause to believe that their recovery involved the recent unscientific or intentional destruction or damage of ancient monuments or archaeological sites, or involved a failure to disclose the finds to the owner or occupier of the land, or to the proper legal or governmental authorities [ICOM 1986].

In short, the ROM should not have acquired the ossuary on loan without an adequate account of provenience. Without such an account, it was not acting according to the highest ethical standard (ICOM's) as required by its own strategic objective.

In July 2003, in a further press release issued in response to police questioning of Golan, the ROM stood by its assessment of the ossuary's authenticity and emphasized again that the museum existed in part "... to help facilitate public understanding and debate about important artifacts and specimens" (Royal Ontario Museum 2003). Finally, and damagingly perhaps, it also admitted that the provenience was unknown: "There is always a question of authenticity when objects do not come from a controlled archaeological excavation, as is the case with the James Ossuary" (Royal Ontario Museum 2003). In response to a letter written to the ROM's director, William Thorsell, in June 2004 about this issue of unknown provenience, he replied that the ROM had held discussions with the IAA over the loan of the ossuary and that the IAA had licensed its export.<sup>4</sup> When agreeing to the loan, however, the IAA "had no idea" of the ossuary's potential importance as Golan had not mentioned the inscription (Burleigh 2008:57; Garehouse 2005:30). Furthermore, in his letter, the ROM's director also expressed the ROM's belief that the ossuary had been acquired on a legal market 40 years before the date of exhibition. If this had been true, it would have placed the ossuary outside the qualifying "recent" stricture of the ICOM code. But the ROM's only source of information in this matter would have been Golan himself. The ROM must have taken his word at face value, without any material verification, which is not acceptable due diligence. Since the ROM display, the only evidence of ownership history that Golan has produced comprises photographs of the ossuary in his home dated to 1976 (Barkat 2007). Critically, the date 1976 is later than the 1970 threshold established by the *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, which has now been generally accepted by the international museum community as the point of demarcation between "recent" and "past" episodes of illegal or destructive misappropriation of cultural objects (Brodie and Renfrew 2005:351–353). The ICOM ethics spoke of "reasonable cause to believe," and although provenience is not known, as the ROM itself admitted, and the ossuary's history is not known before 1976, there will always be reasonable cause to believe that its excavation involved the recent unscientific or intentional destruction or damage of ancient monuments or archaeological sites, and therefore its acquisition or loan should be avoided. This was the ethical standard set by ICOM, and it was the standard that the ROM failed to meet.

When faced by the James Ossuary, the ROM was placed in the unenviable position of weighing the ethical cost of displaying a newly surfaced object of unknown provenience and not yet vetted by the academic and scientific communities against the museum's obligation to the public—presenting visitors with the opportunity to view an astonishing find in the history of archaeology. For its income, the ROM is dependent on direct public support, private benefaction, gate receipts, and other visitor expenditure. At a time when the ROM's direct public support was being reduced, the ossuary was a "god send" (pun intended) for making good the economic shortfall by increasing visitor-related revenues. Even then, it appears that the ROM did want to assess the ossuary properly before agreeing to an exhibition, until Shanks threatened to offer the ossuary instead to the Metropolitan Museum in New York or the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. (Garehouse 2005:30). This threat placed pressure on the ROM to act quickly or lose the financial boost of exhibiting the "find of the century." The ROM's hand was further forced when Shanks announced at the October press conference unveiling the ossuary that it would be displayed at the museum to coincide with the SBL and ASOR meetings in Toronto (Garehouse 2005:30). The pressure to capitalize on the economic potential of the ossuary may have encouraged the museum staff to be less critical of the issue of the authenticity and less cognizant of ICOM's ethical advice. For the ROM, then, a discordant mission allowed or forced them to choose between an ethical and a profitable course of action. It chose the latter, but in so doing set in train a sequence of events that ultimately brought its reputation into question—a reputation that museum ethics are designed to protect.

The attitudes of museums toward unprovenienced objects (that are acquired on loan or through bequests, donations, or direct purchase) are often in a state of flux. While ostensibly adhering to civic-minded mandates for public engagement, museums can easily embrace an object as a relic, a treasure, or a work of art, or less publicly, as a visitor attraction or a means of exhibiting prowess in the marketplace or of overshadowing rival institutions. Their willingness in these circumstances to turn a blind eye to issues of provenience ensures that the demand for looted artifacts persists. It also ensures that sometimes, perhaps often, objects that are fake, as might turn out to be the case with the James Ossuary, meet this demand. But when the museum itself is arbiter and guarantor of authenticity, if it displays a forged object as genuine without first conducting the

appropriate due diligence, it betrays itself, and it betrays the public trust. The lie, as Oscar Muscarella (2000) has said, becomes great.

### Conclusion

It is a long way from a rock-cut tomb outside Jerusalem to a gallery inside the ROM, and there are conceptual and physical distances, too, between territorial claims in Israel and museum governance in Canada. Bruno Latour (1993) would recognize these observations as signs of a hybrid network, of people acting on objects and objects acting on people over distance. Latour would also resist reduction to the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), but it is hard not to recognize the multiple exchanges of economic and various forms of cultural capital that are in play. The scandal of the burial box has exposed more of the antiquities trade network than would normally be the case, and we have offered only a preliminary sketch of its lineaments. We hope, however, to have done enough to demonstrate the wide-ranging social and political circumstances and consequences of the trade in biblical artifacts.

*Acknowledgments:* David Gill and Christopher Chippindale will recognize that we have appropriated their unforgettable phrase for our title. We hope they don't think we have misappropriated it.

### Notes

1. The effect on price of Lemaire's identification highlights the positive impact of scholarly work on the antiquities trade.
2. Electronic document, [http://www.antiquities.org.il/shod\\_eng.asp](http://www.antiquities.org.il/shod_eng.asp), accessed November 21, 2011.
3. Electronic document, <http://www.rom.on.ca/about/pdf/boardpolicies/vision.pdf>, accessed November 21, 2011.
4. Letter dated June 15, 2004, written by ROM director William Thorsell in response to a letter written by Neil Brodie on May 20, 2004.