Remembering the Righteous: Sarcophagus Sculpture and Jewish Patrons in the Roman World

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Program in Religion in the Graduate School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons are an important source of evidence for reconstructing the variety of ways that ancient Jews interacted with visual culture in Late Antiquity. During this period, from the 2nd to 5th centuries C.E., the sarcophagus was the height of burial fashion across the Roman Mediterranean. Wealthy individuals throughout the late ancient world adopted sarcophagus burial not only to protect their bodily remains, but to visibly display and reinforce their social status, to demonstrate their cultural sophistication, and to memorialize and narrate their sense of self. In this regard, elite members of Jewish communities in Late Antiquity were no different from their non-Jewish neighbors (Chapter 2).

The following considers nearly 200 sarcophagi from the late ancient necropoleis of Jewish communities at Beth She'arim and Rome. This corpus captures a wide range of the possibilities open to Jewish patrons as they went about acquiring or commissioning a sarcophagus and sculptural program. The variety reflects not only the different geographic and cultural realities of diaspora and home, but also the immense diversity characteristic of the myriad visual and cultural resources of the Roman world. In order to make sense of this diversity, I contextualize the styles and motifs favored by Jewish patrons according to the cultural resources they engage, moving from local traditions of stone sculpture in Palestine (Chapter 3) to the influence of Roman portrait sculpture on Jewish patrons (Chapter 7).
I begin with local traditions of stone sculpture in Palestine in order to counter the dominant scholarly narrative that these sarcophagi primarily or even exclusively copy Roman models. I argue instead that many make extensive use of visual resources with a long history of use in Jewish contexts (Chapter 4). Moreover, the corpus of sarcophagi from Beth She’arim suggests that the preferences of sarcophagus patrons there were shaped by the provincial context of Roman Syria (Chapter 5). On the other hand, certain sarcophagi from both Beth She’arim and Rome reflect sarcophagus styles with pan-Mediterranean appeal (Chapter 6), and a small group of Jewish patrons in Rome even participated in the ‘portrait boom’ that began in the 3rd century by acquiring sarcophagi with portrait sculpture (Chapter 7).

The corpus of sarcophagi belonging to late ancient Jewish patrons demonstrates a significant degree of mastery of and willingness to engage the visual koine of the Roman world, as well as significant agency with respect to the adoption and appropriation of cultural resources. I argue that the majority of Jewish patrons at both Beth She’arim and Rome were familiar with ‘Roman’ visual culture first and foremost as it existed in their local environments and were comfortable with its usage. At the same time, I consider how different settings—diaspora and Roman provincial—could influence the choices made by sarcophagus patrons. I conclude that the use of sarcophagus burial by Jewish patrons was a highly variable mode of cultural interaction, representing an ongoing negotiation of Jewishness by different individuals from different communities in the context of enduring cultural exchange.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

The Jewish experience of the Roman world is a long and complex history of cultural contact and change which played out over centuries and was variously experienced in different times and different places across the ancient Mediterranean (Map 1). Throughout, however, various forms of visual culture played an important role in mediating and negotiating the variety of Jewish experience in the Roman world and in constructing new ways of being Jewish. This project considers that role by investigating sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons as a window into Jewish interaction with the cultural world of the Roman Empire, and what it meant to ‘be Jewish’ in the context of this persistent cultural contact. As Rutgers puts it:

“Ever since the spread of Hellenistic culture in the eastern part of the Mediterranean basin, the question for Jews of how to preserve their heritage, on the one hand, and how to interact successfully with their pagan, and later, the increasingly numerous Christian neighbors, on the other hand, must have been as continuous as the solutions they found were multifaceted.”

To that end, this project examines the sculptural programs on sarcophagi from the Jewish catacombs of Beth She’arim and Rome as one perspective on the ways in which Jewish communities and elite Jewish individuals interacted with the broader cultural world they lived in, and how they conceived of themselves and others. Evidence for Jewish experiences of the Roman world is derived from the ways in which the sculptural programs on sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons draw on, adapt, alter or avoid the

1 Rutgers 1992, 102.
myriad visual and cultural resources of the Roman world of Late Antiquity (from the 3rd to 5th centuries C.E.). Each chapter isolates a different group of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons by identifying the cultural and visual resources they engage, and by contextualizing them within the broader corpus and conventions of Roman sarcophagus sculpture. The ultimate goal of this project is to assess whether these artifacts and their sculptural programs reveal anything meaningful about Jewish experiences of the Roman world and the construction of Jewish identities therein.

Viewed from this angle, *Remembering the Righteous* is a further entry in the study of ‘Jewishness’ and ‘Jewish identity.’ This is a topic that has received an extraordinary amount of attention of late, and one that runs parallel with a similar preoccupation with ‘local identities’ in the study of Romanization and the field of classical archaeology. Moreover, the role that visual forms and practices played in ‘being Jewish’ has emerged as an important topic in the field of Jewish studies, and the body of research on this topic is growing fast.

This project approaches the question of cultural exchange, visual culture and the Jewish identities constructed therein from a new angle: the nearly two hundred sarcophagi of limestone and marble that belonged to the Jewish patrons of Beth

2 See, for example: Boatwright 2012; Hales and Hodos 2010; Hoffman and Brody 2014; Hope 2001; Laurence and Berry 1998; Mattingly 1997; Mattingly and Alcock 1997; Revell 2011; Webster 2001; Webster and Cooper 1996; Woolf 1994; 1998.

She’arim and Rome. Though they are few in relation to the larger corpus of Roman sarcophagi, the sarcophagi used by the Jewish communities of Beth She’arim and Rome are the best preserved and most elaborately decorated funerary artifacts that survive from Jewish antiquity.

Ultimately, the goal throughout will be to reveal and appreciate the complex picture that visual culture paints of the historical experience of Jewish sarcophagus patrons in Late Antiquity and the nuances of their interaction with Roman culture. Sarcophagus burial was used by only a small number of wealthy, elite Jewish individuals in the Roman world and as such, sarcophagi are one small sliver of the visual culture that was used, consumed and sometimes created by Jews. We will find, however, that the sarcophagi and their sculptural programs reveal a history of cultural negotiation and interaction as complex as any other artifact of Jewish culture. By considering sarcophagi from two communities at either ends of the Roman Mediterranean, and by contextualizing the sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons within local, provincial and pan-Mediterranean visual resources and patronage practices, we will see that elite Jewish sarcophagus patrons were as sophisticated as any other local elites in the Roman world in their consumption of funerary and visual culture.

1.1 Sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons in the Roman World

Sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons represent only a small fraction of the surviving corpus of Roman sarcophagi. They number fewer than 200 in all. With very
few exceptions, they come from the Jewish communities and necropoleis of Beth She’arim and Rome. Even if we accepted the most conservative estimates of 5,000 surviving sarcophagi from across the Roman Mediterranean, the Jewish corpus is disproportionately small—4% of known sarcophagi—especially in comparison with most estimates that place the Jewish populace of the Roman world at roughly 10% of the total population.

The most likely explanation for this fact is that there are more than a few surviving sarcophagi that belonged to Jewish patrons which we can never identify as such because we lack provenance or inscriptional evidence (see below). No evidence suggests that the Jewish sarcophagi were deliberately destroyed at any point. Nevertheless, despite the small sample size, the corpus of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons from these two sites is an astoundingly diverse one which employs a wide range of visual motifs and resources drawn from different sources.

At Beth She’arim, a major necropolis located in rural Galilee (Map 2), 125 limestone sarcophagi were discovered along with the fragmentary remains of another 20 or so imported marble sarcophagi. The sarcophagi from Beth She’arim were published by Avigad in the third volume of the excavations reports, in Hebrew in 1971, and in English in 1976.4 The presentation is not a systematic or thorough catalogue, but instead focuses primarily on the two dozen decorated sarcophagi that Avigad found most interesting,

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4 Avigad 1971; 1976a.
along with iconographic interpretations of some of their elements. The remains of two dozen marble sarcophagi have survived from the Jewish catacombs of Rome (Map 3). These were collected and published by Konikoff in a short volume in 1986. The volume has its flaws, including several missing examples as well as the inclusion of several others that probably should not have been incorporated, and the illustrations leave something to be desired. Nevertheless, as a catalogue, it remains invaluable.

The majority of sarcophagi at Beth She'arim were carved of local limestone and discovered in a single burial hall, Catacomb 20, which was the largest at the site and probably expressly built for the housing of sarcophagi. The possible reasons for this grouping, and the significance of the various materials, will be explored later. By contrast, the sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons from Rome are of marble, and were almost all discovered in later use and lack provenance data, like many other artifacts from the catacombs of the city. The difference in materials—limestone at Beth She’arim and marble in Rome—reflects the availability of stone material in Beth She’arim and Rome respectively. The limestone hills of the Galilee provided abundant material for the manufacture of sarcophagi at Beth She’arim, though fragments of imported marble sarcophagi were also found at the site.

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5 Konikoff 1986.
6 For a critical evaluation, see Rutgers 1988.
7 Some of which were published by Avigad 1976a, 163-72.
While the sarcophagi from both sites are generally well-known to scholars of Jewish visual culture, they rarely figure prominently in their assessments of this culture. Moreover, they have received only limited treatment and analysis since their original discoveries and publication. Thus, evidence of the corpus as a whole, and not just individual examples, is still ripe for analysis. The variety of sculptural programs represented captures a wide range of the possibilities open to ancient Jewish patrons as they went about selecting, commissioning and otherwise orchestrating a sarcophagus and sculptural program in order to honor and remember themselves or their departed loved ones. While we should probably avoid absolute claims derived from statistical analyses of the corpus, my goal in what follows is to offer a compelling reconstruction and analysis of the visual options available to Jewish patrons, the choices made by them, and the meanings revealed by these choices.

1.2 Statement of the problem: identifying difference (and different identities) in the past

Writing of his time spent living abroad but still in the cultural orbit of the western hemisphere, the American essayist Adam Gopnik compared his experience with life

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8 Original publications include: Avi-Yonah 1981b; Avigad 1971; 1976a; Beyer and Lietzmann 1930; Cumont 1916; de Rossi 1867; Fasola 1976; Garrucci 1862; Goodenough 1953b; Herzog 1861; Leon 1960; Müller 1912. The sarcophagi from Rome were discovered in various places at different times. For a fuller account of their history (including the history of publication of individual sarcophagi) see Konikoff 1986. Subsequent research on Jewish patrons and their sarcophagi has been undertaken either as short articles, or as a smaller part of a larger project. See especially: Aviam 2016; Fischer 1998; Foerster 2012; Huskinson 1996; Koch 2002; Levine 2013.
back home and discovered that daily life was more or less the same. Still, he observed that “The differences are tiny and real. Cultures don’t really encode things. They include things, and leave things out.” This observation is telling, and applies equally well to the ancient world. The Jewish community of Beth She’arim was a modest, provincial one in a rural setting. The community at Rome was part of a thriving and cosmopolitan urban environment with extensive cultural and economic ties that spanned the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, just as citizens in the United States and France consider themselves part of the same “Western” culture, broadly defined, the Jewish communities of Beth She’arim and Rome shared at least in broad strokes in the same cultural orbit of the Roman Empire. While this dominant culture was always and everywhere locally inflected, much remained the same, especially in the rhythms of daily life. Jews in both Beth She’arim and Rome were confronted with the same basic question: how and to what extent to engage the cultural koine of the Roman world while maintaining and even fortifying their sense of Jewishness.

This question was probably not at the fore of every cultural encounter or in every mundane event of daily life, rather it probably surfaced most explicitly in those moments outside of the mundane. The occasion of death was one such event representing a departure from the quotidian rhythms of life, and for this reason burial remains of all kinds have long figured prominently in the reconstruction of social history.

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*Gopnik 2001, 94.*
and cultural identities.\textsuperscript{10} Indeed, funerary rituals, including those surrounding sarcophagi, are widely understood as reflective of culture and social structure at large.\textsuperscript{11}

Neither was this question unique to the Jewish communities. Across the Roman Empire, local communities confronted the same basic question of whether and how to maintain their cultural, ethnic and religious traditions in the context of cultural contact and change brought about by incorporation in the Roman world. Ultimately, the answer was composed of the same basic building blocks: choices made by individuals, often conditioned by communal traditions, to “include things, or leave things out.” These choices most often amounted to small, even ‘tiny’ differences, and since they consist mainly of adoptions and rejections—the presence or absence of aspects of ‘Roman’ culture—they are often difficult to locate. Yet, it is in these choices, these small

\textsuperscript{10} Part of the reason for this, as Hall (1997, 111) points out, is practical. Burials present a special class of archaeological contexts that usually represent a single event horizon, and are generally free from intrusive material from other periods. As such, they sometimes present a simpler and straightforward picture of the past. See Hall 1997. However, while this is undoubtedly the case for many burial sites, those encountered here in Rome and in Beth She’arim were large communal burial plots, used over generations, and subsequently the site of repeated incursions and looting by later visitors. Even individual sarcophagi were sometimes used for multiple burials, and/or changed hands between multiple owners in the ancient world.

\textsuperscript{11} Hall 1997, 112; Hope 2011, xi; Morris 1992, 1ff.. In this way, Morris, who compiled one of the foremost accounts of funerary rituals in the classical world, opened his study with the claim that “the analysis of burial is the analysis of symbolic action.” See Morris 1992, 1. Perhaps for this reason—that they are highly symbolic actions—funerary rituals are not always reflective of social structure in ways that are straightforward and easy to interpret. Elaborate or lavish graves or grave goods can be markers of striving to achieve social status, rather than of social status itself. Parker Pearson’s study (1982) of social status in mortuary practices demonstrates the need for caution in reconstructing socio-cultural history from burial data. He found that ‘social advertisement in death,’ in the form of grave goods and funerary monuments was in many ways inversely related to real social locations of individuals and groups in the local social hierarchy. Groups in adverse social locations expressed ideal conceptions of social structure by lavish outputs in funerary expense. Leach, in a study of Victorian funerary practices, put it “there is no \textit{general} correlation between grandeur in graves and grave goods and wealth and high status among the living” (as quoted in Hall 1997, 126).
differences, that most Jews—in common with other local peoples of the Roman Empire—found ways to be Jewish and Roman at the same time.

As we will see, it is exceedingly difficult to pin down where this difference lay with regards to the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons. In most cases, the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons in the ancient world were more or less indistinguishable from those of non-Jews. Regarding the difficulties inherent in identifying different groups of people who used similar sets of objects, Gardner pointed out that the problem is not only “how do we tell them apart? More importantly, how did they tell each other apart?”12 The Jewish communities of late ancient Rome and Palestine by and large used many or most of the same objects, including sarcophagi, as their non-Jewish neighbors and it is rare to find ‘distinctive’ material culture.

Of course, they may have invested these objects and the images on them with different meanings or used them in different ways, but such alternative meanings and uses are obscured in the archaeological record. Sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons were often sculpted in similar styles, and with similar motifs, themes and programs as those belonging to non-Jewish contemporaries. Furthermore, although we encounter differences in the level of execution on many sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons, most of the sarcophagi from both communities were probably sculpted by artisans working out of workshops that served Jews, Christians and pagans alike.13

12 Gardner 2007, 16.
Another difficulty that confronts us is the chasm of time and culture that separates us from our subject. We lack the visual literacy with which ancient viewers would have regarded the sculptural programs of sarcophagi. Visual culture, like all cultural forms and resources from language to objects, does not arise in a vacuum. Every image comes with a genealogy of culturally embedded meanings and layered with historical associations in the forms, symbols and very colors it uses (or avoids). These have been called ‘imbricated meanings,’ previous associations and meanings that are an irrevocable part of the foundation of any new meaning arising out of any instance of visual culture; in every image the old is partly deconstructed, partly constructive.14

These ‘imbricated’ meanings are difficult to recover over a gap of millennia; they rely on implicit knowledge of the cultural traditions out of which art and artifacts emerged.

Along these lines, Hodder has pointed out that:

“In the construction of the cultural world, all dimensions (the height or colour of pottery for example) already have meaningful associations. An individual in the past is situated within this historical frame, and interprets the cultural order from within its perspective. The archaeologist seeks also to get ‘inside’ the historical context, but the jump is often a considerable one.”15

What’s more, the adoption of certain Roman forms of burial culture by Jews in the Roman diaspora, from gold glass to sarcophagi, did not necessarily signify an unambiguous adoption of the Roman functions and meanings attached to these burial artifacts. Indeed, as Meyers has noted in discussing the adoption of Hellenistic material

14 Rolling 2007, 9.
15 Hodder 1987, 7.
culture in Palestine, Hellenism (and, by extension, Romanization) could “serve as a framework for preserving and promoting local Semitic culture.”¹⁶ Nowhere is this notion more true than in the funerary culture of the Jewish Roman diaspora.

Ultimately, the difficulties inherent in identifying difference (and different identities) in the past through material and visual culture may lead us to ask whether difference is even a meaningful preoccupation in the first place. To Gardner’s question “How did they tell each other apart?” we might ask in reply “Did they?” We often find what it is we set out to look for, so perhaps, rather than assume difference and search for it, we should begin more neutrally and allow ourselves the possibility that perhaps by focusing on difference, we might see difference where none really existed. We might accept that our subject—wealthy Jewish sarcophagus patrons—defined themselves as much or more by shared culture, held in common with their neighbors, as by differences.

1.3 Sarcophagi and sarcophagus burial in the Roman Empire

In the period during which the Jewish catacombs at Beth She’arim and Rome were in use, the sarcophagus was the height of luxury, the ultimate status symbol of personal funerary culture. Despite (or perhaps because of) their cost, the use of sarcophagi as burial vessels was wildly popular across the Roman Mediterranean for a period of roughly three centuries, from the 2nd to 5th centuries C.E. So numerous are the preserved

sarcophagi that it's difficult to keep count. Estimates of how many intact examples exist in collections around the world vary, from 5,000 on the conservative side by some earlier estimates,\textsuperscript{17} to as many as 20,000 in more current approximations.\textsuperscript{18} In either case, it is likely that the number of surviving sarcophagi represent only a small fraction of the original number, probably less than five percent.\textsuperscript{19} The total number produced in the Roman world of Late Antiquity could have been anywhere between 300,000-750,000.\textsuperscript{20}

The Roman sarcophagus has forerunners in Egyptian and Near Eastern burial vessels, but its most immediate roots lie in Greek funerary culture. A direct line can be traced from the sarcophagi that were the height of Roman funerary fashions from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century C.E. on and the first sarcophagi that appeared in the Greek world around the end of the 6\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.E.\textsuperscript{21} The Greek forerunners of later Roman period sarcophagi were produced in connection with the growing expenditure and visibility of the monumental grave stele—itsel itself a place of public display of wealth and status—and the visual embellishment of cinerary urns. Like the stelae, many of the sarcophagi in this period were open-air, conspicuously displayed to passersby on the streets leading into a city.\textsuperscript{22} Meanwhile, during the same period on the Italian peninsula, stylistic

\textsuperscript{17} McCann 1978, 20.
\textsuperscript{18} Elsner 2010b, 1. Koch (1993, 58) suggests 12,000. Such estimates generally ignore sarcophagus fragments, which dwarf the number of intact examples.
\textsuperscript{19} Koch 1993, 1.
\textsuperscript{20} Koch 1993, 1; Russell 2010, 127.
\textsuperscript{21} McCann 1978, 17.
\textsuperscript{22} McCann 1978, 15-7.
developments in terra-cotta and stone cinerary urns were underway, with the Etruscan civilization contributing several of what would become popular motifs on Roman sarcophagi in later times. These included active, narrative friezes as well as reclining, full body portraits of the deceased (sometimes with a loved one) on the lid.23

Though they had never truly disappeared in the Greek east, the use of sarcophagi remained a relatively localized phenomenon exclusive to the Greek speaking provinces of the eastern Mediterranean until sarcophagi veritably exploded onto the scene across the Roman Mediterranean during the reign of Hadrian in the 2nd century C.E.24 From this point, the sarcophagus would continue to be produced for well over three centuries, into the early 5th century C.E,25 during which time sarcophagi underwent many evolutions in visual content as styles and tastes shifted over the years. The reason for this new and marked popularity of sarcophagi from the middle of the 2nd century C.E. on has never been adequately explained, although a number of reasons have been offered.26 Certainly, the shift in burial from cremation to inhumation that began at least by the early 2nd century C.E. played a role in the newfound popularity of the sarcophagus.27

23 McCann 1978, 18.
24 Birk 2013, 10; Davies 2010; Elsner 2010b, 3; Koch 1993, 66. On the origins of Roman sarcophagi, see Davies 2010.
25 Elsner 2010b, 3; Koch 1993, 66. After this, sarcophagus production precipitously declines, though a few Christian examples attest to the continued production on a smaller scale into the 5th c. C.E. See Birk 2013, 10 n. 1.
27 Though Toynbee (1971, 40) suggests that the shift to inhumation could actually have been driven by the popularity of sarcophagi and their visual culture. As Elsner (2010b, 3) points out, sarcophagi never completely replace the cinerary urn, and there are also instances where sarcophagi were used for the burial
renewed popularity of sarcophagi has also been variously explained as a product of imperial, classicizing tastes, as the result of an influx of artisans from Asia Minor to Rome and as a byproduct of newly available marble material from eastern sources.\textsuperscript{28}

Against such interpretations, which reduce the change to economic factors or shifts in "fashion and taste,"\textsuperscript{29} explanations grounded in shifting social and religious beliefs have also been offered, including increasing concern for the body and the self during the "Second Sophistic" (1\textsuperscript{st} to 3\textsuperscript{rd} centuries C.E.).\textsuperscript{30} Some have argued that the use of stone was a way of subverting the process of death itself and its attendant decay by immortalizing the deceased with a "visual feast of immaculate and immortal marble bodies," where the physical permanence of the object and its display functioned to "fight against the threat of oblivion."\textsuperscript{31} Given the prominence of stone in Roman civic construction, Russell notes that "[i]t is no surprise... that the Roman obsession with personal immortality acquired its physical form in stone."\textsuperscript{32}

Others connect the sarcophagus form (especially its durable material and its increased space for visual expression) to developing ideas about immortality and the afterlife—ideas that were themselves possibly eastern imports via cultural exchange and

\textsuperscript{28} McCann 1978, 20.
\textsuperscript{29} McCann 1978, 20.
\textsuperscript{30} Ewald 2011, 261-3.
\textsuperscript{31} Ewald 2011, 261.
\textsuperscript{32} Russell 2010, 119.
the influence of religions like Judaism and Christianity, as well as the so-called mystery cults. Inhumation and the preservation of the body after death had long been a preoccupation among religious cultures in the Roman East. The Second Temple period ossuary industry (see below, Chapter 3), attests to the paramount importance of bodily preservation in Jewish culture. Ultimately, McCann probably hits closest to the mark by suggesting that "the sudden re-emergence of marble sarcophagi is in the end due to the happy coincidence of religious, artistic, and economic factors." 

The sarcophagi produced across the Roman Mediterranean after the custom of inhumation became dominant and were indebted to both Etruscan and Greek forerunners for much of their form and visual content, a pedigree McCann has called the "dual heritage" of Roman sarcophagi. Sarcophagi produced across the Empire shared broadly in this heritage and common traditions of Greek and Roman funerary art. Nevertheless, they can still be divided into two groups which reflect the cultural bisection of the Roman Empire into the eastern and western provinces. Sarcophagi produced in the western provinces tended to have flat lids framed by masks or other motifs on the corners and with a small frieze panel or inscription in between. They were most often carved on only three sides, generally with figurative reliefs or strigilated

33 McCann 1978, 20. See however the doubtful remarks of Toynbee (1971, 40).
34 McCann 1978, 20.
35 McCann 1978, 18.
designs (Fig. 1.1). Sarcophagi from the Greek-influenced eastern provinces (especially from the Greek Isles and Asia Minor) typically had gabled lids. They were more often carved on all four sides and with continuous friezes with garlands or architectural motifs (Fig. 1.2). The distinctions between these two regional varieties, though never absolute and often blurred, remained relevant for centuries to come. They are clearly expressed in the differing preferences of the Jewish communities at Beth She’arim and Rome whose sarcophagus patrons were deeply engaged with their cultural environs, as we will see. As the popularity of sarcophagi continued unabated into the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E., significant cross-pollination occurred, with the columnar style of Asia Minor sparking a new trend in Christian sarcophagi in Rome, and Roman strigilated styles finding favor in the Greek East.

Despite their widespread appeal, on a practical level even the simplest sarcophagi, and those of inferior workmanship, must still have been expensive. In only a single case is the cost of a sarcophagus known. An inscription on a simple, undecorated limestone sarcophagus from Salona indicates that it cost the equivalent of 150 denarii in the late 1st century C.E. This sum was five times the annual subsistence income of an

36 Strigils were apparently a convenient cost cutting technique compared to the expense required for figured relief. They may also have originated through emulation wooden coffins. See McCann 1978, 21.
37 McCann 1978, 21.
38 Meanwhile the gabled lid remained a hallmark of sarcophagi produced in the workshops of Greece and Asia Minor.
39 Birk 2013, 10.
average Roman. Sarcophagus were, without a doubt, the special province of the Roman elite. At the same time, this social class may have included a wider spectrum of individuals than traditionally assumed. Davies points out that even before the emergence of sarcophagus burial, Roman social classes in the first centuries of the common era exhibited increasing mobility and that “the flashiest grave altars commemorated wealthy freedmen and other members of the new bourgeoisie.”

Indeed, the Roman Empire and the growing connectivity of the Mediterranean trade network set the stage for increasingly mobile social groups and previously unimaginable opportunities for social advancement. This was especially true during the Severan period and following the Edict of Caracalla which created a large and newly enfranchised class of Roman citizens across the provinces. While sarcophagi were still the province of the rich, a whole new group of ‘nouveau riche’ could now afford to participate in the custom of elite burial, including wealthy Jewish merchants and officials. These citizens were evidently eager to affirm their new status by various means. The “modest sizes and uniform decoration” on many sarcophagi produced in the 3rd century confirms the “nonaristocratic social status” of many sarcophagus patrons after the edict. In Aphrodisias for example, in the 3rd century most of the sarcophagus

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40 Russell 2010, 122.
41 Birk 2013, 10; Elsner 2010b, 14.
42 Davies 2010, 47.
44 Öğüş 2014, 120.
patrons were members of the subelite class: artisans, merchants and tradesmen who were not part of the traditional aristocratic class of the city.\textsuperscript{45}

As objects of visual culture, sarcophagi are of paramount importance. No other corpus spans such a long period and such a geographic range to offer a picture of the visual culture of the Roman world. The Roman Empire, and the cultures of the Mediterranean, underwent major changes in Late Antiquity as a result of expanded trade and cultural contact. Many of these cultural changes can be discerned in sarcophagus sculpture.\textsuperscript{46} But ours is an investigation into individuals and their communities, so it is equally important that the sculptural programs of Roman sarcophagi are now widely regarded as visual witnesses to the lives and identities of the deceased and their families.\textsuperscript{47} The role of sarcophagi as a medium for self-representation and the negotiation of identity has become an unassailable interpretative approach in recent years.\textsuperscript{48} For instance, Birk suggests that sarcophagi "give us insights into the formation of an elite culture that expressed itself through new burial forms and are informative about the social experience of individuals as well as their emotions at times of bereavement and in confronting death."\textsuperscript{49} Indeed an understanding of their role in the

\textsuperscript{45} Öğüş 2014. See also Reynolds 1996.

\textsuperscript{46} McCann (1978, 20) notes that sarcophagi "document an unbroken evolution of relief style from the early second century to the Early Christian world of the fourth century, which is not otherwise attested."

\textsuperscript{47} Birk (2013, 11-3) helpfully reviews for a history of scholarship on sarcophagi reliefs, which has overwhelmingly favored a socio-cultural approach in the past several decades.

\textsuperscript{48} Especially in the works of Huskinson, Ewald and Koortbojian. See Birk (2013, 13, n. 27) for an excellent bibliography of authors espousing this approach. See also Davies 2010.

\textsuperscript{49} Birk 2013, 12.
construction of identities in the Roman world begins with a recognition of their function as a means of memorialization and as a vehicle of memory.

1.3.1 Memory and meaning on Roman sarcophagi

The stone fabric and encased form of the sarcophagus are often understood to reflect a deeply human desire for permanence in the face of death: a need to protect and preserve the physical remains of the deceased. Across the Roman world, this natural desire to preserve the deceased did not stop with the physical body. The occasion of death was simultaneously a physical event, occasioning a series of bodily rituals and practices dealing with the new fact of a corpse and the bodily transition from life to death, as well as a psychological one. The psychological needs occasioned by death are diverse and variable, but two prominent ones that are generally reconstructed for the Roman world are memory and mourning. Recent scholarship on Roman sarcophagi has suggested their sculptural programs were responsive to these psychological needs on many levels.

Memory relies on cultural practices that shape and reinforce narratives of the past, and on the active work of individuals. In the case of sarcophagus burial, this active work could be undertaken by the bereaved of course, but also sometimes by the deceased.

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51 These are the dual themes for instance of a recent edited volume edited by Hope and Huskinson (2011) on the subject of Roman death.
themselves, who often made plans for their own funerary rites and memorials.\textsuperscript{52} Sarcophagi were but one example of Roman funerary monuments that responded to the psychological need to memorialize and remember the dead. They functioned as tools that patrons could employ to promote themselves or their family and to protect their memory.\textsuperscript{53}

This function of funerary monuments was enshrined in Roman law,\textsuperscript{54} and not withstanding its legal status, had the force of custom both before and for a long time after its codification. According to Carroll, a Roman funerary monument was understood as a “physical and visible transmitter of memory.”\textsuperscript{55} As such, we might view sarcophagi as a ‘memory object’ and the practices these objects are embedded in as part of the ‘memory work’ that surrounds the occasion of death.\textsuperscript{56} The sculptural programs that decorated sarcophagi are often read along these lines.

Indeed, Roman sarcophagi were overwhelmingly utilized as spaces for visually expressing identity and commemorating the deceased; for presenting ‘narratives of the self.’\textsuperscript{57} The sculptural programs that decorated Roman sarcophagi were created as "visual statements of deceased individuals that used allegories to plot lives and personal

\textsuperscript{52} See Hope 2011, xvi.
\textsuperscript{53} Hope 2011, xv.
\textsuperscript{54} Ulpian, Digest 11.7.2.6: “…monument est, quod memoriae servandae gratia existat…”
\textsuperscript{55} Carroll 2006, 32.
\textsuperscript{56} On memory work, see Hope 2011, xv.
\textsuperscript{57} Ewald 2011.
memories against mythological and other idealized narratives.” As we will see, even ready-made sarcophagi, whose sculptural programs were largely or completely determined without a specific patron in mind, could convey self-narratives, albeit in formulaic and conventional ways. This function of sarcophagus sculpture as a medium for self-representation has become an almost unassailable interpretative approach in current scholarship. Narratives of self, status and identity predominate in the epitaphs—which often recorded not only the name of the deceased but also official positions, occupations and family connections—and the sculpture alike. Seen in this light, the epitaphs and sculptural programs that decorate these stone monuments appear to be a natural complement to the desire to preserve the physical remains of a loved one: a means to preserve the identity and memory of the departed as well.

For many Romans, preserving the memory of themselves or their deceased was also an opportunity to display (and contest) social status—a form of social competition.

According to Hope:

“In the Roman world memory could be an area for competition and debate. Deciding who or what would be remembered was an aspect of power, authority and prestige. Memory was about controlling the past, defining the present and planning for the future.”

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58 Birk 2013, 12.
60 Graham 2011, 22.
61 Hope 2011, xiv.
The competitive aspect of memorialization has been most extensively studied in relation to imperial imagery. At this scale the politics of power inherent in monumental displays played out in a grand and very public way, both in the valorization of events and individuals and in their censure through erasure via damnatio memoriae and other means. But memorialization as a means of social competition also extended to sub-elites across the Roman Mediterranean. Both the need for memorialization, and its potential to reflect social competition were enshrined in Roman laws, which tended to “define the purpose of a memorial as a means of preserving memory and as a vehicle for representing the ‘wealth and dignity’ of an individual.”

The social competition explicit or implicit in Roman practices of memorialization probably factored in the public nature of sarcophagi and other funerary monuments across much of the Roman world. As Zanker explains, Roman tombs were generally not located in tranquil and remote locations; rather, they were strategically placed on “heavily trafficked arterial roads” so that they could be “seen by as many passersby as possible.” The public nature of earlier freestanding funerary monuments in the Roman West was often raised in epitaphs which hailed the passerby, and was characteristic also of Greek sarcophagi which were self-contained funeral monuments installed on

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62 As Hope (2011, xiv) puts it succinctly, “the art of forgetting illustrates the art of remembering.” On ‘erasure’ in antiquity, see Wharton 2000.
63 See, for example, D’Ambra 2002. On sub-elites and the middle class, see Öğüş 2014, 119-22.
64 Carroll 2006, 19.
65 Zanker 2016, 1.
66 On the public nature of these funerary monuments, see Carroll 2006, 45-53.
routes to and from cities. The highly visible nature of funerary monuments was true not only of earlier family tombs and monuments located around the city of Rome, but also of the communal catacombs and family hypogea in which sarcophagi were deposited from the 2nd century C.E. on. These later necropoleis were strategically positioned on major routes to and from the city, and often had prominent entrances and forecourts that must have attracted the eye of the passerby. In this context, the primary audience of Roman sarcophagi and other funerary monuments was the “people who saw the tombs daily and who understood and responded to the ‘language’ of the tombs and what it represented visually and ideologically.”

Unlike earlier funerary monuments, most sarcophagi in the late Roman world were deposited underground, in catacombs and other subterranean chambers. However, based on the longstanding association between funerary monuments and memorialization, it seems unlikely that their sculptural programs were primarily intended to please the deceased. They were meant to be seen, to be viewed by visitors, families and friends; their inscriptions were meant to be read. Almost all sculpted sarcophagi across the Roman Mediterranean were carved on their outer faces, and, moreover, they were often carved only on those sides that would have been visible to a tomb visitor. The positioning of the sculptural programs suggests that they were

67 Carroll 2006, 95.
68 See Toynbee 1971, 275.
69 It is extremely rare to find a sarcophagus with internal decorations, and then only in a few provinces. See Elsner 2010b, 2, 7.
intended to announce the deceased to the viewer and to memorialize them; to assist the audience in the act of remembering the dead. The content and inscriptions, as we will see, confirm this. In this, sarcophagi continued the function of other, earlier funerary monuments in the Roman world.

1.4 Methodological considerations and the limitations of the evidence

The best approach to history is always an interdisciplinary one. Bloch observed of the term ‘history’ that “the word places no a priori prohibitions in the path of inquiry,” before going on to make a rousing defense of interdisciplinarity in the study of history.70 On these grounds, I adopt an interdisciplinary approach to the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons, their sculptural programs and their historical and cultural significance. Theories and approaches are digested and deployed which were developed in the fields of anthropology, art history and visual culture, classical studies and classical archaeology, religious and Jewish studies, and post- and decolonial studies. I have tried, however, to keep these theories in the background, implicit in my treatment of the objects and informed by my analysis. As Elsner has observed, the best theory is derived from analysis of the objects, not applied to it.71

70 Bloch 1953, 20.
71 Elsner 2007, xvi.
However, three approaches figure prominently in my approach and are worth briefly describing here. The first of these, theories of ‘Romanization’ and cultural change in the Roman Empire, is drawn from the field of classical archaeology though it has a diverse lineage in cultural anthropology and postcolonial studies as well. The second, a socio-cultural approach to images, is characteristic of the field of visual culture that emerged in the 1970’s out of the desire to place the focus on the cultural dynamics of images, rather than the aesthetics and symbolism of the images themselves. My particular approach is colored by my training in archaeology, and draws also on similarities in the socio-cultural aspects of visual and material culture. Lastly, my conception of the role of visual and material culture in the construction of identity is drawn from social-practice theory, the insights of which hold tremendous value for approaching ancient visual culture as a historical source.

1.4.1 Romanization, cultural change and the Roman world

‘Romanization,’ the term most often used to refer to the cultural change with the spread of the Roman Empire and increasing connectivity in the Roman Mediterranean, is a difficult concept to define. Different approaches to this deceptively simple first-order task can and have led to remarkably divergent conclusions. Is Romanization primarily the transmission of Roman religious or philosophical beliefs, or does it manifest principally in the consumption of Roman material culture? And further, does one invariably lead to the other? For the moment, it will be enough to define the term in
broad strokes; subsequent discussion of the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons in the Roman world and their sculptural programs will offer further insight into cultural change in the Roman world of Late Antiquity.

A consensus has increasingly formed around an understanding of ‘Romanization’ as a cultural process marked first and foremost by the adoption of Roman material culture. This view, which for obvious reasons is especially popular among classical archaeologists, stands in direct contrast to earlier research which saw Romanization as a primarily linguistic, philosophical, religious and intellectual phenomenon. Where earlier scholars regarded material culture as significant primarily for its indication of philosophical or religious cultural change and describe Romanization as a process of “becoming Roman,” or conversely, “making Romans,” those who study the provincial impact of Romanization today are quick to emphasize the flexibility and complexity of the process.72 Gardner captures this complexity, writing that “change occurs at a multiplicity of rates on a multiplicity of levels of social life, producing a multiplicity of narratives.” In other words, change takes place unevenly, everywhere and always.

Moreover, it is now widely acknowledged that the adoption of Roman art, architecture and other cultural forms by local populations rarely, if ever, signaled a complete displacement of local beliefs and practices.73 Rather, ‘Romanization’ is now

73 In this regard, see especially the work of Hope 2001; Webster 2001.
often seen as a process that was more generative than it was destructive, giving rise to new ways of expressing local identities. Along these lines Dietler described cultural change in the Roman world as “an active process of creative appropriation, manipulation and transformation played out by individuals and social groups with a variety of competing interests.”74 It has also been suggested that cultural change was often a great deal more superficial than traditionally imagined. For instance, whereas the outward aspect of funerary practices (architecture and location) was a locus for redefining social positions in Roman Syria, it seems that funerary rituals themselves and beliefs about the afterlife changed to a much lesser extent.75 Thus, current models of Romanization mirror Bowersock’s conception of Hellenization as an “extraordinarily flexible medium of both cultural and religious expression... not necessarily antithetical to local and indigenous traditions... it provided a new and more eloquent way of giving voice to them.”76

In light of the recognition of the significant degree of complexity involved in processes of cultural change in the Roman world, some scholars have taken issue with the term ‘Romanization’ itself. Cooper for example has cautioned that the term ‘Romanization’ masks what was in reality a “complex process whereby individual consumers of Roman-style material culture did not necessarily adopt an entire Roman

74 Dietler 2005, 63.
75 De Jong 2007, 38.
‘package.’” Gardner has even gone so far as to abandon the term entirely, claiming that “‘Romanization’ as a catch-all paradigm for understanding a transformative process across the empire, has collapsed.” While it is important to be mindful of such critiques and heed their example in observing the complexity and unevenness of cultural change, the term and the study of the phenomena it describes is nevertheless useful for conceptualizing the spread of a common material and visual culture across the Mediterranean in the Roman periods.

One of the most enduring points of contention in the study of Romanization is locating the driving force behind cultural change across the empire. Where earlier studies suggested important roles for the imperial family and the army, two possibilities are more commonly offered now: a top-down model of social change emphasizing the role of local elites, and a more organic model of social change that locates cultural change in the gradual economic and political incorporation of the provinces into the Roman Empire, and particularly their urbanization. Neither model is mutually exclusive, and both share a perception of Romanization as largely a locally-driven process.

Those who favor a top-down approach view the cultural practices and consumption of local elites as evidence of the adoption of Roman material and visual culture for

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77 Cooper 1996, 95.
78 Gardner 2007, 32-3.
80 Eg. Mattingly 2011; Mattingly 2014; Revell 2011; Webster 2001.
political and social competition. The Roman imperial system that governed the provinces was, by modern standards, minimal and *laissez-faire* in many respects. It focused in large part on retaining local power structures and coopting local elites into the program of Roman rule, especially from the first several centuries of Roman rule into the 2nd century C.E. In this model of ‘Romanization’ it is understood that local elites ‘bought into’ Roman culture and ideology as a way of ensuring their continued socio-economic status.

Roman manners, entertainment and material goods provided the means for local elites to visibly mark their social status, to confirm their role in the new imperial order, and to display their cultural sophistication and facility with the mediums of the dominant culture. The symbiotic relationship between the political order of the Roman Empire and local elites thus resulted in changes in the social and material culture of the provinces driven by elite consumption and conspicuous display. This argument is common in studies of ‘Romanization’ in Roman Palestine and the Galilee. To Schwartz, ‘Romanization’ and cultural change was “the response of the city elites to conditions created by the end of Jewish autonomy and the imposition of direct Roman rule” beginning already in the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E. Levine has suggested that the diffusion of the Roman visual vocabulary in Jewish circles in the 3rd and 4th centuries

82 Schwartz 2001, 137.
C.E. has its root in the practice of urban aristocracy, and particularly the wealthy, pro-
Roman Patriarchate.\textsuperscript{83}

The urbanization model, on the other hand, provides a more organic model for the
spread of Roman culture, arguing that it was the Roman urban environment and its
public and civic institutions which encouraged the spread of Roman culture, and to a
much broader audience than local elites alone. In a time when most people lived in rural
villages and settlements,\textsuperscript{84} urbanization brought an array of cultural forms, practices and
goods that were only available to the populace of the provinces in urban environments.

As Braudel formulated it, “towns are like electric transformers. They increase tension,
accelerate the rhythm of exchange and constantly recharge human life.”\textsuperscript{85} Or, more
recently, Harris wrote that:

“It was in towns that specialist workers of almost all kinds came into existence, it was in
towns that wealth was accumulated, it was in towns that decisions were made about
peace and war... As for qualitative differences, it was in town that most literacy was
imparted, it was mainly in town that Romans benefited from aqueducts, it was in town
that if they were very poor they sought casual work. And so on. And then there are the
big cities, Rome, Alexandria, and one or two others. It was not their population that
mattered most, but their consumption power and the huge numbers of workers,
agricultural and otherwise, that it took to maintain them.”\textsuperscript{86}

Across Roman Syria, beginning in the Severan period many cities “received a
standard package of civic buildings, shapes, and decorative motives.”\textsuperscript{87} This process

\textsuperscript{83} Levine 2005; 2013; 2016.
\textsuperscript{84} Estimates vary, but generally agree that 80-90\% of the population of the Roman world lived outside of
\textsuperscript{85} Braudel 1981, 479.
\textsuperscript{86} Harris 2005, 33-4.
\textsuperscript{87} De Jong 2007, 149.
included the building of public buildings, main streets, and communal necropoleis and can be seen at many cities, large and small, across the region.\textsuperscript{88} To recognize these cities as part of a broader trend of urbanization in the Roman East is to recognize their role in promoting the spread of Roman culture; it was primarily through the city and its institutions that local populations encountered Roman culture. For example, prominent cities in the Galilee like Sepphoris and Tiberias were administratively organized according to the Roman model, providing their elite citizens a chance to participate in Roman governance through city councils (\textit{boulai}) and to practice Roman law.

Likewise, typical Roman entertainment and leisure facilities, especially bathhouses and theaters, were constructed in both cities in the Roman period. The cultural impact of such entertainment and leisure facilities has been underscored by a number of scholars.\textsuperscript{89} Eliav asserts that bathhouses were an important “social arena” in the Roman urban environment by virtue of their accessibility to all classes and the diversity of activities and messages associated with the dominant Roman cultural world on display. These ‘Roman’ activities and other cultural facets included mythological sculpture, mosaics, magic, medicine, athletics, nudity, massages and so forth, a variety that, as Eliav puts it, “came to encapsulate \textit{Romanitas: the Roman experience of life}”.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{88} Pensabene 1997. For Roman Syria in particular, see De Jong 2007.
\textsuperscript{89} See, for example: Eliav 2010; Schwartz 1998; 2001; Weiss 1999; 2010b.
\textsuperscript{90} Eliav 2010, 607. In a similar way, Millar (1993, 524) contends that the most important Greek influence on popular culture was likely exerted in the realm of entertainment. Weiss (1999, \textit{passim}), writing about the Galilee in particular, concurs. His reexamination of literary evidence persuasively supports an important role for public spectacles, particularly of the theater, in Jewish life in the first centuries C.E; 2010b, 635.
Against this backdrop, the connection between the architectural forms characteristic of urban environment and changes to the funerary landscape of Roman Syria has been thoroughly explored by De Jong, who pointed out that tomb architecture and decoration of all forms mirrored in multiple ways the civic architecture that spread during the Roman period, from tomb facades to sarcophagus pedestals. From their decorative schemes to their architectural elements, tombs across the region participated in a new sculptural vocabulary that was “common all over the Roman world of the first centuries of the common era and part of an imperial fashion or koine.” At the same time, the adoption of new styles associated with Roman culture was not exclusive nor did it entail the abandonment of local traditions:

“The people in Roman Syria therefore, mixed symbols and materials that were part of a Mediterranean and probably imperial style of architecture with local forms, and perhaps with motifs originating from outside the Roman world. The tombs in Syria were hybrid buildings in their outward appearance and represent not a Hellenized or Parthian, but a local, Syrian-provincial way of burial.”

