**הגלוסקמא של Ζαχαρίας (= זכריה), מעוטרת במספר מוטיבים: 2 עמודים הרודיאנים גבוהים (עצמאיים), מוטיב הרוזטה היהודי (6 עלים), רישום סכמטי של מבנה (עם פתחים) ובו גוף מרחף בצורת כנף (המסמל ככל הנראה את "כנף השכינה"/"רוח הקודש" או צפור/יונה), רישום של 2 ירחים (המסמלים מחזוריות והתחדשות), מוטיב גיאומטרי "מינדר" (המאפיין את עיטורי תקרות בית המקדש שבנה המלך הורדוס בירושלים) ואמפורה (כד/גביע), סמל יהודי קדום. התקופה הרומית. המאה הראשונה לספירה**

**The ossuary of Ζαχαρίας (= Zechariah), is decorated with several motifs: 2 tall (free-standing) Herodian columns, the Jewish rosette motif (with 6 leaves), a schematic drawing of a structure (with openings) containing a wing-shaped hovering figure (probably symbolizing the "wing of the Shekinah" /"Holy Spirit" or a bird/dove), a drawing of 2 moons (symbolizing cycles and renewal), a geometric motif "Meander" (which characterizes the ceiling decorations of the temple built by King Herod in Jerusalem) and an amphora (urn/cup), an ancient Jewish symbol. Roman period. First century AD/CE.**

The ossuary of Ζαχαρίας (=Zacharias) (the inscription on the ossuary is in Greek) is unique in its character and decoration.

The ossuary is decorated on its narrow side with 2 tall independent columns (which are not attached to the building and are not connected by an upper cornice), composed of links, with each column having a base and a capital in the Greek style. Their shape is typical of the columns of the monumental buildings built by King Herod in Jerusalem, Herodium, Masada, Caesarea and elsewhere (see photos). The shape of the 2 columns (with links) is not typical of the columns of facades of tombs and grand tombstones from the period (such as the facade of the "Yad Avshalom" monument and "Zechariah's Tomb" in the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem, where the columns were made in one unit, and the approximately 12 meter high column, fashioned as one solid piece, which was discovered in the Russian Compound in Jerusalem).

The "rosette" (6 leaved) appears between the 2 columns on the narrow facade of the ossuary. This decoration is characteristic of Jewish ossuaries and bestows an additional mark of “Jewish” identity upon the man whose bones were preserved in the ossuary, whose name was recorded only in Greek.

The two tall “independent” columns (not connected by a cornice) decorating the ossuary are of a sort known from the description of the Jerusalem Temple, where two free-standing pillars were erected in the front of the sanctuary. (In the First Temple, these two pillars were given the names Jachin and Boaz.)

On its broad side, the ossuary is decorated with the walls of a structure (made of schematic bricks) with 4 entrances (one on each side of the rectangle). The person who decorated the ossuary attempted to incorporate an element of perspective for the structure by adding diagonal lines at its corners.

At the heart of the structure one can discern a figure/object in the shape of a scythe (“crescent”) placed within the “rectangle” with the 4 openings. This figure probably represents the wing/wings of God (“the wings of the Shekhina” or “the Holy Spirit”) or the wings of an angel or a bird (dove). The entrances in the structure enable the (“the wings of the Shekhina” or “the Holy Spirit” (represented in the form of a wing or bird/dove) to freely enter and leave the structure, without being trapped inside it. The “hovering” figure (in the shapr of a wing or wings or bird/dove) presumably expresses divine protection over the deceased, in the manner of Ruth’s words to Boaz: “May the LORD reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge!”(Ruth 2:12). It is worth noting that in all four of the NT Gospels, in descriptions that relate to Jesus’ baptism by John in the Jordan, “the Holy Spirit” (spirit of God, often translated as “Holy Ghost”) is represented as a dove (bird).

In the upper part of the other broad section of the ossuary, there is a geometric decoration known as a meander (a series of repeating meandering curves). Such a motif and similar ones appear on fragments of the ceilings of the magnificent buildings built by King Herod in the complex of the Second Temple, on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (see photo showing fragments of ceilings and cornices from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, decorated with a meander of a character similar to that depicted on the ossuary.2 The fragments are found today in the Terra Sancta Museum and the Franciscan Museum in Jerusalem and the ceiling section is currently on display in the Hecht Museum in Haifa). As far as is known, this Meander motif has been found to this day only in the Temple buildings built by Herod on the Temple Mount (Temple complex) in Jerusalem.

