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השכלה גבוהה - 78					

Lost Faces of the Bible

Filmmaker Simcha Jacobovici
facially reconstructs ancient skulls



• By RACHEL MARDER

Have you ever tried to imagine what people from Biblical times looked like? Emmy award winning filmmaker Simcha Jacobovici thinks he may have an answer, or at least some educated guesses.

Lost Faces of the Bible, a four-part series on the National Geographic channel, follows forensic and facial reconstruction experts as they analyze four ancient skulls from the Land of Israel and create a face to match them based on information they gather from the find, such as its gender, age and health defects. Professor Israel Hershkovitz from the Department of Anatomy and Anthropology at [Tel Aviv University's Sackler Medical School](#) conducts a CAT scan on the skull in each episode, after which Victoria Lywood, a forensic artist based in Montreal, creates an extremely realistic looking face, including the hair, skin and even wrinkles. Simultaneously, another expert creates a three-dimensional printing of a replica of the skull to compare to Lywood's.

The Israeli-Canadian Jacobovici, a journalist by training who calls himself an investigative archeologist, makes documentary films dealing with archeological finds surrounding Jesus and the Land of Israel. Since 2005 he has hosted the series *The Naked Archaeologist*, in which he discusses Biblical stories and looks for evidence they occurred by exploring the Holy Land's archeological finds and interviewing scholars. It airs on Canada's VisionTV, History International in the US and just started airing in Israel.

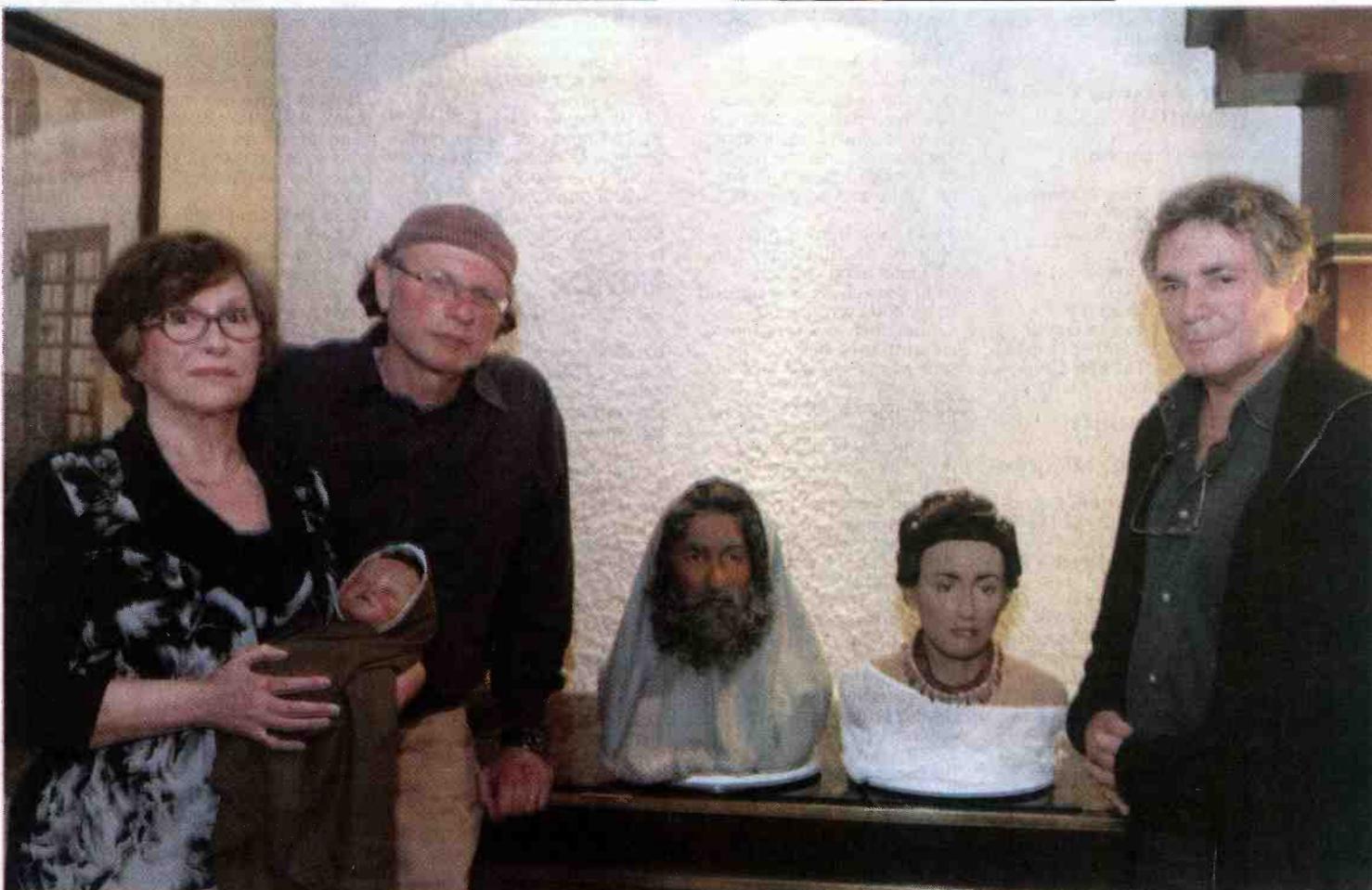
Jacobovici, an Orthodox Jew born in Petah Tikvah, lives in the Shomron area.