Like other local peoples with substantial diaspora populations in the Roman world, Jews encountered Roman culture in different places and different times across the ancient Mediterranean. For Jews living in the heart of the Roman Empire—the city of Rome itself—daily cultural contact and substantial exchange with the Roman world can be taken more or less for granted. Romanization and the adoption of ‘Roman’ material

Furthermore, the studies of Weiss and Eliav both reveal that rabbinic literature confirms the frequent attendance of Jewish patrons at bathhouses and spectacles. See Eliav 2002; 2010; Weiss 1999; 2010b.

De Jong 2007, 169.
De Jong 2007, 170.
De Jong 2007, 171.
and visual culture among the Jewish community of Rome needs little reconstruction here aside from assessing some of the dynamics of the community and its position (both social and geographical) in the city in the following chapter. On the other hand, for other Jewish communities across the Roman world, interaction with Roman culture was mediated by their provincial and local settings. Thus, for the community of Beth She’arim, evidence for Jewish interaction with Roman culture must be considered in light of the history of the region in the Roman period and patterns of urbanization in the Galilee and across Roman Syria, which we will reconstruct in Chapter 5.

1.4.2 Visual (/material) culture and identities

The visual is a fundamental and irreducible sphere of human experience through which cultural encounters are played out, perceived and negotiated. Visual culture produced in periods and places of intense and prolonged cultural contact and exchange is a rich source of information for reconstructing the histories of cultural change. Ancient texts are an important source of knowledge about the past, but they are not the only one.⁹⁴ Images also provide an alternative source of knowledge about the past, and offer

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⁹⁴ For example, Seroussi (2016, 6) writes that “[m]any times music tells a different story than texts” and further, that studying music can help us move past what he described as the ‘logocentric leaning of Jewish studies.’ On both counts, Seroussi may as well have been speaking of images also, and on both counts he would be right.
the possibility of recovering information about lives and experiences that are not reflected in contemporary literary sources.\textsuperscript{95}

Indeed, at the heart of this project is the belief that visual culture, practices, and attitudes toward the visual are a key part of the puzzle for understanding how communities identified themselves within the broader, dominant cultural world of the Roman Empire. This belief is grounded in a socio-cultural approach to visual culture that affirms that Jewish visual culture is essential for understanding how Jewish communities interacted with the broader cultural world they lived in.\textsuperscript{96} In this regard, our approach continues the ‘cultural turn’ in the study of ancient art. This shift has reoriented the discussion of ancient art from concerns of style and symbolism to new questions about the social and cultural dynamics that underlie the creation, use and viewing of images of all kinds.\textsuperscript{97} The following analysis applies a socio-historical approach to visual culture primarily through the study of individual Jewish sarcophagus patrons as historical agents and the choices they made in the contexts of the Roman sarcophagus industry and trade.

As we have already noted, visual culture is not created \textit{sui generis}. It bears the cultural legacy of previous generations, and the imprints of prevailing ideologies, of

\textsuperscript{95} This is especially true of sarcophagi. See, for example, Huskinson (2015, 3), who writes: “[Sarcophagi] are one of the largest bodies of private art from [Rome] to survive, particularly from the third and early fourth centuries, and deal with experiences upon which contemporary written sources rarely touch.”

\textsuperscript{96} Sartre (2005, 277) even suggests that visual culture is among the signs of cultural change that are ‘less tenuous’ than evidence drawn from inscriptions and language.

\textsuperscript{97} On the implications of the ‘cultural turn’ for sarcophagus studies, see Huskinson 2015, 4-7.
tastes and preferences within a culture, of cultural exchange with neighboring communities and peoples, and of uneven power balances between and among peoples— to name just a few of the ways that visual culture is historically inflected. In many ways, visual culture can be usefully compared to pottery. Just as for the archaeologist, pottery is useful not only for dating layers of accumulated history, but can also reveal information about the habits, trade and cultural exchange of the people who used it, so too can the visual culture used by a group of people be a source of knowledge about their consumption and cultural change.

When we use visual culture in this way, we are rarely asking questions about symbolic meaning (e.g. “What does a rosette symbolize?”). Such questions may factor into the background and it is especially possible to ask some interesting questions about why Jews may have preferred certain motifs and images over others. At the same time, as Zanker and Ewald rightly note, “we can scarcely imagine the effortless and random way in which contemporaries, faced with the plethora of images in tomb chambers, were able to look at them and make associations, depending on the circumstances and mood of the observer.”

Therefore, the recovery of symbolic meaning is not the primary goal of my cultural inquiry into sarcophagi and their sculptural programs. Instead, the intent is to use visual artifacts and programs to explore the formation of cultures and cultural change, as well as the negotiation of the identities of individuals and

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communities in these contexts. The socio-cultural approach to images that focuses on the relationships between patrons, producers, viewers and visual culture and on issues of patronage, production and reception suggests that as far as funerary art goes, meaning was created as much in “this life, as opposed to the afterlife.”

One byproduct of the cultural turn in the study of images is that hard and fast distinctions between visual and material culture are difficult to maintain. Material and visual culture affect the senses in overlapping ways, and are produced, consumed and interacted with through similar cultural practices. All material culture is visual, and vice versa, all visual culture is material. The sarcophagi that are the primary evidence of this inquiry are visual artifacts and as such they should be approached both as visual and material culture.

On the one hand, sarcophagi are indeed intensely visual and contain images with potent symbolic and social meanings. On the other hand, sarcophagi are material objects as well that were embedded in the cultural and funerary practices of Roman peoples. Speaking more broadly about Roman sculpture, Smith observes that:

“As objects, statues and reliefs generally were made for one of three distinct domains — to honour the gods in their temples and sanctuaries, to honor and commemorate the special dead in cemeteries and at their tombs, and to honour the powerful living in the public sphere of the ancient city. Each statue or relief marked an occasion and articulated a relationship between the buyer and the subject honoured — gods, heroes, mortals, the living and the deceased.”

100 Smith 2001, 17.
Where some would treat visual culture more like texts to be read, possessing inherent and stable meanings that can be deciphered through careful analysis of their iconography and symbolism, I prefer to treat visual culture more like other objects in the archaeological record, objects that were the result of (and embedded in) human practices. The connection between material culture and the construction of identities is not straightforward. Things, material culture, are basically neutral. As we have seen, they can be used to “tell together” just as much as they can be used to “tell apart”.101

Furthermore, Roman funerary culture was intensely visual. As Zanker and Ewald explain:

“When, during their visits, family members stepped inside one of the richly decorated sepulchres of the Antonine and Severan periods they found themselves surrounded by a wealth of images, just as they were in their own homes. These images were not only on the sarcophagi, but also on the mosaic floors, on the fresco-painted walls, and last but not least on the stuccoed ceilings.”102

At the same time, very little beyond basic consistency of content and form seems to have motivated the overall visual programs.103 In fact, ‘program’ could be considered too generous of a term for what are often extremely varied assemblages in which “no thematic sequence is imposed on the observer.”104 Zanker and Ewald suggest that the visual profusion of Roman funerary culture is better understood “on the one hand as an expression of abundance, and on the other as an encouragement of free association.”105

102 Zanker and Ewald 2012, 30.
103 Zanker and Ewald 2012, 30-1.
In this way, the ancient viewer was invited to ‘free-associate’ in response to the images, and “the thoughts and comparisons evoked by the images... could be applied by the observer as he chose, guided... by whim and personal disposition.”  

This characterization of the visual abundance of Roman funerary culture—and its heterogeneity—is applicable to sarcophagi as well, the sculptural programs of which often bear a number of separate and sometimes unrelated themes. Often, secondary and even tertiary motifs and whole scenes are simply ‘rhetorical embellishments’ driven by ‘narrative excess.’ As Zanker and Ewald point out, “[w]e should be generally wary of wanting to tease a sense out of everything and to discover deep meaning everywhere.”

1.4.3 Symbolic interpretations of ancient art

The quest for symbolic meaning in ancient images is put in stark contrast by the fruits of a socio-cultural approach to visual culture. Indeed, when we embark on socio-cultural investigation of ancient art, we typically find that the cultural contexts of ancient images have a great deal more depth and complexity than often imagined. In light of such findings, iconographical (or 'semantic') readings of images can often seem impossibly reductive and definitive. Speaking of the sort of direct, one-for-one readings

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107 See Zanker and Ewald 2012, 50-5.
offered by Cumont,\textsuperscript{109} Morris describes them unfavorably as “the reduction of symbolic analyses to a series of equations.”\textsuperscript{110}

Throughout, I avoid symbolic interpretations of motifs—including bucrania, eagles, menorahs and rosettes—for a number of reasons. Foremost among them is the number of competing and mutually exclusive interpretations that have been claimed as ‘the’ singular and correct interpretation of such motifs. The sheer number of conflicting interpretations of so many individual motifs is staggering and proof that recovering symbolic meanings from ancient images is an inherently tricky and possibly hopeless proposition.\textsuperscript{111} Morris argues that “[w]e cannot barge in and assign meanings [to symbols], even on the authority of ancient texts.”\textsuperscript{112} Schwartz has similarly illustrated the possibilities, and pitfalls, of reading ancient literature together with visual programs regarding the mosaic floor of the Sepphoris synagogue.\textsuperscript{113} This is not to deny that images have symbolic meaning, only to recognize that such meaning is hard to recover from the remote past with any level of certainty, even when we have surviving literary evidence.

\textsuperscript{109} Esp. Cumont 1942.
\textsuperscript{110} Morris 1992, 17.
\textsuperscript{111} Symbolic interpretations to sarcophagus sculpture were pioneered by Cumont (1942). Symbolic interpretation in general, and Cumont’s readings in particular, were the subject of significant criticism, particularly by Nock and Beasley (1946) who adopted instead a view of sculptural programs as ‘mere decoration.’ A similar history characterizes scholarship of Jewish art in the Roman world, with Goodenough (1953 - 1968) advancing symbolic interpretations of motifs and images, both Jewish and Roman, as they appeared in Jewish contexts across the Roman Mediterranean. In a series of review articles, Nock (1955; 1957; 1960) was the first to critique Goodenough’s interpretations. He was followed especially by Smith (1967).
\textsuperscript{112} Morris 1992, 18.
\textsuperscript{113} Schwartz 2000.
More to the point, by their very nature symbols were highly flexible signifiers capable of sustaining multiple meanings. The creation of meaning in a visual symbol is the work of multiple parties; not only the patrons and artisans, who may have intended one thing by using a certain symbol, but also the viewers, who quite often may have opted for alternative readings for any number of reasons. All this to say that, even if we had a contemporary text defining the meaning of a particular symbol, we should remember that it presents only one meaning and should be wary of allowing such a text to overdetermine the meaning of any symbol.114

1.4.4 Social-practice theory and the construction of identities

How do sarcophagi belonging to ancient Jews reflect cultural exchange and the negotiation of identity? Do they, for example, reflect a positive sense of social identity among a community secure in its place in the Roman world? Or do they depict a striving to achieve a positive status?115 To answer such questions, we need a way to connect the dots between cultural change, visual artifacts and the construction of identities. The final piece of the puzzle that connects these threads is social practice theory.

History, and human lives, are composed of actions; of doing things. One doesn’t need to be an anthropologist to realize this; “the way we spend our days is the way we

114 Precisely what Figueras (1983) does, devoting an entire chapter to interpreting the symbolic meaning of symbols by reading eschatological literature.
115 The language of “positive social identities” and strategies for achieving one is drawn from the work of Giles et. al. (1977, 320-1). See also Hall 1997, 31. Such striving could take place through various means, including assimilation, redefinition of identities, and by the creation of new comparisons and bypassing of negative aspects of identity.
spend our lives.”116 It is in the context of doing things, of practices, that people engage with objects. They create them and use them, and in return, are shaped by them. Practices are the vital link between the individual, visual and material culture, and the intricate web of relationships that constitutes society. They are the common threads in the fabric of human experience and the slow accretion of these practices over time is the stuff out of which the tapestry of history is woven. And so I begin with the basic assumption, born out in the social sciences, that it is “possible to understand what people are from what they do, not just what they think.”117 This simple assumption provides the underpinning for all of my research, the foundation for all of my conclusions, as a historian of visual and material culture. I have no record of what my subjects thought; I have only the material and visual outcomes of what they did.

Social practice theory holds that identities are never static, abstract senses of self. Neither are they final points at which an individual arrives in any conclusory way. Quite the contrary. Just as individuals are always engaged in some form or fashion with their social environments, so too identities are always created in the context(s) of social environments. They are, as Holland explains, formed “in the flow of activity within specific social situations.”118 Social practice theory holds that the individual is always engaged—actively or unconsciously—in the process of locating the self within the

118 Holland et al. 1998, 4.
context of a specific social environment. Thus, Hall argues that we should consider identity “as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.” Hall argues that we should consider identity “as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.”

Price similarly writes that an identity “is really a cultural phenomenon that acquires meaning through symbols, ideas, practices, and the ways in which these intersect with people’s sense of shared history and experience.”

In social practice theory, this ongoing, contextual process is described as the orchestration of cultural resources to ‘tell’ stories—to others and the self—which narrate a sense of self that is relational and contextual. At its most basic, this process is the telling of a self-narrative: a never-ending, always evolving story about oneself that varies depending on the context. The contextually dependent nature of this practice does not undermine the authenticity the narrative or the narrator, rather it highlights the way that individuals deploy cultural resources differently in different social environments in order to author different aspects of themselves. Thus, we should be particularly sensitive to the fact that the identities we see expressed on the sarcophagi under examination here reflect one specific version or ‘telling’ of a person’s identity, one that was considered an appropriate response by the patron (either the deceased or their family) to the immediate context of the catacombs and the funerary sphere of practice.

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119 Hall 1994, 222.
120 Price 2009, 4.
The ‘orchestration’ of cultural resources in the telling of self-narratives is a fundamental component of social practice theory. These cultural resources are, in fact, the critical link between the individual and the community at the heart of this process. In narrating self, the individual orchestrates cultural resources at hand. There are many kinds of cultural resources, from language and literature, to fabric and furniture. Whatever shape they take, the cultural forms that we orchestrate to author ourselves are collectively constructed, derived from collective experience, and have collectively determined meaning. Visual culture, including images of all kinds, is one powerful type of cultural resource.

The concept of ‘figured worlds’ is useful to further understand the cultural processes that give meaning to these resources. Figured worlds are collective ‘horizons of meaning’ against which individual actions and performances are measured. The concept of figured worlds sheds light on the intersection of individual and collective identities by focusing on the cultural resources, artifacts, symbols and images that mediate identity claims. Artifacts like sarcophagi and the images upon them “open up” figured worlds. “They are the means by which figured worlds are evoked, collectively developed, individually learned, and made socially and personally powerful.”

The conception of sarcophagus sculpture as a medium of self-representation that draws on culturally determined symbols and ideas, fits well into a social practice

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121 Holland et al. 1998, 61.
framework. In selecting or commissioning the sculptural program of a sarcophagus, Jewish patrons were employing cultural resources in order to express a particular, contextual identity. Furthermore, applied to the circumstances of Roman sarcophagus sculpture, social practice theory attributes a ‘symbolic value and an emotional valence’ to such symbols and motifs, with artifacts like sarcophagi and the images upon them, ‘opening up’ Roman and Jewish figured worlds.

1.4.5 The limitations of the evidence

Several limitations confront us when considering the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons from Beth She’arim and Rome. The first limitation has to do with gaps in the archaeological record. The relatively small number of examples from both of these communities begs the question of how representative the corpus is. It seems likely that many important examples of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons are absent from the corpuses for one of any number of reasons. Most prominently of course, is the possibility that a great many sarcophagi were lost over the intervening years through the actions of looters, ancient and modern.122

Indeed, like many other large necropoleis of the ancient world, the Jewish catacombs at both Beth She’arim and Rome show clear evidence of extensive looting, a fact noted

122 Sarcophagi, and particularly the visual programs on them, were prized among antiquity collectors in the early days of archaeology, and the sight of whole sarcophagi being used as fountains and planters, and sarcophagi fragments embedded into the walls of church buildings, is still common in modern Rome. Marble sarcophagi were also prized for their potential to be kiln fired and rendered into lime potash. On this last use, see Rutgers 1995, 77.
by most of the original excavators of the sites.\textsuperscript{123} It is probable then that we have lost not only a sizable number of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons to looting, but also many of the best examples. Such factors may skew analysis of the corpus in a number of ways, from distorting the statistics on sarcophagus adoption and popularity among Jewish patrons, to privileging certain types of visual programs chosen by Jewish patrons. The reality of catacomb looting, which seems disproportionately to have affected sarcophagi, has a sobering and cautionary effect on any approach to the data. Still, despite the indiscernible and unquantifiable impact of looting, we will see that the visual vocabulary of sarcophagi from Beth She’arim and Rome is an astoundingly diverse one. Even if it doesn’t capture the full range of possibilities enjoyed by Jewish sarcophagus patrons, must come close.

Another limitation concerns the difficulties inherent in ascribing intentionality to any kind of past practice from the vantage point of the present. It would be easy if we could assume that all past practices were the result of deliberate choices by individuals. Unfortunately, this cannot possibly be the case. The vast majority of practices, then as now, must have been carried out in an unthinking, habitual sort of way,\textsuperscript{124} and there are good reasons to be skeptical of the amount of choice exercised by an individual sarcophagus patron. For example, choice is often constrained on a practical and

\textsuperscript{123} Avigad (1976a), for instance, suggests that an entire chapter could be devoted to the archaeology of looting in Catacomb 20.
\textsuperscript{124} See Gardner 2007.
commercial level by availability.\textsuperscript{125} Cooper, for instance, has made a convincing case that when it came to the adoption of Roman pottery, factors like “availability and convenience” were more critical to the adoption of ‘Roman culture’ in the provinces “than any allegiance to the (assumed) social symbolism of material culture like pottery.”\textsuperscript{126}

For this reason, I devote some time in the coming chapters to reconstructing the Roman sarcophagus economy, in order to illustrate that there was significant potential for agency on the part of sarcophagus patrons. The case for generally passive consumption on the basis of factors like ‘availability and convenience’ is much less convincing when it comes to the sarcophagus industry for a number of reasons. As sarcophagi were expensive objects, acquiring a sarcophagus in the first place represents a deliberate, and meaningful, choice. Furthermore, we see that even at a provincial necropolis like Beth She’arim, a wide variety of options available to local patrons, including even sarcophagi imported from production centers in Greece and Asia Minor (see Chapter 6). Moreover, while the evidence suggests that throughout the Roman world sarcophagi were most often purchased from stock with sculptural programs that were partially or completely pre-carved, we will see that patrons at Beth She’arim and Rome still had the choice of a variety of different visual programs to select from, not to mention the possibility of customizing aspects of even stock sarcophagi.

\textsuperscript{125} See Gardner 2007, 91.
\textsuperscript{126} Cooper 1996, 85.
There are also good reasons to suggest that sarcophagi and the patronage practices surrounding them were a great deal more deliberately self-representative than those related to other groups of cultural artifacts, including pottery. Neither the commission nor the viewing of sarcophagi was a daily practice, rather, they were unique events that were occasioned by death and certain memorials. It is often suggested that practices surrounding death and burial were more intentional than the habitual practices of daily life. Many of the rituals and practices associated with death were deliberately commemorative and their affective aspect was heightened by the unusual circumstances. Furthermore, it is widely accepted that sarcophagi were seen by many ancient patrons as a means of telling ‘self-narratives.’ As we have seen, the telling of ‘self-narratives’ is furthermore a fundamental part of social practice theory which attributes a relatively high degree of intentionality to the construction of identities.

We also know that in the Roman world the deceased themselves often played a direct role in their own funeral arrangements, either through the directing of a will, or

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127 Speaking of funerary inscriptions, Carroll (2011, 135) emphasizes not only the intentionality implicit in the commissioning of a text, but speculates also on the motivations underlying the choices: “... they were intentionally chosen by the deceased or those close to the deceased to negotiate and display status and to commemorate a network of personal relationships the dead enjoyed. What was or was not included in the epitaph reflected an intentional and manipulative selection of details and information to make the life of the deceased visible and memorable...” Woolf (1996) put it similarly and more succinctly when he wrote that “epigraphy provided a device by which individuals could write their public identities into history.”

128 On Roman wills, see Carroll 2006, 40-4; Noy 2011, 6-7. The will, and the elaborate lengths to which some Roman’s went to ensure proper memorialization, was satirized by Petronius in the dialogue that serves as the beginning of the end of Trimalchio’s banquet. Trimalchio describes to a stone-cutter Habinnas at some length the elaborate imagery he expects to be carved on his funerary monument, as well as his inscription—full of self-importance. His comic levels of pretension are timeless, but his sentiment that “Valde enim falsum est vivo quidem domos cultus esse, non curari eas, ubi diutius nobis habitandum est” must have hit home for much of Petronius’s audience (Satyricon 71). The same can be gleaned from other critics of elaborate funeral
more directly through the overseeing of funerary arrangements, including the commissioning of a sarcophagus. There is extensive evidence, both literary and epigraphic, to indicate that many Romans took an active hand in arranging their funerals and funerary monuments. Such an event is even depicted on a panel from a funerary altar in Rome (Fig. 1.3). Yet, it must also be acknowledged that the advanced planning of funerary rituals and monuments, including sarcophagi, required not just farsightedness, but also a certain level of economic means. It should probably be associated with only the most elaborate commissions.

In some ways, moreover, the issue of intentionality and ‘deliberate’ choice may be a moot point. All practices have significance. Structuration theory, for example, points out that practices don’t have to be deliberate in order to be meaningful, but that even habitual, unthinking practice, which in reality, forms the bulk of the material of a life, are meaningful also. In fact, Gardner suggests that it was “precisely through doing such mundane activities as wearing particular items of dress, or dumping rubbish in a certain way, that the relationships between individual people and the social groups and institutions of which they are a part actually become manifest.” Gardner notes that the expense as well, such as Lucian, who wrote a whole tract on grief and funerary practices, De Luctu Adopting the rhetoric of cynicism, Lucian criticizes Trimalchio’s notion that the dead would care about their earthly remains. Calling such displays “foolish”, he writes: λοιπὸν οὖν ἐστὶν αὐτῷ τῶν παρόντων ἕνεκα ταύτα ἀρείων οὐθ’ ὁ τι πέπονθέν αὐτῷ ὁ παῖς εἰδώτα οὐθ’ ὅποι κεχώρηκε (De Luctu 14-19). For further discussion of these sources, see Carroll 2006, 40; Noy 2011. 

129 Including details both large and small, from the dimensions of the monument to the type of marble it used. See Carroll 2006, 86-8, 105.
130 Carroll 2006, 105; D’Ambra 1998, 94.
131 Carroll 2006, 279.
patterns of the past will sometimes “result from habitual action; at other times they will have been discursively noticed in the past.” As humans, “we are always engaging in a mixture of habitual and discursive action.” We are making meaning whether we do it intentionally or not. Thus, whether or not we can separate out the deliberate choices from the quotidian and unthinking practice might matter a great deal less than it seems at first glance.

A final limitation concerns how representative the sarcophagi are for the broader study of Jewish culture in the period; whether the insights gained through their analysis pertain only to a small subset of ancient Jews—those who purchased and used sarcophagi—or more broadly to the historical experience of Jewish communities in the Roman world. The majority of Jewish deceased throughout antiquity were buried in simple pit graves, and sarcophagus burial was practiced only by a very small proportion of the population over the course of roughly three centuries, from the 2nd to 5th centuries C.E. Thus, the answer to this question rests on our identification of sarcophagus patrons, which we will consider in the following chapter. However, it must be emphasized that all signs indicate that the Jewish patrons of sarcophagi at both Beth She'arim and Rome were among the most elite members of their community. The same is true more broadly of sarcophagus patrons across the Roman world. Any careful analysis of the evidence

133 Gardner 2007, 130.
will take this into account, and avoid drawing broader conclusions about Jewish experiences of the Roman world based on the evidence of a small and elite subset of this population.

1.5 Summary of the contents

Relationships—between past peoples, their visual practices, and their communities—are at the core of this endeavor. They are the primary context for my inquiry and the ground-level scale of the study. But in order to understand these relationships, multiple scales of analysis must be engaged which place the relationships in context. We must not only study our core context of sarcophagi, their Jewish patrons and their practices; we must also analyze the way these fit within wider Roman society and the practices surrounding sarcophagus burial in the Roman world. Context, according to Hodder, is “the totality of the relevant environment.” Different societies consume material and visual culture in different and deliberate ways, and even the same material culture can be consumed differently by different cultures; there is no guarantee that the way the sarcophagus and its visual content were consumed by Jewish patrons is commensurate with how it was consumed by Romans.

134 My approach here, and my conception of different contexts, borrows from the model adopted by Gardner (2007, 34).
This approach leads to no simple or easy narrative of the past. Gardner, who takes a similar approach to his investigation of military identity in Roman Britain, writes that his “aim is less to produce another grand narrative and more to highlight a range of diverse narratives.” One could worry that such a goal is toothless and unambitious, and will result only in confusion and complexity; an entirely relativistic result. To avoid this, I proceed through these relationships in a calculated direction, moving from east to west, from Beth She’arim to Rome. I move chapter by chapter from the Galilean center of the Jewish peoples of the late ancient Roman world, to the diaspora community at the heart of the Roman Empire in the city of Rome. Rather than proceed one by one through each sarcophagus and discuss the various motifs and influences individually—the catalog approach—I approach the sarcophagi from these communities and the question of cultural influence and exchange from a broader perspective. I consider the various cultural and visual resources that circulated around the ancient Mediterranean, and situate the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons contextually within this milieu.

Approaching the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim from this perspective is a strategy born out of emerging understandings of the Roman economy as operating on multiple levels, responsive at each level to different geographic and socio-political dynamics. The first and smallest scale of trade was the local level, which represents the majority of trade undertaken by local peoples on a daily basis in the Roman Empire (see Chapters 3-4).

137 Gardner 2007, 17.
138 Bresson 2005. See also Mattingly 2007; Russell 2013.
Such trade took place between a city and its network of satellite villages and towns, or within a network of proximate cities that formed a cohesive geographic subunit, such as the Galilee, for instance (Map 2). The second scale of trade was the regional trade that took place within a province, or possibly between provinces—what we might call intraregional trade. Trade at the intraregional accounted for an overwhelmingly large portion of the global economy of the Roman Empire, and it was at this level that cultural tastes and preferences were often fashioned, giving the provinces what regional identities recognizable in their patterns of consumption (see Chapter 5).

The third and final scale of the trade across the Roman Empire is the pan-Mediterranean, empire-wide trade network by which the ports of the Italian peninsula were connected to cities as far east as Palmyra. In practice however, this trade was subdivided into two large and occasionally overlapping spheres of western and eastern markets, a sub-level of Roman trade that might be termed interregional. Products from the Roman East can and did make their way to the western provinces, and vice versa, but by and large the marble products produced in and around Roman quarries in the west were consumed in the western provinces, while those of Asia Minor were consumed in the East. Many luxury goods, from fine ceramics to sarcophagi, were largely traded at the interregional level (see Chapters 6-7).

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I begin by surveying the history of the discoveries related to the Jewish communities and necropoleis of Beth She’arim and Rome (Chapter 2). Considering the communal dynamics of each community, and the inscriptive evidence, I reconstruct as far as possible the likely patrons of sarcophagi in each place, and their position within the community. Pursuant to the structural goals outlined above, I then explore the history of stone sculpture in Jewish contexts in Palestine, beginning especially in the early Roman period (Chapter 3). I identify three traditions which developed in the region and were used in Jewish contexts: the carving and decoration of ossuaries, of monumental rock-cut tombs, and the ornamental relief and architectural carving of synagogues in the late Roman Galilee.

Having established the major traditions of stone sculpture present in Palestine, I examine the ways that sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons drew on and continued these stone sculpture traditions (Chapter 4). Especially at Beth She’arim, I find evidence that many of the motifs and themes are drawn from contemporary architectural relief carving in the region, or from earlier ossuary and tomb decoration. From this point, I broaden my perspective to consider how sarcophagi and their patrons from Beth She’arim fit into the broader funerary landscape of Roman Syria (Chapter 5). I compare and contrast the corpus of sarcophagi from Beth She’arim to that of another major necropolis in the region at Tyre, and consider how imported Proconnesian sarcophagi had a special role in the sarcophagus economy of Roman Syria and its provincial profile.
Following this, I further broaden my perspective to the trends and major producers of the broader sarcophagus industry across the Roman Mediterranean and consider how sarcophagi belonging to certain Jewish patrons reflect sarcophagus styles and themes which were popular and even famous across Late Antiquity and characteristic of the interregional sarcophagus trade (Chapter 6). The evidence for this comes primarily from sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons of Rome, who naturally acquired their sarcophagi primarily from renowned Metropolitan sarcophagus workshops there. At the same time, the fragmentary remains of a number of imported marble Attic and Asiatic sarcophagi at Beth She’arim demonstrate that some patrons there had sufficient means, cultural sophistication and commercial connections to specially import sarcophagi available only on the interregional market.

In a final turn, I shift my focus to a small group of Jewish patrons whose sarcophagi bear portrait sculpture (Chapter 7). These patrons, exclusively from the Roman Jewish community, took part in the ‘portrait boom’ of the 3rd century C.E. that was especially characteristic of the sarcophagus industry in Rome. I consider their motivations for doing so and the portrait types they seem to have favored. Following this, I offer a summary of my findings and reflect not only on the outcomes of this analysis, but what significance they hold for the study of Jewish visual culture in the ancient world.

\[\textit{Birk 2013, 14.}\]
1.6 What is Jewish about Jewish art?

“What is Jewish about Jewish art?” This question, which has been posed—and answered—in various fashions for over a century now,141 is not one I can or should answer immediately. It is a complex question that contains within it many other related questions, including, in the first place: “Is there Jewish art?” These are questions to which I hope this project can contribute, but it would be hasty of me to identify what is Jewish in Jewish art—or to mount a defense or attack of the term “Jewish art”—prior to discussing the evidence. Instead, after analyzing the evidence from sarcophagus sculpture through which the thread of these questions weave, I return again at the conclusion, in the hopes that the foregoing discussion has shed some light on the topic. At that point, we will see whether “Jewish art” can be upheld as a meaningful category or should be abandoned.

However, because of the complexity of the question and its long history, it is worth introducing some of the dynamics behind it. The question of what is Jewish about Jewish art is one that has been asked for quite some time, and addressed to every period more or less where we have evidence of Jewish engagement and interaction with visual culture.142 The question is related also to another set of questions of definitions of terms

141 In fact, I take the precise wording from a recent survey of Jewish art in America by Baigell (2007).
142 It is noteworthy, perhaps, that the same question has been asked regarding ‘Roman’ art too. In other words, “is there really Roman art, and if so, what is Roman about it?” For Hölscher, the Romanness of Roman visual culture existed not in the particular forms or styles used by Roman artists and patrons, but in the system of conventions that governed the combining of various content, forms and styles—what Hölscher called the linguistic or semantic system of Roman art. See Hölscher 2004.
like “Jewish history,” and “Judaism.” Baigell has recently phrased it as a twofold question:

“For a book such as this [Jewish Art in America], two often asked questions need to be answered immediately: first, what is Jewish about Jewish art and, second, is there something called The Jewish Experience?”

The answers to these questions have been the topic of debate for well over a century, and have been approached from a variety of angles, engaging theories not only of art history, but reflected also through the various prisms of race, nationalism and religion.

The answers to such questions have, of course, been as varied as the ways they have been posed and the definitions that underlie them.

Many have espoused significant and justifiable misgivings about the heuristic value of the term at all. For his part, Baigell’s answer is nihilistic: “The answer to the first question is ‘nothing,’ and to the second, ‘no.’” Baigell goes on to call the notion of ‘Jewish art’ “wishful thinking and bad sociology.” We will see that the study of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons provides ample illustrations for some of the concerns related to such terms as “Jewish art.” For example, the diversity we will encounter belies any notion of anything approaching a monolithic, common Jewish experience, even in the most abstract of terms.

143 Baigell 2007, xiii.
144 For a brief summary of the search for Jewish art, see Baigell 2007.
145 See, for example, Baigell 2007; Elsner 2003; Kraemer 1991.
146 Baigell 2007, xiii.
147 Baigell 2007, xiii.
Moreover, we will see time and time again that there is very little identifiably unique or original about the visual programs of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons. If we were to go searching for originality on the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons in either Rome or Beth She’arim we would indeed be sorely disappointed. Any creativity or originality exists in the way that visual resources were combined on sarcophagi and not in any new visual resources themselves.

On the other hand, according to Sed-Rajna, the debate over Jewish art as a meaningful term and category stems from “misunderstandings and badly formulated questions.” For example, definitions of ‘art’ which are founded to greater or lesser extent on conceptions of ‘originality’ and ‘creativity’ may be of little heuristic value anyways. As Hölscher put it concerning Roman art:

“Above all, we must break free of the expectation of ceaseless innovation, often in the form of progressive ‘development’, and of the assumption that a unified, freestanding, style is somehow expressive of historical individuality.”

This conclusion finds support in ancient commentary on the arts. For millennia and throughout the Ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world, when authors wrote of particularly impressive works of art, they praised them for the technical skill they exhibited and the quality of their craftsmanship, not for their originality or creativity. Freed from the “expectation of ceaseless innovation” and approached from another

\[149\] Hölscher 2004, 7.  
\[150\] For a thorough discussion of ancient commentary on art, see Elsner 2007, esp. Chs. 2-4.
socio-cultural perspective, “Jewish art” may be defensible as a category as far as it reflects an important facet of the historical experiences of Jewish communities and individuals.

Moreover, according to some, the abundant evidence of enduring engagement with visual culture in Jewish history demands a different answer to the questions. Before going on to defend the value of ‘Jewish art’ as a meaningful category, Sed-Rajna observed that:

“One hundred years of archaeological excavations, marked by unexpected and at times astonishing discoveries—such as the mosaics in the Galilean synagogues or the wall paintings of the Dura-Europos synagogue—and fifty years of active research by eminent specialists have brought to light such a wealth of works that a condescending attitude which considers all these monuments as simple reflections of the great artistic trends or as the occasional products of popular crafts is inappropriate.”

Indeed, the first half of the 20th century was an exciting period for the study of Jewish visual culture. The discovery and exploration of a number of Jewish catacombs in Rome and at Beth She’arim in Israel alongside the excavation of dozens of ancient synagogues (especially at Dura Europos, Capernaum and Beth Alpha) revealed a new and unprecedented mass of visual culture from Jewish antiquity.

This new evidence demanded a reckoning from scholars who had long held that a strict interpretation of the Second Commandment and cultural traditions of aniconism broadly proscribed the use of imagery of all kinds by ancient Jews. Old habits die hard, though, and even in the face of such mounting evidence the field was slow to abandon

long and deeply held convictions. Scholars turned their attention to trying to find limits and impose boundaries on Jewish engagement with visual culture in the Roman world. In contrast to their non-Jewish neighbors, it has been variously argued that Jewish patrons studiously avoided all sorts of visual culture, including figural imagery, pagan imagery, cult imagery, images of deities, and portraiture.152

Today however, the idea that Jewish patrons avoided certain types of visual culture in deference to religious ideals or custom has been exposed as the product of a modern projection rather than a historical reality,153 and there is a growing consensus in favor of abandoning the search for criteria and rules to apply Jewish participation in visual culture. In its place, we have arrived at new understandings of the diversity of visual culture that continues to emerge from excavations of Jewish sites across the ancient Mediterranean. This reflects the fact that Jewish attitudes towards visual culture varied widely across time and place, and sometimes even within the same community.

Ultimately, a definition offered by the artist Peter Krasnow in 1925 comes closer to the broad criteria that we will adopt, at least initially. Krasnow said that “Jewish art is a Jewish subject, by a Jewish artist, acquired by a Jewish collector.”154 Krasnow’s concise definition could be taken in different ways, but if we consider each of these criteria as an

152 To some degree, we are still preoccupied with finding limits to Jewish participation in visual culture. Recently in fact, Levine (2013, 162) has written that the Jewish patrons who were buried in the Roman catacombs “shied away from figural art, especially human representations.” Stern (1996; 2013) has argued instead that Jewish patrons made a distinction between “worshipped” and “non-worshiped” images.
independently decisive criterion, then we have at our disposal very broad definition but still functional definition for approaching Jewish history through visual culture. To rephrase, Jewish art is:

1) of a Jewish subject(s) or
2) by a Jewish artist or
3) acquired by a Jewish patron.

If any or all of these criteria are met, then at the very least the art, as artifact, tells us something (however small) about the historical experiences of Jews.\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{155} Indeed, Baigell (2007, xx) agrees with this later in his essay when he writes “Is there an art that is explicitly assimilationist but implicitly Jewish? Can we tease Jewish meanings from works of with no obvious Jewish content? The answer is yes…” but he goes on to say that the ‘full contours of the issue’ are not mapped out yet and the way forward is difficult.
Chapter 2. Sarcophagus Patrons and the Communities of Beth She'arim and Rome

In this chapter, I review the history of the Jewish catacombs of Beth She’arim and Rome, their chronology, and their study in modern scholarship. I also discuss dynamics of the Jewish communities behind these necropoleis. I review the discovery of sarcophagi at each, and consider local sarcophagus production and patronage practices. Finally, I reconstruct the sarcophagus patrons in each community as far as possible on the basis of communal dynamics, inscriptions and parallel evidence of patronage practices in the Roman world.

2.1 The history and discovery of Beth She’arim

Situated in the foothills of the lower Galilee, the ancient town of Beth She’arim lay just off the beaten track, connected by secondary roads to major trade routes that linked the Mediterranean coast of Palestine with Galilee, the Jezreel valley and the Transjordan beyond (Map 2).\(^1\) The village was nestled on a hill with a vista of the Jezreel valley and oriented towards the eastern trade routes.\(^2\) The original excavator, Benjamin Mazar, described the site as a "typical Jewish city," noting that despite its beautiful views and proximity to major trade routes, the village does not reveal evidence of being a major

\(^1\) Mazar 1973, 13-4.
\(^2\) As evidenced by the layout and main entrances to the town. See Mazar 1973, 14.
urban center, but instead remained a small village of farmers, craftsmen and, as we will see, rabbis.³

In contrast to the size and character of the village, the necropolis discovered in the limestone hills around the village is one of the largest and most remarkable Jewish burial grounds of the ancient world. The inscriptions from the catacombs amply attest to the fact that the necropolis served more than just the local community, and that Jewish dead from across the Mediterranean were interred at Beth She’arim. The epitaphs identify the deceased with places on the Syro-Phoenician coast, from Palmyra and Asia Minor, and from Babylonia.⁴ Within Palestine, we find mention of Caesarea, ‘Arav and, of course, Beth She’arim.⁵

The necropolis of Beth She’arim is also remarkable for containing one of the richest assemblages of Jewish visual culture in the Roman world. Wall paintings, sculptural reliefs, carvings and graffiti on catacomb walls and on sarcophagi contain geometric and floral designs as well as figural motifs with both animals and humans. Among the abundant imagery of the catacombs, there are clear adoptions of Roman visual tropes as well as continuations of local traditions of visual culture. While the sarcophagi show no

⁴ See also Saphrai (1958), who suggests that transfer for burial in Palestine became an accepted practice only after the death of Judah Ha-Nasi. However, Rahmani’s catalog (1994) includes the ossuaries of several deceased from Alexandria, Cyrenaica and further abroad still.
⁵ Safrai 1958. See also Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974, 97-110, No. 27.
evidence of patronage beyond the local and perhaps neighboring communities in the Galilee, their sculptural programs suggest extensive cultural exchange.

Imported sarcophagi of marble bear familiar mythological scenes such as Leda and the Swan, Achilles, and the Amazons (see Chapter 6), while locally produced sarcophagi were sculpted with motifs and programs drawn from local and provincial sources (Chapters 4, 5). These sculptural programs, the subject of the coming chapters, are revealing on a number of levels. Not only do they convey the cultural affinities of Jewish sarcophagus patrons in late antique Galilee, they also illustrate broader patterns of cultural exchange (and change), and the mediating role of visual culture in the navigation of Roman rule and the increasing connectivity of the Galilee.

2.1.1 History of excavations at Beth She’arim

Known at the time by the Arabic name Sheikh Abreik, the Beth She’arim was first examined by the Palestinian Exploration Fund in 1872 after the discovery of a series of caves by a local child from the Arab village.6 The survey of the site at this time included superficial explorations of exposed catacombs, including the collapsed catacomb Mugharet el-Jehennem between Catacombs 1 and 2, the "Great Caves" now referred to as catacombs 7-10, and the above ground structures. Many of the catacombs discovered by later explorations showed no trace above ground and were neither explored nor documented in the survey. Little additional study was undertaken on the site until 1936,

6 Condor 1873; Condor and Kitchener 1881.
when Benjamin Mazar learned of a breach at the site leading to a “decorated cave.” This breach turned out to provide access to the burial halls neighboring the collapsed catacomb of Mugharet el-Jehennem. Mazar’s exploration turned up a series of chambers filled with graffiti and inscriptions in Hebrew, Greek and Palmyrene.

These initial findings led to full scale excavations the same year under the auspices of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society and the direction of Mazar. Almost immediately, the discovery of the necropolis at Sheikh Abreik was identified by Mazar with the ancient village of Beth She’arim (Besara) based on the literary references contained in Josephus and rabbinic literature. His identification was quickly affirmed and widely agreed upon.7

Comprehensive excavations were carried out by two giants of Israeli archaeology, by Benjamin Mazar from 1936 to 1940, and by Nahman Avigad from 1953 to 1958. Mazar excavated catacombs 1-11 and 22-27,8 while Avigad excavated caves 12-21. The state of the catacombs as encountered by modern archaeologists was not encouraging. After centuries of looting and decay, Avigad describes the initial impression as one of “destruction and disarray,” with bones disinterred and scattered across the catacomb floors.9

7 For a detailed discussion of this identification and its support on both archaeological and literary grounds, see Avigad and Mazar 1993, 236; Mazar 1973, 1-12.
8 The latter catacombs were never published.
9 Avigad 1976a, 10.
Mazar's excavations from 1936-1940 focused on Catacombs 1-11. During the first season, Mazar excavated Catacombs 1 and 2 near the collapsed Mugharet el-Jehennem tomb where the initial discovery was made. In the same season he also explored Catacombs 7, 9 and 10 on the northwestern hill. In the third season, the village was first excavated. Work was undertaken simultaneously at the synagogue (on the northeastern part of the Tel) and on the necropolis, where the ruins of a mausoleum and a new catacomb (11) were discovered. All told, Mazar and his team excavated and published eleven catacombs during their four years on site: Catacombs 1-4 and 11 on the western slope of the Tel, and Catacombs 5-10 on the adjacent northeastern hill (Map 4). He left at least half of the catacombs only partially excavated, clearing completely only catacombs 1, 3, 5, 6, and 11.10

Avigad’s excavations from 1953 to 1958 included four seasons in the field and explored to various extents Catacombs 12-28, as well as continued in a minor way some work on the village of Beth She’arim (see Map 4).11 During the 1953 season, Avigad continued Mazar's work on the built features at the northern limit of the village, and explored the northern slope searching for new catacombs. The excavations in the village uncovered an olive press and a gate, both of which Avigad dated to the 4th through 6th centuries C.E.12

11 Avigad 1976a, 7-16.
12 Avigad 1976a, 10.
The amount of literature written about the site is surprisingly small in comparison to its standing in the archaeological record and its fame. Since the publication of the final reports of in both Hebrew and English, the last of which was published in 1976, there have been relatively few attempts to advance our understanding of the history of the town and its necropolis. A number of individual articles have been published on a variety of topics, particularly by Levine and Weiss and especially concerning the rabbinic community (see below), but nowhere near as many as befitting a site of such magnitude. A 1974 doctoral dissertation by Nagakubo explored the Greek inscriptions from the necropolis and the light they shed on the beliefs of those interred at the site. Tepper and Tepper’s more recent archaeological study (2004) has been the most comprehensive since Mazar and Avigad’s, but it has been published in Hebrew only and is primarily concerned with the village. Since 2013, new excavations by the Israel Antiquities Authority under the direction of T. Tsuk and Y. Bordowicz have focused on the village. Reports from those executions have not yet been published.

13 Both excavators published a findings volume, with Moshe Schwabe and Baruch Lifshitz publishing a third volume on the Greek inscriptions of the site: Avigad 1976a; Mazar 1973; Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974. Preliminary reports were in both English and Hebrew. For a summary of the excavations and publication history, see further Avigad and Mazar 1993.

14 On the paucity of these attempts, see Levine 2013, 119.


17 Tepper and Tepper 2004.
2.1.2 The ancient village of Beth She’arim

The main settlement of Beth She’arim was situated on the top of a rolling hill and its southern slope, while the synagogue and adjacent 'public' buildings were located on the north-east slope (Map 4, Fig. 2.1). The settlement was encircled by a low boundary wall built in the middle or late 1st century C.E., but which underwent many changes throughout its use over the following five centuries. The material finds reveal that the site (inclusive of the town and its necropolis) was occupied intensively from the 2nd century C.E. to at least the 5th century C.E.

