



Fooling Ourselves

By Kai Kjær-Hansen

It is one thing to be fooled by others; it is quite another to fool ourselves. When others fool us, it can be attributed to their genius and our lack thereof, perhaps combined with some wishful thinking, simple-mindedness or naiveté. When we fool ourselves and others we must accept responsibility.

Since the 1980s one of the great treasures at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem has been a thumb-sized ivory pomegranate with the inscription, "Belonging to the temple of the Lord, holy to the priests." It is the only relic from Solomon's Temple in the museum's collection.

However, at the end of 2004, the Israel Museum announced that after a renewed investigation it was found that the inscription was added in modern times, while the pomegranate itself should be dated to the Bronze Age and is about 3400 years old.

Shortly after the New Year the Israeli police filed charges against five people for being behind advanced false archaeological "discoveries" and for having performed such acts for the last quarter of a century.

Among the five people is antiquities dealer Oded Golan, who became famous in 2002 for being in possession of the so-called James ossuary with the inscription "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." Among some archaeologists this was regarded as the oldest proof that Jesus had lived. Many Bible-believing Christians rejoiced.

Israel's Antiquities Authority still recognizes that the limestone box is about 2000 years old. But the inscription is a recent forgery. If this is true the forgery was done by an expert and good enough to fool respected archaeologists. Many fear that this is merely the tip of the iceberg.

It makes one wonder if mission – including Jewish mission – is exempt from forgery and fakes. How much of what is said was once true but became false because of a recent addition? At an international conference on Jewish mission in Leipzig, Germany in 1895, Professor H.L. Strack found it necessary to point out that conversion stories ought to stick to the absolute historical truth.

This is true as well for one's own conversion story, which – as the years go by – seems to become longer and longer and consequently stand in danger of gaining false additions.

It is no less true regarding reports written about our own success and the number of people that have come to faith. The matter has been spelled out – with sharp sarcasm - by H. Lhotzky, F. Delitzsch's former private secretary, in connection with a reference made to the work of Joseph Rabinowitz. It is historically overstated, but still deserves our reflection:

Oh, those wretched mission reports ... Mission needs reports and money. Anyone who does not write reports cannot gather in money; anyone who does not gather in money cannot carry on mission. One may work in mission without spirit, but not without money.

The Israel Museum bought the above-mentioned ivory pomegranate in the 1980s for the considerable amount of 550,000 US dollars. Rather than forget the unpleasant forgery the museum has decided to continue to display it. On the museum's web page one can read that the museum believes it is important for the public to understand the process of authentication, and the techniques involved. "The pomegranate will be shown in the archaeology section as an example of this ongoing process."

In Jewish mission as well as in all other mission we should learn from this. When we realize that we have been fooled we should not sweep it under the carpet but rather activate the alarm.

A good example to be followed was given by Moishe Rosen at the LCJE Seventh International Conference in Helsinki 2003. Rosen's words speak for themselves:

I read many of the missionary magazines and hear glowing reports and witnessing encounters that thrill my soul. David Barrett in the World Christian Encyclopedia tells us there are 300,000 Messianic Jews and I want to stand up and cheer. We seem to have great reason to be encouraged.

But when I go about seeking those Jews who have come to faith in Christ; when I look for them I don't find them and I'm sure the reason I don't find them is because they are not there. At least not in the huge numbers we are given. I feel like a party pooper or like I am making rain on the Messianic Parade. I want them to be there, I want the glowing stories to be true. I need to believe that the cause to which I have devoted my life is worthwhile.

I let myself be fooled for years believing that there were tens of thousands of Russian Jews who came to faith in Y'shua. I have no less rejoicing that it is only a couple of thousand. Nevertheless many who were reported as coming to Christ just didn't make it and are not even on the way to being saved. Most of the reports of Russian Jews being saved were exaggerated and tragically, some were entirely false. Just knowing about the exaggeration and that it is accepted as being true by my colleagues in Jewish missions makes me feel like a failure by belonging to a profession that needs these exaggerations. I am ashamed of us.