In the new project, Jacobovici says conducting a CAT scan on the skulls allows the academics and artists to avoid doing work on the actual skull – a point of controversy for ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel. Through facial reconstruction, Hershkovitz avoids any manipulation of bones, and Jacobovici says it's a common practice for archeologists the world over, except for in Israel.

"It's a first," says Jacobovici, whose controversial 2007 documentary *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* claimed that Jesus and his family were buried under an apartment building in Jerusalem's Talpiyot neighborhood. "No one's ever done it in Israel."

However, some academics take issue with this assertion, Jacobovici's use of facial reconstruction as a legitimate method in archeology and his films in general.

Joe Zias, a retired physical anthropologist and former archeological museum curator for the Antiquities Authority, claims he conducted the first facial reconstruction –



Gazing at faces from the Bible?

In 'Lost Faces of the Bible' Filmmaker Simcha Jacobovici facially reconstructs ancient skulls, but not everyone agrees it's legitimate science

which recreated a face to resemble a man who lived at the time of Jesus – for a BBC documentary in 1981 with Hershkovitz. But he says he'll never do one again because of how inaccurate it was.

"It's on par with astrology and palm reading," says Zias in an interview in his Jerusalem apartment. "It's not likely the reconstruction will resemble the real person... It's totally, totally subjective."

This isn't the first time Zias has taken issue with Jacobovici, whose films and television series he calls pseudo-archeology and purport false claims. Jacobovici sued Zias for defamation in 2010, as he publicly attacked his film project on the James Ossuary. Zias also went to the police over the film. The \$2.5 million lawsuit against Zias in Israel is still ongoing with a hearing coming up in July in Petah Tikvah.

In 2011 National Geographic dropped a

Jacobovici project about the early Christian relic because Zias and others expressed concerns to the network. However, The Jesus Discovery, which argues that an ossuary found in a tomb underneath a Jerusalem apartment building is the earliest known example of an object bearing a Christian symbol referring to the resurrection, eventually aired in 2012 on the Discovery Channel.

Zias sees the suit as an attempt by Jacobovici to blame him for all criticism he has received for his projects. "They decided they needed to shut someone up and I became the one they wanted to shut up," he says.

Jacobovici's new show, which claims to present "myth-busting archeology," reconstructs the face of a Philistine woman who lived at the time of Delilah, a man whose skull was found in the Galilee and could be

dated to the time of Jesus via Carbon-14 dating, a baby found in an ancient Canaanite jar, and a 6,000-year old man whose Pre-Canaanite remains were found in a desert cave. When the skull is given a Biblical "hook," linking it to a figure it may resemble, Jacobovici says it allows the viewer to connect to a familiar name, but he is not claiming the skull belongs to that figure.

"It's just storytelling," he says. "I can't prove it. I don't have Jesus's diary. But it's a reasonable stretch. We don't make anything more of it than he lived at the same time in the same place and therefore might very well have come into contact with Jesus."

David Berman, an actor on *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, hosts the series, which was four years in the making, according to Jacobovici, who says he does not see anything controversial in the project, as facial



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FILMMAKER SIMCHA JACOBOVICI (second from left) is seen here with Professor Israel Hershkovitz and forensic artist Victoria Lywood. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

reconstruction is an accepted method done by police and forensic scientists the world over.

In this case, he says, it restores the humanity to millennia old skulls. "What's new here is we did it on biblical faces on Bible era faces," he says. "We did it on somebody from Israel.

"You look at a skull and it's an artifact. You look at a face and it's a human being," he explains. "By resurrecting them so to speak, by seeing their face, this is a face that somebody loved. It probably had children. Somebody cared about this person. It's nothing scientific. By seeing a face we open a whole world, a whole audience to seeing these faces."

Archeologists conducted a CT scan and utilized facial reconstruction recently on the remains of Richard III, whose skeleton was found in a parking lot in Leicester. Zias dismisses this as show business.

"That's Hollywood is what it is," he says.

Both men accuse the other of stifling academic debate, with Jacobovici arguing that Zias is a serial defamer of credible academics and Zias countering that Jacobovici pays academics for their participation in his projects, but forces them to sign non-disclosure agreements. He says Jacobovici offered him "a large sum of money" to be interviewed in the James Ossuary film, but the interview was dependent on his signing the form and not talking to anybody.

"These are ways of muzzling people," Zias says, adding that those who agree with him are too intimidated by Jacobovici to come forward with their concerns. "It goes against the whole ethics of what you do."

But Jacobovici says he just wants a true academic debate about his work without personal attacks.

"He can disagree with everything that I do. He has a right to and I frankly don't care," he says. "The law suit is about certain charges that he made which were libelous, and democracy ends where libel begins."

He says most tips he receives that inspire his projects come from scholars who wish not to be on camera. "I have to persuade people," he says. "The minute you lose your anonymity you become an object of criticism and a lot of people don't want that."

Hershkovitz did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

What's next for the naked archeologist? A four-part series on archeological mysteries, he says, will come out next year.