Excavations in the village largely concentrated on the three ‘public’ buildings: the synagogue, the gate and a basilical building of unidentified function. Avigad used these three major built features, together with the topography of the site to speculate on the size of the village at its height. He drew a theoretical boundary around the top of the hill corresponding to a village of approximately 200 meters in width by 400 meters long. At the height of its occupation, Mazar estimated that the village covered approximately 25 acres.

The city was not fortified, instead, its gates were placed between existing buildings, as was the case at the northern gate. The lack of a defensive wall and the placement of a

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18 Mazar 1973, 16.
19 Avigad 1976a, 4-5.
20 Mazar’s (1973, 14) conclusion is based on survey work.
21 Avigad 1976a, 6.
large reservoir some 100 m outside of the northern gates\textsuperscript{22} suggests that Beth She’arim was not a particularly large or prominent village. Traveling to and from the above mentioned cistern from the village would have required weaving between burial sites, an interesting and potentially problematic practice in terms of Jewish purity laws. This intravillage route may have been an important one. Avigad notes that a pair of water pools and “unusual buildings” (most likely mausoleums) as well as the open-air courtyards of Catacombs 30 and 20 seem to be arranged facing the likely path from gate to cistern, and he observed a similar arrangement on the western slope of the site.\textsuperscript{23}

2.1.3 The necropolis of Beth She’arim

The necropolis occupies the opposite side of the hill, forming a semicircle on the northern, northeastern and western slopes and extending onto adjacent hills to the north and west. This area is more remote, considering that the main ingress to the village was by way of the Jezreel valley to the south-east (an area absent of tombs). The hills on which Beth She’arim was situated are geologically suitable for burial, with soft white limestone that was easy to hew and smooth.\textsuperscript{24} Over the course of several centuries of use, as Mazar puts it “nearly every inch of rock suitable for cutting out tombs was

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Avigad 1976a, 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Avigad 1976a, 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Mazar 1973, 20-1.
\end{itemize}
utilized,” even to the point of carving multi-story burial halls situated one on top of the other.\footnote{Mazar 1973, 21.}

There are over two dozen catacombs at Beth She’arim cut into soft limestone rock. The vast majority of these follow a similar format: a series of interconnected burial halls and chambers that split off from a central entry corridor.\footnote{Weiss (2010a, 219) groups the catacombs into five types according to the burial methods within and the layout. They are: 1) the prototypical catacomb featuring a central courtyard with burial halls branching off, with burial in kokhim or arcosolia (Catacombs 12, 15 and 17); 2) catacombs with many burial halls off a long corridor, also featuring burials in kokhim or arcosolia (Catacombs 1 and 13); 3) larger burial halls intended primarily for sarcophagi (Catacombs 11, 20 and 23); 4) mausolea, of which there are two; 5) stone built single tombs.} Most are accessed through a central courtyard, off of which two to four burial halls branch. With a few notable exceptions, the central courtyards are typically small—they would not have accommodated any gatherings—and were recessed into the bedrock and accessed by means of narrow stairs hewn into the rock face. Two burial complexes stand out from the rest: Catacombs 14 and 20. Both feature an outer courtyard with seating, and a built ashlar facade with a triple-arched entrance (see below, Chapter 3 and Figs. 3.31-35). Catacomb 14 also featured an open air gathering place above the courtyard and facade which may have served a ritual or liturgical function.

Within the burial halls, inhumations took place most often in kokh graves—narrow niches little more than the length and width of a body—hewn into the walls of the room, in arcosolia with multiple kokh graves, or in occasional pit graves around the perimeter
of the rooms. Burial vessels at Beth She'arim were carved out of either limestone or marble, manufactured of rolled lead with stamped designs, or crafted of wood. Of these forms, the limestone sarcophagi are by far the most common and best preserved, with some 125 complete (or nearly complete) examples extant that must represent a fairly complete picture of the full corpus. By contrast, marble sarcophagi exist only in fragmentary form,\(^{27}\) there were only five lead sarcophagi discovered, and wooden coffins are known only from a few splinters and preserved metal hardware.

Burials at Beth She’arim were not limited to the catacombs excavated by Mazar and Avigad. In fact, during his ninth season, Avigad’s team discovered a mausoleum near Catacomb 14 that contained a lead coffin with a stamped menorah.\(^{28}\) While the fact that this burial that occurred outside of the catacombs proper surprised the excavators, it turned out not to be an isolated occurrence. Several other graves with lead coffins were found nearby.\(^{29}\) Similarly, Avigad came across two shaft graves, with walls reinforced with bricks.\(^{30}\)

The necropolis served a wider community than the village of Beth She’arim and its environs, as we have noted already. While most of those buried at Beth She’arim were in

\(^{27}\) Avigad (1976a) published many pieces with identifiable motifs, though there were other fragments without distinct or reconstructable sculpture discovered. The marble sarcophagi themselves seem to have been a particular target for later tomb robbers, while only the contents of the limestone sarcophagi were of interest.

\(^{28}\) Avigad 1976a, 15.

\(^{29}\) Avigad 1976a, 15. Avigad called these graves the “outer tombs.”

\(^{30}\) Avigad 1976a, 15-6.
fact local—drawn to the necropolis from nearby cities and towns in the Galilee—some came from the coast, or from as far as Palmyra to be buried at Beth She’arim. Gafni points out that there are several different kinds of diaspora dead possibly transferred for burial at the site. These include not only 1) Jews who originated from outside of Palestine, but also 2) Palestinian Jews who had immigrated from Palestine but wished to be interred with family who remained behind in their native country, as well as 3) Jews who died while traveling abroad. Furthermore, the category of Jews who originated in diaspora (1) is complicated by the fact that it includes subgroups not only of Jews whose remains were transferred after death to Palestine for burial from abroad, but also Jews who may have immigrated to Palestine during their life for reasons other than burial at Beth She'arim.

We have clear indications for various kinds of ‘foreign’ burials at Beth She’arim, yet, as Gafni points out, geographic indicators on tombstones “show only that [the deceased] belonged to a certain community and family;” they are not proof-positive of transfer for interment. The extent to which these individuals retained their local identities from their native countries (expressed through maintenance of languages, dress, practices and other cultural performances) is elusive and difficult to reconstruct with any certainty. At

31 Most likely, these were secondary burial and only the disarticulated bones of the deceased were transferred. In fact, the majority of burials at Beth She’arim continued the practice of secondary burial. See below, Chapter 4, especially discussion of the ‘Daughter’s’ sarcophagus.
33 Gafni 1981, 98.
times, the burials of ‘foreign’ Jews are distinctive from others at Beth She’arim in their inscriptions as well as associated visual culture. This may reflect attempts by the deceased or their family to preserve a non-local identity in death. Concerning the limestone and marble sarcophagi on the other hand, the evidence suggests that they were popular only among members of the local, Galilean Jewish community (see further below).

We can also reconstruct some aspects of the logistics of burial from the inscriptions on the lintels, many of which reflect varying practices and modes of patronage of the funerary economy. It is clear that it was possible to purchase single burial plots, a block of burial plots, or even entire halls. There are also indications that burial by family group was preferred. Weiss suggests that the inscription of ownership on lintels was in accordance with the rabbinic concern noted above for avoiding non-familial burial in family tombs. He further concludes that, since the lintel inscriptions refer often to purchase and not to burial, these purchases were made during the lifetime of the head of the family. One inscription even indicates explicitly that “Justus commanded in his lifetime...”.

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34 For instance, one Aidesios purchased a room for six burials in Catacomb 12. See Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974, No. 142.
35 Weiss 1992, 358. See also Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974, no. 142.
Another inscription, from Catacomb 20, reads “this is the tomb of Rabbi Hillel, son of Rabbi Levi, who made this cave.” This is the only inscription from the necropolis to reference the actual construction of a burial chamber, and points to familial involvement with all aspects of burial, including the actual hewing of the burial chamber (or commissioning of local workers to do so). Such inscriptions suggest a high level of familial involvement in determining various aspects of burial, and possibly the involvement of the individual during his lifetime. Indeed, everything points towards familial involvement in the preparation of tombs and burials, and the material finds, epigraphy and rabbinic sources contain no mention of any central organization responsible for the logistics of running a communal burial site.

2.1.4 The dating of the necropolis and village of Beth She’arim

Avigad’s excavations at the site revealed that Beth She’arim was first settled in the late Iron Age, with sustained occupation in the Persian and Hellenistic periods. The dynamics of this occupation are obscured by the lack of buildings dating to before the

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38 But, see Weiss (1992) who reads the inscription as an indication of a burial society, of which he concludes that Rabbi Hillel was a member.
39 And yet, Weiss (1992) concludes that there must have existed one. He does so partly on analogy with the documented existence of one for the Jewish community at Acmonia and on analogy with similar funerary societies in pagan and Christian Rome. Whether Weiss is also unconsciously drawing a line from modern hevra kadishot is unclear, but his mention of the modern parallel in the subsequent paragraphs later would suggest that may be the case. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that Weiss cannot imagine the functioning of such a large necropolis without a central organization to oversee its logistics; he cannot conceive of Beth She’arim operating on a more organic model. Ultimately, relying strictly on rabbinic witness, Weiss concludes the existence of private burial societies that: “…set laws and regulations regarding the environmental rights of the individual, such as determining the location of the cemetery in relation to the city’s borders, marking the graves so as to avoid impurity, as well as fixing a number of halakhot concerning buy-seller relations.” See Weiss 1992, 362-6.
early Roman period.\textsuperscript{40} The site was intensively occupied from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century C.E. to at least the 5\textsuperscript{th} century C.E., though the \textit{terminus ante quem} has been a matter of debate.

Initially, it was supposed that the necropolis dated from a much smaller range of about 130 years, between the burial of Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi (ca. 220 C.E.) and the Gallus revolt (351 C.E.).\textsuperscript{41} Avigad’s reconstruction of the chronology of the site largely coincided with Mazar’s. Both believed that the village never recovered from the supposed destruction in the 4\textsuperscript{th} century C.E., and that the necropolis ceased to be used around this time. On this basis, Avigad argued that the robbing of the graves began already in the Byzantine period.\textsuperscript{42} The heyday of the site, according to Avigad, was the period in which Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi resided and immediately after he was buried in the necropolis, around the middle of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century C.E. After this the village and necropolis began a slow decline. In Avigad’s estimation, the character of the buildings and graves becomes simpler and poorer following this period, starting in the late 3\textsuperscript{rd} and early 4\textsuperscript{th} centuries C.E.\textsuperscript{43}

Following the Byzantine period, there is little dispute that the necropolis was abandoned, though the village may have been occupied in a limited and sporadic way in

\textsuperscript{40} Avigad 1976a, 1.
\textsuperscript{41} See Avi-Yonah 1961, 36. See also the earlier view of Mazar (1973, 6-7), who ties the abandonment of the necropolis with the destruction of the village during the Gallus revolt, following which the settlement at the site was substantially “thinned out” and finally abandoned in the Byzantine period. Avigad (1976a, 3) largely agreed with Mazar’s assessment and writes that Beth Shearim “never recovered” from the destruction during the Gallus revolt and was a “small, poor settlement whose inhabitants built their houses amid the ruins of the demolished city” in the Byzantine period.
\textsuperscript{42} Avigad 1976a, 3.
\textsuperscript{43} Avigad 1976a, 3.
the centuries that followed. At some point after the Byzantine period, the catacombs were thoroughly looted. Looting was generally accomplished by holes dug into the soft bedrock above the lintels of the doors, though the looters could be aided by natural collapse as well. Islamic and Crusader graffiti testify to the visiting of the site in the centuries before it was lost, including one particularly poignant piece of Arabic poetry, a lament written by a 9th century female visitor to the tombs.

Mazar identified a chronological evolution of the site based on the typology development of catacomb layout and burial style. For example, the oldest inhumations, he suggested, were kokh style inhumations dating to the 1st and 2nd century C.E. Weiss has recently reevaluated the finds, with a goal of assessing whether the obvious differences in layouts and practices have chronological significance, in light of the fact that Mazar’s chronology was purely based on typology and not on dated finds. He convincingly shows that many of the inhumation styles neatly divided by Mazar into phases actually existed concurrently, such as the simple and complex arcosolia, and cannot be neatly chronologically divided. He likewise demonstrates that the kokhim, taken by Mazar to be used only in the first two centuries C.E., were used well into the 3rd century.

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44 Avigad (1976a, 4) believed that the tombs were used by Arab shepherds, and notes several families who lived in the vicinity of the village in the Mameluke period.
45 Avigad 1976a, 10.
46 Avigad 1976a, 4 n.14.
48 Weiss 2010a, 209.
49 Weiss 2010a, 210-1.
and even 4th centuries C.E. Thus, constructing a coherent chronology of the catacombs based on their construction and the type of burials within is impossible. Rather, it seems that the multiple types of burials, including sarcophagi, were employed throughout the history of the necropolis.

2.1.5 The Rabbinic presence at Beth She’arim

One of the communities prominently visible at Beth She’arim (both village and necropolis) was the rabbinic community, and, as we will see, members of this community also figured among the sarcophagus patrons at the site. As early as the beginning of the 2nd century C.E. we have literary evidence of rabbis living and working at Beth She’arim. The first rabbi attested at Beth She’arim was Rabbi Yohanan ben Nuri, a tannaitic pupil of Rabban Gamaliel II and contemporary of Rabbi Akiba in the early 2nd century C.E. By the end of the 2nd century and for reasons largely unknown, Beth She’arim had risen to some prominence as a center of rabbinic activity, one of a few such sites mentioned in rabbinic literature across the Galilee. Avigad writes in this regard that “Beth She’arim became one of the important cities of refuge for scholars…” Beth She’arim is a stopping point along the fabled story of the step-by-step relocation of the Sanhedrin after the revolt.

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50 Weiss 2010a, 211. Weiss attributes the selection of various grave types to economic factors, reflecting shrewd marketing strategy on the part of an assumed central organizing burial society in charge of overseeing Beth She’arim See Weiss 2010a, 223-25.
51 Levine 2013, 119.
52 Levine 2013, 119.
53 Avigad 1976a, 2.
Descriptions of funerals and details of burial practices in rabbinic literature suggest that “rabbis chose to be buried near each other.” This is borne out by the presence of ‘rabbinic burials’ in the catacombs, in which the title ‘rabbi’ (רבי) appears 27 times. Most of these appear in two catacombs which are often considered “rabbinic.” These are Catacombs 14 and 20, which together account for 16 instances of the title. The title ‘rabbi’ appears nine times outside of these catacombs, and these appearances further suggest that rabbinic families tended to bury near each other. Thus in Hall G in Catacomb 1, the rabbinic family of Mokim was buried, along with colleagues R. Paregoris, Judah HaQatan and Dose.

The most famous rabbinic burial in the necropolis was that of Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi. An account of Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi’s burial at Beth She’arim is found in several places in rabbinic literature. His funeral procession apparently included the members of eighteen synagogues who bore his body from Sepphoris, his home in his last years, to Beth She’arim, a distance of some 15 km. During the procession, the waning daylight was reportedly miraculously preserved. A compelling case has been made that Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi’s final resting place was located by Avigad, in none other than Catacomb 14. While there is no inscription in the catacomb bearing Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi’s name,

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55 Weiss 1992, 367-9. Weiss is certainly right in pointing out that the rabbinic conception of the family often extended beyond the ties of blood and included the pupils or rabbinic fellowship circle of a household. See also Miller 2006, 445ff.
56 For a list of such occurrences, see Levine 2013, 120.
already in preliminary reports Avigad begin identifying the catacomb as the burial hall of Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi’s family.\textsuperscript{57} This identification, further argued in the final publication and generally accepted since,\textsuperscript{58} is based primarily on the monumentality of the architecture that served a single, prominent family (in contrast to the monumental architecture of Catacomb 20, a communal burial hall) as well as the inscriptions, which record the burials of a R. Shim’on and R. Gamaliel. These happen to be the names of R. Judah’s sons as recorded in rabbinic literature, and the coincidence is suggestive.\textsuperscript{59}

Many scholars have made the leap from the well documented presence of a rabbinic community and prominent rabbinic families at Beth She’arim to the presumption that it was this presence that was responsible for any and all aspects of the necropolis: from its popularity among foreign Jews, to its diverse visual culture.\textsuperscript{60} Avigad suggested that the Jews who came from abroad “must have been staunch, conscientious Jews, otherwise they would not have requested to be brought from afar in order to be buried in the same cemetery as Rabbi Juda Ha-Nassî.”\textsuperscript{61} By “staunch, conscientious Jews” Avigad obviously means the religious observance of the individuals, and Avigad wrote in eulogizing

\textsuperscript{57} Avigad 1954; 1955.
\textsuperscript{58} For subsequent debates, see Cohen 1981; Lapin 2011; Miller 2004a.
\textsuperscript{59} See Avigad 1976a, 62-5. Other details are mustered to support this association, including the lack of patronymics (suggesting the family was well known) and a double grave in a prominent location without inscription.
\textsuperscript{60} For a concise history of this argument, see Rajak 1998.
\textsuperscript{61} Avigad 1976a, 286.
language that, “[a]fter the burial of Rabbi, leader of the nation and guiding spirit of his generation, the cemetery at Beth She’arim became sacred for the Jewish people.”

Perhaps none so explicitly connects the rabbinic community to the prominence of the catacombs as Levine. Levine suggests that the town’s “heyday” was during the years when Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi was based there, going so far as to argue that it was Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi’s burial that “transformed the town into the site of a major necropolis for Jews living in Roman-Byzantine Palestine and the eastern Diaspora…” Weiss argues similarly that the site gained significantly in stature with the burial of Rabbi Judah, “when the necropolis became the burial estate of the patriarchal family…”. He goes on to argue that it was this elevation in stature through the presence of the patriarchal family that drew Jews from across Palestine and the diaspora.

The logic of this and related arguments presumes a significant amount of Rabbinic influence outside of the Land of Israel when the extent of rabbinic influence even within Israel is anything but a settled question. It also presumes a cultural and religious orientation of Jews in the diaspora not only towards Palestine, but also towards the rabbinic movement. None of the identifiably foreign burials at Beth She’arim

64 Levine 2013, 120. Part of Levine’s argument is based on his connection with the Gamaliel dynasty and the patriarchate, with the assumption that the patriarchate being based in Beth She’arim would have substantially raised the profile of the town. However, it is anything but clear that the patriarchate was a substantial institution in this early period, or even in later periods.
65 Weiss 2010a, 209. See also Weiss’s (1992, 366-7) argument that Beth She’arim “attracted many people who chose to be buried near the burial site of the Patriarchal family.
demonstrate such a rabbinic orientation. Some do contain references to ‘piety,’ but this
eulogistic term should not be overdetermined as a term of the rabbinic community only.
While the rabbinic presence is an important one in the necropolis of Beth She’arim, we
should be wary of overstating the influence and impact of this community on the site.66

The epithet of Justus from Catacomb 11 is illustrative in this regard.67 Written in
Greek, in Homeric hexameter, using Latin (Justus) and Greek (son of Leontios) names,
the inscription references Hellenistic philosophical and religious concepts such as
Hades, Fate (μοῖρα) and Sophia. Moreover, Justus (son of Leontios) appears to have
been a resident of Beth She’arim (“…And my brothers too, alas, in my Beth She’arim”).68
Justus’s residence in Beth She’arim, his cultural, philosophical and even theological
affinities, and his evident lack of rabbinic affiliation point to the multicultural nature of
the town, and call into question theories of rabbinic predominance.69 We will return to
this inscription again in Chapter 6 when we consider an imported marble sarcophagus
found in the same context.

It seems to me at least as likely that Beth Sheʿarim emerged as a major Jewish burial
site due to simply to its proximity to the few urban centers of the Galilee and its
positioning at the nexus of an important if secondary interior trade.70 We might further

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69 Nagakubo’s (1974) reading of this inscription concurs.
70 The urban centers—which at this point included Tiberias, Sepphoris and Beth Shean-Scythopolis—were
all of mixed, and possibly predominantly gentile populations.
speculate that Jewish elites in the Galilee desired to participate in the same funerary practices that used by other local elites in Roman Syria, which we will encounter further in Chapter 5. We will see there that many of the funerary practices at Beth She’arim—and especially the sarcophagi from the site—are the product of the same processes of urbanization and cultural change that characterized the funerary practices across the region.

These funerary practices were marked especially by engaging in (competitive) display in communal necropoleis. In order for Jewish elites to take part in these same practices, a single location was needed to facilitate the type of display and social competition. Beth She’arim, by virtue of its Jewish population, its gentle limestone hills and its accessible location, was a natural candidate. This simpler explanation has two virtues: 1) it explains the disparity between the size and nature of Beth She’arim the village and the necropolis surrounding it and 2) it does so without resorting to the burial of Rabbi Judah HaNasi and other prominent rabbis, or assuming that their presence would have appealed to Jews from as far abroad as Palmyra.

Another, related issue with which much scholarship has been occupied is the question of how members of the rabbinic community could have been buried in catacombs so filled with visual imagery. Avigad implicitly contrasts rabbinic culture with various aspects of the catacombs, writing “While it became a center of Torah and Jewish learning, Beth She’arim also absorbed Greek cultural values in language and
art...”. Beneath this scholarly preoccupation lay a certain presumption about the rabbinic stance on images, leading to the presumption that the rabbis would have stringently objected to the sort of visual culture seen in the catacombs. Thus, the apparent contradiction: how could the rabbis, so (assumedly) opposed to visual culture, have chosen to be buried at a necropolis like Beth She’arim?

Rabbinic antipathy towards the visual has been substantially overstated. Not only were members of the rabbinic community buried in catacombs decorated with abundant visual imagery, but based on the few inscribed sarcophagi they appear to have been regular patrons of this culture as well (see further below, and Chapter 4). Neis has gone a step further and argued convincingly that “sight—and its interpretation, inscription, deployment, ritualization, and curtailment—was an important vehicle” within the rabbinic project of (re)creating Jewishness.

Moreover, there is much evidence to suggest that many members of the early rabbinic community were of high social standing and deeply engaged with the Roman cultural world. Mazar speculated that Beth She’arim was granted to R. Judah as part of a Patriarchal estate by the Roman government of Palestine. While there is no proof of this

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71 Avigad 1976a, 2.
73 Neis 2013, 6. Neis goes on to highlight a “robust rabbinic visuality” in the Amoraic period that was “vital to the formation of rabbinic subjectivity”, in other words, attitudes towards the visual played a critical role in the construction of rabbinic identities. So, for example, far from supporting the notion of a Jewish theology of an invisible God, rabbinic literature confirms that the rabbis spilled a great deal of ink and imagination on visual encounters with the divine. See Neis 2013, 254.
claim, Weiss and Levine argue more generally that the rabbis, and particularly the Patriarchate, formed an elite social class with substantial ties to the Roman Empire and its cultural world, with the further implication that their cultural proclivities would have influenced broader society.\textsuperscript{74} If this is indeed true, it would coincide well with models of Romanization that suggest that cultural change in the provinces was largely driven by local elites.\textsuperscript{75}

2.2 The sarcophagus economy at Beth She’arim and Jewish patrons

Aside from a few exceptions,\textsuperscript{76} all of the sarcophagi discovered at Beth She’arim come from a single, communal burial hall: Catacomb 20. The corridors and rooms of this sprawling catacomb teemed with 125 limestone sarcophagi which were packed in like sardines along with dozens of fragments of marble sarcophagi. Avigad’s description of the discovery, an intensely visual experience as he relates it, is worth reproducing:

“What was revealed before us, even in the weak light of our flashlights, was so different from what we were accustomed to in Beth She’arim that we could hardly believe our eyes... Wherever we looked, we saw rows or groups of large stone sarcophagi, all broken into. Sometimes the heavy lids were flung onto the floor... Every now and then, someone of our group would call out in excitement: ‘Here are Lions! Here is a Hebrew inscription!”\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{74} Weiss 1992, 367.
\textsuperscript{75} See especially Brunt 1976; Brunt 1990; Millett 1990; Woolf 1994; 1998. See also the introduction and essays in Laurence and Berry 1998.
\textsuperscript{76} One sarcophagus with garlands and inset circles was found in Catacomb 23, while fragments of two others, including a child’s sarcophagus or ossuary and a sarcophagus with bulls’ heads and garlands, were found in the collapse of Catacomb 11. All three are still visible at the site.
\textsuperscript{77} Avigad 1976a, 2.
Avigad notes his surprise and excitement at finding so many sarcophagi gathered together in one place, and especially at Beth She’arim. He hints at the wonder felt by the excavation team at the rich visual culture of the sarcophagi. So many sarcophagi, with such rich decoration, were unexpected by the excavators.

In its size and plan Catacomb 20 is different from other catacombs. The overall size of the catacomb is remarkable, with a central hallway running north-south into the western hill and eleven (sub)halls branching off to the east and to the west for a total of 26 halls in all (Fig. 2.2). This enormous catacomb, entered through a single, monumental facade, was almost certainly intended for communal use. Not one room inside can be identified as having been the work or property of a single family, and Avigad concluded that the catacomb served as a “large public burial place.” Also unusual, its rooms seem clearly constructed with sarcophagi in mind, with extra floor space and wide passageways. What’s more, there are indications that the sarcophagi were considered part of the architectural program of the rooms. In several chambers, large arcsolia and quadrosolia were purpose-hewn to hold (and display) sarcophagi.

On the other hand, though Catacomb 20 differs substantially in layout from other catacombs at the necropolis, it also bears striking similarities that caution us against seeing the sarcophagi deposited within as a phenomenon separate from other types of

78 Though some small groupings of sarcophagi by family may exist, this is perhaps a departure from standard burial practices at Beth She’arim where it seems that families were more frequently buried together in rooms or entire halls.
79 Avigad 1976a, 62.
burial at Beth She’arim. Sarcophagi are only one form of burial in Catacomb 20, which also exhibits the same range of burial forms found elsewhere at the necropolis: arcosolia of both group and individual types, kokh graves, as well as loculi and floor burials. Likewise, inscriptions with similar content and graffiti adorn the walls. With similar burial practices, epitaphs, and visual programs accompanying the sarcophagi and nearby graves, it seems much more the case that burial in sarcophagi was seen as an extension of local burial practices rather than a departure from them. In other words, it does not seem that sarcophagus burial was the special province of a particular community at Beth She’arim, so much as it was a special practice open to all (or at least, all who could afford it). As such, burial in Catacomb 20 may have been restricted to the wealthiest members of the local or Galilean Jewish community.

2.2.1 The sarcophagus economy at Beth She’arim

At Beth She’arim, Avigad reconstructs an entire ‘tomb industry’ in broad strokes. He envisions “hewers, stone pointers, and artisans,” as well as workshops for the production of local limestone sarcophagi. Concerning the latter, the overwhelming majority of sarcophagi from Beth She’arim were produced from limestone quarried either locally, or in the region. On all levels and all stages of the process, the quarrying and refining of limestone material required substantially less work than marble, as little

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80 Avigad 1976a, 137.
as one third in some cases.\textsuperscript{81} The use of local materials for the production of sarcophagi is quite common in the Roman world; at least one third of all sarcophagi produced across the Roman Mediterranean were hewn of local stones and intended for local consumption.\textsuperscript{82} Locally produced sarcophagi, mostly of limestone, predominate also in the nearby necropolis of Tyre (see further, Chapter 5).\textsuperscript{83} The limestone sarcophagi at Beth She'arim are thus illustrative of larger patterns of local production. The great majority of sarcophagi from the site are made of limestone from the surrounding region.\textsuperscript{84} The sculptural programs of these local limestone sarcophagi are the subject of Chapters 4 and 5. For the moment, it is important to reconstruct as best we can the sarcophagus economy of the necropolis at Beth She’arim, and the patronage practices therein.

There is no text or inscription recording any of the steps entailed in the practice of commissioning or acquiring a sarcophagus at Beth She’arim. Nonetheless, we can make some logical and plausible inferences about them, based on the materials and on parallels with the production of local sarcophagi in other places. Transporting carved limestone over any distance is a risky proposition, since the stone is soft, brittle and easily broken. Moreover, the ashlar blocks quarried to produce sarcophagi weighed on average eight tons each and stood around 2 meters long and 1.5 meter high with lid,

\textsuperscript{81} For precise estimates, see Russell 2013, 33.
\textsuperscript{82} Russell 2010.
\textsuperscript{83} Russell 2010, 124.
\textsuperscript{84} Soft nari sarcophagi materials were quarried at Beth She’arim and surrounding hills, while harder meleke stone probably came from nearby in the Galilean hills or possibly as far as the Carmel range. See Avigad 1976a, 136.
four times the size of most ossuaries. Instead the sarcophagi from Beth She'arim, which were of limestone from local and Galilean sources, probably made their way to the site as roughhewn sarcophagus blanks. At the quarry, they would have probably been hollowed out and worked into the sarcophagus form and given their distinctive gabled lid by craftsmen working in small teams. No more than a quarter of the material was removed in this process, meaning that the completed limestone sarcophagi weighed, on average, at least six tons each.

Many sarcophagi were probably hewn with a sculptural program in mind, some of the elements of which were possibly roughed out at the quarry. The sculptural programs of many locally produced sarcophagi at Beth She'arim however could have been produced from stock sarcophagus blanks, after the fact. The lids of the local limestone sarcophagi were tightly fitted with the bodies, and possibly hewn from the same ashlar blanks. At times the gaps were plastered over to create a seamless limestone face.

85 Limestone weighs approximately 2,600 kilograms per cubic meters. Assuming each block was already roughly the correct side and needed mostly smoothing and carving, the blocks would have been around 3 m³ (2 m. long x 1.5 m. high x 0.8 m. wide). Each would have weighed therefore around 7,800 kg, or about 8 tons. Ossuaries, on the other hand, were on average around 0.5 m long, 0.25 m wide, and 0.35 m high, or around 0.5 m³. See Rahmani 1994, 6.
86 Possibly as far as the Carmel mountain range. See Avigad 1976a, 293.
87 Around half of the time it is clear that a visual program was intended from the outset and part of the initial design and hewing of the body, as the carving extends out from the sarcophagus body. This is the case with the group of ‘tabula ansata’ sarcophagi that emulate Proconnesian quarry-state sarcophagi, and with several of the rosettes and circle sarcophagi, as well as the ‘gable’ and ‘shell’ sarcophagi.
88 So much so that usually tomb robbers in later centuries entered the sarcophagi by creating a breach in the side wall of the sarcophagus body, rather than attempting to dislodge the lid. See Avigad 1976a, 136.
While a clear picture of the burial practices was obscured by extensive looting, the evidence suggested that the sarcophagi accommodated both primary and secondary burials. Very few grave goods were generally interred with the body, though such practices may have been obscured by later looting. The sarcophagi were typically placed on the floor of the burial hall and arranged neatly in rows (though typically without any internal logic, at least as far as we can perceive it now), but two special arrangements were possible. Sarcophagi could either be placed on a raised platform in the burial hall, or in a specially hewn niche. These are rare exceptions to the pattern, however, with no more than a half dozen cases of each throughout the whole of the catacomb.

As Avigad points out, the general style of the relief work in the catacombs and on the sarcophagi shares distinct similarities that suggest that they were produced by the same local workshops specializing in stone sculpture. This would suggest that a local industry existed at the site specializing in the final preparation and completion of the sarcophagi and in relief carving. We will consider further the nature of local workshops and sculptural output in Chapter 3 and 4, but a few preliminary remarks are in order.

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89 Which fact may have deterred later tomb robbers and account for the high preservation of the limestone sarcophagi.
90 Which Avigad (1976a, 137) judges ‘poor.’ On the other hand, using singularly circular logic, Avigad excludes from local production a number of sarcophagi precisely because of their adjudged quality.
91 Avigad 1976a, 2-3.
The size of this industry, and whether there were multiple or even a single stone sculpture workshop with a continuous presence at the site is not clear. There were only 125 local, limestone sarcophagi purchased over the course of several generations, and only 30 of these bore sculptural programs, roughly 20% of the corpus. Relief carving is also sparsely encountered on the lintels and walls of a number of catacombs at Beth She’arim (see below, Chapter 3). Given this relatively small corpus, it seems a smaller scale of industry on the level of a single workshop with a small group of craftsman, or even a handful of independent and possibly itinerant artisans is more likely. A single workshop could have created the sarcophagus bodies, while traveling, independent artisans may have been commissioned to decorate the few that were of particularly high quality, as well as the architectural relief sculpture in hard limestone featured on several catacombs and mausolea. Such a model would account well for the variations in style, motifs and technical skill seen in the corpus (see Chapter 4).

Evaluating the capabilities of this local industry is another matter entirely, and to some degree peripheral to an analysis of cultural exchange. Yet it is important nonetheless to consider how the locally produced sarcophagi at the site measure up against sarcophagi produced by other communities in the Roman world. The level of execution seen on locally produced sarcophagi may, in some ways, reflect the standing and importance of Beth She’arim as a community in Roman Syria. We will return to this

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For example, the ‘Acanthus’ sarcophagi. See below, Chapter 5. The existence of itinerant artisans in antiquity is suggested by many, including: Öğüş 2016; Russell 2010; 2013.
question again in the coming chapters (particularly Chapter 4), but for now it must be said that the consensus opinion holds that the sculptural programs are of a relatively low, naïve quality based on their general lack of depth, odd proportions and often incomplete nature.\(^93\) For Avi-Yonah, the local nature of the production resulted in work of a lower quality than that observed in other regions of Roman Syria and neighboring provinces.\(^94\) He suggests that the “provincial necropolis did not attract any outstanding talents,” and that figural reliefs, being new in Jewish art, were unfamiliar to local craftsmen.\(^95\)

To some degree however, this ‘low quality’ may have been a result of the material and not the skill of the sculptors. Soft limestone is difficult to work in any detail or high relief. The material naturally lends itself to simple motifs, often schematic, and low, even flat relief. Furthermore, there are also examples of quite skillful relief carving from the necropolis; several sarcophagi of local hard limestone as well as architectural relief carving on several catacombs and mausolea from the sites are in high relief with naturalistic motifs requiring high levels of technical skill (see especially Chapters 3 and 5). It is possible that, as we have suggested, traveling artisans were employed in the

\(^{93}\) This view was especially espoused by Avi-Yonah and Avigad. See Avi-Yonah 1961; 1981a; Avigad 1976a. With some important exceptions and additional nuance, the same view is held by Eric Meyers (personal communication), and myself. On exceptions to the low level of execution, see the discussion of the ‘Acanthus’ sarcophagi in Chapter 5. See also the Chapter 8 for a conclusory evaluation.

\(^{94}\) Avi-Yonah 1961, 38-41.

\(^{95}\) Avi-Yonah 1961, 41.
carving of these hard limestone examples, and the remainder of the sculptural programs were executed by less skilled artisans based at the site.

Whatever the case may be, the principal question that will concern us is what the use of the sarcophagus as a funerary monument, and the sculptural programs on them, reveals about cultural exchange between Jewish sarcophagus patrons, Jewish communities of the Galilee and the broader Roman world. We will question Avigad’s argument, echoed by many, that “locally produced stone sarcophagi are essentially imitations of the imported marble ones,” and not particularly good ones at that. On the one hand, will see in fact that the fragmentary remains of marble sarcophagi discovered in the catacomb indicate that some patrons at Beth She’arim who were particularly well off, had the means, knowledge and desire to import marble sarcophagi. Some of these imported sarcophagi reflect the tastes and styles popular in larger province of Roman Syria (see Chapter 5). Others, on the other hand, were imported from renowned sarcophagus workshops in Greece and Asia Minor (see Chapter 6). On the other hand, while some locally produced sarcophagi do imitate imported styles to greater or lesser degrees (Chapter 5), the majority draw instead on local traditions of stone carving (Chapters 3 and 4). Ultimately, there seems to have been a proliferation of local styles

Moreover, these show connections in style and content to other relief carving in the Galilee in Late Antiquity, which further suggests a model of more skilled, traveling artisans. See further, Chapters 3-5.

that developed and thrived through creative invention and the combination of local and Roman elements in accordance with local tastes at Beth She’arim.

2.2.3 Identifying sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim

Who were the sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim? Across the Roman world, sarcophagus burial was first and foremost a potent form of elite display, a way of marking wealth and social class through conspicuous consumption. Stone was an expensive material to quarry, difficult to work and heavy to transport even short distances, especially in the form of large sarcophagi. Sculptural programs could further elaborate on the accomplishment, character and virtues of the deceased, but they were clearly not considered a necessary component. At both Beth She’arim and Tyre for example, as we will see in Chapter 5, sarcophagi more often employed plain, undecorated forms with gabled lids.

Based on the widespread association of sarcophagi with the display of wealth and attainment of a certain social standing, we should assume that the sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim were well to do. Yet, there is a risk in overestimating the amount of wealth required to obtain the kinds of sarcophagi most common at the site. Russell, for instance, argues that certain types of sarcophagi can offer us substantial data on the

*For further discussion of sarcophagi as a form of elite display, see below, Chapters 4, 5.*

*Compare the discussion of the cost of ossuaries (below, Chapter 3), several of which bear price tags that suggest they were within the financial means of many more families than imagined. See also Rahmani 1994, 7.*
'subelite' or Roman middle class. Across the Roman East, there was a hierarchy in sarcophagi, with elaborately imported marble sarcophagi (including mythological and columnar examples) occupying the top end, and locally produced versions costing much less and being more readily available (this hierarchy will be further discussed in Chapters 5 and 6). What data exists about the sarcophagus consumption patterns does suggest that at least near major production centers, such as Aphrodisias and Ephesus, sarcophagi were within the means of a wider group of social classes—including well to do traders and tradesmen and minor political figures. However, as Russell observes, these are still wealthy individuals.

The picture is much less clear in more remote provincial settings like Beth She’arim. The cost of transport was the most expensive factor in the Roman stone trade, consuming as much as 50% of a production or construction budget in some cases, with any transport overland multiplying the cost exponentially. This alone is probably the determinative factor in the preference for local stone seen at Beth She’arim and other inland sites, where all non-local stone would have had to have been transported overland. Indeed the vast majority of the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim (over 80%) were not imported but were carved from local limestone, mostly from the nearby hills, though limited petrographic analysis suggests that some were quarried in the Carmel range.

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100 Russell 2013, 21-2; Smith 2008.  
101 Russell 2013, 22-3. For Aphrodisias see Öğüş 2014; Smith 2008. For Ephesus, see Thomas and Içten 2007.  
102 Russell 2013, 23.  
103 Russell 2013, 95-6.
some 20 km to the north-west. Even the plainest of sarcophagi made of local limestone weighed somewhere in the area of six tons and would have been costly to prepare and transport.

On the other hand, many of the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim drew mostly or exclusively on the labor and visual resources of local traditions in relief sculpture (see Chapters 3 and 4). This contemporary local tradition, the subject of the next chapter, found outlets in numerous monumental buildings across the region and indicates that there was an ample supply of workshops and stone sculptors to employ. Moreover, the contents and compositions most often encountered on locally produced sarcophagi at Beth She’arim would have been familiar to local sculptors, as we will see. The execution of these visual programs would not have required any special knowledge or extraordinary labor then. Thus, while sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim were probably from families with a certain amount of financial resources, they were not necessarily more than modestly well off.

Most of the sarcophagi do not carry an inscription, and those that do make no mention of the origins of the deceased. Still, we can probably assume that most of the sarcophagus patrons were local, if not to the village of Beth She’arim then at least to the subregion of the Galilee and especially the lower Galilee. It would have been one thing to arrange the transport of a deceased family member to Beth She’arim to be (re)buried,

\[\text{104 Avigad 1950, 293. Nine sarcophagi were sampled from the site.}\]
\[\text{105 See further, Chapters 3, 4.}\]
but quite another to arrange for the transport and finishing of a sarcophagus. The only clear evidence of ‘foreign’ burials of individuals originating outside of the Galilee comes from outside of Catacomb 20. Furthermore, as most burial halls were probably owned by families as we suggested above, the international burials were grouped in particular places, by family, around the site.

On the other hand, as we noted above, Catacomb 20 does not seem to have been operated in the same way as other burial halls at the site. Beyond the obvious trove of sarcophagi and their quantity in numbers unseen throughout the site, there is little evidence that any of the rooms belonged to particular families. The catacomb instead seems to have been communally owned, and burial by family was the exception, not the rule. Based on the appearance of communal ownership, we might speculate that in order to be interred (in a sarcophagus) in Catacomb 20, one had to be a member of this community. It is hard to imagine anything but a local community constructing and maintaining a catacomb as monumental and unique as this one over the course of several generations.

The handful of inscriptions on the sarcophagi from Beth She‘arim prove a little more helpful in clarifying the identity of the sarcophagus patrons. However, only ten sarcophagi had preserved inscriptions on them, and of these only four bore sculptural programs (including the ‘Daughters,’ ‘Shell’ and ‘Gable’ sarcophagi discussed in
Chapter 4. The small number indicates that inscribing sarcophagi was a rare practice, a fact further confirmed by the absence of any rule indicating the location of inscriptions and the unevenness of style. The inscriptions on plain sarcophagi do not differ markedly from those on decorated examples, and do not indicate any difference in social standing or cultural preferences among the patrons. Aside from inscriptions on the sarcophagi, there were only eighteen additional inscriptions found in Catacomb 20, painted or incised in Hebrew over arcosolia and in passageways between rooms. These do not substantially differ in content or form from the inscriptions on sarcophagi either.

The inscriptions tell us much about the cultural identifications and religious beliefs of the patrons and the deceased. All of the inscriptions are in Hebrew, and none are incorporated into a sculptural program. Most include only a name, occasionally two if a familial relationship is indicated. Of nineteen names included in the inscriptions, the vast majority are common Jewish names (e.g. Joshua, Gamaliel or Hillel). Only three are transliterations of Greek or Latin origin. A number of inscriptions include a title or honorific. Particularly common is the title ‘Rabbi,’ which appears on the three decorated sarcophagi with inscriptions encountered above, as well as in several inscriptions on plain sarcophagi and on the walls of the burial chambers of Catacomb 20. Members of the rabbinic community thus seem to have been an important group among those buried

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106 For a brief catalog, see Avigad 1976a, 161-2.
107 Possibly indicating the lack of trained inscription carvers in the general funeral industry at Beth She'arim. This point seems to be amply confirmed by the epitaphs, discussed below.
108 Atio and Ation, Kyrilla.
in the catacomb, though we cannot assume that they were the only group.\textsuperscript{109} The term ‘the holy ones’ appears in an inscription on sarcophagus no. 15, apparently in reference to several of the interred.\textsuperscript{110} A transliteration of the Greek honorific “Lady” (KYPA), appears on sarcophagus no. 116, and is also reconstructed by Avigad as appearing on no. 27.\textsuperscript{111} It also appears as on several inscriptions painted on the walls of the catacomb.\textsuperscript{112}

Quite in contrast to the predominance of Greek inscriptions elsewhere in the necropolis,\textsuperscript{113} all of the inscriptions from Catacomb 20 were in Hebrew. It is easy to observe that the use of Hebrew is in contrast to the Roman form of the sarcophagus, but it is harder to know whether this contrast would have been apparent or meaningful to the ancient viewer or patron. The use of Hebrew may itself have been a kind of visual marker of Jewish identity. In Rome, Hebrew is used on inscriptions in ways that suggest it served visually, rather than lexically, to identify the deceased. This seems to have been the case with the sarcophagus of Faustina, discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, where the Hebrew word ‘shalom’ seems to have been inserted on the epitaph as another of the Jewish ritual symbols, rather than part of the inscription proper (which was in a different hand, in Greek). Elsewhere in the catacombs at Beth She’arim, the use of

\textsuperscript{109} See Avigad 1976a, 62.
\textsuperscript{110} On this reconstruction, see Avigad 1976a, 244-5.
\textsuperscript{111} Avigad 1976a, 161.
\textsuperscript{112} For example, see Avigad 1976a, 245-6, Nos. 19-20.
\textsuperscript{113} Nagakubo 1974; Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974.
‘shalom’ is encountered in ways similar to the sarcophagus lid of Faustina.\(^\text{114}\) In Catacomb 20 however, the use of Hebrew was the rule and not the exception.

Furthermore, unlike the sarcophagus of Faustina from Rome, Hebrew inscriptions were typically placed outside of the sculptural programs of sarcophagi at Beth She‘arim in haphazard ways. Only on ‘Daughters’ sarcophagus, with its sprawling inscription across the lid in large characters, can it be suggested (and only speculatively) that Hebrew was used as much as a visual symbol or signal to the viewer as it was meant to be read (see below, Chapter 4, Fig. 4.29).

The patrons of sarcophagi at Beth She‘arim then, appear to have been by and large local individuals of high social standing who adhered, in every observable way, to local cultural conventions and expectations. Many, maybe even most, seem to have gained their social standing by virtue of their membership in the rabbinic community. Even if the use of sarcophagi was a special phenomenon at Beth She‘arim, mostly restricted to a single catacomb, there is little evidence to suggest that sarcophagus patrons identified differently than those buried in loculi or elsewhere at the site. Sarcophagus patrons were moreover conversant in the visual vernacular of relief sculpture in the Galilee, as we will see, or at least familiar enough with it to appreciate the sarcophagi produced for them.