It seems that all of the features notes above (the tall columns, the schematic sketch of the building with the openings containing the "wings of the Shekinah" and the decoration of the Meander typical of the Temple in Jerusalem) point to a connection between the deceased Ζαχαρίας (Hebrew: זכרי; Zechariah) and the Temple in Jerusalem, that is, suggesting that the deceased had been a priest in the Temple, and that divine protection was given to the deceased, and that there had been a divine revelation to the deceased that was known in the community.

The name Ζαχαρίας is meticulously engraved on the ossuary, and appears with this exact spelling in Greek in the New Testament as the name of Zechariah the priest, the father of John the Baptist, a relative of Jesus, the herald of the coming of Jesus and the baptizer of Jesus. Zechariah the priest is said to have been a relative of Jesus and the husband of Elizabeth (Elisheva), who was also a member of the family of priests and a relative of Mary (Miriam), the mother of Jesus. According to the Gospel of Luke, Zacharias was a priest from her father's house, one of the most respected priestly “watches" in the Second Temple during the reign of Herod, and while Zacharias the priest was burning the sacred incense in the Temple, an angel appeared to him and announced to him that a son would be born to him and he would name him "Yohanan" (John), and that this child will announce the coming of the Messiah (Luke 1:12-17)… The account of the revelation of the angel (Gabriel) to Zechariah the priest, father of John the Baptist, is one of the central stories in the Gospel stories of the New Testament and it also adorns an ossuary from the beginning of Christianity (see the last photo). According to tradition, Zechariah the priest was murdered in the Temple courtyard.

The decoration of the ossuary with a "floating" object (figure), assuming that it symbolizes the wing(s) of God/the Holy Spirit or the wing(s) of an angel, together with the description of the two columns placed in front of the Temple in Jerusalem by Herod, and the rectangular structure with openings that encloses the body-like wing/dove, along with the Meander (which characterized the ceilings and eaves of the Jerusalem Temple) are all consistent with the possibility that this ossuary belonged to Zechariah the priest, who served as a priest of the Temple in Jerusalem, and who, according to Christian tradition, was given divine protection and received revelation from God's angel - the angel Gabriel ("And the Angel replied and he said to him, "I am Gabriel who stands before God" (Luke 1:19.). It is worth noting that according to Jewish and Christian belief, the angel Gabriel is described as a disembodied being made of light, so it is possible that the "wing/wings" allude to the angel Gabriel, and not to the wings of God (the Shekinah)/the Holy Spirit.

Just as the appearance of the divine "wing of the Shekinah" on the front of the ossuary symbolizes the connection between the deceased and God, so it may also be assumed that there is a mystical meaning (which is not sufficiently clear) for the appearance of 2 crescents (moons) in the wide back part of the ossuary. The appearance of 2 crescents (moons) rather than one single moon and the lack of representation of the sun and the stars rule out the possibility that the origin of the presentation of the moons lies in non-Jewish worship (of the sun, the moon and the stars – a foreign belief, considered idolatrous in Judaism). Despite the unique decorations found in this ossuary, there is no doubt that the person whose bones were interred in it was Jewish (the use of osssuaries in the first century was in any case unique to Jews). The moon had a great symbolic meaning in the Jewish world - mainly due to its "cyclical" nature and its "renewal". In the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Hullin, it is said that the renewal of the moon (“*levana*”, from the root for “white”) every month symbolizes the Jewish people. Just as the moon renews itself and fades every month, so the Jewish people go through periods of ebb and flow. This cycle will continue until the future redemption. It is therefore reasonable to presume that the moons ornamentation represents the expected future renewal, the expected resurrection of the dead, and the anticipated future redemption. It should also be noted that the Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar based on the cycle of the moon's appearances and that the ritual "Blessing of the Moon” was common among the Jews in the Roman period and was recited in the first half of the Hebrew month, in front of the growing white face during this time of the month and blesses God "Who told the moon to renew itself." It is also possible that the buildings of the temple complex in Jerusalem were decorated with a geometric motif in the form of a moon, but to date no evidence for this has been found in the archaeological findings (it should be remembered that no archaeological excavations have everbeen carried out inside the Temple Mount complex itself).”

