

Both camps were well
pronto for the unveil-
ossuary. Many mod-
do not rely on the spe-
of epigraphers to date
preferring the methods
sciences. Even antiqui-
often to use epigraphers
objects for the market,
graphy as more of an
. Gideon Sasson, one
ected antiquities deal-
old me last fall, "How
rologers have different
e future of the same
something be a sci-
sults you get can dif-
depending on whom
at day you happen to

and that the ossuary it-
he time of Jesus of
and Joseph were fairly
en. But some scholars
question whether the in-
a written by a single
century A.D. At a
n panel sponsored by
epigrapher Kyle Mc-
at the first half of the
son of Joseph") was
that appeared similar
ne of the Dead Sea
scription's second half
was written in cruder,
Carter concluded that
the inscription was
ent hand. A month
nman, the author of
James the Brother of
ed the discovery of
pat." The scholars in
ware that bad blood
Shanks and Eisenman,
to break the scholarly
Dead Sea Scrolls had
Shanks.

lay, the Society of

THE MODERNIST IMPULSE

On My Birthday

Has it ever been absent, this desire
for every moment to stand in relief,
the unending row of them set
like solitaires into what passes,
burnished to unbearable depths?

The park here is going green and all at once
its expanse is a moment of its own great making,
a flare in the midst of so much shattered.
The trees are certain their time has come.

I have never once been able to say yes,
now, this is the instant in which
I should begin to live again,
in which this love is the only love
worth having, the richest of all possible shining arts

its owner, Oded Golan, was under
criminal investigation for illicit trade
in antiquities; the American Schools of
Oriental Research policy forbids the
publication of scholarly articles about
objects from the black market. (Golan
has claimed that he bought the ossuary
more than thirty years ago, from a dealer
in the Old City of Jerusalem; if so,
that would place the purchase before a
1978 law forbidding trade in antiquities
not licensed by the Israeli government.)
Meyers also referred to an analysis
of the inscription by an independent
scholar named Rochelle Altman, who
published her work on a Biblical-studies
Web site, the Bible and Interpretation
(bibleinterp.com). Focussing on what
she called "writing systems" (including
script, direction of letters, format, size,
punctuation, and content) rather than
on individual letters and phrases, Alt-
man had concluded that the inscrip-
tion on the James ossuary was a forgery.

Hershel Shanks rose to respond.

claimed, it was the schools' policy of re-
fusing to engage with the antiquities
market that encouraged the looting of
archeological sites. Whether the in-
scription on the ossuary was composed
by one hand or two hands, Shanks ar-
gued, should be up to reputable aca-
demics to decide.

"Who is this Rochelle Altman, any-
way?" Shanks asked. "Has anyone ever
heard of her?" Then, lowering his voice,
he added, "All questions are legitimate.
What is not legitimate is to vilify and
castigate those who attempt to learn."

Many scholars in attendance were
impressed by the seeming agreement be-
tween Lemaire and Fitzmyer. But others
agreed with Meyers's stand against the
antiquities market, and felt that Alt-
man had been treated shabbily. Hershel
Shanks wanted to ship the James ossu-
ary to a convention of Christian broad-
casters in Nashville, but the Israel An-
tiquities Authority refused to extend an
export permit for the artifact. The James

to hold forth: Here,
I was here and I knew it.

In this neighborhood the slate
sidewalk piles up on itself all winter,
as it has for hundreds of winters,
cracked by the cold and heaving
into crazed shelter for the dirt below.

I roll back the stone from my life.
Oh my near-miss, return to me
now when I need you most. Come
and tell me that ages pass, that effort
is rewarded at the very least after we die.
I loved you as well as this sweet green park
coming into focus across the street,
all in delicate arrogance.

—Melanie Rehak

monumental inscription, in ancient He-
brew, on dark-gray sandstone—the first
inscription ever found bearing the name
of a king from the First Temple period,
which historians date back to the tenth
century B.C. The tablet refers to the son
of "[A]haziah, k[ing . . .] [J]udah," who
is known to Bible readers as King Je-
hoash, and who ruled between 836-
798 B.C. Jehoash was familiar to con-
temporary Biblical archeologists, most
recently in connection with an inscrip-
tion, discovered in 1993, that made the
first mention of the House of David
outside the Bible. The inscription on the
Jehoash tablet closely paralleled a pas-
sage in the Second Book of Kings, in
which Jehoash directed repairs to the
temple built by King Solomon.

The Jehoash tablet was offered for
viewing to representatives of the Israel
Museum, in Jerusalem, on behalf of an
anonymous client by an attorney named
Yitzchak Herzog. A former Cabinet sec-
retary to Ehud Barak, the Israeli Prime

Temple Mount. That site is occu-
ped by the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome
of the Rock—holy places for Muslims
and is bordered by the Western Wall, the
holiest site in Judaism. According to
Abdullah Kanaan, the secretary-general
of Jordan's Royal Committee for Jewish
Affairs, "Jewish gangs and extremist
groups" were using the newly discov-
ered Jehoash tablet to "support their
efforts to destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque." The
Archaeological Survey of Israel described
the find as "an archaeological sensation
that could have global repercussions and
effectively vindicates Jewish claims to
the Temple Mount." With such histo-
rical claims at stake, the price for the
Jehoash tablet was reportedly set at
\$1 million dollars.

The epigrapher Joseph Naveh, of
Jerusalem's Hebrew University, first
saw the tablet in mid-2001. In a Jeru-
salem hotel room, he met a man who
introduced himself as Izak Tzur, and who was