\(^{114}\) See Avigad 1976a, 245.
2.3 The history of the Jewish community of Rome and the discovery of the catacombs

The Jewish catacombs of Rome (Map 3) may be the single most important source of information on the Jewish diaspora in Late Antiquity. In terms of volume and diversity of information, no other source from the ancient Jewish diaspora (Map 1), archaeological or literary, can compare. From the catacombs come data that shed light on more than just Jewish burial practice. On the walls of these burial chambers and on the surfaces of the artifacts found therein, we find encoded a variety of symbols and messages that hold significant promise for understanding the Jewish culture and experience of Roman diaspora. The sarcophagi are just one part of the puzzle. Over 600 inscriptions, countless wall paintings, decorative motifs, stone, ceramic and glass remains testify to Jewish social and religious associations, trade, artistic taste, occupations, language, interaction with Christians and pagans, and modes of identity construction.

The visual culture from the Jewish catacombs of Rome is an important resource for understanding the way that diaspora Jews navigated and negotiated their cultural environment. Abundant imagery adorns the walls of the catacombs in rich painted frescoes, the sarcophagi in expertly sculpted programs, the loculi on marble and clay slabs and incised on delicate gold leaf sandwiched between sheets of glass. The art is at once impressively varied and yet in many ways, unremarkable. It is neither exceptionally skilled nor particular crude, nor is it particularly unique or inventive. Remarkably similar images and visual artifacts were used in non-Jewish catacombs of
Rome too (Map 5), and can be found in the collections of countless museums. Indeed, if it were not for the regular appearance of a handful of Jewish ritual objects, especially the menorah, there would be very little to suggest at first glance that the Jewish catacombs of Rome were “Jewish.”

At the same time, it is possible to approach the visual culture of the Jewish community of Rome as a reflection of cultural experiences of Jewish patrons in the city of Rome and of their negotiation of Jewish and Roman identities. Even as they selected sculptural programs that are more or less the same as non-Jewish consumers, Jewish sarcophagus patrons in antiquity were making choices that bear witness to their sense of identity and values. In negotiating place and identity in a diaspora environment, the Jewish communities of Rome actively engaged images in the process of producing unique identities, appropriate to and embedded in their Roman context. Indeed, the visual programs of the sarcophagi from the Jewish community of Rome manifest a wide spectrum of possible Jewish responses to Roman culture, and, by extension, hint at the range of outcomes and experiences that existed in the encounter between Jews and the city of Rome. Furthermore, they indicate the very different contexts of patrons at Beth She’arim, a rural provincial location, and Rome, one of three true metropolises of the Roman world (the others being Alexandria and Athens, by most accounts). In this context, the variety of cultural outcomes demonstrates that the choice between identities was only very rarely conceived of as a binary, that is, as an ‘either/or’ choice between being Jewish or Roman. The sarcophagi of Jewish patrons document the rich and varied
ways in which elite Jews in Rome, could (and most often did) choose to be both Jewish and Roman.

### 2.3.1 The Jewish community of Rome

The Jewish community of Rome was one of the most prominent, longstanding and enduring Jewish diaspora communities in the Roman world.\(^{115}\) Our knowledge of this community comes from literary sources (mostly non-Jewish authors) and epigraphic evidence from the community itself. Literary evidence suggests that Jews settled in Rome as early as the middle of the 2\(^{nd}\) century B.C.E. In an account written almost two centuries after the fact by Valerius Maximus, a historian writing in Latin during the reign of Tiberius, alludes to an expulsion of the Jews of Rome—together with astrologers and Chaldeans—under the praetor Hispanus. If the account can be trusted, this would suggest a Jewish presence already in 139 B.C.E.\(^{116}\) According to Philo, the earliest Jews were manumitted slaves—possibly captured in the Maccabean revolt—who became Roman citizens and settled in Trastevere.\(^{117}\)

From its earliest origins, the Jewish community of Rome endured and grew in the city. Indeed, by some estimates the Jewish community of Rome was the largest community in the Jewish diaspora. With the exception, perhaps, of the language of the

\(^{115}\) The scholarly literature on this community is extensive. Good overviews can be found in: Cappelletti 2006; Geller 1983; Goodenough 1953b; Leon 1960; Rutgers 1995; 1998; Westenholz 1995.


inscriptions (predominantly Greek, see below) there is no evidence that the Jewish community was particularly insular or isolated in the cosmopolitan milieu of Rome. Eleven synagogues, with locations throughout the city, are mentioned in the inscriptions from the community. Likewise, the six known catacombs are not grouped together, but spread out and adjacent to catacombs used by Christians and pagans (Map 5). Thus, it comes as no surprise that there is no evidence of any central communal organization that governed Jewish affairs in the city, as is attested to in some other diaspora communities. Rather, the Jewish community of Rome seems to have been well dispersed throughout the city. The material culture associated with the community confirms this picture, and further suggests a well-integrated community thoroughly engaged with its Roman cultural environment. The sarcophagi, gold glasses, inscriptions, lamps and other artifacts from the catacombs all tell the same story. The Jews of ancient Rome shopped from the same markets and workshops as their non-Jewish neighbors.

The Jewish community of the city is also mentioned by a number of authors working in the city of Rome, including Cicero, Valerius Maximus, Tacitus and Juvenal. Their writings convey a mixture of curiosity, impartiality, and occasionally xenophobia. It is important to note that from these accounts, we know that some Jews were subject to

120 Though rarely could it be considered a special sort of hatred comparable to modern anti-Semitism. See further Schäfer 1997, 180-211.
occasional expulsion from the city. A half dozen such actions were taken against Jews in Rome beginning in the late Republican period, and under the emperors Tiberius, Claudius, Vespasian and Domitian. At the same time, it is unclear to what extent these expulsions were enforced and whether they applied to all Jews in Rome or only recent immigrants.\footnote{121}

Moreover, the trustworthiness of these sources is in much doubt, and while it does seem that the Jewish community experienced persecution at least occasionally at the hands of the Roman government, there is much disagreement about its nature and duration. Crucially, most of the persecution(s) do not seem to have singled out the Jewish community; more often they appear to have been part of wider events targeted at a number of minority groups in the city. Moreover, these events occurred in the 1\textsuperscript{st} centuries B.C.E and C.E., and there is no record of similar actions or persecution of the Jewish community between then and the Theodosian code of the early 5\textsuperscript{th} century C.E. Ultimately, however, whatever the reality of such episodes is, as a whole they suggest that even if the Jewish community of Rome was a relatively stable one and enjoyed, for the most part, a tolerant rapprochement with the city of Rome, this harmony could be punctuated by periods of tension.\footnote{122}

\footnote{121 For a recent, nuanced assessment of this evidence and the status of the Jewish community in Rome, see Boatwright 2012, Chapter 5. See also, Cappelletti 2006, 33-141; Rutgers 1998, 171-98.}
\footnote{122 See Rutgers 1992; 1995.
2.3.2 The discovery of the catacombs of the Jewish community of Rome

Six catacombs outside of the city walls of Rome have been identified as belonging to the Jewish community of Rome on the basis of the symbols—especially by the omnipresence of depictions of menorahs—and inscriptions encountered within. As was the case with catacombs used by other Roman citizens, they lie outside of the city walls and along major ancient highways. They are not grouped in any one quarter of the city. Rather, their locations effectively circle the city of Rome to the south, the east, and the north, with a slight predominance in the southeast area of what is today Monteverde (Map 3). In all these locations, and particularly the southeast region, Jewish catacombs were constructed in close proximity to catacombs used by Christians and pagans (Map 5).123

The history of their discovery begins in the 16th century and has been thoroughly treated by Rutgers.124 The first Jewish catacombs of Rome, identified by the presence of painted and inscribed menorahs, were discovered in Trastevere in 1602 by a Vatican scholar, Antonio Bosio.125 In the latter half of the 19th century, a period of renewed interest in the catacombs of Rome in general,126 four more Jewish catacombs were

123 For a survey of the Christian catacombs of Rome, see Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni 1999.
124 Rutgers 1995, 1-49.
125 Bosio 1632.
126 See Rutgers 1995, 30-42.
discovered at Vigna Randanini (1859-61),\textsuperscript{127} Conte Cimarra (1866),\textsuperscript{128} Via Labicana (1882),\textsuperscript{129} and Via Appia Pignatelli (1885).\textsuperscript{130} Modern study of the catacombs began in earnest following the 1904 ‘rediscovery’ of the Trastevere catacombs by Müller, today known as the Monteverde catacombs.\textsuperscript{131} The last of the six known Jewish catacombs of Rome was discovered in 1919 at the Villa Torlonia.\textsuperscript{132} Of these six catacombs, only two are extant, those of Vigna Randanini and Villa Torlonia, the rest having succumbed to the effects of time, modern construction and collapse.

The layout of the Jewish underground burial networks varies greatly, from the simple hypogaeum, or family burial chambers—found at Cimarra, Labicana, and Pignatelli—to much larger networks of vestibules, galleries and cubiculae found in the catacombs of Monteverde, Randanini and Torlonia. The decoration of the burial halls and chambers varies greatly by context and location also. For example, in two cubiculae in the catacombs of Vigna Randanini, one encounters a preponderance of pagan elements mixed with a scattering of Jewish motifs, while in a cubiculae of similar design at Villa Torlonia, Jewish ritual symbols are predominant. The decorative program also differs when one moves from the cubiculae to the galleries where, on the loculi seals, Jewish ritual symbols are commonly painted or incised to accompany the epitaphs.

\textsuperscript{127} Garrucci 1862; 1866; Herzog 1861; Marucchi 1984.  
\textsuperscript{128} de Rossi 1867.  
\textsuperscript{129} Marucchi 1884; 1887.  
\textsuperscript{130} Müller 1886.  
\textsuperscript{131} Müller 1912; 1915; Müller and Bees 1919. See also Kanzler 1915; Paribeni 1919; Schneider Graziosi 1915.  
\textsuperscript{132} Beyer and Lietzmann 1930; Fasola 1976.
From these catacombs, and especially from Monteverde and Villa Torlonia, comes a
variety of visual and material culture that is immensely helpful in studying the history
of the Jewish community of Rome. In addition to the sarcophagi, there are countless
marble and clay loculus seals. These produced over 600 inscriptions from the catacombs
which provide scholars with fertile data for prosopography, including the
reconstruction of language, communal roles and institutions, and onomastics. In brief,
the inscriptions are predominantly in Greek, with approximately 20% in either Latin or a
Semitic language (Hebrew or Aramaic). The names show a similar heavy preference for
Latin, with only 15% Semitic. H. Leon has characterized the evidence rightly by noting
that “[t]he Jews formed no linguistic island in ancient Rome.”

Still more information
can be gleaned from other artifacts, including gold glasses, wall paintings, and lamps.

Ultimately, the material culture of the catacombs in general paints a unifying
picture, both between the six Jewish catacombs, and with neighboring catacombs used
by non-Jews. Indeed, it has become rather commonplace today to highlight the
commonalities between Jewish, Christian and pagan catacombs in Rome. For instance,
Cappelletti notes that "few positive differences distinguish the catacombs of the
Christian from those of the Jewish communities." Rutgers takes the argument further,

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133 Leon 1960, 92.
135 Cappelletti 2006, 173; Levine 2013, 35.
using the strong stylistic, technical and thematic parallels to convincingly argue for the use of shared workshops that furnished pagan, Jewish and Christian catacombs alike.\textsuperscript{136}

\textbf{2.3.3 Dating the Jewish catacombs of Rome}

While, the dating of the Jewish community of Rome is not particularly problematic, as we have seen, the dating of the construction and use of the Jewish catacombs, remains a matter of minor controversy.\textsuperscript{137} Today, consensus leans towards a broad range of dates between the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 5\textsuperscript{th} centuries C.E.\textsuperscript{138} The most recent and most thorough attempts at dating all follow the general trend of placing the origins and excavation of the Jewish catacombs in the same period as Christian catacombs, beginning sometime in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century C.E., with their use peaking in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} centuries, and abandonment around the same time as the sack of Rome in the early 5\textsuperscript{th} century.

Earlier scholarship, including the work of Leon and Smallwood, tended towards an earlier dating of the Jewish catacombs which placed them earlier than those of their Christian neighbors.\textsuperscript{139} Considering the literary evidence of the Jewish community in Rome, and the dating of the brick stamps in the catacombs, they proposed an early 1\textsuperscript{st} century C.E. date for the Jewish catacombs. Smallwood, for example, concludes that Jewish catacomb burials began in the late Republic, and peaked when demand spiked:

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\textsuperscript{136} Rutgers 1995, 57, 76.
\textsuperscript{137} For a review of the problems, see especially Cappelletti 2006.
\textsuperscript{139} Leon 1960; Smallwood 1981.
\end{flushright}
following the Jewish revolts and the influx of Jewish prisoners of war to Rome. The assumption of these scholars is that the bricks are in primary use and thus provide a marker of absolute dating. This interpretation draws heavily on the work of Frey, who published the brick stamps from the Jewish catacombs of Rome in Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum Vol. I, and in an article on the catacombs published the same year. Leon agreed in large part, adding that burial in catacombs was likely a practice imported from Palestine, and thus dates the Monteverde catacomb, on the basis of Frey’s study of brick stamps, to the 1st century B.C.E. with the earliest Jewish community of Rome. The rest of the catacombs he dates to between the 1st century CE to late 3rd century CE on similar considerations.

More recently, epigraphers and archaeologists—including Fasola, Mazzoleni, Rutgers and Cappelletti—have insisted on the contemporaneous nature of the use of the Jewish and Christian catacombs based on clear parallels in material culture. This simultaneity of Christian and Jewish practice enables the next step in their argument: they date the Jewish catacombs on the basis of the dating of Christian catacombs. This entails analyzing the artifacts through typological comparison with materials found

140 Smallwood 1981, 519-20.
141 Frey 1936a; Frey 1936b.
142 Leon 1960, 54.
143 Leon 1960, 66.
144 Leon 1960, 65-6.
from other contexts. Rutgers has considered seven types of material evidence to date the Jewish catacombs: brick stamps, architectural comparanda (chiefly wall matrices), epigraphy, wall paintings, sarcophagi, gold glass and ceramics. More recently, he has conducted C\textsuperscript{14} dating of charcoal found in the galleries of the Villa Torlonia catacombs. The results of these studies concur and provide a \textit{terminus ante quem} to the construction of Jewish catacombs not before the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century C.E., with burials peaking in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} century C.E.

A relative chronology of development of the catacombs and their relation to one another is much more easily arrived at. It is widely held that Jewish catacomb burials began on a small scale as hypogeum belonging to wealthy families or possibly collegia. The three Jewish hypogeum explored in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century at Conte Cimarra (1866), Via Labicana (1882) and Via Appia Pignatelli (1885), while no longer extant, attest to this practice in general. Such origins correspond well to what is known about general pagan practice. In the early Imperial period, ca. late 1\textsuperscript{st} century C.E., a general trend towards inhumation over cremation led to the popularity of above ground burials in masonry family graves. As demand increased, renovation of these facilities were undertaken

\begin{flushleft}
146 Rutgers 2002, 541.
147 Rutgers 1998, 50-69.
148 Rutgers, De Jong, and van der Borg 2002; Rutgers et al. 2005.
149 Richardson (1996) has identified early synagogues as following the collegium model. The inscriptive evidence cannot confirm this suspicion, as no synagogue groupings have been distinguished by gallery or hypogeum location.
150 Bodel 2008, 177ff.
\end{flushleft}
from the 2nd century C.E. onwards, with most of the expansion carried out underground providing the origins of our trend.\textsuperscript{151} Prior to these expansions, no examples of entirely 'Jewish' necropoleis are known, and it is most likely that Jewish citizens of Rome were often buried in pagan cemeteries.\textsuperscript{152}

The second phase is the excavation of galleries which connected these earlier hypogea and subsequently contained the majority of burials. Beyond incorporating earlier hypogea, it is evident that the fossores (Latin for ‘diggers’) followed a general principle of convenience in their excavation. Thus, rather than finding regular, straight galleries, we find winding passageways that make use of natural fault lines and preexisting waterways and quarries.\textsuperscript{153} Furthermore, characterizing these early catacombs is the higher number of cubiculae, many of which were likely earlier hypogea, though it is impossible to tell exactly how many. Such a characterization fits

\textsuperscript{151} Rutgers 1995, 51-2. The evidence of this stage of development—the excavation of small scale hypogeum—is clearest at Vigna Randanini, where it is obvious that a collection of private hypogea were effectively renovated into a catacomb at a later date. See Rutgers 1995, 54. This phase can be distinguished, for instance, in painted rooms I and II at Vigna Randanini by the different striations in the tufa left by the fossores, or original excavators of the complex. These striations show that the excavators of the initial hypogeum worked from the east, while the gallery connecting the rooms was excavated from the opposite direction. See Cappelletti 2006, 155-6; Rutgers 1995, 54-5. It is entirely unclear whether or not these rooms where originally Jewish, and this convincing argument for separating their construction cannot be taken as indicating either original Jewish or pagan use. Painted room III of the same catacombs shows similar evidence of reuse, with intrusive loculi disturbing several painted elements on the wall flanking the current entrance. See Rutgers 1998, 63. The case is much more ambiguous at Villa Torlonia, but it is likely that one particular area of the lower catacomb incorporates an earlier hypogeum as it is the only cubicula of the lower level. See Cappelletti 2006, 167. The evidence from the Christian catacombs may be brought in to confirm our understanding, where several well identified and early hypogeum (for instance the Villa Piccola at S. Sebastiano, hypogeum of the Flavi at Domitilla) provide further examples of this practice of incorporation of pre-existing structures. See Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni 1999, 16-24; Rutgers 1995, 51-2.

\textsuperscript{152} Mazzoleni 1976, 84. Note especially the inscription of Julius Juda that derives from just such a context.

\textsuperscript{153} Cappelletti 2006, 173.
the entirety of the Vigna Randanini catacomb, the southern and greater part of the
Monteverde catacombs, and perhaps the upper catacomb at Villa Torlonia. The nature
of these galleries, their plans and proposed sequences of excavation, suggest that the
growth and expansion of these facilities was entirely organic, i.e. the catacombs spread
out haphazardly over time to meet demand. The existence of three separate entrances
to the Vigna Randanini catacombs offers confirmation of this hypothesis.

The third and final phase is the systematic planning of catacomb structures,
designed from the start to incorporate large numbers of inhumations through regular
and planned expansion. This practice is best evidenced from Christian parallels such as
the catacombs of S. Callisto, Prestato and Priscilla. Analysis of the architecture and plans
of these catacombs suggests that they were well thought out with "an eye to future,
systematic expansion." In terms of relative dating, it is perhaps suggestive that pagan
catacombs do not appear to have ever reached such a stage of development. This may
indicate the origin of the 'planned catacombs' as post-dating the inception of Christianity
as the official religion in Rome. The general characteristics of these catacombs are a
lower ratio of cubiculae to gallery space, and more rigid and orthogonal galleries that
are more likely to traverse rather than follow natural fault lines. Along these lines, the

155 Rutgers 1995, 56.
157 Rutgers 1995, 52.
158 Thus for instance, at Villa Torlonia the severing of a hydraulic pipeline. See Cappelletti 2006, 168.
northern extremity of Monteverde is suggestively linear and bare of cubiculae. Clearly some or all of Villa Torlonia fits the description; the lower catacomb at Villa Torlonia is highly linear and bears only a single cubicula.\textsuperscript{159}

2.4 The sarcophagus economy of Rome and Jewish patrons

The production of sarcophagi went on unabated in and around the city of Rome between the beginning of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century C.E. and the beginning of the 5\textsuperscript{th} century C.E.\textsuperscript{160} This span of time encompassed important social changes in Roman culture such as the extension of Roman citizenship to the provinces, the expansion of Mediterranean trade networks, and the growth of Christianity culminating in the so-called conversion of the Empire. Throughout this period, the city of Rome was one of the largest production centers for sarcophagi in the ancient world,\textsuperscript{161} and the city and its environs have preserved the highest concentration of known sarcophagi. Of the many thousands of sarcophagi produced across the Roman Mediterranean in Late Antiquity, at least 6,000

\textsuperscript{159} An interesting question arises as to where to fit the upper catacomb of Villa Torlonia into this schema. This portion of the catacomb is also highly orthogonal, but unlike the lower catacomb, the upper has at least five verifiable cubiculae. Notably, one of these is a double or connected cubicula (cubiculae B, C), unique at Villa Torlonia, and on an angle at odds with the linear plan of the gallery. Cubicula E is similarly at an odd angle to the general layout, though it looks as if some attempt has been made to compensate by adjusting its immediately connecting galleries to correspond to this angle. See the plan of Fasola 1976. Thus, it may be that the upper catacomb at Villa Torlonia represents a hybrid or intermediate phase between stages two and three that we have identified. Of course, judgment must be reserved until better dating can be offered, and it is equally possible that the preponderance of cubiculae is a coincidence. Indeed, there has been some suggestion that the upper catacombs post-date the lower. See Cappelletti 2006, 169-73.
\textsuperscript{160} Elsner 2010b, 3.
\textsuperscript{161} Though the size of the local sarcophagus industry did not seem to put a damper on the importation of sarcophagi from eastern production centers as well. Many examples of imported sarcophagus number among those discovered in Rome.
known examples and probably many more came from workshops in the city of Rome.\textsuperscript{162} The sarcophagi produced in and for the market in Rome are often referred to as ‘Metropolitan’ sarcophagi in order to distinguish them from sarcophagi produced in and for consumption in the provinces. We will return again to the Metropolitan sarcophagus industry and especially their sculptural programs, but a few remarks are necessary in order to introduce the corpus of sarcophagi from the city belonging to Jewish patrons.

Most of the sarcophagi from the city of Rome were produced by workshops based in and around the city.\textsuperscript{163} These workshops imported marble from a number of quarries, mostly based on the Italian peninsula but also from major quarries across the empire.\textsuperscript{164} They finished the imported sarcophagus blanks according to the needs and tastes of the Roman market.\textsuperscript{165} In fact, they primarily served the Roman market alone; Metropolitan sarcophagi were rarely exported to the provinces.\textsuperscript{166} By virtue of this, several sarcophagus styles emerged as particularly distinctive among the Metropolitan corpus. These include the \textit{lenos} or tub style and the strigilar motif which were used across styles.\textsuperscript{167} This is a testament to the strength of the market for sarcophagi in Rome, and the sizable local demand.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[162]{Their discussion, for instance, occupies almost the first half of Koch and Sichtermann catalog (1982, 33-275). The next largest may have been Athens; 1,200 examples derive from there. See Koch 1993, 58-9.}
\footnotetext[163]{Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 267-72; Russell 2013, 277-8.}
\footnotetext[164]{See Fant 2001.}
\footnotetext[165]{Most of the Metropolitan sarcophagi are marble. Other exotic and imported stones such as porphyry or granite were occasionally imported.}
\footnotetext[166]{Russell 2013, 277.}
\footnotetext[167]{Russell 2013, 278.}
\end{footnotes}
Living in the heart of the Roman Empire, sarcophagus patrons in Rome had a wider range of options available to them than their contemporaries in the Roman provinces. Patrons in the city of Rome could, of course, select and customize Metropolitan sarcophagi from a wide range of popular styles produced in the various workshops of the city. Yet they could also harness the power and reach of the Roman stone trade in order to commission special imports from the distant reaches of the Roman Empire. These include immediately recognizable sarcophagi of Pentelic marble from the renowned workshops of Athens, and Asiatic sarcophagi of Dokimeion marble. In fact, these imports often spurred local imitations in Rome, just as in the provinces. For example, a Metropolitan sarcophagus produced in Rome now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 2.3) is clearly indebted to the popular Proconnesian garlanded form.\textsuperscript{168} Furthermore, the draw of the city also attracted artisans from across the empire; arriving with them were new styles and motifs from the provinces.\textsuperscript{169} Thus, while Metropolitan sarcophagi are relatively easy to identify based on style and form, they are nonetheless an extremely diverse group with a complex cultural heritage.

The two-dozen odd sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons from the city of Rome form only a small fraction of the broader corpus. Nonetheless, they are found in sufficient numbers and contexts to suggest that among elite Jewish citizens of Rome burial in sarcophagi was an attractive burial option. These sarcophagi, like most of the

\textsuperscript{168} MMA 90.12. See also McCann 1978, 25-9.
\textsuperscript{169} See McCann 1978, 20.
visual culture from the catacombs of the community, largely reflect styles and tastes popular in the city of Rome. As we will see below (Chapters 6 and 7), they demonstrate that the elites of the Jewish community of Rome were deeply engaged in the cultural environment of the city. Sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons only rarely depart from the conventions of Metropolitan sarcophagi (see below). It is important therefore, to briefly discuss the dynamics of this industry and its patrons (especially Jewish ones).

2.4.1 The Sarcophagus Economy of Rome

The vast majority of sarcophagi produced for the Roman market were "mass-produced," at least by the standards of the ancient world. While occasionally Metropolitan sarcophagi are quite unique and point to the possibility of extensive input from the patron, most often the motifs and tropes encountered on sarcophagi from Metropolitan workshops appear repetitive, conventional and even 'formulaic,' in the way in which they draw on a well-known repertoire of motifs. This is a byproduct of the shift from an early production model tailored to the unique requests of individual patrons to a 'production-to-stock' model, whereby sarcophagi across the Roman world were pre-manufactured and mass-produced for a rapidly expanding, pan-Mediterranean market.\(^{170}\) In a typical scenario for sarcophagi produced in and around

\(^{170}\) Russell 2010, 120. The identification and explication of this shift is credited primarily to Ward-Perkins, advanced in a pair of articles authored in the same year (1980a; 1980b). Toynbee argued in a more limited fashion for such a model a decade earlier (1971, 273). Ward-Perkin’s conclusions have been taken much farther than his initial argument that quarries were producing sarcophagus blanks in anticipation of demand. See Russell 2010, 126.
Rome, rough blocks of sarcophagus material (essentially hollowed out blanks) were ordered from a number of quarries by Roman workshops, often over great distances and by sea. Once delivered in Rome, specialized workshops might carve the sarcophagus according to a particular style and fashion they were known for, leaving a tabula empty for an inscription and a portrait bust or busts roughed out to be completed only on purchase by an as-yet-unknown consumer.\textsuperscript{171} Such a mode of production accounts well for the wide repetition of stock motifs across the corpus of sarcophagi.\textsuperscript{172} It can also lead to the impression, expressed by Davies, "that the designs were largely dictated by the sculptors," with patrons selecting their sarcophagi "from what the sculptor had in stock, or ordered from a limited selection of design options."\textsuperscript{173}

The pre- and mass-manufactured nature of these sarcophagi and their visual programs is obvious in many well-preserved examples, such as the Endymion sarcophagus in the Louvre (early 3\textsuperscript{rd} century C.E., Fig. 2.4). This sarcophagus, carved in exquisite high relief, was left partially incomplete.\textsuperscript{174} Most conspicuously, the faces of the two central characters, Selene and Endymion, were left uncut and only roughed out, seemingly ready to be carved in the likeness of the purchaser (perhaps intended to

\textsuperscript{171} Russell 2010, 138. This is but one of the models Russell proposes. He also notes that a large workshop could have afforded to hold on to the stock, awaiting the commission of a patron. The pre-sculpting of well-known styles and visual programs is best supported in cases where the market for a particular style was well developed and the visual program was highly formulaic.

\textsuperscript{172} Several other possible models exist which are not mutually exclusive. See Russell 2010, 124-7.

\textsuperscript{173} Davies 2010, 48.

\textsuperscript{174} In the case of this sarcophagus, it was likely carved in Rome and then shipped to the province of Gaul for sale and completion.
depict a husband and wife). The tabula on the lid, flanked by cavorting and winemaking putti, is similarly blank, awaiting inscription. This sarcophagus then, never received the imprint of the identity of the deceased, possibly because it never found a patron.

Recent scholarship has suggested that the impact of the "mass-production" and "production-to-stock" models of the sarcophagus economy has been overstated so far as it has obscured the possibility of individual tastes and preferences on the part of the sarcophagus consumer. Among such scholars, Russell has argued that both at the quarry, and at the final destination, it was many smaller "nucleated" or independent workshops rather than a few major workshops that dominated production. With smaller workshops at both market and quarry, the industry was likely much more responsive to market forces shaped at the local level by artisans and their customers.

A rethinking of the scale of production to smaller, independently operating workshops at every stage has also helped identify greater agency and involvement on the part of the patron in controlling certain elements of the visual program. Indeed, a

175 Another possibility, suggested below, is that the blank spaces create space for the viewer to recall the features of the deceased.
176 It is possible that the inscription was painted and has faded (Elsner 2010b, 2), but in this case it seems unlikely.
177 Whether it was ever used is not known. It is possible that the sarcophagus was purchased and used in its incomplete state, for lack of funds or availability of skilled artisans in the area. Russell 2010, 138-9) points out however, that there are examples of commissioned sarcophagi with blank portraits.
178 Russell 2010, 130-1.
179 Or, as Russell (2010, 137) puts it, ‘reactive’ rather than ‘proactive’.
close look at some of the most popular sarcophagus styles would seem to support such a model, as would several key examples from the Jewish corpus, as we will see. Russell identifies the popular Metropolitan strigilar style in particular (e.g. Fig. 2.5) as an example where large portions of the sarcophagus could have been finished in advance "without depriving the customer of choice over key features of their monument," especially in figurative panels and distinguishing motifs.\textsuperscript{181} Perhaps it is best then if we think of "stock" motifs on sarcophagi, spanning the range from strigilations to seasons, as highly neutral motifs ready to receive the imprint of the patron.\textsuperscript{182}

A few remarks about the social and practical aspects of the commission and reception of sarcophagi will help us towards a more nuanced understanding. The development of a mass-production model undoubtedly brought down the costs of sarcophagi and made it possible for subelite groups such as Roman civil and military officials to acquire them. In fact, Russell has suggested that the sub-elit\textsuperscript{e} class formed the largest group of sarcophagus patrons in Rome.\textsuperscript{183} A study of the inscriptional evidence made by Ewald suggested a similar pattern of patronage, finding that members of what might be considered the upper middle-class of Rome made up the lion’s share of the sarcophagus market.\textsuperscript{184} Such individuals, while not the pinnacle of the Roman social hierarchy, still formed a large and important subgroup of elites. In the end even the

\textsuperscript{181} Russell 2010, 138.
\textsuperscript{182} On the \textit{symbolic} neutrality of such motifs, see below, Chapter 6.
\textsuperscript{183} Russell 2010, 122-3.
\textsuperscript{184} Ewald 1999, 116-7. See also Birk 2013, 10, n. 3.
most modest sarcophagus was probably still out of reach of the lower classes.\textsuperscript{185} The find-spots of sarcophagi discovered \textit{in situ} sarcophagi generally confirm the relatively elite status held by their owners; sarcophagi were, as a rule, placed in the hypogea and cubiculae of the catacombs where they were set apart from the main galleries. There, a close circle of intimates, family and friends would have viewed them, most likely on special occasions.\textsuperscript{186}

While many sarcophagi were undoubtedly commissioned during the lifetime of the deceased (perhaps even most),\textsuperscript{187} we need not be overly concerned with whether it was the individual or their family who commissioned an appropriate sarcophagus and saw to its completion.\textsuperscript{188} Regardless of whether the sarcophagus was commissioned \textit{post-} or \textit{ante-mortem}, decisions about the visual programs of the sarcophagus were made by either the individual or close family: about what style of sarcophagus to purchase, what epitaph to inscribe, and what likeness or symbols, themes and motifs to add. The responsibility for the funeral arrangements, including the possibility of a sarcophagus, fell by law to the immediate family and heir of the deceased when arrangements were

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{185} Birk 2013, 10.
\textsuperscript{186} Elsner 2010b, 6. Earlier sarcophagi, produced before the regularization of catacomb burial, were typically placed in mausolea above ground. See Elsner 2010b, 6. Hypogea and cubiculae are modeled on the earlier mausolea.
\textsuperscript{187} Russell (2010, 139) suggests that most sarcophagi in Rome were likely purchased during the lifetime of the individual. See also Jongste. However, see Sorabella (2001, 67) who notes in discussing an unusual case that grieving parents and spouses are the most common dedicants in sarcophagi inscriptions.
\textsuperscript{188} For a discussion of the issue of patronage, and the shift entailed when considering a sarcophagus commissioned by family vs. by the individual deceased, see Birk 2012, 107-8.
\end{flushleft}
not made during the lifetime.\textsuperscript{189} Recall that these were the exact same individuals who would have been most likely to view the sarcophagus in its sepulchral setting. Thus, by virtue of their close relationship and similar social status, the deceased, the patron(s) and the viewers were all naturally likely to share similar, if not identical, values, cultural norms and communal identities that would be reflected in their choices and interpretation of the visual programs.\textsuperscript{190} Therefore, not only the commission, but also the reception of a sarcophagus was governed by the cultural norms and identities shared by the close circle of intimates who were most likely to view it.

Sarcophagi could also be reused.\textsuperscript{191} Complete sarcophagi could be reused and handed down through a family or transferred between families, while broken sarcophagi could be adapted to other purposes, such as sealing loculus niches. Though the reuse of sarcophagi for additional burials or reburials appears to have been a relatively rare phenomenon in Rome,\textsuperscript{192} we know of at least one example of a sarcophagus in reuse in the Jewish catacomb of Monteverde, where Müller describes fragments of the same strigilated sarcophagus being used to seal two different loculi.\textsuperscript{193}

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\textsuperscript{189} Birk 2012, 109-10; 2013, 22-3.
\textsuperscript{190} At least in the case of adults. As Birk (2013, 157) points out, the visual programs of children’s sarcophagi were, by necessity, chosen by parents and not peers.
\textsuperscript{191} In fact, many sarcophagi have a surprisingly extended afterlife of reuse. On the reuse of sarcophagi throughout antiquity and into the early modern period, see Huskinson 2010; Zanker and Ewald 2012, 1-30. As Zanker and Ewald (2012, 1) put it, sarcophagi are a special class of artifacts, which, “Unlike most classical sculpture… never fell into total disuse.”
\textsuperscript{192} Birk 2012, 109. In Roman Syria, at Tyre however, as we will see, sarcophagi were often (re)used for generations.
\textsuperscript{193} Müller 1912, 41.
While we should be aware of the potential for reuse, it need not cause us too much anxiety because the question throughout our examination is what sarcophagus sculpture Jewish patrons chose, and what these choices reveal about the cultural dynamics of Jewish identity in Rome. As we argued above in Chapter 1, how involved the Jewish owner was in the original production of a particular sarcophagus (whether they were purchased completed, and possibly pre-owned, or partially finished and open to input from a patron) bears only partly on this important question.

### 2.4.2 Problems with the corpus of sarcophagi from the Jewish catacombs of Rome

There are over two dozen sarcophagi and sarcophagus fragments that are variously attributed to the Jewish community of Rome. The majority of these were discovered either out of context or disturbed within a catacomb, though sarcophagi were discovered at all but one of the Jewish catacombs.\(^{194}\) This state of affairs is surprisingly similar between Jewish and Christian catacombs owing in large part to a similar history of excavation. The vast majority of Christian and Jewish catacombs were excavated (or emptied out) between the mid-18\(^{th}\) and the early 20\(^{th}\) centuries.\(^{195}\) Thus, our records are conspicuously incomplete and inexact, with precise locations of finds almost never

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\(^{194}\) The catacombs on the via Labicana.  
\(^{195}\) Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni 1999, 12.
noted and obvious instances of excavators moving artifacts around the site without documentation.196

Indeed, a real problem confronts us in the fact that many of the known examples of "Jewish" sarcophagi are identified as such (in museum collections and catalogues) by their visual content alone. Only a few sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons from Rome have come to us via recorded find spots or with positive inscriptions. Markers of "Jewishness" commonly used to identify sarcophagi include not just positive criteria (chiefly the presence of a menorah and other temple objects), but negative criteria as well such as the absence of pagan and Christian characters (mythic heroes, saints and apostles) and symbols (the Chi-Ro).

But these markers are themselves complicated. While it is generally accepted that the sarcophagus of a self-identified Jew was unlikely to feature a Chi-Ro or make reference to Christian scripture, the picture is much less clear when it comes to pagan myth and themes. Likewise, there are many examples of Christians making use of narrative material from the Hebrew Bible in the images of their catacombs, not only on sarcophagi, but in other media as well (e.g. frescoes and gold glass).197

Moreover, we can never be entirely sure either that some sarcophagi preserved in the broader corpus and lacking provenance were not the sarcophagi of Roman Jews,

196 While characterizations of this sort are commonplace, see Guyon 1994, 90.
197 Elsner 2010b, 9, n. 35. On the complexity of religious symbols in Late Antiquity and after, see especially Fine 2015. See also Kraemer 1991.
especially those that do not contain explicitly pagan or Christian narrative myth (and possibly even some that are). This is, in fact, especially likely in light of the sarcophagi we will encounter below that indicate that some Jewish patrons commissioned portraits or chose narrative sculptural programs, with content from Greek and Roman myth. In other words, it seems likely that there are examples of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons right under our noses that we must continue to overlook for lack of identifiably Jewish motifs, inscriptions or provenance.

Given the lack of context for most examples, it is essential to establish what qualifies as the sarcophagus of a Jewish patron in the first place. Should we err on the side of extreme caution and, like Koch and Rutgers,\textsuperscript{198} include in our corpus only sarcophagi with a clear inscription or ‘Jewish’ symbols? Or should we cast our net more broadly, like Leon,\textsuperscript{199} Goodenough,\textsuperscript{200} and Konikoff,\textsuperscript{201} and consider additional sarcophagi that are found in verifiably Jewish contexts? I propose that for our purpose, a sarcophagus may be identified as having belonged to a Jewish patron if it fulfills one or more of the following criteria: a) the fragment contains clear-cut Jewish ritual symbols or images (e.g. a menorah or other ritual objects associate with Jewish religious practice), b) the fragment is accompanied by incontrovertible epigraphic evidence that asserts the Jewish

\textsuperscript{198} Koch 2002; Rutgers 1988.
\textsuperscript{199} Leon 1960, 210-8.
\textsuperscript{200} Goodenough 1953b, 3-50.
\textsuperscript{201} Konikoff 1986.
identity of its occupant, or c) the fragment can be verifiably shown as having been discovered inside a Jewish catacomb (whether in situ or not).

The latter criterion bears some explaining. Many scholars, operating under the influence of a pernicious assumption of Jewish aniconism, have attempted to explain away certain of the sarcophagus fragments discussed below as intrusive to the Jewish catacombs. The typical argument is that, because a fragment so clearly offends the scholar's principle of a presumed aniconic Judaism, they could not be of Jewish origin or commissioned by Jews. Rather, later tomb raiders must have brought it into the catacomb.202 It is only in the latter half of the 20th century that the stock character of the 'artless Jew' and the myth of Jewish aniconism have been abandoned,203 and nearly all early excavators and researchers of Jewish culture in Rome adhered to an almost dogmatic belief in Jewish avoidance of figured imagery. This belief has prompted many to cast doubt on the attribution to Jewish patrons of some of the figured sarcophagi discussed below, even to the present day.

There is no conclusive evidence for later (re)use of the catacombs for any purpose that might have given rise to the introduction of foreign sarcophagus fragments. Most frequently, it is argued that the fragments were introduced in the course of the centuries

202 See also the discussion of inscriptions which include the D.M. formula from the catacombs in Rutgers 1998, 83ff. While often regarded as 'intrusive' on the basis of the traditionally pagan formula, Rutgers follows Frey in concluding that these inscriptions more likely indicate that certain Jewish individuals felt no discomfort at the use of non-Jewish funerary formulae in epitaphs.

of tomb robbing. But precisely why tomb robbers in the medieval and early modern periods would have transported and then discarded the heavy stone fragments (including one *kline* sarcophagus lid that must have weighed at least one hundred pounds) is never explained. Indeed, no definitive evidence has ever been discovered that would positively confirm even a single instance of such reverse tomb robbing (whereby artifacts were brought *into* a catacomb rather than removed).

On the whole, it seems too convenient a way to excise examples from the corpus that complicate or challenge traditional views on the Jewish encounter with Rome. Moreover, the evidence seems conclusive that, however much Jewish, Christian and pagan Romans may have mingled in daily life, with regard to burial the communities maintained strict social boundaries. Thus my operative principle: in the absence of convincing evidence (for example clear and identifying pagan or Christian inscription), any sarcophagus fragment discovered in a Jewish catacomb must be regarded, *a priori*, as Jewish. In effect, this leads me to include every fragment discovered in the Jewish catacombs, as no argument beyond the presumed aniconism of ancient Judaism can be advanced to exclude even a single example.204

204 On the other hand, I exclude all but one of four sarcophagi discussed by Goodenough (1953b, 52-3) which he encountered on the grounds of Villa Torlonia. A workman assured him that the sarcophagi, were removed from the catacombs below the villa. However, there is no record of such sarcophagi by Beyer and Lietzmann (1930), who explored the catacomb before the villa was constructed. The lack of mention in this report is all the more striking because the sarcophagi in question are extremely well preserved and include a child’s strigilated sarcophagus, a *lenos* sarcophagus with lions and prey at either end, and a sarcophagus with an abbreviated scene of pagan rite. These three sarcophagi lack conclusive provenance as well as any identifying symbols or inscription. On the other hand, one sarcophagus, with a simple strigilar motif and a central tabula, I do include because of the combined weight of the epitaph (which mentions the position of
Ultimately, and although we can have only limited confidence in the completeness of our corpus, we can still make some very compelling analyses. Moreover, certain ‘group’ characteristics exhibited in the visual programs and discussed below suggest underlying similarities in preference and tastes on the part of a distinct community that bolster the association of such identified sarcophagi with the Jewish community of Rome. Because the focus of this project is not primarily to catalogue visual culture but to offer a model for its socio-cultural interpretation, my treatment of the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons will not aim to be exhaustive. Instead, I will note the existence of sarcophagi that fit within the fluid borders of the groups I identify along the spectrum of the Jewish-Roman cultural experience. Detailed treatment will be limited to a few, representative examples chosen for their inclusion of those elements characteristic of the group. My examination of the formal characteristics of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons will be combined with a discussion of the particular ways in which Roman (and sometimes Jewish) symbols are meaningfully utilized, combined, ordered, and situated, and in the way that expectations, the conventions of the sarcophagus as a Roman funerary medium, are upheld, subverted, or manipulated.

archon and the community of the Siburesians, known elsewhere in the inscriptive evidence from Jewish Rome) and the proximity to the Torlonia catacombs. See discussion of the sarcophagus of Caelia [D]omnina, below.
2.4.3 Jewish sarcophagus patrons in Rome

In the Jewish community of Rome, who were the patrons of sarcophagi? We have already discussed above some aspects related to sarcophagus patronage in the city of Rome. These tended to suggest that sarcophagi—made of expensive materials and found in special, more private chambers in the catacombs—were the reserve of a select group of wealthy elites. Based on this and the inscriptive evidence, we can suggest that the same held true within the Jewish community.

Eleven sarcophagi and sarcophagus fragments, roughly half of the known corpus, include inscriptions that are helpful in clarifying the patrons—and patronage practices—of the Jewish community.205 These inscriptions as a rule are brief and formulaic, identifying the deceased and often including a title or honorific and ending with a benedictory phrase, typically some variation of “may they sleep in peace.”206 As was the rule with inscriptions throughout the Jewish catacombs of Rome, Greek is the language of choice. All of the epitaphs are in Greek, with the exception of one in Latin.207 One, the lid of the sarcophagus of Faustina with the word “shalom” appearing in Hebrew beside

205 Noy 1995, Nos. 277, 403, 527, 535, 540, 542, 544, 554, 558, 559, and 577. An additional possible inscription is identified by Frey (1936a, No. 733c) as a fragment from the sarcophagus of Artimpedia. This identification rests on the inclusion of the phrase “in peace” (ΕΝ ΕΙΡΗΝΗ) at the end of the inscription. This attribution is too tentative to include here in reconstructing the patronage practice of the Jewish community, however we will consider this fragment again in Chapter 6. See also Konikoff 1986, 44-5, No. 16. One other inscription, on the sarcophagus of Julia Irene Aristae, is sometimes identified as Jewish (e.g. Frey 1936a, No. 72), however it lacks provenance or specifically Jewish content. It was not included in Noy’s more recent catalog (1995), nor is it included here.