On its narrow back side, the ossuary is decorated with an open amphora (vase), a sort of large goblet with two handles. The vase motif is recognized as a Jewish motif from a number of ossuaries (this is one of the few objects that adorn a number of Jewish ossuaries. See, for example, ossuaries 213, 325, 378, 399, 815 in Corpus Rahmani). According to the assessment of ossuary specialist L.Y. Rahmani, amphorae (with and without handles) probably originally decorated Jewish tombstones that were installed on top of, or next to, Jewish tombs in Jerusalem during the first century, including the tombs of King Herod’s family and probably also the Yad Absalom tombstone in the Kidron valley. During that era, amphoras also adorned several Nabatean tombs carved into the rock in Petra, and these may have been the original inspiration for a number of Jewish tombstones carved into the rock in Jerusalem - as an elegant decorative element for the Jewish burial caves. The amphora was adopted as a distinctive Jewish symbol at the end of the Second Temple period (in the first century CE/AD) and it also appeared afterwards on Jewish coins both during the Great Revolt against the Romans (around 70 CE/AD) and during the Bar Kochba Revolt (at the beginning of the second century CE/AD) - (see photo of the Jewish *peruta* with an amphora from the days of the Great Revolt and the coin from the days of the Bar Kochba Revolt stamped with a magnificent amphora decoration). The prominence of the amphora in ancient Jewish art may br associated with the fact that from a certain stage in the first century CE/AD, Jews refrained from drawing the seven-branched menorah. In later times, the vase was also a Christian symbol and it decorates several mosaic floors of churches from the fifth and sixth centuries CE/AD found in and around Israel, with branches and vines and bunches of grapes hanging from it. It is possible that in the early days of Christianity the motif of the vase also reminded the Christian believers of the cup that Jesus held in his hand at the Last Supper, known as the "Holy Grail."

NOTES:

1. In the Ancient Near East, winged animals (especially birds and particularly doves), had a symbolic meaning of the revelation of the divinity. A wing/wings and/or a bird/dove symbolized in ancient times the Spirit of God ("Holy Spirit" in the New Testament), and sometimes the possibility of communicating with God. At the end of the Second Temple period, the dove was considered a symbol of the Holy Spirit and also symbolized the souls of saints.
2. One of the most important references to the appearance of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament refers to the event of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John the Baptist - and there the "Holy Spirit" is described as a dove. The connection between John the Baptist and the spirit/wings of the dove appears explicitly in all four books of the Gospel in the New Testament: in the book of John, it is said about John the Baptist: “Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.” (John 1:32-33). The Gospel of Matthew states "And it came to pass when Jesus was baptized and he hastened to come up from the water, and behold the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and resting on him." (Matt 3:16). In the Gospel of Mark 1:10 it is said: “And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.” In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 3, it is said: “Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). Due to these depictions, the most popular depiction of the Holy Spirit in Christian art from the fifth century onwards was the form of a winged/winged (dove).
3. The "rectangular frame" on the long side of the ossuary(within which floats the "wing" = the Holy Spirit) is not closed and leaves, as indicated, "openings" (passages) on each side. The openings above and below the "wings" are particularly wide and allow the wings of the Shekinah (or the angel) to "rise and come down", and not be "trapped" inside it. A number of Jewish ossuaries feature rectangular "frames", but they are distinctly different from the decoration in Zechariah's ossuary: they are always complete and closed, and usually even double, and they always contain an architectural element of a door/entrance gates, or of several (schematic) columns, or a magnificent facade of a tomb (facade) (see photo of 2 such examples) - which do not appear in this ossuary.
4. The possibility that the object in the shape of a "crescent" ("wings") symbolizes a jewel or an object that marked the status of the wearer, such as the biblical "wreath", "tiara" and "crown" is extremely low, as no equivalent to such an object is known or has been found in Israel or throughout the ancient world.
5. This is one of the few ossuaries decorated with high quality on all sides. Unlike most ossuaries (which were created in workshops for the production of ossuaries), it was also produced and decorated specifically in reference to the person buried in it. This suggests that the ossuary was used by a well-known person and was individually ordered for them, and that it was probably intended to stand in the center of the burial chamber, rather than adjacent to the wall or inside a hut, so that all its sides could be viewed. It thus would have been used in a certain sense as a "tombstone" for the person who was buried, and may have been commissioned by the Jewish-Christian sect/community that existed in and around Jerusalem in the first centuries CE/AD.