206 In the Greek of the epitaphs: ΕΝ ΕΙΡΗΝΗ Η ΚΟΙΜΗΣΗ. The latter part, translated “the sleep” was optional and often left off.

an incised group of Jewish ritual symbols, hardly qualifies as bilingual. Much has been made of the common use of Greek in the inscriptions of the sarcophagi, the predominance of which is reflective of the trends observed throughout the Jewish catacombs of the city.\textsuperscript{208} Leon was the first to seize on this pattern, and, taking the inscriptions to be representative of the spoken language of the community, concluded that the Jews of Rome spoke a Greek \textit{koine} common among those of lower social class.\textsuperscript{209}

At the same time, the predominance of Greek in the inscriptions of the Jewish community of Rome, including on their sarcophagi, stands in stark contrast to the general preference for Latin observed in the funerary contexts of other communities in Rome.\textsuperscript{210} To van der Horst, this suggested that the Jewish community “lived in relative isolation” in Rome.\textsuperscript{211} Somewhat more cautiously, Rutgers seized on this fact to suggest that the use of Greek was one way that the community marked their Jewish identity.\textsuperscript{212} Greek was very likely the language used in Jewish religious practice in diaspora communities, and, moreover, the language of the Bible.\textsuperscript{213}

Any conclusions about the prevalence of Greek and its relationship to the spoken language of the Jewish community and, moreover, their cultural affinities, must be counted against the evidence of naming practices (onomastics). Both among Jewish

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{208} Where Greek inscriptions account for about 75\% of the epitaphs. See Cappelletti 2006, 180.
\textsuperscript{209} Leon 1927; 1960.
\textsuperscript{210} See Rutgers 1995, 182-4.
\textsuperscript{211} van der Horst 2001, 22-3.
\textsuperscript{212} Rutgers 1995, 177-209.
\end{flushright}
sarcophagus patrons and the broader Jewish community, Latin names predominate in inscriptions in both Greek and Latin. Of seventeen names mentioned in inscriptions on sarcophagi, only four are transliterations of Hebrew names: Jonathan, Sarah, Maria and Mnias (Manasseh). The remainder are common Latin names—e.g. Julianus, Marcella, Caelius Quintus or Faustina—or names of Greek extraction—e.g. Eudoxios, Silicius, Sophronia and Nicandrus. Rutgers takes the onomastic evidence in general to indicate “more than a superficial acquaintance with Roman name-giving practices,” and a “lively interaction between Jews and non-Jews” in the city of Rome.

All but two sarcophagus inscriptions (those of Eudoxios the painter and Faustina) include a mention of a title or honorific. This is a revealing fact for the consideration of the social position of Jewish sarcophagus patrons, and suggests that they may have been among the most prominent members of the community. In one inscription, belonging to the sarcophagus of Julianus, the elevated position of the family endured over two generations. Seven possible titles and honorifics are mentioned: archon, archisynagogos, gerusiarth, phrontistes, priest, and the role of ‘father’ and ‘mother’ of a synagogue. The

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214 On this last transliteration see Noy 1995, 428.
215 These last three names are from a single sarcophagus, belonging to Silicius, and may suggest a family originally from Asia Minor or Roman Syria. See Noy 1995, No. 554.
epitaph on the sarcophagus of Domnus, a strigilar sarcophagus with a *tabula ansata* flanked by columns, is instructive in this regard. It reads:\(^{218}\)

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ΕΝ[ΘΑ]ΔΕ Κ
ΕΙ[ΤΑΙ Δ]ΟΜΝΟ
C ΠΙ[ΑΤ]ΗΡ ΚΥΝΑ
ΓΩ[ΗΚ Β]ΕΠΝΑΚΑΩ
N ΤΠΙ Α[ΠΧ]ΩΝ ΚΕ ΔΙ Φ
ΠΟΝΤ[ΙΧ]ΗΚ ΕΝ ΕΙΠΗ
Ν[Η Η Κ]ΟΙΜ
Μ[ΗΚ]Η ΑΥ
[ΤΟ]Υ
```

Here lies
Domnus,
‘father’ of the synagogue
of the Vernaculii,
 threesome archon,’ and twice
*phrontistes*. In peace
may
he
sleep.

These and other titles may have referred to real positions in the Jewish community, or have been used to honor its members.\(^{219}\) Most likely they were used in both ways, but in either case, they reflect the prominent social standing of the deceased and their families within the Jewish community of Rome. In the case of Domnus, it seems that the roles of *archon* and *phrontistes* may have been an elected or appointed position with term limits. By contrast, none of the inscriptions on sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons mention a civic role or honorific relating to participation in the broader community in Rome, and only one mentions an occupation (painter). This is in keeping with the practices observed in other inscriptions from the catacombs,\(^{220}\) and with the (Jewish) communal focus of the sarcophagus inscriptions on which six synagogues are mentioned by name (the synagogues of the Siburesians, Calcaresians Vernaculi,

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\(^{218}\) Reconstruction following Noy (1995, No. 540).


\(^{220}\) Cappelletti 2006, 190-1.
Augustesians, Calcaresians, Campus and Volumnius). Quite in contrast to the inscriptions on sarcophagi at Beth She’arim, no mention of the title or honorific ‘rabbi’ is made.

Only one epitaph identifies more than one deceased individual. The epitaph of this strigilated sarcophagus read “Here lies Silicius, gerousiarch, and Sophronia his wife, with Maria and Nikandros their children.”221 Sarcophagi containing more than one interment are rare in Rome, and there is scant evidence for the practice of secondary burial in the Jewish catacombs of the city as opposed to at Beth She’arim. This, and the Greek names of the deceased, suggest that the family may have immigrated to Rome and brought with them foreign burial customs, and possibly, secondary burial. Still, Silicius and his family evidently integrated well into the Romano-Jewish community, as he gained the position or honor of gerousiarch.

Age is mentioned in three epitaphs, in each case presumably because the age at death was unusual. Caelius Quintus, a “Hebrew boy” (ΠΑΙ)}>EUR</SUP>CΕ[Β]>EUR</SUP>C, died at age thirteen;222 Jonathan, an archon, at nineteen.223 The epitaph of Caelius Quintus in particular is suggestive of a certain category of patronage. His unnamed father is mentioned, along with the fact that he served in the role of archon twice. This detail and the circumstances of the death suggest that Caelius Quintus’s father was the patron of

221 Following Noy 1995, No. 554.
222 Noy 1995, No. 559.
the sarcophagus, and, furthermore, that his patronage was a means of displaying his own prestige.\textsuperscript{224} The Latin inscription on the sarcophagus of Beturia Paula identifies the deceased as a ‘proselyte’ and ‘mother’ of two synagogues who lived a remarkable 86 years and 6 months.\textsuperscript{225} It is not clear what the role of ‘mother’ of a synagogue (or the analogous role of ‘father’) entailed, whether the position was as synagogue functionary or an honorific.\textsuperscript{226} Her sarcophagus, the only one belonging to a proselyte, is also one of the few to bear Jewish ritual symbols which are incised on the epitaph (see below, Chapter 4). With the exception of these three examples, we can assume that the age of death was more or less average for those buried in sarcophagi in the Jewish community of Rome.\textsuperscript{227}

What emerges from the inscriptive evidence then is that many Jewish sarcophagus patrons were prominent members of the Jewish community in Rome, with extensive ties to synagogues in the city and holding a variety of positions and honors related to the community. While the epitaphs suggest that the primary (funerary) identity of the deceased was derived from their position in the Jewish community,\textsuperscript{228} it is less clear that this can be taken to mean that “the primary interest of Roman Jews was not to integrate

\textsuperscript{224} On prestige accomplished through patronage, see Birk 2012.
\textsuperscript{225} Apparently 16 of those years she went by her Hebrew name, ‘Sarah.’
\textsuperscript{226} On such roles and the place of women in Jewish synagogues in antiquity, see especially Brooten 1982.
\textsuperscript{227} In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that the Jews of Rome enjoyed higher survival rates than the non-Jewish population, especially among females. See Rutgers 1995, 119, Table 5.
\textsuperscript{228} See also Rutgers 1995, 199.
with Roman society, but to preserve their own cultural and religious identity,” as Cappelletti argues.\textsuperscript{229} The evidence is much more nuanced than that.

Ultimately all the evidence—the use of common epitaphic formulae and conventions, the highlighting of social roles and accomplishments and, not to mention, the choice of a sarcophagus burial in the first place—suggests that the patrons were familiar with the conventions of Roman funerary culture, especially sarcophagi and epitaphs. Moreover, it has been suggested that the roles themselves and the communal structure of many diaspora communities and synagogues were modeled on the civic structure: “miniature versions of the city of which they are a part.”\textsuperscript{230} When it comes to the kinds of sculptural programs selected by these patrons, the leaders of the community opted for what might be considered more conservative options among the possibilities offered by producers of Metropolitan sarcophagi. We will return to this point in Chapter 6. For now, it is enough to observe that, based on the limited evidence at hand, the social class and patronage practices of Jewish sarcophagus patrons did not substantially differ from those of other, non-Jewish patrons in the city of Rome.

\textsuperscript{229} Cappelletti 2006, 191.
\textsuperscript{230} See Rajak 1999.
Chapter 3. Traditions of Stone Sculpture in Palestine: Second Temple Period to Late Antiquity

The sculptural programs of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons did not emerge *ex nihilo*. They drew on Roman models to varying degrees—a fact more or less recognized by all who have studied them—but also on an enduring tradition of Jewish stone carving that emerged towards the end of the Second Temple period. The relationship between stone carving and other forms of visual culture in antiquity—including wall paintings and mosaic floors—is tenuous. Separate workshops were responsible for each, and artisans were generally responsible for or employed in only one medium. It is therefore appropriate to treat stone sculpture as a discrete category, as its development and content evolved in ways that were more or less independent of developments in other media (though certainly not ignorant of them).

In this chapter, I examine the history of stone sculpture in Palestine from the late Second Temple period to Late Antiquity (from the 1st century B.C.E. to the 5th century C.E.). I identify three major and related traditions of stone sculpture in ancient Palestine, and particularly in Jerusalem and the Galilee, on which the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim draw. Two of these are traditions that emerged in the late Second Temple period, both primarily in Jerusalem: ossuary carving and relief sculpture on the facades of

1 May and Stark 2002, 229. A possible exception exists in the relief carving at Chorazin, where May and Stark (2002) have suggested that portions of the interior frieze exhibit features associated with the work of a painter. Rockwell's (1993) study of stone working in antiquity suggests much the same.
monumental tombs. The third tradition, the emergence of architectural relief sculpture in the monumental public buildings of the Galilee in the Late Antiquity, was more or less contemporaneous with the catacombs of Beth She’arim.

3.1 Ossuaries in the Second Temple period

Ossuaries are burial vessels used to hold the bones of one or more individuals collected for the practice of secondary burial. They are the closest analog used by ancient Jews to sarcophagi in material (typically of local limestone), form (carved, rectangular, lidded containers) and function (burial containers). The use of ossuaries in Roman Palestine began in the latter half of the 1st century B.C.E. and steadily gained in popularity over the next century. While ossuary production declined after the revolts of the late 1st and early 2nd centuries C.E., the custom was continued well into the 3rd century C.E. Thus, at least vestiges of the practice may be considered contemporary with the earliest activity in catacombs of Beth She’arim. By the middle to late 3rd century C.E., the use of ossuaries was all but abandoned, though the practices of secondary burial and the reinterment of the dead were not. While stone sarcophagi and wooden

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2 The terms ‘collected’ or ‘gathered’ are used to indicate the “orderly transfer of bones from primary to secondary burial, especially within the same cave.” See Klomer and Zissu 2007, 107. Also, refer to the orderly transfer of bones from primary to secondary burial, especially within the same cave.

3 Or “ossilegium,” from where the term is derived. On the terminology of ossuaries and the practice of secondary burial, see Meyers 1971, Ch. 3.

4 Figueras 1983; Meyers 1971, 47; Rahmani 1994, 24.

5 Rahmani 1994, 21. The practice of ossilegium, on the other hand, may have continued in some circles. For evidence from Beth She’arim, see below, Chapter 4. See also Meyers 1970, 22; 1971, 33; 1983, 108.

6 These stone sarcophagi bear little resemblance to the later sarcophagi from Beth She’arim. Their motifs share the same visual koine of funerary sculpture as the ossuaries and the facades of contemporary rock cut
coffins also appear occasionally in the same contexts as ossuaries in the Second Temple period, the use of ossuaries was so predominant that they may be considered one of the distinctive and defining features of Jewish burial practices in this period in Palestine.

Over 1,200 ossuaries with decorative programs or inscriptions, as well as more than 2,000 plain examples are known.\(^7\) Vast in number, they were also geographically diffused. They have been discovered and recorded at nearly 130 sites in Palestine,\(^8\) and even among diaspora Jewish communities in Alexandria, Carthage and Spain as well.\(^9\) Yet, while ossuaries are found especially throughout the region of Palestine in the early Roman period, they are particularly concentrated in the rock-cut tombs hewn in the limestone hills of Judea and especially Jerusalem. There are over one hundred such tombs dating to the 1st centuries B.C.E. and C.E., particularly concentrated in the area of Mount Scopus in Jerusalem, but in other areas of the city as well.\(^10\) Ossuaries are
tombs, probably coming from the same workshops. The technical skill more closely mimics that of the ossuaries, with occasionally higher relief carving and better execution, but showing the same basic elements and similar *horror vacui*. They furthermore have little in common with the broader Roman sarcophagus industry, which was in its infancy at this time, with cremation still the preferred mode of burial in the Roman west. They are an isolated and local phenomenon, and exceedingly rare. They mirrored the shape and design of lead and wooden coffins, with thin walls and repetitive designs typical of the former. Rahmani’s catalog (1994), which includes these coffins, counts fewer than a dozen examples, which he does not separate out for special treatment. Kloner and Zissu (2007, 114) concur, and consider them “technically related to the world of ossuaries.” See also Hachlili 1988, 115.

\(^7\) Kloner and Zissu 2007, 113. While no complete catalog exists, Rahmani (1994) published the most extensive catalog, which included all decorated and inscribed ossuaries in the IAA collections.

\(^8\) Kloner and Zissu 2007, 113. Ossuaries have been found also in Hebron and Jericho, on the coastal plain and in the Jordan valley, as well as at several sites in the Galilee including Nazareth, Gush Halav and Beth Shemesh. For a more complete list of find spots, see Rahmani 1994, 302-3.

\(^9\) Meyers 1971, 37.

\(^{10}\) Kloner and Zissu 2007.
especially common in (but by no means exclusive to) tombs belonging to wealthy families, including those featuring monumental facades.\textsuperscript{11}

In these tombs, ossuaries were used to collect (and protect) the bones of deceased individuals. This took place after the bodies were interred first in narrow \textit{kokh} graves lining the walls of the tomb chambers. After a period of time, the bones were collected and gathered in either short \textit{kokh} graves or in ossuaries. The practice of secondary burial is one of the few, defining characteristics of the funerary customs practiced in ancient Judaism.\textsuperscript{12} The practice has a long history, beginning already in the Israelite period.\textsuperscript{13} At least in the archaeological record, the custom became particularly prominent in Herodian Jerusalem in the latter third of the 1\textsuperscript{st} century B.C.E. and was associated with the reinterment of the dead in an ossuary.\textsuperscript{14} The size of the ossuary corresponded to its functional role in this practice; it needed to be large enough to accommodate the longest bone in the human body (the femur) and wide enough to accommodate the widest (the pelvis). Most ossuaries correspond quite closely to these measurements.\textsuperscript{15} After bone collection, ossuaries were placed either directly on the floor of the rock cut tomb in most cases, or sometimes on a low bench or in purpose-hewn niches.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{11} Kloner and Whetstone 2016, 265.
\textsuperscript{12} See especially Meyers 1971, 17-36.
\textsuperscript{13} Secondary burial has origins in the Israelite period. See Kloner and Zissu 2007, 107-8; Meyers 1971, 33, \textit{passim}. On comparative Chalcolithic practices in the region, see Meyers 1971.
\textsuperscript{14} Kloner and Zissu 2007, 108.
\textsuperscript{15} Kloner and Zissu 2007, 108.
\textsuperscript{16} Kloner and Whetstone 2016, 193.
The funerary practices of the Second Temple period, and especially those related to secondary burial, can be understood by taking a brief look at a specific example from Jerusalem: a two-tomb, rock-cut burial complex on Mt. Scopus, dating to the first centuries of the common era.¹⁷ This burial complex, as Kloner and Whetstone observed, “contains most of the features characteristic of Jewish burials in Jerusalem and Judea in the 1st century B.C.E. and the 1st century C.E.”¹⁸ These characteristic features include five chambers hewn out of the limestone hillside and containing long and short kohk graves, arcosolia and quadrosolia, as well as fragments of Herodian oil lamps, cookware, juglets and amphorae that suggest continued visitation and funerary rites. Extensive evidence for the practice of secondary burial was found. In the relatively undisturbed context of the five chambers, 35 whole ossuaries were found, in addition to the lids and fragments of several others.¹⁹ These most often contained the remains of two or three individuals.²⁰ They were placed either on the floor, or purpose-hewn niches that could hold up to three ossuaries.

Just as sarcophagi can be connected to broader patterns of stone trade and urbanization in the 2nd and 3rd centuries C.E. in Roman Syria (see below, Chapter 5), the adoption of ossuaries has been connected to civic building programs and urban

¹⁷ Kloner and Whetstone 2016.
¹⁸ Kloner and Whetstone 2016, 16.
¹⁹ Kloner and Whetstone 2016.
²⁰ Kloner and Whetstone 2016, 265. In 23 ossuaries with preserved bone assemblages, the bones of 40 individuals were identified. The numbers are as follows: nine ossuaries contained a single individual, eleven ossuaries contained two individuals, and three ossuaries contained three individuals.
revitalization under Herod the Great. Herodian building programs stimulated substantial quarrying activity in the limestone hills of Judaea, and particularly Jerusalem. These developments made available abundant material along with workshops and the practical knowledge needed to produce other stone goods, such as ossuaries. That there were Jewish stonemasons starting in the Second Temple period and on is not in doubt. These craftsmen were employed in the production of a number of other stone goods as well, including stone tabletops, which share a similar decorative vocabulary. Indeed, according to Hachlili, “stonework was one of the most prevalent crafts of Jewish art” from Herodian times. Moreover, under Herod, urbanization brought with it the emergence of a new class of Jewish aristocrats, particularly in Jerusalem, as well additional financial means. It is no coincidence that it is in this same period that we first encounter the construction of wealthy ‘mansions’ in the Upper City of Jerusalem.

But the adoption of ossuaries can only partially be explained by economic change and Herodian urbanization, which do nothing to account for the practice of secondary burial in which ossuary use is embedded. As Figueras correctly points out, secondary burial complicates funerary customs and can only be explained in light of shifts in

22 These shared a common repertoire of motifs with ossuaries (below), including rosettes, vases, and scrolling vines. For examples, see Hachlili 1988, 72-8, figs. 8-9.
23 Hachlili 1988, 83.
24 For a review of the material evidence for this class, see Berlin 2014.
cultural or religious beliefs about the proper care of the dead and the afterlife. It is possible that the emergence of ossuaries, together with the growth in the practice of secondary burial, are connected to a growing need to preserve the individual’s wholeness—the ‘totality of the individual’—in death and for the afterlife. Other factors that may have stimulated the practice of secondary burial and the use of ossuaries include the continuation of earlier Israelite funerary customs as well as the desire of some Jews living abroad to be buried in Israel.

Like the locally produced sarcophagi of Beth She’arim, ossuaries from this period were, with very few exceptions, made of the soft, *nari* limestone so abundantly available in environs of Jerusalem and the Galilee. This material had the benefit of being readily available in the Judean hill country and of being very easy to work with. At the same time, the softness made it difficult to sculpt with depth and precision and thus limited the type of decoration that could be carved. Occasionally, harder limestone was used. In these cases, different stone carving techniques were employed, leading to different visual programs, and the use of different motifs. Even more rarely, other media, including wood and terra-cotta, were used. With the caveat that wood especially is rarely well preserved in Palestine, it can nonetheless be suggested that soft limestone by

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26 Meyers 1971, 89.
27 Meyers 1971, 89. Whether or not they can be connected with more specific beliefs such as the resurrection of the dead, or shifts in beliefs about the soul, is a matter of some debate. See below, and Figueras 1983, 9-10; Meyers 1971, 85.
far the preferred material for ossuaries, and that fewer than ten percent of ossuaries were made of other materials including harder limestone, clay or wood.\textsuperscript{29}

3.1.1 The decorative programs of soft limestone ossuaries

As many as half of all soft limestone ossuaries are decorated.\textsuperscript{30} The material of soft limestone ossuaries was suited to simple carving techniques—typically chip carving (the removal of material in small ‘chips’ from the surface plane), incising or a combination thereof was employed.\textsuperscript{31} The decorative programs of ossuaries were limited mostly to the body of the artifact. In only a few cases were there decorations of any kind on the lid,\textsuperscript{32} which was typically in gabled form but without the acroteria characteristic of the sarcophagi from the later Roman periods at Beth She’arim and across Roman Syria and the Eastern Empire.\textsuperscript{33} Generally, they were carved only on one side; soft limestone

\textsuperscript{29} Rahmani (1994, 4) argued that wood may have been “deliberately avoided” for reasons having to do with permanence of preservation. It is also possible that stone was preferred for purity reasons. Finally, the scarcity may be due to the unevenness of the archaeological record and the poor preservation of wood.

\textsuperscript{30} The numbers in Rahmani’s catalog (1994, 7, 11, 25) suggest more, 559 out of 856, but this does not account for many undecorated ossuaries which have often been discarded or ignored during excavation. The numbers from the Mt. Scopus tomb, which presents a small sample from a relatively undisturbed context, are probably more accurate in this regard, and suggest around half of all soft limestone ossuaries featured decorative programs. See Kloner and Whetstone 2016. The majority of the ossuaries in Rahmani’s catalog (1994) were chip carved (354), while another 189 were featured incised decorations.

\textsuperscript{31} Relief carving is generally characteristic of the hard limestone ossuaries (see below). Only a dozen soft limestone ossuaries out of 856 in Rahmani’s catalog (1994, 7) were relief carved. The chip-carving technique may be a transfer from wood carving in the period, where the ossuary form and some decorative elements have been suggested to have roots. Their form, and to some extent their decoration, may have been based on wood chests popular across the ancient Mediterranean. See Figueras 1983, 30-1. Unfortunately, aside from a few examples in later mosaics and some fragmentary remains, that the suggestion must remain speculative. Several reasons to be suspicious of the connection have also been offered. See Rahmani 1994, 3-5.

\textsuperscript{32} Rahmani 1994, 6.

\textsuperscript{33} At the same time, the earlier popularity of the gabled lid—albeit in simpler form—may have been factor in the adoption of the Proconnesian form with its characteristic gabled lid in the later periods. The earlier adoption of the gabled lid on ossuaries may have paved the way for what would then have been a very
ossuaries worked on other sides or the surfaces of the lid are uncommon. Only twelve featured relief carving of any depth that would mimic the more detailed carvings of hard stone.

Whether chip-carved or incised, the sculptural programs of the soft-limestone ossuaries contained little that was carved freehand. The decorative programs were generally geometric and abstract, consisting of combinations of a limited repertoire of motifs. The motifs—which did not require high levels of detail—were typically laid out using chalk lines, a compass and rule. Hachlili has suggested that ossuaries workshops generally worked from a set repertoire of motifs, which may have been enshrined in a ‘pattern book’. Occasionally, the surface was treated with a red or yellow pigment wash prior to carving, in order to create a contrast between the surface and the incised or carved decorative program. Very few ossuaries make use of painted motifs, and fewer still were painted in polychrome.

recognizable form with ties to earlier Jewish practices. There are roughly a dozen examples of gabled lids with acroteria from southern Judaea. One group of five such ossuaries were found near Be’er Sheva (Rahmani 1994, 219-20, Nos. 681-6, 90). Another group, also of five, were found in the hills of Hebron (Rahmani 1994, 256-7, Nos. 858-62). Both groups of ossuaries with acroteria were dated by Rahmani to the third century, and connected to the same influences from Proconnesus and the Sarcophagus trade in Roman Syria observed above. See Kloner and Zissu 2007, 113-4; Rahmani 1994, 6.

34 Rahmani 1994, 25.
37 Hachlili 1988, 111.
38 Painted motifs on ossuaries seem to have emerged outside of the industry in Jerusalem. See Rahmani 1994, 8.
The limited techniques used in carving ossuaries of soft limestone are mirrored in the limited repertoire of motifs employed, and indeed may have been part of the reason for such restriction. Different attempts have been made to classify the decorative schemes of the stone ossuaries from the Second Temple period, with little success and even less resolution. Here, I adopt the pragmatic approach of Rahmani by avoiding the issue altogether and eschewing any attempt at categorizing the ossuaries. Instead, I will discuss the major motifs that formed the limited repertoire.

Rosettes were far and away the most common decorative motif found on soft limestone ossuaries in Palestine. This motif, in all its various forms, was found not only on ossuaries but also on contemporary facades of rock cut tombs (below), as well as on mosaics and frescos of the Second Temple period. The popularity of the rosette in this period is such that some argue it 'exemplifies' Jewish art from the time of the Second Temple. In truth, while the rosette may have been a favored motif among Jewish patrons, it had long been employed across the Greek and Roman Mediterranean in a

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39 On the limited nature of the repertoire, see Figueras 1983, 29; Rahmani 1994, 9.
40 Figueras (1983, 36ff.) for instance, broke them down into three main groups—plants, architectural and geometric—with a fourth catchall group: 'varia.' Hachlili (1988, 111) approached the problem according to the way the elements were arranged, proposing three categories: 1) ossuaries with a framed pair of symmetrical rosettes, 2) ossuaries with rosettes flanking a central motif (eg. a tomb facade, column or amphora), and 3) ossuaries with a horror vacui but lacking the symmetrical rosettes characteristic of most decorated ossuaries.
41 Rahmani 1994, 1. Rahmani opted instead to proceed by inventory number.
43 Hachlili 1988, 80.
variety of contexts. It appears, for instance, in several different forms across the front of the funerary monument of Scipio Barbatus (Rome, 3rd century B.C.E.)\textsuperscript{44}

On ossuaries, rosettes could either be carved in low relief, or etched. They most often occurred in pairs filling two metopes, or panels, on the long side of ossuaries, though other arrangements were common.\textsuperscript{45} Often they are framed in their metopes by geometric bands, columns or vegetal motifs. The six-petalled rosette was the most common type, though rosettes with as few as three and as many as a dozen petals were used.\textsuperscript{46} For some, the omnipresence of the rosette as a motif has meant that it must have had deeper meaning than mere decoration.\textsuperscript{47} For others, the very same fact has indicated its lack of meaning.\textsuperscript{48} Some have seen significance in the numbers of petals or the pairing of rosettes, but the easy coexistence of ‘types’ belies any attempt to read meaning out of the numbers. On a single ossuary lid for example four different types of rosettes are found.\textsuperscript{49} Others have argued an apotropaic function for the rosette, based on its common, contemporaneous appearance over the entrance of tomb lintels.\textsuperscript{50} Figueras considered rosettes a form of stylized plants and thus classed them with plant motifs in

\textsuperscript{44} My thanks to Tolly Boatwright for calling my attention to this monument.
\textsuperscript{45} Figueras 1983, 36.
\textsuperscript{46} Figueras 1983, 37.
\textsuperscript{47} Figueras (1983, 40) for instance, writes: “It cannot be held as a simple element of decoration or space-filling when we see it even in graffito.”
\textsuperscript{48} Avigad (1976a, 285) wrote regarding rosettes that: “The only conclusion deducible from archeological data is that the rosette, in all its variants, evolved into a conventional decorative pattern which was easy to execute by compass and to use wherever it was needed.”
\textsuperscript{49} Figueras 1983, 39, No. 653.
\textsuperscript{50} Figueras 1983, 40.
his work.\textsuperscript{51} The symbolic meaning of the rosette must ultimately have been as varied as its appearance, and the debate over its precise interpretation cannot, and should not, be settled.

A second, similar group of motifs are obscure circles and round objects that often occupy a similar place in the visual programs as rosettes. These can and have been interpreted as any number of different things. Figueras notes that they can be read as “any round things whatsoever, such as loaves, fruits, nailheads and so on.”\textsuperscript{52} To this list we might add handle rings, stylized wreaths, planets or other astrological motifs. In fact, it is impossible to pin down any understanding of what they represent, not the least because they could often simply be incomplete rosettes.\textsuperscript{53}

Schematic representations of architectural features—especially columns but also gates, faux ashlar masonry, and colonnades—are another motif that appears often on the faces of soft limestone ossuaries.\textsuperscript{54} A soft limestone sarcophagus on long-term loan to the Metropolitan Museum of Art is a good illustration of the kinds of schematized architectural elements found on ossuaries and the way that architectural elements could be combined with rosettes and other motifs (Fig. 3.1).\textsuperscript{55} This ossuary is a fine example of the chip carving technique and features a pair of sixteen-petal rosettes. The rosettes are

\textsuperscript{51} Figueras 1983, 36.
\textsuperscript{52} Figueras 1983, 64.
\textsuperscript{53} Examples of ossuaries (and sarcophagi) with incomplete decorative programs are exceedingly common.
\textsuperscript{54} Rahmani 1994, 25.
\textsuperscript{55} MMA Inv. L.2003.10a/b
separated by a squat, fluted column that is topped by a conch motif. All of the
decorative elements appearing on this ossuary were common ones. So too is the *horror vacui* so obviously evident in this example—the negative space is filled with various scrolls, circles, tendrils and other filler motifs.

Indeed, despite the limits of repertoire and technique—or perhaps because of them—it is widely observed that most of the decorated soft-limestone ossuaries exhibit a similar *horror vacui*, or fear of empty space.⁵⁶ For Rahmani, this characteristic was the result of the “unsophisticated taste” of the craftsmen. And yet, the combination of limited repertoire and the *horror vacui* also granted artisans considerable license in creating a visual program.⁵⁷ On most ossuaries, the surface area of the body is filled with a variety of motifs and filler patterns and devices. Furthermore, any of the limited elements in the repertoire—especially rosettes, rings and schematic architectural features, but also vases and various plants—could be combined with the others in any position, size or combination. In this way, despite bearing significant resemblances, no two ossuaries are alike and it is difficult to reconstruct workshop identities.⁵⁸

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⁵⁶ Figueras 1983, 33; Rahmani 1994, 8.
⁵⁷ Rahmani (1994, 25) recognized this as a characteristic “freedom of design.”
⁵⁸ On the difficulty of reconstructing workshop identities, see Rahmani 1994, 9. Likewise, among the 660 ossuaries he published, Figueras (1983, 34) found only 15 examples with exact parallels in the corpus. The remainder were close variations on the limited repertoire of motifs and themes. Despite the difficulty in identifying workshops, it has been suggested that elaborate architectural representations were the product of a particular workshop in Jerusalem. See Hachlili 1988, 113.
3.1.2 Hard limestone ossuaries and relief carving

The hard limestone ossuaries are best considered as a separate group.\[^{59}\] They are relatively rare in the broader corpus, with fewer than three dozen examples. There are several features that set them apart, including not only the use of relief carving technique but also the consistent decoration of more than the front side.\[^{60}\] Almost all were found in Jerusalem—only five were found outside of the city and its environs,\[^{61}\] and of these only two were decorated.\[^{62}\] Of the 23 examples from Jerusalem, the majority (19) were decorated, and all but one was relief carved on three or more sides. The carving of three or more sides suggests that these ossuaries were intended to be viewed from more angles and would have been placed prominently in the tomb.

The sculptural programs on all hard ossuaries were exclusively relief carved, a technique that was extremely rare on the soft limestone ossuaries as we have noted.\[^{63}\] Most often this relief carving was executed in sunken panels in shallow bas relief. The limited numbers of these ossuaries and the high technical ability evident in the relief carving suggests that they were expensive objects which were special commissions.\[^{64}\] The use of different materials and techniques suggests that they were commissioned

\[^{59}\] More often, however, they are treated as one group. See, for example, Figueras 1983; Rahmani 1994.
\[^{61}\] Rahmani 1994, Nos. 158, 282, 676, 681, 873.
\[^{64}\] See Rahmani 1994, 7.
from and executed by different workshops than the more common soft limestone examples. Perhaps, as Rahmani suggests, they were “made by [the same] stonemasons, employing the same techniques and ornamentation” as the ornamental tomb facades of the period (see below).  

The motifs employed on hard limestone ossuaries overlapped with the soft limestone ossuaries to some extent, such that rosettes, for example, are common on the hard limestone ossuaries as well. Rosettes form the primary motif on a half dozen or so examples, including one at the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 3.2). This example, though relief carved, nevertheless looks more or less like the vast majority of soft limestone ossuaries. Its primary motif is a triplet of rosettes in the sunken panel on the front. The two rosettes on the outside have six petals each, while the central rosette has fourteen. These are flanked on either side by a pair of squared columns, picking up an architectural motif.

Hard limestone ossuaries were also more often carved on the sides or the lid. An example from the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem is good example of this phenomenon (Fig. 3.3). This ossuary looks much like the soft-limestone examples, including the paired rosettes on the front. However, the rosettes are much more elaborately carved than those

66 MMA Inv. X.248.11 a/b
67 While more often ossuaries had pairs of rosettes, harking back possibly to the handles on wooden chests, an odd number is not uncommon either. See above, and Figueras 1983, 31-2.
on soft limestone ossuaries and approach a naturalistic style. Moreover, the motif is continued on the sides, and on the lid as well, where concentric rings are used in place of rosettes.

Wreaths—relatively rare on soft limestone ossuaries—are almost as common as rosettes on the hard limestone ossuaries. In one example, a pair of wreaths frame an inscription on either side of a gabled lid, in Greek on one side and Hebrew on the other (Fig. 3.4).\(^6\) The inscription records the name of “Kynoros son of [Dio]dotos” and his rank as a ‘first citizen’ (πρωτοπολειτης in Greek, translated as מַחְרָם יְשָׁר in Hebrew).\(^7\) In this instance, the wreaths are probably associated with the citizen’s crown, or coronae civicae as suggested by Rahmani.\(^7\) This very specific reading illustrates the highly contextual nature of symbolic meanings. It should not be extrapolated to all appearances of the wreath on ossuaries and in funerary art in general, where wreaths may have been more generally associated with graveside offerings.\(^7\)

Besides rosettes, wreaths and other circular motifs however, hard limestone was suitable for a wider array of visual programs and elements than soft limestone. The framing elements of stylized columns, zigzags or arrowed bands are replaced on hard limestone ossuaries by simple, architectural moldings. Floral motifs are also common. Several examples have primary or secondary motifs of naturalistic floral designs,

\(^7\) This reconstruction of was suggested by Yadin and accepted by Rahmani (1994, 143).
\(^7\) Rahmani 1994, 144.
\(^7\) Hachlili 2005, 145.
including pomegranates, grapes, palm branches, palmettes and acanthus leaves that are rare or absent on the soft limestone ossuaries. So, for instance, a hard limestone ossuary from the western slope of Mt. Scopus was carved on the front and lid with a motif of scrolling vines, acanthus leaves and hanging grape clusters. (Figs. 3.5, 3.6). Another featured a pair of elaborate rosettes surrounded by complex moldings, set on a background of scrolling vines and separated by a large acanthus motif (Fig. 3.7). Other floral motifs found on hard limestone ossuaries include palm branches and pomegranates.

Some of these motifs seem to have been specific to funerary art, found on facades and ossuaries alike. On the other hand, vines and grapes were extremely popular in civic architecture as well. Indeed, the vine motif especially was an exceedingly popular representation found in multiple genres—not only in funerary art in the region, but in domestic and public settings—and mediums from painting to mosaics to carving. Any symbolic associations of the vine were probably very vague connotations at best. Their popularity and wide range of use belies any specific association. As Hachlili has pointed out, they were first and foremost a “decorative and filling motif.” More generally, the

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74 Jacoby 1987a, n.1987.106. See also No. 60 from Rahmani’s catalog (1994), and the lid of several hard limestone ossuaries from the necropolis of Dominus Flevit (Jacoby 1987a, An.1987.88, 104).
75 Hachlili 1988, 80.
76 Hachlili 1988, 80.
77 For a list of appearances, see Hachlili 2005, 139-42.
78 Hachlili 2005, 144.
floral motifs of the Second Temple period are comprised mostly of representations of plants native to the region, or appropriated from earlier sources.79

Architectural motifs of columns, ashlar masonry and other features appear less often on hard limestone ossuaries. However, when they do the results could be quite striking. Perhaps the most unique and elaborate hard limestone ossuary comes from the same group of rock cut tombs on the southern slope of Mt. Scopus, discussed above. The body of this ossuary is carved on all four sides in deep relief with a regular and precisely executed architectural facade (Figs. 3.8, 3.9).80 On the front and rear, a six pillared facade with square capitals is punctuated by a series of five openings: two arched openings or niches to either side of a taller, central opening with a gabled pediment. The empty space of the four niches on the front are filled with floral and vegetal motifs that emerge from the center of a naturalistic rosette. The rear is not completed. The sides are carved with a single doorway each, with paneled, double leaf doors and topped with a gabled pediment. Rahmani confidently interpreted the visual program as depicting a tomb facade.81 On the other hand, nothing about this ossuary is conclusively related to tomb architecture. It may simply be alluding to the grandeur of monumental architecture in a general way.

79 Hachlili 1988, 79.
80 Rahmani 1994, 184-5, no. 482.
81 Rahmani 1994, 184-5, No. 482. Rahmani further attributed the motif to Nabatean influences, calling attention to the tomb facades of Petra, and the use of floral elements in place of figural representations there. Rahmani was not the only one saw connections between the tomb facades of Petra and stone carving in Jerusalem. See Avigad 1950, 103-4.
3.1.3 The patronage practices of ossuaries and social class

Reconstructing the patronage practices surrounding the use of ossuaries is no easy task, made all the more difficult because many ossuaries contained the remains of more than one person, sometimes of different generations. Nonetheless, some observations can be made. There is little doubt that ossilegium, and especially the use of an ossuary, marked (or displayed) the attainment of a certain social status. Just how much status was conveyed however, is an open question, and one somewhat unsettled by evidence suggesting that ossuaries were within the means of a larger portion of the population of ancient Palestine than traditionally thought.

The find spots of ossuaries in archaeological excavations suggest that they were used by individuals of different social statuses. They were found not only in the largest, most ornamented cave but in the simplest, smallest rock-cut chambers as well. Since the grandeur of a cave is indicative of the financial means of the family in the Second Temple period, the presence of ossuaries in even the most modest tombs indicates that ossuaries were used by a wider subset of the population than just the most elite. Their wide geographic distribution is also an indication that they were not associated with a single, elite group.

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82 Figueras 1983, 25.
83 Kloner and Zissu 2007, 113.
84 Meyers 1971, 37.
More evidence of the social class of ossuary patrons comes from two ossuaries with ‘price tags’ inscribed on them. The prices listed indicate that they were within the financial means of at least the middle—tradesmen and traders—and upper classes of ancient Palestine.85 One, a plain example, is priced at only one dinar and four obols, a sum that could have been easily earned in a day in many trades.86 A modestly decorated ossuary of soft limestone went for at least twice this price, but still not an exorbitant sum.87 Moreover, the incised ossuaries, which give all indications of being contemporaneous with the chip-carved examples, may have provided a cheaper alternative for some patrons, requiring less work or that of a less skilled hand.88

The wages commanded by the artisans also suggest that ossuaries may not have been the elite objects they are often imagined to be. A wage ledger listing the daily wages of 23 craftsmen was found on discarded ossuary lid excavated at Beth-page. The wages range widely, from a subsistence level barely high enough to sustain one person, to roughly twice the price of a plain ossuary.89

There is good reason for this disparity. The vast majority of ossuaries were carved out of readily available local material that was easily worked and, moreover, display a

86 Indeed, much more than this was earned by most of the craftsman listed on the ossuary mentioned below, whose wages ranged from one obol to four dinars. See Rahmani 1994, 7-8.
87 Rahmani 1994, 10.
88 Rahmani 1994, 8. In some cases, however, it is clear that the incised work stems instead from a horror vacui, especially where it complements chip-carving.
89 Rahmani 1994, 7.
very limited repertoire of motifs that required minimal levels of technical ability to execute. For the production of these sculptural programs, the craftsman would need only a few tools; a rule, a line and compass for measurements, a burin for incising and marking, and a few chisels and knives for chip-carving. What’s more, the decorative programs of these ossuaries in soft limestone were mostly simplified versions of the a restricted set of the motifs and elements that decorated harder limestone and marble carvings of the period.

Within this production scheme, there was exceedingly little room for artistic creativity and innovation. The limited repertoire and the restraint of technique based on geometric forms indicated as much, as does the fact that very little was done freehand. What little there was is of comparatively low quality. Moreover, it is clear from the lid of the ossuary from Beth-page that ossuary sculpting was a workshop process, with many hands taking part in the creation—twenty-three artisans are listed. We can assume that the relief-carved examples, and particularly the hard limestone ones, would have cost more, perhaps somewhere between two weeks or a month’s wages of a skilled tradesman.

Finally, various factors related to the production of stone ossuaries probably conspired to make them relatively affordable and attainable objects. According to some

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90 On the technical aspects of ossuary carving, see especially Rahmani 1994, 7-19.
91 Rahmani 1994, 7.
93 Rahmani 1994, 7.
estimates, stone was cheaper to procure than wood in ancient Palestine.\textsuperscript{94} This fact alone probably goes some way to explaining the popularity of undecorated sarcophagi as a relatively cheap and practical burial vessel. Moreover, the limited evidence we have of quarry practices suggests that most were purchased ready-made, and required little to no additional work for the patron.\textsuperscript{95} The findings of quarry excavations suggest that the soft limestone ossuaries were hewn at the quarry and given at least their raw form, as was the case with stone vessels produced in the period, and, as will see, sarcophagi.\textsuperscript{96}

For all these reasons, the cost of an ossuary may not have been as prohibitive as one might imagine. But economy was not necessarily the only factor that dictated the choice of elaborate, simple or plain decorative schemes. Different attitudes towards the use of decorated ossuaries existed within the same family, the members of which would assumedly have access to the same financial resources. In one family tomb in Jerusalem, three plain ossuaries were deposited side by side with an elaborate example.\textsuperscript{97} The ossuary of Queen Helena of Adiabene, discovered in her Jerusalem tomb, is quite simple in comparison to others in the same chamber.\textsuperscript{98} Analogously, that of Nicanor, a wealthy patron of the Temple, was plain.\textsuperscript{99} Rahmani suggested that the choice of simple ossuaries over elaborately decorated ones may have been governed by an ethical or religious

\textsuperscript{94} Figueras 1983, 27; Milik 1956-1957, 253.
\textsuperscript{95} Rahmani 1994, 11.
\textsuperscript{96} We know this from comparing tool marks on quarry remainders to finished ossuary. See Rahmani 1994, 3.
\textsuperscript{97} Rahmani 1994, 11.
\textsuperscript{98} Rahmani 1994, 11.
\textsuperscript{99} Rahmani 1994, 11.
impulse; purchasing an elaborate ossuary for burial may have been considered a form of ‘forbidden squandering,’ a taboo that would later be proscribed in rabbinic law.\footnote{Rahmani 1994, 11. T. Semahot, 8.2-6. Cf. m. Sem. 9.23.}

Little evidence for patronage practices can be gleaned from the inscriptions. Relatively few of the ossuaries were inscribed (around 25\%),\footnote{Fewer ossuaries were inscribed; only 227 in Rahmani’s catalog (1994, 11) of over 800 bore an inscription.} and those that were typically contain only very short inscriptions preserving a name. Most of the inscriptions are ‘graffiti carvings’ made by unskilled hands, possibly by relatives of the deceased. They were rarely incorporated into decorative programs, rather they were most often located on otherwise plain surfaces, especially a short side or the lid.\footnote{Figueras 1983, 18.}

Ranks, civic or religious titles, honorifics and professions are so rarely mentioned that no general picture of the social status of ossuary patrons can be reconstructed from them.\footnote{Rahmani 1994, 16.} The inscriptions are generally in Hebrew or Aramaic with occasional use of Greek, while the names are more evenly split between ones of Hebrew and Greek origins.\footnote{Rahmani 1994, 12-3.} Occasionally family names or nicknames are added to further specify the identity of the deceased, but these reveal little about the social status or location.\footnote{Rahmani 1994, 14.}

Half of inscriptions indicate a family relationship. Most of these, however, are patronymics that indicate family lineage (“son of” or “daughter of”) rather than
patronage. Fewer specify family relationships that exhibit or preserve patronage patterns—husbands and wives, father or mother. However, the custom of secondary burial, where some time must pass between burial and interment in an ossuary, would seem to require that ossuaries were by and large commissioned or purchased by surviving relatives. A handful of inscriptions name the son of the deceased and suggest just such a practice.\textsuperscript{106}

### 3.1.4 Meaning and identity on ossuaries

Various attempts have been made to interpret the visual programs and individual motifs of ossuaries, with little resolution and less common ground.\textsuperscript{107} Broadly speaking, two schools of thought exist: one that attributes symbolic meaning to all or parts of the decorative programs, and one that holds the visual programs were ‘mere decoration’.

The first attitude has resulted in various motifs being isolated and given multiple, conflicting symbolic interpretations, as we saw above regarding rosettes.\textsuperscript{108} Some have tried to stake out a middle ground and limit their interpretations to specific types of motifs. Figueras, for example, argued that while there is no point in searching for the symbolic meaning of elements like zigzags, it is important to search out meaning in decorative elements like gates or rosettes.\textsuperscript{109} Indeed, the rosette has been a special target

\textsuperscript{106} Rahmani 1994, 16.  
\textsuperscript{107} Perhaps Rahmani (Rahmani 1994) was most sensible in avoiding the issue of categories altogether.  
\textsuperscript{108} Figueras 1983; Goodenough 1953 - 1968.  
\textsuperscript{109} Figueras 1983, 79.
for this sort of approach. Other motifs receiving symbolic interpretations include the amphora (understood to indicate the priestly lineage of the deceased), gabled facades and columns (the Temple), and gates and doors (Torah Shrines).

For some, the interment of ossuaries in dark burial halls indicates that the motifs were intended for the deceased, not the living, and must have had eschatological significance. The regular use of rock cut tombs over generations, together with features and finds associated with communal gatherings, not to mention the ubiquity of lamps in the tombs, belies this reading, however, as does the placement of the visual programs on the exterior surfaces of the ossuaries, like later sarcophagus sculpture. Still, the contextual meaning of some motifs, such as the coronae civicae of the hard limestone lid encountered above, would suggest that many motifs may have had symbolic meanings. At the same time, as we have noted, symbols always have the potential to contain multiple, even contradictory meanings relating to their context and viewers which are necessarily difficult to recover.

Others have denied any symbolic interpretation whatsoever, adopting a doctrine of ‘mere decoration.’ In Rahmani’s view, the general absence of ‘consolatory’ inscriptions or ones expressing “hope for everlasting life, bodily resurrection, or rest in an eternal home” is decisive—the absence of symbolic content in the inscriptions indicating that

111 Figueras 1983.
the visual programs lacked symbolism too.\textsuperscript{112} His basic position, staked out already in his dissertation research and continued in his 1994 catalog, was that the rock-cut tombs of Jerusalem (and especially their architecture and surroundings) were, with few exceptions, the sole source of the decorative elements found on the stone ossuary, and the sole source of any limited meaning too.\textsuperscript{113} Hachlili generally agrees with Rahmani in denying a symbolic value,\textsuperscript{114} arguing that they are “part of a general ensemble of decorative patterns” derived from the overall art of the period.\textsuperscript{115}

In fact, the lack of consensus on the interpretation of the visual programs of ossuaries, and the disconnect between approaches, may result from misconceptions about the functions of ossuaries and their decorations. Indeed, it may be that patronage and meaning is difficult to tease out of the ossuaries because, unlike Roman sarcophagi, ossuaries and their visual programs do not seem to have functioned to preserve the individual identity of the deceased. While many aspects of the form, function and even decoration of ossuaries prefigure later Roman sarcophagi, as we will see, it seems unlikely that the individual motifs and visual programs of the ossuaries conveyed specific memories or any sense of the individual identity—either personal history or character traits—of the deceased.

\textsuperscript{112} Figueras 1983, 27-8.
\textsuperscript{113} Rahmani 1977; 1994. Despite opposing the symbolic interpretation as a strategy, Rahmani (1994, 20) argued that menorahs were a symbol used by priestly families on the basis of inscriptions.
\textsuperscript{114} Hachlili (1988, 113) states definitively that “no symbols are depicted on the ossuaries...”
\textsuperscript{115} Hachlili 1988, 113.
The various geometric and architectural motifs common to ossuary sculpture are a thin framework on which to erect any sense of the identity. It is hard to imagine a rosette, for instance, could have conveyed any meaningful insight about the memory and identity of the deceased when it was so ubiquitous. Rather, with the exception perhaps of a few hard limestone examples, the limited repertoire of geometric and abstract motifs seems insufficient to sustain anything more than the most abstract of group identities, and not individual ones. By combining decorative elements within the known repertoire, the patron’s social conformity and taste was demonstrated and, by extension, a loose sense of group identity may have been communicated. In other words, by deploying an ossuary with a pair of rosettes, one might proclaim one’s adherence or group membership, but one certainly didn’t set oneself apart from the group. It emerges then that ossuaries and their visual programs were not viewed as a tool to negotiate and preserve the memory and identity and individuals. Rather, they were viewed more narrowly as a medium for the display of membership and status. Ultimately, this highlights one of the primary differences in the social uses of sarcophagi and ossuaries.

This understanding is confirmed by several details of the funerary and patronage practices that ossuaries were embedded in. Many ossuaries, we noted, contained the bones of more than one individual. This fact alone would render any attempt to preserve the memory or identity of the individual difficult, though in a given generation it is
possible that a family could have kept track of such details while not inscribing it.\textsuperscript{116}

Indeed, fewer than 25\% of ossuaries bear even a simple inscription, recording the name of the deceased.\textsuperscript{117} Those that do may indicate a preference for individuality in death, however the fact that in most cases names are not recorded suggests that traditional Israelite beliefs about joining one’s ancestors in death were still maintained.\textsuperscript{118} Fewer still record any personal details about the deceased (profession, associations, family). Those inscriptions that do exist (including names) are incised so crudely and so poorly incorporated in the visual programs that Rahmani has suggested they be understood as “spontaneous acts of grief” and not as deliberate or planned indications of identity.\textsuperscript{119}

Lastly, as Meyers has observed, there is little evidence that the use of ossuaries is related to new beliefs about the afterlife in the period, especially bodily resurrection.\textsuperscript{120} It is true that new ideas of this kind emerged in various Jewish sects during the Second Temple period, and further that ossuaries indicate a distinctly different burial practice from the \textit{kokh} burials and charnel rooms of earlier periods.\textsuperscript{121} Yet the treatment of the deceased in ossuary burials belies the notion that it was the individuality of the person or corpse was being preserved: multiple individuals were interred in the same ossuary,

\textsuperscript{116} Personal communication with Eric Meyers.
\textsuperscript{117} See above, and Rahmani 1994, 11.
\textsuperscript{118} Personal communication with Eric Meyers.
\textsuperscript{119} Rahmani 1994, 21.
\textsuperscript{120} Meyers 1971, 85.
\textsuperscript{121} Meyers 1971, 85.
occasionally only parts of the skeleton were reburied, and sometimes the remains were pulverized.\textsuperscript{122}

\subsection*{3.2 Monumental tomb facades of the Second Temple period}

While the ossuaries may have provided the closest analog for the sculptors and patrons of limestone sarcophagi at Beth She’arim, an equally long tradition of architectural relief carving existed as well. Elaborate facades with relief carving are a regular feature of many monumental buildings—both public and funerary—in Palestine beginning in the Hellenistic period, but especially in the late Second Temple period (1\textsuperscript{st} century B.C.E. to 1\textsuperscript{st} century C.E.). The origins of this relief carving tradition can be traced to the first centuries of the common era, and especially to the facades of monumental rock-cut tombs in Jerusalem. Indeed, together with ossuaries, the tomb facades of Jerusalem in the late Second Temple period “exemplify the essentials of Jewish sepulchral art which developed at this time.”\textsuperscript{123}

The close connection between the sculptural programs of ossuaries and tomb architecture and ornamentation was recognized by Rahmani,\textsuperscript{124} and has been largely upheld since.\textsuperscript{125} As we noted already above, according to Rahmani the limestone

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{122} Meyers 1971, 85.
\textsuperscript{123} Avigad 1950, 96.
\textsuperscript{124} Rahmani 1994. Rahmani (1994, 28) further speculated that the sculptors producing ossuaries drew directly from contemporary tomb facades for theological reasons: “everything related to death [was] considered a major source of impurity,” a fact that “led contemporary artisans to turn to tombs rather than to houses.”
\textsuperscript{125} For example, see Kloner and Whetstone 2016, 235.
\end{footnotesize}
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ossuaries and the facades were “obviously made by [the same] stonemasons, employing the same techniques and ornamentation.” Indeed, it seems almost certain that many of the ossuaries were produced by the same craftsman who worked on the ornamental facades and other architectural features of these buildings. Thus, the relationship between ossuaries and rock cut tombs is best understood as a web of reciprocal relationships of shared artisans, workshops, techniques and decorative motifs.

The construction of rock-cut tombs was a longstanding practice in the limestone hills in and around Jerusalem, beginning already in the Israelite period. Throughout their history, rock cut tombs consisted of one or more burial chambers carved into the limestone hills, and belonged to wealthier families from the region. It is only in the Hellenistic period however, and especially in the last centuries of the Second Temple Period that the entrances to these tombs are monumentalized.

The elaboration of tomb structures was not an isolated phenomenon, and the monumental tombs of the late Second Temple period in Jerusalem (1st century B.C.E to 1st century C.E.) are similar to any number of such tombs throughout the Hellenistic Mediterranean. In fact, while monumental tombs have a long history in the Ancient Near East and Egypt, in Palestine they are rare prior to the Hellenistic period. Rather, the phenomenon of monumentalization was connected to changes in the funerary

126 Rahmani 1994, 7.
127 Avigad 1976b, 627-8.
129 Fedak 1990, 140.
landscape across the eastern Mediterranean that began very early on in the Hellenistic period. These changes, which included the monumentalization and increased ornamentation of royal tombs and heroa, seems to have originated in Asia Minor in the 5th century B.C.E., and spread from there in both directions, west to the Greek isles, and east to the Near East.

The funerary monuments of the Mediterranean in this period are characterized especially by a combining of architectural styles and visual vocabularies—especially the mixing of traditional Greek forms with Eastern ornamental and architectural forms. According to Fedak, funerary monuments at this time begin to “display greater variety and freedom of design than longer-established types of building.” The decorative programs of these Hellenistic tombs were a “carefully planned piece of propaganda” carried out through the use of relief carving and painted friezes. For wealthy patrons, the function of such tombs was parallel in many ways to ossuaries and later sarcophagi. Patrons built them in order “to reflect their own wealth, importance and authority.” The content was typically floral or abstract, although according to Fedak such motifs had symbolic associations with funerary rites. “Symbolic ornament also helped to

130 Fedak 1990; 2006.
131 Fedak 2006, 71.
132 Fedak 2006, 71.
133 Fedak 2006, 71.
134 Fedak 2006, 72.
135 Fedak 2006, 72.
indicate the nature of the monument; it was a visual message to the visitor, and therefore carefully selected.”136

There are nearly a dozen tombs with monumental facades in the environs of Jerusalem. Monumentalization there was accomplished through the carving and construction of elaborate entryways—sometimes with columned porches—as well as secondary buildings and monuments including freestanding nefeshes (an obelisk-shaped structure or crowning element especially common in Jewish and Nabataean funerary culture).137 The architectural elements and styles of these tombs are broadly and thoroughly Hellenistic—including *inter alia*, *distyle in antis* porches, Doric friezes and the use of pediments with acroteria or lintels with entablatures. Such facades served as an entrance to the rock-cut tomb chamber itself, or occasionally as a small vestibule to the tomb entrance. With very few exceptions, they were hewn out of the natural rock face,138 and carved to give the illusion of built (rather than hewn) architectural features.139 Facing the facades were often large courtyards, cut out of the same rock slope. The courtyards were likely used for ceremonial purposes and gatherings, and ritual baths were also discovered near several of the tombs.140

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138 ‘The ‘vertical plane’ of the tomb facade (Kloner and Zissu 2007, 45). Kloner and Zissu 2007, 49) note two exceptions to this rule, the ‘Nazirite Family’ burial cave (1-11) and ‘Herods Family Tomb’ (4-1).
139 On this interpretation there is general agreement. See Avigad 1950; 1976b; Kloner and Zissu 2007.
140 Kloner and Zissu 2007, 44-5.
No chronology has been proposed for the typological evolution of the monumental Jerusalem tomb facades.\textsuperscript{141} Rather, most seem to have been constructed in last hundred years or so of the common era, during which time a number of styles of architecture and relief carving coexisted. For this reason, a coherent typology of these styles is difficult to construct. Most of the monumental tombs of Jerusalem are highly individual monuments that seem to mix and match elements and styles as fitted the tastes of the patron and the context.\textsuperscript{142} This propensity to combine architectural and ornamental styles—including the use of Hellenistic and traditional monumental architectural forms such as the columnar porch and the nefesh—created what Hachlili called the ‘composite style’.\textsuperscript{143}

While such forms afforded ample space for sculptural programs in entablatures, gables, and moldings, the majority are plain and free of ornamentation. For example, a pair of tombs in the Hinnom valley have Attic framing elements with simple molding and barren panels (Fig. 3.10).\textsuperscript{144} In such cases, decoration could have been achieved by less expensive means, such as wall painting in the interiors, which often included motifs of inhabited vines with birds, tromp l’oeil masonry à la Pompeii, and wreaths.\textsuperscript{145} Still,

\textsuperscript{141} Kloner and Zissu 2007, 51.
\textsuperscript{142} But, see Avigad 1950. Avigad developed a rather detailed typology which was followed by Kloner and Zissu (2007, 45-50).
\textsuperscript{143} Hachlili 2005, 127. See also Kloner and Zissu 2007, 46.
\textsuperscript{144} Kloner and Zissu 2007, Nos. 7-15 and 10-70.
\textsuperscript{145} A painted fresco frieze ran around three walls of the Goliath tomb at Jericho, above the loculi. Though not as naturalistic as later inhabited scrolls, the motif clearly influenced by Hellenistic art; a scrolling vine with leaves and grape clusters fills the majority of the fresco, with birds interspersed throughout the composition. A wreath was painted at the very center of the program, at the rear of the tomb. See Hachlili 2005, 133-8.
while the ossuaries could be accurately characterized as having a very limited repertoire
of sculpted motifs, the tomb facades have an even more restricted vocabulary.

The architectural style of the facade—especially whether the pedimental style or
lintel with entablature was used—had a significant impact on the type of decoration
selected. Tombs with the *distyle in antis* layout typically had lintels and Doric friezes.
These facades were the most common. The Doric friezes of these tombs tended to be
occupied by alternating metopes of either rosettes (e.g. Mugharet Umm el ‘Amed, Fig.
3.11) or wreaths, motifs in common with ossuary decoration as we have seen. The most
elaborate such frieze is preserved in the Tomb of Queen Helene of Adiabene, which has
a facade nearly 30 meters wide. Only a fraction of this is well preserved, however
enough remained to reconstruct the decorative program (Fig. 3.12). The Doric-style
frieze consisted of metopes and stylized disks with a central portion carved with a pair
of anthemia of acanthus leaves, and two wreaths, centered on a cluster of grapes. Below,
in the architrave, an elaborately carved molding filled with oak leaves.

A cornice, if included on the monumental facade, could be filled with anthemia or
palmettes. Such is the case in the Tomb of the Frieze (Fig. 3.13), which also shares the use
of rosettes and wreaths in the metopes with the Tomb of Queen Helene. The molding of
the entablatures could vary, from simple ogee styles to more elaborate egg and dart.
Ornamental relief sculpture was not necessary however. For example, on the Tomb of
Zechariah, which may be considered a modified version of the lintel tomb, the lintel is
blank and crowned with a cornice. Likewise, the tombs of Jason and Nicanor in
Jerusalem were relatively plain with empty lintels. The tomb of Bene Hezir featured a 
*distyle in antis* vestibule, crowned with a frieze of triglyphs and empty metopes (Fig. 3.14).

Pedimental facades were less common among the monumental tombs of Jerusalem. Examples of pedimental facades include the Tomb of Jehoshaphat in the Kidron Valley, the Tomb of the Sanhedrin, and the Tomb of the Grapes.\(^{146}\) The gabled form of the pediment on these tombs created more space for relief sculpture and more freedom of design. The Tomb of the Sanhedrin, which actually had two pedimental facades, one at the entrance of the forecourt and the other over the tomb itself, fills the pediments of both with vegetal motifs consisting of scrolling vines, acanthus leaves, and pomegranates and grape clusters (Fig. 3.15).

Also among the tombs is the first appearance of an architectural feature that would become a characteristic trait of buildings including synagogues—especially basilical—of the region in later periods: the triple-door facade.\(^{147}\) Just such a facade appears in a tomb in the Hinnom valley, where two smaller entrances flank a grand entrance at the center that is topped with a conch.\(^{148}\) This type of facade, we will see, is employed in the architecture of the monumental tombs at Beth She’arim and elements of it are incorporated into the sculptural programs of sarcophagi there also.

\(^{146}\) See Avigad 1950.

\(^{147}\) Avigad 1950, 105.

\(^{148}\) Interestingly, the scallops of the conch radiate downwards. Avigad (1950, 105) suggests this aspect connects the example to Roman sculptural traditions in the Augustan period.
The monumentalization and decoration of the facades, we should be clear, was not common practice—as Kloner and Zissu write, they were “an insignificant minority among the hundreds of common, undecorated specimens.”\(^{149}\) By and large, most family tombs continued to have simple facades and were entered through plain openings in the stone face.\(^{150}\) The gap between the simple, low openings of most rock-cut tombs and elaborate monumental facades of like that of the Tomb of Queen Helen of Adiabene (see below)—as well as the diversity of options in between—is a reflection of the fact that rock cut tombs were used by families of very different social standings, from the most elite families of Jerusalem and abroad, to those of more moderate wealth such as prominent traders and tradesmen.\(^{151}\) The majority of the dead, however, including probably all those of lower social standing, were buried in simple pit burials.\(^{152}\)

Various interpretations of the sculptural programs of the monumental tombs of the late Second Temple period have been offered. Avigad, who like Rahmani was generally skeptical of symbolic interpretations, offered a functionalist one, arguing that the facades were designed and sculpted to create the illusion of contemporary buildings, intended to memorialize the deceased in monumental ways.\(^{153}\) On this basis, he further argued that the sculptural programs were “not to be regarded as an independent and

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\(^{149}\) Kloner and Zissu 2007, 39.
\(^{150}\) Avigad 1976b, 628; Kloner and Zissu 2007.
\(^{151}\) Sed-Rajna 1997, 50.
\(^{152}\) The burial of Jesus in the tomb of a wealthy Judean, Joseph of Arimathea, is an exception that illustrates (and proves) the rule. See further McCane 2003.
\(^{153}\) Avigad 1950. See also Kloner and Zissu 2007, 46.
creative art, but merely as a secondary, imitative one” because they more or less closely mimic imported architectural forms.\textsuperscript{154} Moreover, because the facades are generally carved and not built into the rock faces of the hillsides where the tombs were located, these architectural elements are “reduced to features of ornamental value”; the facades were sculpted with the intention of giving the impression of a building. In this sense, the relief carving and architectural forms of the monumental tombs of Second Temple Jerusalem are prime examples of elite display, serving no structural purpose.\textsuperscript{155}

The stone carving of ossuaries and monumental facades, two traditions of stone sculpture in Palestine dating to the Second Temple period, mark the foundation of an enduring engagement on the part of Jewish communities, patrons and craftsmen with stone working and sculpture. Already in this period a new visual vocabulary of architectural forms, sculptural styles and motifs emerged out of the development of the funerary arts and the experimental mixing of old and new traditions. Carved motifs including the rosette, wreath, scrolling vines and grape clusters, as well as representations of architectural facades and features first appear in Palestine and gain popularity in this period. These elements would remain popular, and find new expressions in the architectural relief carving of the Galilee and on the sarcophagi produced locally at Beth She’arim. At the same time, the repertoire of motifs was limited and figural relief sculpture was even more so; on tombs and ossuaries alike the

\textsuperscript{154} Avigad 1950, 106.
\textsuperscript{155} With the exception, perhaps, of the short porches with distyle in antis columns.
decorative elements are floral or geometric in nature. A few birds appear in frescoes—in the Goliath family tomb in Jericho or in the wealthy homes of the Herodian quarter in Jerusalem—but these are isolated examples and outside of the tradition of stone carving that emerged in Second Temple period Palestine.\textsuperscript{156}

3.3 Architectural relief carving in the monumental buildings of the Galilee

While earlier traditions of stone carving in Palestine were concentrated in and around Jerusalem, after the turmoil of the 1\textsuperscript{st} and early 2\textsuperscript{nd} centuries the Galilee became the cultural center of the Jewish population in the region. It is no surprise that it is there that the local sculptural tradition continued to develop in the following centuries. In this period, from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century C.E. on, processes of urbanization in Palestine and particularly in the Galilee brought new, monumental buildings. With them came new outlets for ornamentation also. These buildings commonly featured ornamental facades with elaborate relief carving. On the lintels, architraves and other stone surfaces of these monumental buildings, the motifs developed in Second Temple period stone carving are reproduced, often in quite similar combinations and schema. At the same time, an expanded repertoire of motifs emerged, a response no doubt to increasing cultural exchange and the integration of the region into the larger Roman world.

\textsuperscript{156} Where they appear, they seem to take their cue from Pompeian frescos. See Hachlili 1988, 81-3.
Stone carving in the Galilee throughout Late Antiquity almost exclusively took the form of relief sculpture in local materials. Relief sculpture was employed not only on sarcophagi of local limestone, but on the facades and interiors of monumental buildings—especially synagogues.157 Across the region, beginning at least by the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E. most major cities and villages (and many lesser ones) had one or more public buildings with some form of architectural decoration. Many of these monumental buildings were contemporary with the catacombs of Beth She‘arim, and were located in towns and villages nearby that participated in the same, tight-knit trade network of the Galilee region (see Map 2).158 Relief-carving of the exterior was often carried inside the synagogue as well, occasionally in frieze panels (at Chorazin and Capernaum), as well as on chancel screens, Torah Shrines, and other fixtures and features. Since the turn of the 20th century and the publication of Kohl and Watzinger’s survey of the ancient synagogues of the Galilee,159 archaeological discovery in the synagogues of Roman and Byzantine Galilee prompted an continuous process of reassessment of Jewish engagement with visual culture in the period in question.160

157 Sculpture in the round is exceedingly rare in Jewish contexts in Palestine throughout Late Antiquity, especially in Jewish contexts such as the synagogue. Nonetheless, it was not unknown in the cultural environment of late ancient Palestine. See Eliav 2002; Weiss 2013.

158 Lapp 2016, Ch. 5 and passim.

159 Kohl and Watzinger 1916.

160 See especially: Avi-Yonah 1942; 1948; 1950; 1981a; Baumgarten 1975; Chancey 2005; Eliav 2002; Fine 2005; Gutmann 1961; Hachlili 1988; 2014; Hengel 1974; Levine 2013; 2016; Meyers 1992; Ovadiah 1995; Pearce 2013; Schwartz 2001; Tcherikover 1959; Urbach 1958; Urbach 1959; Weiss 2013. In fact, Sed-Rajna (1997, 9) uses these archaeological discoveries as the launching point of her defense of ‘Jewish art’ as a meaningful category. She writes: “One hundred years of archaeological excavations, marked by unexpected and at times astonishing discoveries—such as the mosaics in the Galilean synagogues or the wall paintings of the Dura-
Like the monumental tombs of the Second Temple period, the emergence of monumental public buildings with relief sculpture in the Galilee is not an isolated phenomenon. Rather, it was connected to the growing influence of Roman culture throughout the Galilee beginning in the middle Roman period (2nd century C.E. to mid-3rd century C.E.) and continuing through Late Antiquity. While the region may have lagged behind the rest of Palestine in the early Roman period in terms of Roman material culture and architecture, the gap was rapidly closed. This cultural influence is visible at all levels in the archaeological record, from the import of fine wares and lamps from across the Roman world to the adoption of Roman architectural styles in the monumental buildings of the Galilee.

The number of these synagogues is astounding, with most concentrated in the northern half of Palestine and especially in the lower Galilee (Map 6). A non-exhaustive list of only monumental synagogues with architectural relief carving in the Galilee region would include Capernaum, Chorazin, Bar’am, Nabratein, Gush Halav, Dike and Ramah. Further north, in the Golan, the list would include synagogues at Kazrin, H. Kanef and Assalieh. Kohl and Watzinger observed already that despite differences in

Europos synagogue—and fifty years of active research by eminent specialists have brought to light such a wealth of works that a condescending attitude which considers all these monuments as simple reflections of the great artistic trends or as the occasional products of popular crafts is inappropriate.”
levels of execution and materials there is a “striking conformity” in the architectural decoration of the synagogues of the Galilee across Late Antiquity.\textsuperscript{161}

Because of their great number as well as their general conformity, I will use one synagogue only as a paradigmatic illustration of the trends and developments of architectural stone carving in the region: the synagogue at Chorazin, less than 5 km from the Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee.\textsuperscript{162} In some ways the Chorazin synagogue is an extraordinary, and unusual example to use. It features more relief carving than any other synagogue of late ancient Palestine, and on more surfaces too. It is also unusual in featuring figurative reliefs, including some with clear Greco-Roman mythological content. At the same time, Chorazin is an excellent example precisely because of this visual abundance. Hardly a single motif exists in the sculptural tradition of late ancient Palestine that does not appear in the reliefs at Chorazin.

3.3.1 Architectural relief carving in the synagogue at Chorazin

While the nearby synagogue at Capernaum may be the more impressive of the two in terms of dimensions and architectural grandeur,\textsuperscript{163} the basilical synagogue at Chorazin makes up for its smaller size in the stunning diversity and sheer density of relief carving in its more compact structure. Like its larger neighbor at Capernaum, the

\textsuperscript{161} Kohl and Watzinger 1916, 147: “Eine auffallende Einheitlichkeit der Gesamtform und der einzelnen Bauglieder schließt die von uns untersuchten Synagogen Galiläas eng zusammen.”

\textsuperscript{162} Kohl and Watzinger 1916, 41-58; May and Stark 2002. There may have been two synagogues at Chorazin in fact, a larger ‘main’ synagogue from which most of the decorative reliefs come, and a second smaller one. See May and Stark 2002, 207.

\textsuperscript{163} Sed-Rajna 1997, 98.
synagogue at Chorazin was also one of the few to feature elaborate interior relief carving. The use of this building was dated by the excavators to the early 4th century C.E., and was used for a period of over two hundred years into the late 6th century. On stylistic grounds, May has dated the relief sculpture to the 4th and 5th centuries C.E. In light of this, the synagogue at Chorazin was roughly contemporaneous with the catacombs of Beth She’arim which lay approximately 50 km to the southwest, though some of the decorated sarcophagi probably predate it. Rather than identifying direct influences—or the direction of influence—examination of this relief sculpture is useful in establishing the sculptural vocabulary of the region more broadly, along with the range of motifs and styles available to artisans working in local materials.

In this sense, while Chorazin was certainly remarkable for its profusion of sculpted surfaces, it is nonetheless representative of broader trends in stone sculpture in the Galilee from the 3rd to 6th centuries C.E. Indeed, very few elements or motifs that occur across the monumental building of the Galilee in this period are not represented there. Not only are the major themes and motifs, but nearly every single element that is refracted in the sculptural programs of the locally produced sarcophagi at Beth She’arim appears, and often in stunningly similar styles and combinations. Thanks especially to the work of May, the relief sculpture of the building has been made significantly easier

166 May 2000; May and Stark 2002.
to study. This relief carving, executed in local basalt, includes not only familiar and new geometric, floral and faunal motifs, but also several Jewish ritual symbols along with mythological figures found elsewhere in the region only on mosaic floors, including a centaur scene and several pagan deities.

The relief carving at Chorazin was evidently the work of several workshops,\textsuperscript{167} and is thus marked by a variety of levels of skill and execution. Some of it is in a ‘relatively high relief, marked by naturalism and plasticity,’ with a large and varied repertoire of both animal and floral motifs that are arranged in strictly symmetrical compositions.\textsuperscript{168} On the other hand, some of the relief sculpture was characterized by an apparent ‘inability to arrange space’ leading often to the ‘free development’ of the visual programs. It has even been speculated that some of this work was undertaken by someone untrained in stonework, possibly a painter.\textsuperscript{169}

Across the whole facade and the work of all the workshops, one encounters a profusion of images and motifs that indicate the same horror vacui observed in ossuary decoration, and long associated with ‘oriental’ art.\textsuperscript{170} May and Stark write that: “the [Chorazin] reliefs are the richest of all stone ornamentation at any of the southern Levantine sites of the Late Roman and Byzantine period in general, and in synagogues

\textsuperscript{167} May and Stark 2002.
\textsuperscript{168} Notably, the work of May and Stark’s (2002, 209) ‘Workshop I.’
\textsuperscript{169} May and Stark 2002, 229.
\textsuperscript{170} Avi-Yonah 1961; May and Stark 2002, 208.
In particular.” In this case, the *horror vacui* also motivated the use of the ‘carpet’ style of relief sculpture, unusual in the region. This technique has its origins in the late Second Temple period in Palestine, but reached its full expression only in the 3rd and 4th centuries, when it became one of the characteristic forms of visual expression of the region (especially on mosaic floors) until well the early Islamic period. The ‘carpet’ style consisted of repeating, regular friezes and frames full and even overfull of floral and geometric motifs interspersed with geometric, faunal and figural motifs. The scrolling vine—sometimes appearing as inhabited scrolls—was a particular common theme of the ‘carpet’ style in both sculpted relief friezes and mosaic floors. The architectural sculpture at the synagogue at Chorazin is an excellent example of this development—hardly a stone surface is undecorated and the relief programs make liberal use of both floral and geometric repeating patterns.

While the following discussion treats the relief sculpture thematically, it should be noted that the sculptors responsible for the motifs paid little attention to themes or categories. Instead, they drew more or less indiscriminately and voraciously from the various motifs they were familiar with and combined them into complex, crowded and at times overwhelming programs. So, for example, a single cornice fragment could

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171 May and Stark 2002, 208.
174 There is some limited evidence that one workshop in particular may have been responsible for the mythological motifs. See May and Stark 2002, 228-9.
include a band of repeating anthemia of palmettes and acanthus leaves, a band of rosettes and palmettes, a bead and reel pattern, dentils, and egg and tongue molding (Fig. 3.16). The Torah Shrine, according to the reconstruction proposed by May and Stark, contained no fewer than a dozen discrete decorative motifs that spanned geometric, faunal, and figural themes (Fig. 3.17).\(^{175}\) Thus, the organized way we proceed through the relief sculpture below is an illusion, a way to impose order on the chaotic compositions simply for the purposes of discussion.

Repeating geometric motifs were found on the moldings of architraves, cornices, voussoirs and capitals of the exterior facade, and on the pilasters of the Torah Shrine. The variety of motifs employed is exceptional. Familiar motifs such as bead and reel, roping, egg and dart or egg and tongue, and dentils are combined with less familiar ones. For example, running bands of interwoven rhombuses and woven ‘carpet’ patterns are used to decorate the body and capital of a pilaster (Fig. 3.18). Floral motifs including acanthus and laurel leaves, rosettes and palmettes, scrolling vines and grape clusters, were used in similar ways in running bands, particularly in friezes. A particularly popular motif was a running band of acanthus scroll medallions, with inset rosettes of various, naturalistic designs inset (Fig. 3.19). Similar running acanthus medallions are found in the friezes at Capernaum.\(^{176}\) Single and repeating palmettes, and anthemia of

\(^{175}\) May and Stark 2002, 226-8.
\(^{176}\) See Hachlili 2014, 239-40.
acanthus and palmettes leaves were also frequently used in moldings, as were ‘bud’ wreaths, typically composed of three petalled segments.

Many of the figural motifs that appear in the relief sculpture of the Chorazin synagogue are non-narrative and faunal in nature. They are executed in a simple style in static compositions, often frontal, and typically easily recognizable. These are often executed in higher relief than the surrounding elements in order to create contrast, and to highlight the motifs.\textsuperscript{177} Many, perhaps most, were defaced at some point in antiquity. It is unclear when, why or by whom, though the synagogue was destroyed sometime in the late 7\textsuperscript{th} or early 8\textsuperscript{th} centuries.\textsuperscript{178}

Birds are especially popular, and appear in a variety of contexts. A single bird pecking at a pile of grapes appears on several frieze fragments (e.g. Fig. 3.20). Eagles appear twice, once on the apex of a cornice frieze (Fig. 3.21), as well as in a narrative mythological scene depicting the rape of Ganymede (see below). It is depicted in both instances in the familiar, frontal heraldic pose with spread wings, with articulated chest feathers and sharp talons. Simple depictions of birds appear already in the Second Temple period, though not in stone sculpture, and are found in relief sculpture in the synagogue at Kanef. The eagle appears nearly four dozen times in relief sculpture in the

\textsuperscript{177} May and Stark 2002, 210. 
\textsuperscript{178} Milson 2007, 337.
synagogues of late antique Galilee and the Golan.\textsuperscript{179} Given its widespread appearance, it is not surprising that it has also received many, often conflicting interpretations.\textsuperscript{180}

Lions also feature prominently at Chorazin. A pair of lions emerging from acanthus leaves is shown on two frieze fragments (Fig. 3.22), a composition we will encounter again on a sarcophagus from Beth She‘arim, discussed in Chapter 5.\textsuperscript{181} Another pair of lions were depicted on the gable of an interior feature, reconstructed by May and Stark as the ‘Seat of Moses’.\textsuperscript{182} A lioness and her cub appear in an acanthus medallion from the interior relief, and a lion appears in the hunt scene from the same relief as well. Like the eagle, lions were extremely popular figures in the relief sculpture of the Galilee. They figure prominently in the decorative programs of a number of synagogues and in multiple contexts. Most often they appear in antithetic compositions; for example, a pair of rampant lions dominate the Torah Shrine from Nabratein while a pair of lions in stride are arranged around a vase on the lintel of the synagogue at H. ‘Amudim.

Narrative scenes and reliefs with human figures are rarer at Chorazin, but more common than elsewhere. Several such scenes, likely the work of a single sculptor,\textsuperscript{183}

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\textsuperscript{179} Eagles appear in relief sculpture six times at the nearby synagogue at Capernaum, for instance. For a recent catalog of the appearance of the eagle as a motif in synagogue sculpture, see Werlin 2006, 10-75.

\textsuperscript{180} In Roman mythology, the eagle was associated with the god Jupiter, and sometimes used in Roman art as a stand in. Goodenough (1958b, 129-30ff.) considered it an appropriation of the powers and symbolism of solar worship and immortality. More recently, Werlin (2006, 146-55) has suggested that the eagle is associated with winged messengers of God and finds parallels in Byzantine Christian art of the period, including the popularity of winged victories.

\textsuperscript{181} May and Stark 2002, 210.

\textsuperscript{182} May and Stark 2002, 242.

\textsuperscript{183} May and Stark’s (2002, 229-35) ‘Master E.’
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were found on fragments of a frieze belonging to the interior of the synagogue. This
drieze was comprised of inhabited medallions formed of scrolling vines and interspersed
with occasional solitary motifs. It depicts several narrative scenes, including humans
engaged in wine-making (Fig. 3.23), a number of hunt scenes (Fig. 3.24), and a single
medallion showing the rape of Ganymede (Fig. 3.25). The figures of these scenes are
shown in active poses but schematically portrayed. The humans are frontally depicted,
while the animals are in profile. The hunt scenes in particular commonly emerge from
and break out of the acanthus medallion that frames them, a feature in common with the
lions mentioned above. Other medallions enclose birds and grapes, various masks, a
centaur, and a wreathed figure as well as nonfigurative elements, especially conches and
rosettes (Fig. 3.26).

The wreathed figure in particular may be a representation of a winged ‘victory,’
though it is impossible to conclusively identify the figure because of damage. This motif,
though not as common as the eagle, is an important anthropomorphic motif in the
period. It appears especially on the lintels of three synagogues in the region, at Bar’am,
Dikke, and Ramah.184 It is certainly not exclusive to Jewish art. They are popular
especially in relief sculpture of the Roman provinces of Asia Minor and the Near East.
Winged figures appear often in the funerary art of the province, for example on both
long sides of a late 4th century C.E. sarcophagus from Constantinople showing two

184 Avigad 1993; Jacoby 1987b.
winged figures in high relief, holding aloft a wreath with a Chi-Rho cross (see below, Chapter 4).  

One motif in particular resists categorization. Conches appear nearly a dozen times, both as major components of architectural features—particular aediculae where they top the niche—and as illustrations and medallion insets in various friezes. They vary in size according to context, and are typically framed by a series of elaborate bands of molding. The conch motif is prominently featured in the Torah Shrine at Chorazin (Fig. 3.27). Like the other conches, this one had a series of moldings framing it: bead and reel, repeating groups of three leaf palmettes, bud wreath, a schematic scrolling vine with leaves and grape clusters, and a band of acanthus leaves. Another conch was found relatively complete (Fig. 3.28). This similarly naturalistic conch was also framed by a series of moldings: bead and reel, dentils, bud wreath, running ornament of three petalled leaves and trapezoid flutes, and roping.  

The conch was already in use in Jewish funerary art in the Second Temple period; it appears on at least one tomb facade in Jerusalem and on several ossuaries (see above). In synagogues of Late Antiquity, mosaic depictions of arks at Beth Alpha, Beth She’an, Na’aran and Beth She’arim all show an ark surmounted by a gabled roof. In the

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186 A fact which should not trouble us much, given the scant attention that the sculptors themselves appear to have paid to categorization.
187 May and Stark 2002, 213.
188 Hachlili 1988, 281, fig. 27.
entablature, a conch is inset. Conches also appear in stone carvings of ornamental architecture of these buildings as well at Nabratein and Capernaum especially, and one is painted into the niche at the Dura Europos synagogue. Hachlili argues that the frequency of the mosaic depictions showing an ark with a conch design in the entablature suggests that the conch itself, at least by Late Antiquity, had come to be a recognizable symbol of the Torah Shrine itself, and as such it “developed the characteristics of religious symbol” signifying the sacredness and holiness of the Torah and the Ark.189 At the same time, the conch appears regularly in the architecture of the areas bordering ancient Palestine, including Northern and Southern Syria, Nabataea, and Phoenicia.190 In light of its widespread popularity, an exclusive association between the Torah Shrine and the conch is impossible to maintain.

3.3.2 ‘Jewish’ symbols in the stone sculpture of the Galilee

While the association of the conch motif with Jewish religious history and practice must remain questionable, other motifs that appear at Chorazin, and in architectural relief carving of the period are less ambiguous. First and foremost among these is the menorah, which emerged as the visual symbol par excellence of Judaism and Jewishness in Late Antiquity.191 At Chorazin, a pair of menorahs appear on several fragments of a lintel with a knotted ‘bud’ wreath between them (Fig. 3.29). A second menorah may

190 Hachlili 1988, 281.
191 On the development of the menorah as a symbol, see especially the recent monograph by Fine (2016a).
have been crudely incised on a fragment from the Seat of Moses, as reconstructed by May and Stark (Fig. 3.30).192

The popularity of the menorah as a visual motif is demonstrated not only by the frequency with which it appears in the visual record, but in its geographic spread and the diverse contexts it appears in too. Depictions of menorahs are found on objects used in daily life such as bread stamps and lamps, in synagogues in architectural reliefs on lintels, chancel screens, and capitals and on mosaic floors and on ritual objects like incense shovels. In Jewish funerary contexts, especially at Beth She’arim and Rome, menorahs are painted, carved and incised on walls, loculus seals, gold glasses and sarcophagi.

This enduring popularity is probably the result of several factors. First, the menorah was a prominent feature Jewish of worship, past and present. Ritual menorahs were used in both Temples, and in ancient synagogues. Furthermore, the menorah was simple in shape and easy to depict, not to mention that the menorah was easily the most distinctive and recognizably “Jewish” object in the ancient world. Other objects used in Jewish religious practice such as offering tables and incense shovels were more or less indistinguishable from pagan cult objects.

192 May (2002) identifies the figure as a representation of a lulav, or palm branch. However, the tripod feet of the figure on the left suggests that the sculpture intended otherwise. There is little question that the figure on the right is represents a lulav and etrog, and it may be that this figure influenced the one on the left.
Other ‘Jewish’ symbols emerge in this period as well, including especially the lulav, etrog, shofar and incense shovel. These often appear as secondary motifs grouped around menorahs on lintel reliefs, incised on epitaphs, or etched in gold glass. Each of these motifs had a longstanding, often exclusive, association with Jewish religious practice. The lulav and etrog are two of the four species associated with the biblical pilgrimage festival Sukkot, while the shofar was most closely associated with Rosh Hashanah.

It may be surprising that it is only in Late Antiquity that symbols and motifs associated with Jewish ritual practice appear with any regularity in relief sculpture in the region. Various explanations have been offered for this phenomenon, but the most convincing involve the emergence of Christianity and the importance of communal self-definition, in which visual symbols play an vital role. There is little doubt for instance, that the proliferation of the cross as a visual symbol of Christian identity played a role elevating the visibility of the menorah as a Jewish analog, and probably vice versa. Like the menorah, the cross was used symbolically in a wide range of private and public contexts to mark objects, individuals and spaces as Christian.

Given that Jewish ritual symbols like the menorah are commonly encountered in relief sculpture in Jewish contexts in Late Antiquity and also appear in other media associated with Jewish funerary culture, it is surprising perhaps that they rarely appear

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393 Hachlili 1988, 311-78.
on sarcophagi. This is a phenomenon which we will return to again in the next chapter. It is also the reason why so little time is spent on them here. For our purposes and for the moment, it is enough to document their emergence in this period, their wide diffusion across contexts and media, and their association especially with relief sculpture in the Galilee.

### 3.3.3 Monumental buildings and relief carving in the Galilee

The monumental buildings of the Galilee set the stage for the sculptural programs at Beth She’arim in a number of ways. For one, the architectural styles of these prominent buildings created a highly visible and prominent architectural language. This included especially the triple-arched entrance. Such entrances were contemporary with Beth She’arim at least at Chorazin and Meiron, En Gedi, and Huseifa, and possibly also at Hammath Tiberias B and Capernaum. Similarly, the ‘Syrian gable’ was another highly recognizable architectural feature of many monumental buildings, including synagogues, of the period. This feature emerged in Roman Syria in the early Roman period through local creative adaptations of Hellenistic forms.\(^{194}\) The Syrian gable appeared on a number synagogues in the Galilee in Late Antiquity, including Bar’am, Chorazin, Capernaum and, by at least one account, at Beth She’arim.\(^{195}\)

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\(^{194}\) On the so-called Syrian gable, see Hachlili 1988, 161-3; Kohl and Watzinger 1916, 147-52.

\(^{195}\) Hachlili 1988, 161. On the identification of a Syrian gable over the synagogue at Beth She’arim, see Yeivin 1942, 75, fig. 1.
On the stone surfaces of these buildings, a new and expanded vocabulary of motifs building was also worked out. This repertoire was partly based on earlier Second Temple traditions of stone carving, but also on new motifs adopted in the context of continued cultural exchange in the Roman Mediterranean. Thus, it is in this period that many of the ‘Greco-Roman’ elements we will encounter in the sarcophagi below first appear and are widely diffused in the contemporary architectural relief carving. At the same time, it is in this period that ‘Jewish’ symbols—representations of the menorah and other ritual objects—appear increasingly often and with new significance. Moreover, some characteristic features of relief carving also develop, including a preference for “heraldic and antithetic designs,” which were often composed of figures like lions, eagles and Nikae.

Antithetic programs are not unique to Jewish visual culture, but they are encountered across a wide range of Jewish contexts and media, including the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim.

Perhaps most importantly though, the relief carving that decorated monumental buildings like the synagogue of Chorazin establishes the presence of multiple workshops of stone sculptors in the Galilee region. It is likely that there was at least a half dozen such workshops at any given time. While some of the artisans, and perhaps the ‘workshops’ themselves were mobile, at least some must have been based in the Galilee. According to May and Stark, there were at least two workshops with multiple

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Hachlili 1988, 317.
artisans, and several independent sculptors responsible for the various friezes and relief
sculpture of the Chorazin synagogue. It is probable, moreover, that some of the
sculptors were Jewish, though it is equally probable that many were not. The
employment of multiple workshops and the variety of motifs at Chorazin for example, is
a testament to a thriving industry—much of the relief sculpture at Chorazin and
elsewhere was of a very high quality and undertaken by capable craftsmen.

3.4 Architectural relief carving at Beth She’arim

In light of these trends, the absence of relief sculpture in the synagogue at Beth
She’arim is all the more remarkable, and only goes to show just how much the cultural
and economic capital and industry of the village was geared towards the funerary
sphere. Although the synagogue featured no architectural ornamentation, relief carving
was a prominent feature of the monumental facades of several of the catacombs and
tomb monuments at Beth She’arim. These monumental tombs emulated the architectural

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197 May and Stark 2002.
198 Though there is little reason to attribute figurative and mythological reliefs exclusively to non-Jewish
sculptors, as May and Stark (2002, 228) do. Nonetheless, It is important to entertain the possibility that non-
Jewish sculptors were responsible for some of the relief sculpture at Chorazin and other synagogues in the
region. May and Stark (2002, 228) for instance, suggest that the two masters of ‘Workshop II’ at Chorazin
were based in southern Syria, on the basis of style and their familiarity with the basalt material.
199 See, for example, the work of ‘Workshop I’ at Korazim, as reconstructed by May and Stark (2002, 209-26).
This workshop produced extremely fine relief sculpture that, despite being largely non-figurative, is
nonetheless complex and of a high technical ability.
200 The synagogue, dated to the 3rd and 4th c. CE on numismatic and ceramic grounds with a renovation in
the mid 4th c., had no relief sculpture to speak of in either phase. Fragments of plaster, some with traces of
paint, have been found and suggest that the interior may have been decorated. See Sed-Rajna 1997, 76. The
synagogue may also have had a facade or one or more interior walls paneled in marble. Fragments of
marble slabs, many bearing inscriptions and one even with incised decorations of a fish, lion and ram, were
found in excavations. See Milson 2007, 326-9.
styles and trends of contemporary monumental buildings in the region and surpassed even the local synagogue in their grandeur.

First among these was none other than Catacomb 20, where our sarcophagi were deposited. The triple-arched facade of this catacomb was created by cutting away the hillside, and faced in hard limestone ashlars (Figs. 3.31, 3.32). The engaged columns that frame the entrances have simple cyma recta molding, but the arches of the three entrances, as well as the entablature, feature elaborate moldings with nonfigurative relief carving, especially egg and dart, bead and reel and palmettes. The forecourt had only a single entrance, and lacked the ornamental relief work of the entrance facade, though it too featured engaged columns on either side, as evident in the preserved portions (Fig. 3.33). The space of this forecourt was similarly grand, measuring nearly 200 m² and providing more than enough space for large groups to gather. Catacomb 14 also featured a similar triple-arched entrance, faced in hard local limestone ashlars (Fig. 3.34). While the moldings of this facade are simple and lack the ornament of Catacomb 20, the structure is no less monumental with a forecourt over 150 m² and a second, slightly smaller upper courtyard (110 m²) replete with benches (Fig. 3.35).

Mazar posited that the hills of the necropolis were dotted with a number of above-ground mausolea, “to which they doubtlessly lent beauty.” Of the remains of these

201 Avigad 1976a, 86-93.
202 Avigad 1976a, 89.
203 Avigad 1976a, 43-52.
that have been found, certainly none was more impressive than the mausoleum
associate with Catacomb 11. The frieze over the mausoleum of Catacomb 11, preserved
in fragments, was cut from hard limestone and contained a number of faunal motifs in
active compositions in addition to a cornice with elaborate acanthus anthemia, waves
and layered egg and tongue moldings (Fig. 3.36). The faunal motifs included a heraldic
eagle (Fig. 3.37), and a procession of animals including a scene of four dogs fighting (Fig.
3.38) and a gazelle leaping (Fig. 3.39) that probably represents a hunt narrative. When
these stones were removed, Mazar and his team discovered a polychrome mosaic
floor.\textsuperscript{205} The mausolea above Catacomb 11 also contained a decorated marble coffin
depicting narrative scenes of Greek mythology, which we will encounter again in
Chapter 6.\textsuperscript{206}

Aside from these monumental facades and tomb structures, architectural relief
carving was found in a more limited way on many of the lintels of the catacombs. The
jambs and lintels of most of the burial halls were built of local limestone or basalt, and
provided an appropriately grand entrance to the catacombs, whose rock-cut entryways
were generally roughly shaped. Decorated lintels feature rosettes, menorahs and even
gorgoneions. Those over the entrances to the three burial halls of Catacomb 19, for
instance, all feature one or another such motif. The lintel over the western burial hall, for
instance, has a gorgoneion carved at the center between an incised, schematic menorah

\textsuperscript{205} Mazar 1973, 31.
\textsuperscript{206} Mazar 1973, 26.
and an inscription indicating the name of the tomb owner as one Sokratos (Fig. 3.40). At the time of its discovery, it was the first anthropoid face found in a funerary context in Palestine. Directly opposite this lintel, the lintel over the eastern burial hall has a naturalistic relief carved rosette with six petals in high relief (Fig. 3.41). The central hall also featured the head of an animal, probably a lion, carved in the center of the lintel (Fig. 3.42). Both the gorgoneion of the western hall and the animal face of the central hall show signs of erasure, and were likely defaced in antiquity. Other lintels featured elaborate ornamental moldings, such as the lintel over the entrance to Hall N of Catacomb 1 that employed an egg and dart motif (Fig. 3.43).

Inside the same burial hall, engaged pilasters were hewn out of the limestone walls and impressively decorated with rope patterns and Corinthian style capitals (Fig. 3.44). While such engaged columns hewn out of the limestone walls were a common feature in the catacombs and attest to the influence of architectural forms on the catacomb excavators, rarely were they so ornamented. Many doors, often of basalt which would have been imported from western shore of the Sea of Galilee, were carved in imitation of wood and wrought-iron doors that would have been used in contemporary buildings (Fig. 3.45). Lastly, architectural motifs found their way into the wall carvings in the

\[\text{207} \quad \text{Avigad 1976a, 78-9.}\]
\[\text{208} \quad \text{Avigad (1976a, 81) mentions only the obvious damage to the animal face on the lintel of the central hall. This damage was more extensive, rendering a positive identification of the animal in question impossible. However, the female face on the lintel of the western hall was also defaced by the removal of the nose, a common means of erasure of human images.}\]
interior of the burial halls as well. A triple-arch is carved in the passage between rooms in Catacomb 1 (Fig. 3.46). A pair of aediculae are carved on opposite jambs in Catacomb 4 (Figs. 3.47, 3.48).

Throughout the burial halls, various other relief sculptures were scattered in addition to countless graffiti. Some of these employ motifs familiar from the relief carving of monumental buildings in the Galilee, albeit in new and sometimes surprising ways. An elaborate and large conch in high relief is carved in the back wall of an arcosolium in Catacomb 3 (Fig. 3.49). Menorahs appear frequently and in different contexts. To mention only a few, they appear below an arcosolium in Catacomb 26 (Fig. 3.50), between arcosolia in Catacomb 12 (Fig. 3.51), in the passage between rooms of Catacomb 3 (Fig. 3.52) and as a headdress above a human figure in the same catacomb (Fig. 3.53). Flat, almost incised reliefs of humans figures also appear in several catacombs, including the figure with the menorah headdress from Catacomb 3, but also a horse being led by a human figure with a club or sword in Catacomb 1 (Fig. 3.54), as well as a horse and rider from the same catacomb (Fig. 3.55).

The foregoing discussion has set the stage for examining the sarcophagi of Beth She’arim, to which we turn next. We have seen that stone sculpture was employed in Jewish contexts in Palestine by the 1st century B.C.E., and for some four centuries before the catacombs of Beth She’arim came into being. Over this time, stone sculpture was used in private, funerary contexts as well as public, communal ones. A basic set of motifs—especially rosettes, wreaths and architectural representations—was used
initially in the late Second Temple period. This repertoire was significantly expanded in the period after the revolts of the first centuries of C.E., and especially with the appearance of monumental synagogues in Late Antiquity. Most importantly, we have seen that the architecture and architectural decoration of the catacombs at Beth She’arim made extensive use of the local sculptural traditions, demonstrating their familiarity to local stone sculptors as well as local patrons. Many of the locally produced limestone sarcophagi, as we will see, are no different in their extensive use of local traditions of stone sculpture.
Chapter 4. The Persistence of Local Traditions: The Sculptural Programs of Sarcophagi from Beth She'arim

A third or more of all sarcophagi produced in the Roman Empire were produced from local materials for local consumption,¹ and the corpus of sarcophagi from Beth She'arim fits squarely in this category. The great majority sarcophagi from the site are made of limestone from the surrounding region (125 examples, or approximately 85% of the corpus).² Like other forms of funerary art and visual culture across Roman Syria, the sculptural programs of sarcophagi discovered at Beth She'arim and, in fact, across the province, were composed of a mixture of Roman styles and motifs together with elements drawn from local traditions of stone sculpture. The balance of the equation—whether a sarcophagus exhibited more Roman or more local influence—could vary from place to place and from piece to piece. At times Roman influences prevailed, whether inflected through regional or provincial tastes or more directly via import from one of the major cosmopolitan centers of Roman culture in the ancient Mediterranean. Many sarcophagi exhibit strong influence, and mastery, of specific imported Roman sarcophagus styles that were popular, even distinctive, in the region of Roman Syria (see Chapter 5). Others were specially imported from one of the major centers of the Roman world (see Chapter 6).

¹ Russell 2010, 124.
² Soft nari sarcophagi materials were quarried at Beth She’arim and surrounding hills, while harder meleke stone probably came from nearby in the Galilean hills, no further than 20 km away. See Avigad 1976a, 136.
We will consider sarcophagi demonstrating both possibilities in the following chapters. However, since the discovery of Catacomb 20 and its bounty of limestone sarcophagi, analysis has typically centered on the way that the locally produced sarcophagi draw on or imitate imported marble sarcophagi. Not surprisingly, the result has been a general neglect of the impact of local traditions in stone sculpture on the sarcophagi discovered at Beth She’arim, and further, an overestimation of the influence of Roman imports.3

In this chapter, I begin by considering how local traditions in stone carving just encountered in the Chapter 3 influenced sarcophagus sculpture at Beth She’arim. I argue that sarcophagi at Beth She’arim draw deeply on the visual repertoire and techniques characteristic of contemporary architectural relief stone sculpture of the Galilee and other traditions of stone sculpture in Palestine to a previously unacknowledged degree. Far from reflexively copying imported sarcophagi, many sculptors and sarcophagus patrons drew on local material and local visual resources in order to create sarcophagi and compose their sculptural programs. These resources were reviewed in the previous chapter, and included the following: 1) ossuary decoration, and 2) architectural relief sculpture on the facades of monumental rock cut tombs in Jerusalem, as well as 3) contemporary architectural stone carving in the monumental synagogues of the Galilee.

Quite often it can be difficult to distinguish between Roman and local in the visual and material culture of late ancient Palestine. Some motifs, such as rosettes, bulls’ heads, lions and various floral motifs, were used in the region long before the Roman period. Other motifs may have originally appeared in Palestine as the result of contact with Greco-Roman culture—e.g. wreaths—but their frequent and continued local use over centuries had probably done much to diminish, if not entirely nullify, their foreignness. On the other hand, ‘Roman’ visual culture is itself a nebulous concept. The Roman Empire was a vast network of countless local peoples with different cultural and religious practices. As Elsner describes it, the Roman Empire was “a large, multicultural, and pluralist domain characterized by an extraordinary number of religions” (not to mention peoples) who used visual culture in ways that were “complex mixtures” of rejecting, ignoring, borrowing and adapting the images of others.

Indeed, by the time the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim were produced beginning in the 3rd century C.E., cultural exchange with the broader Roman world had intensified over the course of several hundreds of years. Precisely this complex process of rejecting and borrowing from the dominant cultural and visual forms of the Roman Empire by local Jewish communities in Palestine ensured that many ‘Greco-Roman’ motifs had become part of the visual koine of both the broader region and the area of the Galilee by the time they appear in the catacombs of Beth She’arim. Motifs like rosettes and wreaths—

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4 See De Jong 2007, 171.
5 Elsner 2003, 125-6.
common in visual culture across the Greek and Roman Mediterranean—enjoyed an especially long history in the stone sculpture of Palestine, appearing already in the 1st century B.C.E., as we saw in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I suggest therefore that much of the ‘Greco-Roman’ influence as well as individual ‘pagan’ motifs often identified in previous scholarship as predominant in the sarcophagus corpus and as the result of copying of imported Roman sarcophagi more likely entered the sculptural repertoire at Beth She’arim through local traditions instead, in the process of which they were creatively adapted for the practical and cultural needs of local patrons.

Necessity is the mother of all invention, and the complications and costs of transporting imported marble sarcophagi overland to inland sites like Beth She’arim coupled with the demand for sarcophagi certainly created the conditions of necessity. These dynamics created a “greater incentive to ‘do it yourself,’” 6 a prevailing attitude in the villages and towns in the interior of Roman Syria that is observable in the predominance not only of local materials in the archaeological record of the region, but also of locally created designs and styles. 7 As such, the stone industry that must have sprung up around the catacombs and the village was first and foremost a local one that made creative use of local materials and resources, including the visual resources of

7 Russell 2013, 5-6. This represents an important aspect of the Roman stone trade, especially in the eastern provinces. These provinces were still a part of the empire wide stone economy and the stone trade therein was shaped by the forces and dynamics at work in the larger stone trade. At the same time, the significant influence of local demand, local culture as well as economic factors and local position in regional trade networks cannot be discounted.
local traditions in stone sculpture, in response to the demands of the local community. The invention spurred on by this necessity is recognizable not only in the creation of local limestone imitations (see below, Chapter 5), but in the use of the sculptural traditions and visual vocabulary already existing in the interior of Roman Palestine.

This should hardly be surprising. While well situated on inland trade routes in the Galilee (see Map 2), Beth She’arim was only peripherally connected with the major centers of Roman sarcophagus trade and the main, overseas trade routes of the Roman world (Map 7). Transporting a heavy stone sarcophagus weighing several tons was a costly proposition and a necessarily infrequent occurrence. Moreover, many of the funerary practices associated with Catacomb 20 demonstrate clear continuity with local burial traditions. Several of the practices in which ossuaries were embedded, particularly those related to patronage and viewing, seem to have continued at Beth She’arim. For instance, the deposition of sarcophagi in chambers hewn out of limestone hills, often stacked in ways that obscured sculptural programs from view, and the heterogeneous mixing of plain undecorated sarcophagi with ones sculpted according to a variety of tastes and styles are practices familiar already from the rock cut tombs and ossuaries of Second Temple period Jerusalem (see Chapter 3). Moreover, the custom of secondary burial was clearly continued by some sarcophagus patrons at the site.

At the same time, the sculptural traditions that developed in ancient Palestine had limited impact on sarcophagi of Jewish patrons discovered in Rome, for both obvious and less obvious reasons. On a practical level, travel between Rome and Palestine was
not commonplace, and furthermore sarcophagi and other stone goods are hardly among the most portable of artifacts. This, coupled with the existence of prominent and thriving sarcophagus industry in Rome itself, undoubtedly meant few Jewish sarcophagus patrons in Rome were compelled to bring with them, import, or otherwise draw on the sculptural traditions of ancient Palestine. Other, cultural reasons can be imagined for this phenomena as well, having to do with the tensions and pressures of negotiating a diaspora environment and the attractiveness of the cultural resources of the dominant culture. Nonetheless, one sarcophagus from Beth She’arim and four from Rome do make use of motifs—especially ‘Jewish ritual symbols’—that may suggest a familiarity with or a desire to explicitly mark the Jewishness of the deceased. These will be discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

4.1 The ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus: ‘Roman’ or ‘local?’

The ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus (Fig. 4.1) is an excellent illustration of the difficulty of distinguishing between Roman and local culture and motifs after centuries of cultural contact. So named for the two winged figures who dominate the front panel—understood to be representations of winged victories, or ‘nikae’ in Latin—this sarcophagus was discovered towards the rear of Catacomb 20, partially broken. The lid of the sarcophagus was missing. Only the front and right panels were completed, while

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8 Very little travel to Rome, for instance, is attested in rabbinic literature of the period. On rabbinic representations of travel to Rome, see Hezser 2011, esp. 264-73; Krauss 1911, 316-423.
the left side panel was roughed out but unfinished. The sculptural program was carved of soft local limestone in a shallow, almost flat bas-relief.

The front panel of the sarcophagus is framed by two truncated columns with stylized capitals and bases. At the very center of the program is a geometric motif of a pentagon and central circle, surrounded by a wreath. The ends of a knotted ribbon tied below the wreath form a band across the bottom of the front panel, terminating at the columns. The wreath is roughed out, but almost certainly intended to be a ‘bud’ wreath of the sort we encountered already at Chorazin.

This wreath is flanked by two winged figures whose appearance and pose mirror each other. Though portrayed frontally, the figures are laid out so as to give the appearance of flying. Their wings are splayed and they have flowing robes with mantles, with both feet floating. Their raised heads look out at the viewer. They have no hair, but on their faces are indications of all basic features, including eyebrows. In one hand, the figures hold the body of the wreath, while in the other, they hold the ribbon that continues below the composition. Though the minimal detail and shallow relief contribute to a poor impression of the quality of the sculpture, the composition is nonetheless successful in conveying its intended program. We will return to the ‘naïve’ quality of the local stone sculpture later in this chapter, after discussing a few further examples.

The right side of the ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus was found in fragments but well enough preserved to reconstruct the program. At the center of the panel is a conch, surrounded
by another wreath (Fig. 4.2). This wreath is worked out in more detail than the wreath of the front panel, with lines that delineate the plants composing the individual segments of the wreath. Below, the wreath is tied off in an identical knot. On either side of the wreath are two dolphins. Their tails are in the air, their bodies almost vertical. The inverted tail and body imitate the effect of framing columns. Their heads, at the bottom of the composition, turn towards the wreath and each grasps a side of the ribbon in its mouth. The left side was only blocked out; however, the shape of the blocking suggests that a similar program was intended for this side (Fig. 4.3).

I begin with this example precisely because, on face value it may seem that we should include it among the imported motifs or at least regional appropriations that will be discussed in the next chapters. Foerster, for instance, argued that the nikae on this sarcophagus derive from representations of erotes and nikae holding wreaths on sarcophagi produced in Rome.\(^9\) Certainly, symmetrical compositions of winged erotes and nikae with wreaths do occur on sarcophagi in Rome, though they are not among the most common themes. Many Seasons sarcophagi produced in the Metropolitan sarcophagus workshops feature four winged personifications of the seasons, with the central pair holding a portrait clipeus, occasionally ringed with a wreath (Fig. 4.4).\(^10\) Less frequently, flying erotes and nikae on sarcophagi hold aloft a central clipeus, rondel, or

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\(^9\) Foerster 2012, 203. See also Koch and Sichtermann 1982, No. 283, 286.
inscription (Figs. 4.5, 4.6).\textsuperscript{11} These rarely include a wreath, and \textit{nikae} occur less often than \textit{erotes}, and are often shown standing instead of flying (Fig. 4.7). Similar compositions can be found in Asia Minor as well. A sarcophagus discovered in Istanbul for instance, does bear a composition remarkably similar to that of the ‘\textit{Nikae}’ sarcophagus. It depicts a pair of winged victories in flowing robes holding aloft a wreath containing a Chi-Rho symbol (Fig. 4.8).\textsuperscript{12}

Despite the existence of these parallels, there are a number of reasons to be suspicious of the notion that this sarcophagus is a locally produced copy of an imported Roman model. Stylistically the work has all the hallmarks of local relief carving. This is especially visible in the winged figures. The local style used to depict human figures was highly schematic, idealistic and not naturalistic. According to Hachlili, this stems from the fact that “each part of the body was considered a discrete element; body proportions were disregarded; and each limb was rendered separately… head exaggerated in size, body and face portrayed \textit{en face}, legs in profile, arms attached unnaturally to the body, and few details depicted.”\textsuperscript{13}

Of course, the ‘local’ style demonstrates only that the sarcophagus was sculpted by a local workshop, and it could be the case that a Roman model was still used. However, while such ‘\textit{Nikae}’ sarcophagi are known from the broader corpus, none have been

\textsuperscript{11} Koch 1989, Figs. 282-93.
\textsuperscript{12} Smith and Ertug 2001.
\textsuperscript{13} Hachlili 1988, 340.
found in Roman Syria, even in the coastal cities, and certainly not in the interior where marble imports are rarer. At the same time, close parallels to decoration of the ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus in both style and content exist in the relief sculpture that decorated synagogues in the region.

By the time they appear on sarcophagi at Beth She‘arim, wreaths enjoyed a long association with funerary sculpture in the region. As we have seen, they appeared regularly on hard limestone ossuaries and the Doric friezes of monumental tombs already in the Second Temple period. By 2nd and 3rd centuries C.E., among motifs originally drawn from Greco-Roman visual vocabulary the wreath especially must have been so thoroughly appropriated that their viewing and interpretation would have been heavily mediated by the long history of local use. Indeed, the wreath as a sculptural motif would almost certainly have picked up its own ‘imbricated’ meanings unique to Palestine by virtue of its long use there.

Wreaths continue to appear with great regularity in the relief sculpture of many synagogues in the region, including Chorazin. In fact, several fragments of the inner frieze from the synagogue there have medallions of ‘bud’ wreaths enclosing abstract, geometric motifs and conches (Fig. 4.9). Similar wreaths also appear at Chorazin on the lintel fragment together with menorahs encountered in the previous chapter, as well as on several other lintels including those from the synagogues at Capernaum, Kazrin and

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14 See, for example, Avigad 1976a, 139.
Nabratein. Furthermore, on several chancel screens knotted ‘bud’ wreaths quite similar to the representation here are used to frame menorahs.\textsuperscript{15} These examples suggest that not only was the wreath an integral part of the visual koine of the Galilee region throughout the period, but that the ‘bud’ wreath enjoyed particular popularity. It was employed as a central element on many architectural features with relief sculpture.

What’s more, winged figures bearing wreaths appear so commonly on the lintels of synagogues in the region that Hachlili designated them as a specific ‘type.’\textsuperscript{16} Winged \textit{nikae} figures appear on the lintels of three synagogues in the Galilee and Golan: at Ramah, on two fragments from ed-Dikke (Fig. 4.10) and on two lintels from Bar’am (Figs. 4.11, 4.12).\textsuperscript{17} On all, the \textit{nikae} flank a wreath and are shown holding a ribbon and in the very same awkward pose as on the sarcophagus from Beth She’arim: upright torsos with horizontally splayed legs, forming almost a ninety-degree bend. These examples are undoubtedly conceptually related to similar antithetic compositions on lintels at Safed, Japhi’a and Dabburah, were the winged victories are replaced by with eagles (e.g. Fig. 4.13).

Even the use of dolphins is paralleled in the region. At Beth She’arim, dolphins appear in almost identical form and position on the sides of the ‘\textit{Nikae}’ and Menorah sarcophagus. Dolphins also appear in the polychrome mosaic floor of the Mausoleum of

\textsuperscript{15} See Hachlili 1988, 189-91.
\textsuperscript{16} “Type II” in Hachlili 1988, 206-10; “Type A” in Hachlili 2014, 224-5.
\textsuperscript{17} At Bar’am, the figures were extensively defaced in antiquity, but the outline left behind is conclusive in indicating the original representation.
Catacomb 11. They appear on the mosaic floor of the synagogue at Japhia, and the seats in the Roman theater at Neapolis (Nablus) are carved with dolphins. At the same time, dolphins are not closely associated with sarcophagus decoration. They appear in isolated instances as secondary and tertiary motifs on sarcophagi in Rome and the provinces, but never in great numbers. A single dolphin, for instance, appears in the acroteria of a garlanded sarcophagus from Tarsus in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 4.14).

Based on these parallels, the stylistic evidence and the general lack of Roman models in the region, it seems more likely that the motifs of the ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus were drawn from local traditions in stone sculpture first, where direct parallels for this composition occur. In fact, it is enticing to wonder whether the sculptor(s) responsible for the ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus copied the composition more or less directly from a synagogue lintel. The use of one of the above lintels as a model would explain some of the features of the sarcophagus, particularly the narrowness of frieze, which appears truncated and does not take full advantage of the space available, leaving a plain band above and below. It would also explain the compressed shape of the figures, which form an L-shape—their lower halves are awkwardly horizontal while their upper halves bend upwards. Ultimately however, it is neither possible nor responsible to speculate whether the

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20 Personal communication with E. Meyers, Dec. 6th, 2016.
21 Avigad (1976a, 148-9, 62) concurs on this point.
lintels served as an actual model for the Beth She’arim sarcophagus or vice versa. Rather, it is important to observe that this motif—winged figures symmetrically opposed around a central bud wreath—was a recurring one and part of the visual koine of the region at this time, drawn on by the local sculptors of synagogues and sarcophagi alike. One need not look all the way to Rome or to imported sarcophagi for close parallels for this sculptural program. The style, form and content all have analogues in contemporary architectural relief carving, not only in the use of antithetic composition, but in the figures of winged victories and the wreath.

If we accept this suggestion, namely that the winged victories of the Nikae sarcophagus and other motifs were drawn from local, contemporary stone carving, the question naturally turns to discerning the mechanism for this. The simplest answer of course, is that the work was completed by the same artisans, or artisans from the same workshop who were familiar with these motifs and practiced in their execution. The Galilee is not so large that trained sculptors could not have regularly travelled between cities and villages, which were well connected by an extensive and efficient network of major and minor trade routes (see Map 2).

Another possible mechanism is the ‘pattern book,’ a compendia of common motifs that ancient sculptors, painters and mosaicists could have drawn on to create their compositions. The existence of pattern books in antiquity is hypothesized in connection with a number of contexts, particularly when motifs are unfamiliar in the region. For instance, Hachlili proposed the existence of a pattern book for stone sculptors in the
Galilee, and cites the ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus in particular as evidence. At Sepphoris, when the mosaic tesserae of the mosaic floor in the House of Dionysus were removed, the “original sketch lines” were preserved in black.

Does the existence of local parallels mean that the figures themselves were not associated with the dominant Roman culture by ancient Jewish viewers? It is more difficult to answer this question. Certainly, at some point these figures were adapted from Roman models to use in architectural relief carving in the local context. In other words, there is little question that originally at least, winged victories were associated with Roman cultural influence and exchange. On the other hand, their geographically and chronologically widespread appearance in monumental architecture of the late Roman and Byzantine periods in Palestine suggests that they had been thoroughly embraced in the local visual language as well, at which point they may or may not have retained much of their association with Roman meanings.

This is a difficult and potentially dangerous argument to make, though, as it risks reducing the meaning of an image to singular interpretations with little evidence. Moreover, moving beyond the recognition that Roman visual culture could be transmitted (and filtered) by local traditions requires making symbolic interpretations.

22 Hachlili (1988, 317) argued in this case that: “A common source for the motifs in Jewish art, most probably a pattern book, is indicated by the stylization of pose and posture as well as the patterning…”
23 Personal communication with E. Meyers. Dec. 6th, 2016
24 Though they may always have retained a (loose) cultural association.
25 Hachlili (1988, 340) for instance, disassociates these nikae from any pagan association whatsoever, suggesting that they “are completely different in meaning.”
Better only to suggest that, based on parallels in style, form and content, the program of the ‘Nikae‘ sarcophagus was drawn from the local visual sphere first, and only indirectly (if at all) implied Roman cultural tastes. It seems unlikely that it is a direct copy of an imported marble sarcophagus from Rome, or that its patron desired to copy such a sarcophagus.

4.2 Rosette sarcophagus no. 87 and the ossuary tradition

It is not always so difficult to tease out the different traditions employed in the sculptural programs of the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim. Some sarcophagi draw much more clearly and identifiably on local traditions of stone sculpture. Among these, the rosette is perhaps the single most common motif included in decorated sarcophagi, though it is not so predominant as on ossuaries. As we have seen above, the use of rosettes in Jewish contexts, particularly funerary ones, has a long prehistory in Palestine dating back to the late Second Temple period where they appear with frequency on ossuaries and tomb facades. Rosettes remained a popular motif in architectural relief carving in the late Roman and Byzantine periods in the Galilee, though they lost their predominant status as the repertoire of motifs expanded. Still, at Beth She’arim, rosettes and related motifs appear as primary motifs on just over a half-dozen sarcophagi in ways that are analogous to their earlier use on ossuaries, as well as in the center of lintels at the entrance of several burial halls as well (see above, Chapter 3).
A prime example of the use of the rosette motif on locally produced sarcophagi is sarcophagus no. 87 (Figs. 4.15, 4.16). Sarcophagus no. 87 has the characteristic gabled, monumental form of sarcophagi produced locally at Beth She’arim and across the eastern provinces. The lid, sides and rear are plain and imperfectly smoothed, with a simple band of double bead molding running along the top of all four sides. The front panel of the body features four evenly sized rosettes, each of a different composition. They are relief carved, but extremely shallow. All show regular, careful layout indicating the use of a compass and scribe. The one on the far left is unfinished; the blank rondel is only roughed out, and none of the petals were carved. Aside from the gabled form, the visual program of this sarcophagus shows no influence from the sarcophagus trade of Roman Syria or the broader Roman world. Rather, in their form, position and layout, the rosettes harken back to the decoration of ossuaries.

Reliefs such as this one were the most commonly deployed sculptural program on locally produced sarcophagi.26 Within this group of seven examples, however, there is a good deal of diversity in not only the form of the rosettes, but their number, placement and the use of framing devices. This heterogeneity — in spite of a limited repertoire — was a characteristic phenomenon of ossuaries with rosettes as well. Rosettes appear on several of the local imitations of Proconnesian imports we will encounter in the next chapter and the rosette itself was not foreign to the Proconnesian garlanded form, on

26 Sarcophagi in this group include nos. 29, 43, 87, 92, 94, 119, and 120.
which it is often found above garland swags. The use and design of rosettes on the sarcophagi of the group reconstructed here, though, shows little evidence of influence from these imports.

Unlike the naturalistic rosettes used on Proconnesian forms, these rosettes are shallowly and schematically carved in the manner of rosettes found on ossuaries. Moreover, they are found in different combinations, and in different placements than on sarcophagi from Roman Syria and the broader Roman Empire. Among the sarcophagi of this type, they appear in schema that are familiar only from their use on ossuaries. Sarcophagus no. 120, for example (Figs. 4.17), has three rosette blanks across the front, and a simple ogee molding around the top. While initially this combination of three blank rondels may call to mind the Proconnesian quarry-state form and the local imitations (see below, Chapter 5), it must be observed that the spacing of the blanks could not have accommodated the characteristic garland. Moreover, the right side has a single rondel carved with a schematic rosette—similar in design to the first rosette on no. 87—as opposed to the naturalistic style characteristic of the Proconnesian examples (Fig. 4.18). This rosette is framed by a pair of schematic columns, the style of which is now impossible to determine.27 The left side was badly damaged by later tomb robbing, and appears not to have been completed, but was carved in the same style. This

27 Avigad (1976a, 159) suggests they are “reminiscent of Egyptian Djed columns.”
sarcophagus, found in Room XXVI, would have been viewed together with a larger than life wall carving of a menorah on the adjacent wall (Fig. 4.19).

Sarcophagus no. 43, called the ‘Circle’ sarcophagus by Avigad, is another good example of the group. Across the front of this sarcophagus are a pair of schematic rosettes surrounding what appears to be the beginnings of a third, possibly larger rosette that was never completed (Fig. 4.20). It also contains a small and schematically executed wreath on the right side panel. The wreath is positioned in a unique place, at the bottom of one short side, unparalleled on sarcophagi in the Roman world (Fig. 4.21).

The majority of sarcophagi with primary motifs of rosettes draw clearly and exclusively on local traditions of stone sculpture. Some, however, draw also on Roman sarcophagus models in limited ways. Sarcophagus no. 94 features three identical ‘sunken’ rosettes across the front panel (Fig. 4.22). The right side panel has a stylized garland swag with a rondel above that clearly imitates the Proconnesian quarry-state form (Fig. 4.23, see further Chapter 5). Such sarcophagi demonstrate that the boundaries of the few ‘types’ observable among locally produced sarcophagi at Beth She’arim—namely the rosettes and ‘tabula ansata’ (on the latter, see below, Chapter 5)—were not hard and fast. Rather, they were flexible, and while certain combinations of motifs were more common—possibly considered more appropriate or conventional—nothing prevented a more creative approach to the composition of a sculptural program.

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28 Certainly, this element was begun using a compass in the same manner as rosettes.
However, there is some limited evidence that such categories are not entirely a retrospective invention. While sarcophagi with primary motifs of rosettes and circles were found throughout the catacomb, several also appear grouped together in a single room.\textsuperscript{29} Three sarcophagi, two of which bore primary motifs of rosettes and circles, were deposited in Room XVII (nos. 92-94). They were the only three sarcophagi in the room, and their visual programs were effectively hidden by the way they were deposited (Fig. 4.24). Furthermore, this room was entered through another chamber where sarcophagus no. 87 (above) was deposited. This series of two rooms, the last of a three room wing\textsuperscript{30} of Catacomb 20 thus contained five plain sarcophagi and three sarcophagi decorated with rosette motifs.\textsuperscript{31} Only one sarcophagus, a plain example (no. 89), bore an inscription; this indicated that the deceased was Rabbi Hillel, son of Levi.

The wreath, commonly found in ossuaries but also in the other stone carving traditions we have discussed, is worth mentioning here for its appearance on the sarcophagi of Beth She’arim. Wreaths appear on a small number of sarcophagi in prominent and various ways. A small wreath, for instance, appears at the bottom on the side of sarcophagus no. 43, mentioned above. On that sarcophagus, the rosette motif dominates. Wreaths also form a framing element on several other sarcophagi, as on the ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus, also encountered above. On the “Daughters” sarcophagus (Fig.

\textsuperscript{29} The other group, the ‘tabula ansata’ sarcophagi, will be discussed below, in Chapter 7.
\textsuperscript{30} Rooms XV-XVII.
\textsuperscript{31} In the first room of the wing, Room XV, a sarcophagus with masks and garland swags was deposited (no. 84).
4.25), however, the wreath is the most important part of the sculptural program, outside of a large inscription on the lid. This simple sarcophagus was discovered in Room V. It is one of the very few to feature both an inscription and a visual program. The visual program is comprised of two wreaths to either side of a rectangle with inset diagonals, which may be a reference to the *tabula ansata* design seen elsewhere. The incised lines of this sculptural program were painted with red pigment.\(^{32}\) The placement and design of the wreaths of the ‘Daughters’ sarcophagus looks especially like that of the hard limestone ossuary with *coronae civicae* mentioned above.

The program was clearly never completed. The wreath to the right of the central placeholder was carved in a high relief with braided bands forming the body, and ribbons below in a kind of stylized knot (Fig. 4.26). The left two-thirds of the sarcophagus body was unfinished. Only the shape of the wreath on the left is etched out, while the central rectangle and crisscrossing lines that bisect it serve as a placeholder for some other planned design. The left end of the sarcophagus is rough and clearly untreated (Fig. 4.27), like the left side of the front). The fact that the left end was unfinished is all the more interesting because it was this end that stuck out into the center of the room, viewable as a visitor passed by on the way to Rooms VII and VIII. The completed right end of the sarcophagus on the other hand, bearing a simple concave

\(^{32}\) No longer visible. See Avigad 1976a, 138.
rondel with a central knob, butted up against sarcophagus no. 24, a plain sarcophagus (Fig. 4.28).

While a space for an inscription between the wreaths on the front panel seems to have been intended, it was never completed. Instead, a Hebrew inscription was incised on the front gabled panel of the lid and was painted in red, like the relief work on the front of the sarcophagus body.\(^{33}\) Not only would the red paint have attracted the viewer’s eye, the Hebrew lettering here is abnormally large, so large that at times it can be difficult to read (Fig. 4.29). The inscription of eight lines flows beyond the bounds of the gabled panel, onto the adjacent acroteria and to the lip of the lid below. One possible reason for the size and prominence of this particular inscription could be the visuality of Hebrew as a script. The inscription reads:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{כְּנַן מִיַּחַת אֲשֶׁר בְּתֵּיהֶם שִׁלְׂרֵי}
&\text{ Here they lie: Atio, the daughter of Rabbi} \\

gַמְּלַיֵּל בֵּן נְהֵמָיָה שִׁמְתָּה &\text{Gamaliel son of Nehemiah, who died} \\

בְּחיָלָה בֵּּשֵׁרִי וּשְׁמוֹ & a virgin aged twenty-two \\

שְׁנֵה חָמֵלָה בֵּן שֵּׁלְרֵי & years, and Ation, daughter of Rabbi \\

יוֹדְּהָ חַנְּנוֹּ שֵׁלְרֵי גַּמְּלַיֵּל & Judah, son of Rabbi Gamaliel, \\

שְׁמֵהֶּלֶת הַבַּת שְׁמוֹ & who died aged nine \\

שְׁנֵים & years \\

וּשְׁנֵשַׁו הָדְּשִׁיָּר שֵׁיָּה & and six months. May their resurrection...
\]

This remarkable inscription suggests a number of important conclusions about the identity and cultural leanings of sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim. In brief, we can note that the given names are well-known names of both Latin (Atio and Ation) and Hebrew origin (Gamaliel, Nehemiah and Judah). A few important insights are also

\(^{33}\) Likewise, no longer visible. See Avigad 1976a, 138.
gained regarding the religious beliefs of the patrons. The use of the title ‘Rabbi’ already suggests that the deceased persons, and their families who probably commissioned this sarcophagus, adhered to normative Jewish customs and beliefs of the period. The mention of resurrection (duğמ) is telling, as is the fact that the sarcophagus seems to have been used for the practice of secondary burial.34 Unless their death was the result of a shared accident, it seems unlikely that Atio and Ation died at the same time and at a young age, and were deposited in the same sarcophagus. The inscription was incised in a single hand, which further suggests that the sarcophagus was commissioned specifically for secondary burial, after the primary burial of both daughters. The inscriptions of two other sarcophagi indicate that multiple persons were interred together, probably in secondary burial.35 All of this, from the mention of resurrection to the practice of secondary burial, is in keeping with normative Jewish customs of the time.

Furthermore, these examples indicate that a cultural memory of the customs (especially secondary burial) and decorative motifs characteristic of ossuaries were preserved and continued by some sculptors and sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim. The same carving techniques36 that were employed to produce local ossuaries were adaptable to sarcophagi surfaces, the materials being the same and only the proportions

34 Given that the sarcophagus could not have accommodated two bodies, except if disarticulated. See further Avigad 1976a, 243-4.
35 Sarcophagi Nos. 114 and 117.
being enlarged. At the same time, the influence is limited, and extends mostly to the appearance of the most common motifs—rosettes and wreaths—of soft limestone ossuaries. By contrast, carvings comprised of incised, gouged, or geometric line patterns, were largely abandoned on Beth She’arim sarcophagi, though they continued to be employed in the decoration of the limestone walls of the chambers of other catacombs at the site.37

4.3 The ‘Shell’ sarcophagus and the influence of contemporary architectural forms

Several sarcophagi were conspicuous for their extensive, even exclusive representations of architectural forms, together with motifs familiar from relief carving associated with monumental architecture. The ‘Shell’ sarcophagus is chosen here as the paradigmatic example of sarcophagi that borrow heavily from architectural forms and especially architectural relief carving (Fig. 4.30). The sculptural program of this sarcophagus depicts architectural features and facades and, in the filling of space and framing elements, makes liberal use of the floral and faunal motifs of contemporary architectural relief carving.

The ‘Shell’ sarcophagus (no. 117) was found in Room XXI at the rear of the room, with its left side abutting another sarcophagus. It was carved on three sides, the front and both short sides. Along the lid, a band of bead and reel molding runs on three sides.

On the popularity of such motifs on ossuaries, see Figueras 1983, 27.
In the center of both long sides of the lid, an antefix with a conch motif is carved. The acroteria of the lid have shallowly and schematically incised tendrils. The shallow relief programs on the front and two sides are contained in raised panels. Traces of red paint at several points suggest that many of the motifs and details discussed below would have been highlighted.

On the front panel, which takes up roughly two-thirds of the available space, a pair of representations of aediculae dominate the composition (Fig. 4.31). Spaced unevenly, they are identical in design: a pair of columns with schematic indications of base and capital are topped by an evenly executed conch. Each has an animal in the central space created by the conch and columns: on the left, a heraldic eagle with wings spread, on the right a lion in profile with four legs visible, identifiable only by the way its tail arches over its back (an element common to depictions of lions on other sarcophagi). In between the aediculae, a pair of rosettes surrounded by wreaths were evidently intended, but only the one on the right was finished.38 Above, in a narrow band created between the tops of the conch arches, two pairs of animals are shown: a pair of rampant lions separated by a bull’s head, and a pair of birds pecking at a cluster of grapes between them.

This narrow band was separated from the aediculae below by a bead and reel molding continuing the molding from the lid above. A guilloche of intersecting circles,

38 On the left, the ribbon tied at the bottom was begun.
probably mapped out with the use of a compass, fills the negative space. On either side, in separate friezes, run two vertical bands of scrolling vines with regular, large clusters of grapes. These are in a shallower relief which was likely carved by a different hand. Since the animals and aediculae of the panel are unevenly spaced and one of the wreathed rosettes was unfinished, it may be that other figural elements were planned here but not completed.

The sides of the sarcophagus continue the motifs and theme of the front. The right panel is more elaborately carved, and prominently features a pair of male and female rampant lions with a gazelle between them (Fig. 4.32). The gender is indicated in an unusual way by the presence of a half dozen teats on the female lion to the left, which might be compared to the lion suckling her cub at Chorazin. The composition is active and energetic, with the rampant lions and the suspended gazelle, whose head is turned back, trying to evade capture. Above and on either side are birds; three to the left perched on a vine, and two to the right facing each other. Interspersed unevenly throughout the remaining space are five fish of different sizes. Above and to the left of this program are bands of scrolling vines with large clusters of grapes like those on the front, while a band of intersecting guilloches runs to the left and bottom. The left side of the sarcophagus is much simpler, with a small raised panel featuring two pairs of facing birds, one on top of the other (Fig. 4.33).
A four line inscription between the aediculae of the front panel was painted in red, and is preserved only in a transcription provided by Avigad. The inscription, which was mostly legible at the time of discovery, was reconstructed by Avigad as follows:

This is the sarcophagus of [Rabbi] Gamaliel, son of Rabbi Eliezer [who died] age seventeen years. May the memory of the righteous be a blessing.

The inscription thus offers some insight into the identity of the patrons and the deceased. As in prevailing Roman customs, the age of the deceased is marked here only because it is unusual: Gamaliel seems to have predeceased his parents at a relatively young age. We encountered this feature already on the ‘Daughters’ sarcophagus. It seems likely that the parents of Gamaliel, including his father, Rabbi Eliezer, were the patrons responsible for this sarcophagus. The practice of identifying the burial type (ארון here) is not common in Roman epitaphs, but encountered frequently at Beth She‘arim. Most significant here, however, is the use of the title ‘Rabbi’ as well as the consolatory formula “May the memory of the righteous be a blessing.” Both indicate that the deceased and his family, like those of the ‘Daughters’ sarcophagus, adhered to normative Jewish customs and beliefs of the period, and further probably had some standing in the (local) Jewish community. There is disagreement about whether ‘Rabbi’ at this time was a title indicating a real position in the Jewish community or merely an

39 Avigad 1976a, 250-1, Fig. 125.
While seventeen may seem a young age to have attained the status of rabbi, and the use here could be a posthumous honor, either is possible.\(^{41}\)

Avigad observed already that this sarcophagus borrowed little if anything from imported models.\(^{42}\) Rather, this sarcophagus is so unusual that it must be judged to be largely locally derived. The creative approach to the sculptural program is remarkable for the variety of motifs and their flexible combination. In fact, despite suggesting that the local sarcophagi at Beth She’arim were not “particularly impressive” and betrayed “the low standard and inferior talent of Jewish artists” (see further below), Avigad nonetheless singled out this sarcophagus as the exemplar of “imaginative originality” in the catacomb.\(^{43}\)

Much of the sculptural program on the ‘Shell’ sarcophagus appears to be driven by *horror vacui*: witness, for example, the irregular spacing and odd numbers of the motifs (especially on the right side panel).\(^{44}\) The stylized scrolling vines and guilloches also seem to be primarily a space filling mechanism, familiar in style and function from contemporary architectural relief carving. Indeed, almost all of the elements have been encountered already in similar compositions and styles in the architectural relief carving at Chorazin—the birds pecking at grapes, heraldic lions, eagles, scrolling vines, bead

\(^{40}\) See especially: Cohen 1981; Lapin 2011; Miller 2004a; 2006, 426-45.
\(^{41}\) See Avigad 1976b, 251.
\(^{42}\) What Avigad (1976a, 144) referred to as ‘a conventional sarcophagus.’
\(^{43}\) Avigad 1976a, 163.
\(^{44}\) Avigad 1976a, 144.
and reel moldings, wreathed rosettes and so forth. Even fish appear in the relief friezes of the synagogue. While it is tempting to read the aediculae as an allusion to the Torah Shrine or Ark of the Covenant, as Avigad pointed out the presence of two makes such a reference difficult.\textsuperscript{45} At the same time, as we noted in the previous chapter, the gabled roof with inset conch was an exceedingly common architectural feature in the monumental buildings of the region, as well as in relief carving. Much like schematic architectural motifs on ossuaries, the use here of a familiar architectural form could simply be an allusion to monumentality.

The other fifteen sarcophagi in this large room were plain, with the exception of the ‘Gable’ sarcophagus (no. 103).\textsuperscript{46} This ‘Gable’ sarcophagus was positioned at the entrance of the room. It is much simpler than the ‘Shell’ sarcophagus discussed above, but also makes use of architectural forms and motifs. Like the ‘Shell’ sarcophagus, the decoration on the front is limited to just a portion of the available space, a conch with a bead and reel band above, framed by a simple, triple stacked molding in the shape of a Syrian gable (Fig. 4.34). This central motif is further framed by a square molding with four stacked ogees. On the left side panel a raised frame holds a single heraldic eagle,\textsuperscript{47} wings outstretched (Fig. 4.35). The execution and design of the conch and eagle, the (limited) use of bead and reel molding, and the incised tendrils of the acroteria, all suggest the

\textsuperscript{45} Avigad 1976a, 144.
\textsuperscript{46} Arcosolia, with single or double loculi, were hewn out of the chamber walls heights approximately equivalent with the tops of the sarcophagi so that they would be visible.
\textsuperscript{47} The bird was identified as a heron by Avigad (1976a, 145).
work of the same artist or workshop as the ‘shell’ sarcophagus. Again, the motifs of this sarcophagus were common, recognizable and even distinctive features of local, contemporary architecture, especially the Syrian gable and the conch.

Painted in red and crammed into sculptural program in different places (under the molding, on both sides of the conch and below the sculpted panel) is a short inscription. Though the order may be scrambled by the awkward placement, read from top to bottom, right to left, it reads:

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הארון
הזה
ש
[...]
בתו
שלרבי
יהושוע
[...]
זיכרון
צדיקים
לברכה
```

This is the sarcophagus of [...]
daughter of Rabbi Joshua [...] May
the memory of the righteous (ones) be a blessing.

Including this example, five sarcophagi in this room featured inscriptions, including the ‘Shell’ and ‘Gable’ sarcophagi. This a remarkable cluster accounting for half of all inscribed sarcophagi in the catacomb. The use of Hebrew and traditionally Jewish names is suggestive. In addition to the inscriptions on the Shell and Gable sarcophagi discussed above, the three plain sarcophagi with epitaphs in this room (nos. 114-116) contain only names and patronymics, with the exception of one ‘שלום’ used at the conclusion of the inscription on sarcophagus no. 116. All three use the title ‘Rabbi’ to refer to either the deceased, or the father of the deceased. The names indicated are common Hebrew names—e.g. Joshua, Gamaliel, Eliezer—except for sarcophagus no. 116, “belonging to lady Mega” (שלליה מגֶה), though in this instance ‘Mega’ may be a transliteration of an attempted Greek honorific. Two sarcophagi in this room appear to belong to a father
and daughter, the plain sarcophagus of “Rabbi Joshua” (sarcophagus no. 115) and the
decorated, ‘Gable’ sarcophagus of his daughter (no. 103).

4.3.1 Combined traditions on sarcophagi with architectural representations

Two other sarcophagi are worth mentioning in this context as they too appear to
draw inspiration from architectural forms or relief carving. The first is the ‘Column’
sarcophagus, which has a central frieze panel carved with a relief of alternating columns
in different styles and interspersed with figural and faunal motifs (Figs. 4.36, 4.37). At
the center, in between two stylized Ionic columns, is the figure of a man with a spear
standing behind a dog with raised ears. The remaining columns, which are staggered in
a way that suggests, perhaps, a portico, are a mix of Corinthian and Ionic, all stylized.48
Those in front are Corinthian and have smooth drums, while those behind are Ionic and
carved to suggest fluting. Between the last two columns on the right is a motif of two
enigmatic, upright objects in a bowl.49

The ‘Column’ sarcophagus is tantalizingly similar to columnar sarcophagi produced
in Asia Minor.50 At least one such marble sarcophagus was imported to Tyre, where
three panels framed by columns show a triplet of Maenads (Fig. 4.38). Other mythic
figures were also common. In this light, Avigad’s tentative suggestion that the figure on

48 It is equally possible that the secondary columns were simply a “convenient filling device,” as Avigad
(1976a, 155) interprets them.
49 For suggestions on the identification of these objects, see Avigad 1976a, 155-6.
the example from Beth She’arim may be Meleager and his dog from the hunt of the Caledonian boar takes on greater importance.\textsuperscript{51}

At the same time, columnar motifs have a long history in Jewish funerary art. Individual representations of columns figured prominently on many ossuaries. The composition here especially recalls the carving of the unique hard limestone ossuary discussed above in Chapter 3, at least in layout if not in technical execution. Ultimately if this is a local emulation of the columnar sarcophagus style popular in the broader Roman world, it is an imitation heavily inflected through local traditions and style.

The second sarcophagus, called the ‘Gate’ sarcophagus, is similarly difficult to attribute to any one tradition or influence. It features a large double-leaved door set between two fluted columns on the front panel (Fig. 4.39). This motif fills the space vertically, while to the right and left the remaining space of the front panel is filled by deep and roughly incised undulating grooves. The right side of the sarcophagus had a conch motif in the gable, and a single fluted column, carved in flat relief and flanked by geometric motifs consisting of rhombuses and circles. The lid was unusual, and the large panels of the roof were decorated with strips of geometric design almost like a tapestry (Fig. 4.40).

This sarcophagus, like the ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus, demonstrates again the difficulty at times of separating Roman and local influences. In this case, the difficulty comes because

\textsuperscript{51} Avigad 1976a, 155.
both appear to have been so thoroughly woven together that it makes little sense to call this sarcophagus either a straightforward copy of a Roman marble model (as Avigad does) or purely local. Avigad suggested that ‘gate’ motif was drawn from Roman strigilated sarcophagi bearing double leaved doors.52 There can be little doubt that the striations on the panels of the sarcophagus beside the central ‘gate’ motif are an emulation of the popular strigilar form. Moreover, several similar programs exist on sarcophagi from Rome and its environs, including one from Genzano, a suburb of Rome (Fig. 4.41).53 Such sarcophagi typically, but not always, featured mythic figures interspersed in the composition and, in most, one leave of the door was ajar.54 The blocked out columns at the corners of the ‘gate’ sarcophagus are suggestive of the figured frames that typically populate Roman examples in the same position.

At the same time, strigilated sarcophagi with central doors are not common, even in Rome, and are exceedingly rare in the provinces. None are known from Roman Syria. Even if Avigad is correct in positing a Roman model, the imprint of local sculptural traditions on this sarcophagus in equally unmistakable. The use of bead and reel molding and fluted columns is drawn from the local architectural vernacular.55 Moreover, the double leaved door with columns appears frequently in both ossuary art

52 Where, according to Avigad (1976a, 153), the motif “generally symbolizes the gate of the tomb or the entrance to the world beyond.”
53 See further Huskinson 2015, 23-4.
54 Huskinson 2015, 152-80; Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 243-4.
55 Fluted columns do not appear on strigilated sarcophagi with doors produced in Rome or Asia Minor.
and architectural relief sculpture of the period. It was also a common architectural form of the entrances to monumental buildings in the region since the late Second Temple period, and especially the monumental buildings of the Galilee (including the monumental facades at Beth She’arim). The appearance of this motif here is used in ways that are similar to both.

It is even possible that some influences from the sarcophagus industry of the broader region, and especially Palmyra, are incorporated in this singular sarcophagus. The lid we saw was decorated with vertical strips of repeating motifs running continuously across both panels. These repeating motifs are unfamiliar from architectural relief carving of the Galilee region, and may very likely be transferred from woven patterns in textile. The use of textile patterns in relief carving was in fact a common feature of architectural decoration at Palmyra. There, as Schmidt-Colinet has demonstrated, textile patterns appear often in the moldings of tombs. Textile patterns are also regularly carved into the stone couches of *kline* sarcophagi found in Roman Syria (e.g. Fig. 4.42) and Palmyra, as well as in Asia Minor.

### 4.4 The ‘Eagle’ sarcophagus and animal motifs

Animals feature prominently in the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim, appearing on almost every figured sarcophagus, in every style, in some way, shape or form. We have seen several examples of this already, on the ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus, the ‘Shell’

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sarcophagus, and the ‘Column’ sarcophagus. They are particularly prominent, however, on several related sarcophagi where they form the most important part of the sculptural program. There are five examples of this group, four of which were found in (or around) Catacomb 20, while a fifth was found in Catacomb 11. Local and regional influences can be discerned also in this group, though none is heavily indebted to Roman trends and all have a decidedly local flavor to them, especially in their frontal and schematic depiction of the animals. Two of the sarcophagi, the ‘Hunt’ sarcophagus and the ‘Lion’ sarcophagus exhibit little influence from Roman sarcophagi whatsoever (see below), while the remaining three are strikingly similar and feature garlands framing some grouping of bull’s heads, rampant lions and heraldic eagles.

The ‘Eagle’ sarcophagus (no. 56), so-named for the eagles depicted on its lid and on one short side, is a paradigmatic example of this type (Fig. 4.43). The only sarcophagus from the site to have been carved on all surfaces of both the body and lid, it is undoubtedly the most elaborate sarcophagi of local limestone discovered. As such, it warrants special attention. The sarcophagus was prominently featured in Room XI, together with several other decorated ossuaries of the ‘tabula-ansata’ type which lacked figural decoration (see below, Chapter 5). The original excavators moved it into Room X in Catacomb 20 after excavations were complete so that it could stand on its own and to “make it possible for the public to view it from all sides.”57 In the final publication,

57 Avigad 1976a, 218 n. 18.
Avigad devoted more space in the plates to this single sarcophagus than any other, playing to the same desire to show off all four sides.\textsuperscript{58} Subsequent Parks Authorities confirmed the decision to highlight this sarcophagus by leaving it in its new location and surrounding it with spotlights that now create an almost eerie effect for the viewer.

At around two and a half meters long, a meter wide and one and a half meters tall (with lid), the sarcophagus is monumental, but not particularly larger than other sarcophagi carved of local limestone. The lid is of the gabled type, with four large, plain acroteria at each corner. The sculpture occupies the four faces of the body, the two gables, and the short faces of the lid—for a total of eight carved surfaces. These surfaces bear repeating combinations of a very small set of motifs, including framing garlands (six swags), bulls’ heads (seven), heraldic eagles (three), and rampant lions (four). The motifs are carved in shallow, flat relief, with only the garlands showing multiple levels of depth. The individual representations vary little between themselves, and the differences are inconsequential; each instance gives the impression of following a well-established design.

The body of the sarcophagus is divided into three by a band of sculpted frieze that runs continuously around the four sides of the sarcophagus—no columns separate the long sides from the short or divide up the program. In fact, the scenes on the long sides are not framed at all, while the short sides of the body each have a single loop of garland

\textsuperscript{58} Avigad 1976a, Pls. XLI-XLII.
to frame an eagle on one and a bull’s head on another, a device which is mirrored and
doubled on the lid. This band of frieze, which accounts for roughly two-thirds of the
sarcophagus body, is bounded above and below by a narrow strip of reverse ogee
molding that separates the frieze from wide, comb-dressed bands on the top and base of
the sarcophagus body.

The two main sides of the sarcophagus body are identical in design and in execution,
with only the tiniest departures (Figs. 4.44, 4.45). A pair of lions face each other with a
single bull’s head at their feet between them. With heads and bodies in profile, the
stance of the lions in all four instances is the same, rampant, active and vicious. A single
hind leg is planted above the lower molding, and the two forelegs are splayed atop one
another, reaching towards the bulls’ head in the center. The arrangement of the limbs
and the position of the bodies, at times slightly awkward, seems to have been dictated as
much or more by the constraints of space as by any need to adhere to realism.

At the same time, by any measure the program is successful in communicating the
concept of rampant and ferocious lions. This viciousness is not only communicated by
the active posture of the lions, but also by their jaws. Set in heads exaggerated in size
and by prominent manes, the jaws hang open and hungry with teeth bared and tongues
hanging out towards the bulls’ head at their feet. The manes are full and prominent,
reaching a third of the way down their backs and down to their splayed forelegs as well.

59 For instance, one of the largest detectable differences is that the lion on the left has five teeth showing in
its upper jaw, while the lion on the right has only four.
The long strands of the mane are indicated by deep semicircles gouged from the material that radiate from the head of the lion in a scale-like pattern.

Other features are given less attention. The lions’ eyes are rendered according to the same principle observed in the bulls’ heads, as well as in the nikaē already discussed—simple ovals with semicircles set above, forming a brow. The barest hint of nostrils—indicated by a dash at the tip of the muzzle—is detectable in all four lions; if it were not visible in all four instances it would likely go unremarked. Though active in gesture, the paws of the lions lack claws, which might have been expected based on the violence lurking in their mouths. They generally have four toes each, though some have only three. The tails have a characteristic curve common to lion depictions of the Galilee—they curve back on themselves like a scorpion’s tale, ready to strike—but lack any indication of a tufted or tasseled end present in real life. The actual bodies are scarcely more than rough trapezoids that connect the dots between the major identifying features—the head and mane, the tail and the legs. No musculature or any attempt at fur is present on any of the four lions. The same comb dressing that smooths the surface of the sarcophagus throughout is used on the lion’s body as well.

The bulls’ heads at their feet are carved according to a recognizable and familiar pattern, repeated on either side and in every other instance on the sarcophagus with little variation. Perhaps of note, the bulls’ heads are the only faces shown frontally in the whole visual program—while the eagles (discussed below) are depicted with frontally in positioned bodies and heads in profile. The heads are schematically, almost
geometrically shaped. They are easily identified as bulls’ heads by the pair of short horns that sit atop a pair of oval ears that jut out from the head as well as by the long snout below, with shallow circular gouges at the very end for nostrils. The ears feature one of the few attempts at creating depth or multiple levels of sculpture, in that they are each gouged, adding a small element of realism with an effect that is quite natural. The eyes are much like those of the lions—ovals with semicircles forming brows above—except in frontal view and, unique among the animals depicted here, with small gouges for pupils.

The short sides follow a set pattern (Fig. 4.46). A garland of six, tripartite sheaves hangs from the corners of the frieze. The nadir of this garland has a figure-eight deeply incised to join the two strands, as on the garlands of the lid. The garland on one side frames a heraldic eagle, on the other, a bull’s head. Both depictions, the eagle and the bull’s head, follow the pattern established by the motifs elsewhere on the body and lid. The only curiosity, perhaps, is the choice to employ an eagle on one side, which contrasts with the other side, and more to the point, with the depiction of a bull’s head on the short face of the lid directly above.

This eagle is the best preserved of the heraldic eagles on the sarcophagus, the other two being on the pitched sides of the gabled lid. The eagle, like the bulls’ heads and lions, was clearly carved from a roughed out geometric shape. This is even clearer in this case because of the way the claws and wings were carved. Small interstitial spaces that were not fully removed to the level of the background were left, preserving some
connective material that indicates the original shape of the geometric blank. Still though, the eagle is as detailed as the lions, even if its posture is more static due to its heraldic pose that was squeezed into a lozenge-like shape. Its head was shown in profile, cocked sharply to the right, showing a prominent hooked beak. The rest of the bird is shown frontally, with wings splayed out from a small body, and two prominent claws with four exaggerated talons each. The wings and tail feathers (which are shown to the left of the talons, *contra* the beak and providing a sense of balance) are indicated by diagonal grooves, while the plumage of the body is indicated by semicircles like the lion’s manes. The eye in profile is simple, a round circle created by a single incised circular groove.

The lid of the sarcophagus is large and well smoothed with even comb-dressing all around (Figs. 4.47, 4.48). It is somewhat more weathered than the body, but is still well preserved overall and its features are easy to distinguish. Its four corners feature large, outsized and well-shaped acroteria that are plain and undecorated. The small face at either short end features a single bull’s head. The main visual program is reserved for the pitched panels of the gabled roof. On either, the framing device of a double garland is sculpted. At the center of the panels is a “T” shape, from which hang one end of the garlands; the other ends simply terminate at the apex of the gable. Each garland is comprised of six individual plaits of three leaves each, and a figure eight is gouged out of the nadir where the strands meet. Above each garland is a single motif; on one side, two bulls’ heads while on the other, two heraldic eagles. Both the bulls’ heads and the eagles follow the pattern established on the sarcophagus body.
Ultimately, the ‘Eagle’ sarcophagus is a paradigmatic example of the capabilities of local sarcophagus workshop(s) at Beth She’arim. It is obvious that the program of the sarcophagus was established at least partially beforehand, and the places for the motifs were marked out and roughed out in a way analogous to the acanthus type. The blocking out of features, often done in the quarry, was a common practice in stone sculpture in antiquity and not unique to any one production center or product. On the ‘Eagle’ sarcophagus, the various faunal figures were carved from blank shapes left in the rough working of the sarcophagus lid and body. This can be detected to varying degrees in much of the sculptural program, for example, in the way the rampant lions are forced into position, their heads crammed and flattened to fit, or in the shape of the eagles, with interstitial space between the claws and the wings still connected by traces of the original rough shape.

4.4.1 Further examples of sarcophagi with animal motifs

There are four further examples of sarcophagi featuring primary motifs of animals. Two of these look more or less like the ‘Eagle’ sarcophagus, with flat relief carvings of bulls’ heads and the use of garlands. One of these, already lost by the time of Avigad’s excavations, is the ‘Bull’ sarcophagus which was found nearby but outside of Catacomb 20 (Fig. 4.49). It featured an ogee molding along the top of the sarcophagus body, and a

60 See: May and Stark 2002; Rockwell 1993; Russell 2013.
repeating motif of bulls’ heads in the same design as those on the ‘Eagle’ sarcophagus: carved in flat relief and set above garland swags.

Imported Proconnesian sarcophagi and local copies thereof will be the primary subject of the following chapter. For now, suffice it to note that the garland swags here mirror the basic Proconnesian garland style, a type of sarcophagus that was popular and widely imported in Roman Syria. At the same time, the style and execution of the animal motifs on these examples is locally derived and finds many parallels in the sculptural tradition of the Galilee (Chapter 3). Fragments of another sarcophagus of this type were found in Catacomb 23 (Figs. 4.50, 4.51). This group of sarcophagi, with a limited and closely related set of motifs executed in identical style and technique and showing limited influence from imported sarcophagi suggests that some local production at Beth She’arim was organized along the lines of the workshop model that characterized the broader sarcophagus economy of the region and the Roman world (see Chapter 5).

Two other sarcophagi with primary motifs of animals however, are best considered individually. The ‘Hunt’ sarcophagus (Fig. 4.52), was found at the entrance of Room VIII, a long hall with several other decorated sarcophagi. The ‘Hunt’ sarcophagus is carved only on the front face, though its relief was unfinished and may have been started with one program in mind and finished with another. A six-petalled rosette carved in shallow, almost flat relief occupies the center of the panel. At the left corner, a roped column with base and capital is carved. The capital has tendrils, like those that often occupy acroteria. A shorter capital, beginning halfway up the body, is carved at
the right corner, suggesting more than one sculptural program was planned for this sarcophagus. To the right of the rosette, carved in shallow, almost incised relief, is a scene of a lion pouncing on a gazelle. The animals are rendered schematically, with little naturalism, and yet, as Avigad observes, “the artist succeeded in portraying a lively scene full of movement with rapid, simple strokes.”

The ‘Lions’ sarcophagus (no. 47; Fig. 4.53) was found in the same room as the ‘Hunt’ sarcophagus at the end of the long eastern wing, where it was one of three sarcophagi in the catacomb that had been placed in its own hewn niche (Fig. 4.54). The placement in the niche would have meant that the sarcophagus was seen only frontally, and indeed, the sides of the sarcophagus were left plain and relatively untreated. The sarcophagus has a simple but well-dressed gabled lid with prominent acroteria. The front of the sarcophagus is carved in high, flat relief. A roped band runs along the top, with two columns decorated with similar roping framing the composition. These columns terminate at the top in capitals featuring a branched design. While neither column is particularly well-preserved in its upper portion and the details are difficult to make out, from the better preserved capital on the left it appears that these may have been seven

\[\text{\textsuperscript{61}} \] Avigad (1976a, 140) also suggested that the sarcophagus underwent several transformations, and that the placement of the gazelle and lion indicates that it was ‘possibly introduced at the request of the customer’ after the original carving.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{62}} \] Avigad 1976a, 140.
branched menorahs. The braided grooves of the upper band and columns were painted in red.63

Inside this frame are two lions striding towards each other, separated by an ambiguous object, probably an altar of some sort. The lions are heavily stylized but easily and immediately recognizable. Both feature tails with bushy ends, and vertical striations marking the mane. The lion on the left has markings at the rear of the head suggesting a continuation of the mane, while the one on the right notably does not. This might possibly reference a male and female lion,64 but it is impossible to know whether a) the sculptor knew enough of the physiology of lions to b) make the markings intentional, though we have encountered a female lion distinguished by the presence of teats in the relief sculpture of the synagogue at Chorazin (Chapter 3). Both lions on this sarcophagus have simple, large eyes, and their mouths are open. The lion on the right is further distinguished by its tongue jutting out. The lines around the lions face (its hair and facial features, including teeth and eyes) as well as its toes (claws) were painted in red.65 The red paint around the animals face, especially the teeth and nail may have served to heighten the “fierce power and terrifying wildness of the beast,” as Avigad suggests.66

63 This paint is no longer visible today, so I rely on Avigad’s report (1976a, 139) for the documentation.
64 So assumed Avigad (1976a, 139).
65 See above note on the decay of paint. See also Avigad 1976a, 139.
66 Avigad 1976a, 139.
4.4.2 Sarcophagi with animal motifs and local relief sculpture

Among these sarcophagi with primary motifs of animals, there is no horror vacui. Instead, there is plenty of negative space on all, and the animals, while large, are given ample space and are restrained in scope and number. Any feeling of crowding is purely a result of the way the artisans had to squeeze their subjects into the frieze band.\textsuperscript{67} Indeed, it seems that an overriding principle at work in the program is symmetry and simplicity. This is in marked contrast to the tendencies of architectural relief sculpture seen in contemporary architectural relief carving.

In places, these sarcophagi show limited influence from imported Roman models, especially the Proconnesian garland form which we will encounter in the next chapter. This is particularly evident on the ‘Eagle’ and ‘Bull’ sarcophagi. The use of the garland on the side panels, the use of heraldic eagles and bulls’ heads as medallions or lozenges above the garland, the manner in which the garland and animal motifs are employed on the lid,\textsuperscript{68} all recall the form of the Proconnesian garland sarcophagus (see below, Chapter 5).

The bull’s head is a good example of the broader influence of Greco-Roman motifs and forms on the corpus that goes beyond rote copying to creative adoptions. In the examples just encountered, the bull’s head serves a decorative function parallel to the rosettes and gorgoneions of Proconnesian garland sarcophagi we will encounter in the

\textsuperscript{67} Perhaps the sculptors were more familiar with working in the space of lintels and architectural friezes.\textsuperscript{68} If not the placement. The garland motif is never carried to the lid in Proconnesian examples.
next chapter. The bull’s head as a sculptural motif is relatively rarely encountered in art from Ancient Palestine before it appears at Beth She’arim. It appears in such few numbers, in contrast to its wide diffusion at Beth She’arim, that it is hard to account for its popularity in relief sculpture in local stone in the Galilee other than to reference the Roman relief sculpture, on which both the bull’s head and bucranium (bull’s skull) were ubiquitous.

At the same time, there are no imported marble fragments from the site that preserve bulls’ heads. Furthermore, the bulls’ heads that appear on the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim—exclusively of local limestone—are interesting in that they are highly schematic and even simplistic compared to the Proconnesian examples. The simple, schematized rendering is no doubt part of why Avigad points to parallels in art of the Ancient Near East rather than imported marble sarcophagi as the source of this motif. Yet, though they are schematic, it is easy to recognize that the bulls’ heads that appear on the Beth She’arim sarcophagi are not *bucrania* proper (bulls’ skulls) but rather fleshed bulls’ heads, with eyes and ears. The same preference for bull’s heads over bucrania is visible on almost every example of Proconnesian sarcophagus encountered not only at Tyre, but in every place they are found in the region, including at Shechem, Neapolis and Ashkelon. By contrast, the heraldic eagle on this sarcophagus bears little relation in
style or in placement to eagles found on Proconnesian sarcophagi, such as the one cited in this connection by Avigad from Tell Barak (Fig. 4.55).

The antithetic motif of facing animals arranged around a central object also enjoyed a long history in the visual culture of the Ancient Near East, and was near ubiquitous in art across the ancient Mediterranean. It is also important to point out that the bull and lion (and to a lesser extent the eagle) appear grouped together regularly in contemporary relief sculpture of the Galilee. At Beth Alpha, a large bull and lion face each other in either corner of the entrance, flanking the dedicatory inscription. Lions in particular were popular in Jewish art, and the list of places where similar motifs could have been encountered by the patron or craftsman responsible for the program is long—inter alia in the synagogues of Umm el ‘Amed, Capernaum, Nabratein, Bar’am, and Chorazin.

The primary motif of lions arranged antithetically around a bulls head is common in the local sculptural vernacular. Like the heraldic figures of the ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus, at Chorazin paired lions are found on the lintels of several synagogues. At Horvat ‘Amudim, where the synagogue is dated from the early 4th to 5th centuries C.E., a lintel features a pair of lions in stride, with forepaws resting on bulls heads, arranged around

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69 "Notes and news" 1924, Pl. V; Avigad 1976a, 142.
70 Including depictions of animals around the ‘sacred tree’ from the Iron Age and possibly earlier.
71 Avigad 1976a, 139. A catalogue of their appearance in antithetical compositions (over two dozen examples) is made by Hachlili (1988, 321-5).
72 For additional examples, see Hachlili 1988, 321-8.
a central vase (Fig. 4.56). Paired lions also appear on the lintel of the Torah Shrine from Nabratein (Fig. 4.57). Also at Chorazin, individual representations of lions were found on several frieze fragments. At Beth She’arim, the same animals appear in a number of different contexts across the site. Lions are depicted flanking the crowning conch on the representations of aediculae carved in Catacomb 4 (see above, Chapter 3). The eagle appears on frieze fragments from the mausoleum of Catacomb 11 (see also above, Chapter 3), and on a graffito in Catacomb 12, in archway between rooms (Fig. 4.58).

While it is not the main thrust of this analysis, which seeks primarily to position the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim in the context of sculptural traditions in the Galilee, it may be interesting to consider why this trio of animals in particular—the bull, the lion and the eagle—occur so regularly, and in such similar compositions, in relief sculpture at Beth She’arim and indeed, in different media across the region in the same period. It is important to reiterate first and foremost that none of these motifs is unique to Jewish visual culture or the period. Rather, representations of lions, bulls and eagles have long and enduring tradition of usage across a wide range of ancient arts of Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome. More than anything else, the near universal popularity of these animals, their multivalence, and their appearance in varying contexts and meanings, lends them a special suitability for appropriation.
Various meanings have been attributed to the lion as a symbol, including an apotropaic function, a representation of death and a symbol of the fierce power of the natural world. Some of the first appearances of the lion (along with the bull and gazelle/deer) are in royal hunt scenes in Mesopotamian art of the 2nd and 1st millennia B.C.E. At the palace of Ashurbanipal at Kuyunjik, for instance, hunt scenes, and particularly lion hunts featuring the king and his entourage, are a popular recurring motif. One includes a particularly epic scene that shows a dozen lions dead or dying. The association between royalty and the lion is demonstrated on the 13th century B.C.E. sarcophagus of Ahihram of Byblos, also one of the earliest appearances of the lion in funerary sculpture. This large stone sarcophagus rests on supports of four lions. On the gabled lid, two lions face opposite each other on either peak. The rest of the sarcophagus is carved with a processional relief scene, but the lions remain the largest and most dominating feature of the sarcophagus.

The fact that the lion and the bull could be readily found in Jewish literature and scripture may account for a degree of familiarity, the readiness of adoption and their popularity as opposed to other animals found in other people’s art of the times (e.g. horses, mythological beasts, etc.). In Jewish literature of the period, the bull figures prominently in the dream narrative of the Testament of Enoch, where biblical characters...

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73 Hachlili 1988, 328.
74 Avigad 1976a, 328.
75 For a more detailed description and figures, see Frankfort 1996, 186-94.
76 Frankfort 1996, 271.
appear in the guise of bulls, and in Lamentations Rabbah as a “herald of the messiah,”
and in other rabbinic literature as a “type of Deliverer.”  
Like the bull, the lion also had a long pre-history in Israelite and Jewish literature. The ferocity of the lion is
emphasized almost universally across Biblical and Second Temple period literature,
from the comparison of a gang of prophets to “roaring lions… rending prey” (Ezek. 22:25) to the ferocity of Judah Maccabee as a “lion in his deeds, like a lion’s cub roaring
for prey” (1 Macc. 3:4). Hachlili suggests that the popularity of the lion as a visual
trope, especially its use flanking representations of the Jewish ritual objects like the
Menorah (at Ma’on) and the Torah shrine (in depiction at Beth ‘Alpha and in reality at
Nabratein) has to do to with its cultural resonance with Judah, and with power and
vigilance.

Yet we should be careful before assuming a biblical context or connection with
heraldic lions seen in mosaics around the Torah Shrine or in the lintel from Nabratein.
At the same time as lions became popular in Jewish art, they were also popular in
Roman sarcophagus sculpture, and similar examples of two lions flanking a vase like
object can be found on sarcophagi from Tyre (see below, Chapter 5). In these examples,
the motif is always found on the rear of the sarcophagus, while the front is occupied by

77 Goodenough 1958a, 24-7.
78 Trans. JPS
79 Trans. RSV
80 See Goodenough 1958a, 79-81 for a thorough review of the evidence.
81 Hachlili 1988, 321.
mythological reliefs. The sarcophagi treated here depart from that pattern, making the lions the central motif of the sarcophagus, perhaps suggesting an aversion to mythological scenes on the part of the patron or family. In either case, it is not necessary to suppose, as Avigad does, that the artists copied the motif from a marble parallel, no longer extant, from Beth She’arim.

In this context, the absence of representations of rams or rams’ heads on any sarcophagi from Beth She’arim—or on any relief sculpture from Jewish contexts in the Galilee in Late Antiquity for that matter—is worth mentioning. Ram’s heads in particular are a common sculptural motif in this period, and are found on many forms of visual culture, including Proconnesian garland sarcophagi (see examples of imported and local forms in the following chapter). Moreover, the ram is well represented in Jewish history and literature. The ram, like the bull, was a sacrificial animal in biblical literature. Without pressing the evidence too far, it may be that the adoption of the ram as a Christological symbol, seen already in Late Antiquity on Christian sarcophagi from Rome and Roman Syria, might have spurred an avoidance of the image in Jewish culture. There is little doubt that in this period visual symbols of Judaism and Christianity developed as markers of identity (see above, Chapter 3).

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82 Avigad 1976a, 139.
83 Avigad 1976a, 139.
On the level of execution of the sculptural programs of locally produced sarcophagi at Beth She’arim

We noted already in Chapter 2 that one of the most striking aspects of the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim is the low level of execution of the sculptural programs of many examples, particularly relative to that of other sarcophagi produced in Roman Syria. At the outset, it is important to observe that this is not the case with all sarcophagi produced at Beth She’arim; there are some locally produced sarcophagi that are sculpted to relatively high standards. These demonstrate that at least some artisans who worked at Beth She’arim—possibly itinerant ones—were quite capable of skillful relief carving (see, for example, the discussion of the ‘acanthus’ sarcophagi in the following chapter). However, the sarcophagi we have just encountered have amply illustrated the phenomenon.

Indeed, on locally produced sarcophagi such as the ‘Nikae,’ ‘Daughters,’ ‘Column’ and ‘Eagle’ sarcophagi, the sculptural programs look aesthetically ‘naïve’ in many regards, and seem to have been carved by artisans with little training or talent. The winged figures on the ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus are simplistic, portrayed with little detail or depth, and moreover are carved in distorted perspective and with odd proportions. On the ‘Daughters’ sarcophagus, two-thirds of the sculptural program was unfinished and only roughly laid out (yet still proudly displayed). The wreath on the right side is tied with a barely identifiable knot. On the ‘Eagle’ sarcophagus, though the animal motifs are easily construed, they are carved on a single plane, poorly proportioned and lacking any
naturalism, much like the winged figures on the ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus. Similar observations could be made about many other sarcophagi just described, including the ‘Hunt’ and ‘Lions’ sarcophagi, as well as many individual motifs and features of the ‘Shell’ and ‘Gable’ sarcophagi.

Commentary on the ‘naïve’ quality of much of the relief sculpture on the Beth She‘arim sarcophagi has long been a fixture of scholarship on the catacombs. Avigad judged these sculptural programs “poor or mediocre, both technically and artistically.”84 Throughout his discussion, he employed adjectives like ‘primitive,’ ‘simple’ and ‘unimpressive.’85 For Avi-Yonah, the local nature of the production resulted in work of a lower quality than that observed in other regions of Roman Syria and neighboring provinces.86 He suggested that the “provincial necropolis did not attract any outstanding talents,” and that figural reliefs, being new in Jewish art, were unfamiliar to local craftsmen.87

We observed already in Chapter 2 that the properties of the soft limestone material of most locally produced sarcophagi may account for some of the low quality of the relief sculpture. Soft limestone, while easy to quarry and hew, is difficult to work with relief sculpture in any great detail. Some additional nuance to our understanding of this facet of the corpus is deserved, and a few further observations are warranted in light of

84 Avigad 1976a, 137.
85 Avigad 1976a, 136-64.
87 Avi-Yonah 1961, 41.
our evolving understanding of the various visual resources engaged in sarcophagus
sculpture at the site. Firstly, when one compares the individual motifs of the sarcophagi
with parallels appearing contemporary architectural relief carving in the region, the
impression of different levels of execution by and large disappears. Thus, for example,
the individual figural motifs of the inner frieze at Chorazin are similarly ‘naïve’ and
schematic, though they are embedded in a naturalistic and deeply carved scrolling
acanthus motif. Likewise, there is little qualitative difference between the nikae on the
sarcophagus at Beth She’arim and those found on synagogue lintels throughout the
region. Indeed, what the sarcophagi especially lack are the framing elements of
architectural relief sculpture—for example, elaborate moldings and naturalistic acanthus
scrolls—that lent additional detail to the friezes at Chorazin and suggested more skillful
artisans. Without these added elements, the individual motifs on the sarcophagi at Beth
She’arim are isolated and their irregularities and imperfections are readily observed.

It may also be the case that such figural motifs were less familiar to sculptors in the
region and carved less often than moldings and scrolling vines. More to the point, the
sarcophagus form itself was likely an unfamiliar canvas for the local or regional
sculptors who were responsible for the sarcophagi produced at Beth She’arim. All
indications suggest that these artisans were much more practiced at the kinds of relief
sculpture used in the monumental buildings of the region. The shape and proportions of
sarcophagi differ significantly from those of lintels and frieze panels where relief
sculpture was most frequently employed. This alone would have made it difficult to
transfer practiced compositions and motifs, as well as techniques. This understanding coincides well with current reconstruction of stone workshops in antiquity as highly specialized in the use of specific materials and the production of particular forms.88

In this connection it is surely significant that the ‘naïve’ level of execution is entirely restricted to the sarcophagi discussed in this chapter. Other sarcophagi from Beth She’arim that we will encounter in the next chapter draw on styles and motifs that were well-established in contemporary sarcophagus sculpture familiar in the province of Roman Syria. By contrast, the sarcophagi we have encountered above—such as the ‘Nikae,’ ‘Daughters’ and ‘Eagle’ sarcophagi—were, in large part, original compositions for which local sculptors creatively combined traditions of stone sculpture developed on other forms.

The fact that the low aesthetic level of the sculptural programs of these sarcophagi is restricted to precisely these examples reinforces the cohesiveness and meaningfulness of the influence of local traditions identified here and in the preceding chapter. It also sheds light on the substantial creativity—if not the talent or skill—with which local sculptors (and possibly patrons) approached the task of decorating sarcophagi. This creativity goes unappreciated all too often in favor of negative assessments of the technical and aesthetic aspects of the sculptural programs, but it attests to the fact that local sculptors were drawing on locally developed traditions and not only or even

88 See, for example, Rockwell 1993, 178-82.
mostly copying from imported sarcophagi, as sometimes suggested. Moreover, the fact that these sarcophagi were proudly and prominently displayed in many cases suggests that the patrons too would have judged them successful renderings of the messages and meanings they wished to convey, and furthermore, appreciated the creativity of their sculptural programs.

4. 6 ‘Jewish’ symbols on sarcophagi from Beth She’arim and Rome

Quite in contrast to the ubiquity with which the menorah and related Jewish ritual symbols appear across the ancient Mediterranean and in diverse contexts at this time, on Jewish sarcophagi from both Beth She’arim and Rome, the use of Jewish ritual symbols in the sculptural programs was exceedingly rare. Only one sarcophagus from Beth She’arim uses a Jewish symbol, a menorah. In Rome the menorah and other Jewish ritual symbols are only slightly more common, appearing on five sarcophagi.

4.6.1 Jewish ritual symbols on the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim

In the same period that the catacombs of Beth She’arim were hewn and the sarcophagi produced, in the 3rd through 5th centuries C.E., Jewish ritual objects become popular and widely used symbols marking Jewish people and places (see above, Chapter 2). The menorah was particularly common, and appeared in stone sculpture and on mosaic floors in synagogues in the Galilee, and on bread stamps, lamps, ceramics and other objects from daily life. At Beth She’arim, representations of the menorah in particular figured prominently on the walls of the catacombs in a variety of contexts,
marking individual arcosolia as well as communal spaces; on lintels at the entrances of burial halls and in passages between rooms. They are also stamped on a pair of lead coffins (e.g. Fig. 4.59). In Catacomb 20, a larger than life menorah is carved on the wall of Room XXIII (see above, Fig. 4.19). Yet, up to now, we have not once mentioned the menorah or any other Jewish ritual implements as motifs on the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim. This is not by accident. In fact, in light of the popularity of Jewish ritual symbols, it is surprising that Jewish ritual symbols appear clearly on only one local limestone sarcophagi from Beth She’arim.

This is sarcophagus no. 122 (Fig. 4.60). Appropriately dubbed the ‘Menorah’ sarcophagus by Avigad, this gabled sarcophagus in local limestone was discovered in Room XXVI. This area of the catacomb has collapsed since Avigad’s excavations, so we must rely on his descriptions and photos. The front panel of the sarcophagus was plain, though Avigad noted horizontal lines at the top and bottom which probably have marked out the borders of a relief panel that was never completed. On the left side, a seven-branched menorah with a squat shaft and square, stepped base appears, framed between two simple columns at the corners. The branches of the menorah are composed of different types of cups; on the left a series of regular, tapered cups comprise the branches, while on the right alternating spheres and spacers are used. The six branches to the sides terminate in a flower bud, while atop the central branch sits an oil lamp. The

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Ã— Avigad 1976a, 149-50. A portion of the catacomb has since collapsed and covered over both the ‘menorah’ sarcophagus and the ‘column’ sarcophagus, along with several plain gabled sarcophagi.
right side of the sarcophagus is more or less identical to that of the ‘Nikae’ sarcophagus, described above, featuring a knotted wreath containing a conch and flanked by a pair of dolphins.

On one other sarcophagus (no. 27) a possible Jewish symbol has been tentatively identified. This sarcophagus, which was found adjacent to the ‘Daughters’ sarcophagus described above, was entirely plain with the exception of a raised vertical band bisecting the front panel (Fig. 4.61). This panel is incised with a shallow representation of an upright branched motif, which may have been intended to depict either a date palm tree, or a lulav. If either interpretation is correct, then there is good reason for suspecting that the motif had symbolic, religious meaning. Both the date palm tree and the lulav branch had long associations with Jewish history and religion. The date palm tree was associated with the region of Judaea already in the early Roman period, where it appears on both Roman and Jewish (Bar Kochba) coinage. The lulav was one of the four species associated with the pilgrimage festival of Sukkot. However, the depiction is extremely schematic and without any accompanying symbols or motifs. Traces of painted inscription were preserved on the rear of the sarcophagus, but the inscription was illegible. Ultimately, the identification of this motif as a Jewish symbol is unproven.

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90 See Fine 2005, 140-5.
91 Lev. 23:40, Exod. 34:18-23, Deut. 16.
92 Avigad 1976a, 160. However, in a discussion of the inscriptions Avigad suggests that at least part of the inscription could be deciphered as קירה. On the meaning of this term, see below.
It is striking that Jewish ritual symbols appear clearly on only one sarcophagus from the catacombs at Beth She’arim; all the more so when we consider that the menorah appeared regularly throughout the catacombs, carved, painted and incised in a wide range of contexts (see above, Chapter 3). On the basis of the regularity with which it appears at Beth She’arim and in relief sculpture of the region more generally, we can rule out that this absence was the result of a lack of ability, familiarity or knowledge of the motif on the part of the artisans. Rather, any explanation for the phenomenon must presume that Jewish patrons of sarcophagi at Beth She’arim did often not feel the need to have Jewish ritual symbols sculpted on their sarcophagi, in marked contrast to other Jewish families and individuals who used the catacombs of Beth She’arim.

It may be speculated that the menorah and related Jewish ritual symbols were most often directed outwardly, meant to announce to the outsider the Jewishness of a space, place or person to viewers. If this is the case, in the context of the catacombs at Beth She’arim where all of the interred identified as Jewish, the use of Jewish ritual symbols may not have been considered necessary by sarcophagus patrons, especially as markers of individual spaces. Sarcophagi were generally used for single inhumations in the Roman world, and the limited inscriptive evidence coupled with the scant remains found in the looted sarcophagi confirms that this practice was observed at Beth She’arim too, though as we have already noted occasional secondary burials also occurred in the
sarcophagi. This explanation is belied somewhat by the regular appearance of menorahs on objects used in daily life in the period, however at Beth Sheʿarim it is true that representations of the menorah appear most commonly incised and carve in communal spaces; over the entrances to tombs, below and between arcosolia with multiple burials and in passageways between rooms. In these cases, they do not seem to be associated with any single individual.

This explanation concurs with Avigad’s treatment of the lead sarcophagi from the site. Avigad pointed out the imported nature of these lead sarcophagi as evidence that Jews in the diaspora felt a greater need to mark their identity than Jews in Roman Palestine. Aside from the use of stamps with menorahs, these lead coffins are otherwise stylistically identical to ones produced in Roman Syria. They have been discovered in necropoleis across the region, from Ashkelon to Beirut. No workshop has been excavated, but it seems likely that they were manufactured in one of the major port cities, most likely Tyre or Beirut, but possibly Ashkelon as well. The motifs and the schema are sufficient to prove that the lead coffins from Beth Sheʿarim were almost certainly imported from a workshop along the coast, and not a local product. Since they were manufactured in a foreign workshop, and together with sarcophagi for Gentiles, it seems logical that either the workshop (as a sales tactic), or the Jewish patron, would

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93 See the discussion of the ‘Daughters’ sarcophagus above. Multiple inhumations are also known from earlier ossuaries and from sarcophagi discovered at Tyre.
94 Avigad 1976a.
have opted for the use of a Jewish symbol to differentiate the coffin from virtually identical models used by non-Jews.

4.6.2 Jewish ritual symbols on sarcophagi from Rome

Some combination of Jewish ritual symbols, including the menorah, shofar and lulav, appear on five sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons in Rome. Three of these feature Jewish ritual symbols in relief carvings, while on two others incised Jewish ritual symbols accompany an epitaph.

The first example is perhaps the most remarkable, and famous sarcophagus attributed to the Jewish community in Rome. The ‘Jewish’ Seasons sarcophagus as it is often called (Fig. 4.62) is one example of a sarcophagus type extremely popular in the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E. At the center of the sarcophagus in the clipeus, a space most often reserved for portrait busts, a large and skillfully rendered menorah is depicted. We will return to this sarcophagus again in Chapters 6 and 7, when we consider the way it adopts popular Roman figural tropes while subverting the expectations of the viewer for portrait sculpture in the clipeus. For the moment, what is significant about this sarcophagus is the way in which Jewish ritual symbols are combined with an otherwise

\[^{95}\text{A fourth, a small marble fragment tentatively identified by Koch (2002, 195) and considered part of a sarcophagus by Frey (CIJ, No. 202) is almost certainly a loculus seal.}\]

\[^{96}\text{Most known examples of this style, including the Jewish example discussed here, were collected in two volumes by George Hanffmann (1951).}\]
unremarkable Roman figural program of seasons, *nikae* and putti. Clearly no tension between the two was perceived by the sarcophagus patron.97

In a similar way, the lid of a sarcophagus from Rome belonging to one Faustina features a trio of Jewish ritual symbols and the Hebrew word ‘shalom’ (שלום) surrounding a Greek inscription (Fig. 4.63).98 In this case, the use of Hebrew is almost certainly a visual symbol and not intended to be read as part of the epitaph. In the catacombs of Rome, Hebrew appears almost exclusively in formulae—either שָלומָה or שלום על ישראל—and there is little evidence to suggest that members of the Jewish community were fluent in the language, as we saw above in Chapter 2.99

The lid features three theater masks jutting out from the corners and center of a flat lid. In between the two masks on the right is a tabula with a Greek inscription, "Here lies Faustina." What makes the program remarkable however, is the inclusion of an incised menorah, shofar and lulav, together with the word “shalom” in Hebrew below the inscription. The same combination of incised motifs was also observed on a sarcophagus fragment belonging to one Veturia Paula, copied by a Flemish traveler in the 16th century.100 The inscription on the fragment identifies a ‘proselyte’ who took on the

97 If there was a perceived tension, then it must be concluded that the patron made a statement through this visual program affirming the coexistence of ‘Roman’ and ‘Jewish’ visual resources.
98 Discovered out of context in 1732. See Konikoff 1986, 46-9, no. 15.
100 Frey 1936a, No. 523; Konikoff 1986, No. 1; Noy 1995, No. 577. See also a reproduction of the travel notes in Konikoff 1986, Pls. 1-3.
Hebrew name Sarah and was a ‘mother’ of two synagogues.\textsuperscript{101} For Goodenough, the sarcophagus of Faustina—with an entirely ‘Jewish’ inscription complementing an otherwise ‘Roman’ sculptural program—provided an opportunity to remark on the danger in taking "simple and loyally Jewish inscriptions as a sign that the persons celebrated by them were not Hellenized,” i.e. fluent in Roman culture.\textsuperscript{102} Indeed, what sarcophagi like that of Faustina or the Seasons sarcophagus suggest is that many “loyal Jews” were also eager patrons of and participants in Roman visual culture.

Two other sarcophagi suggest, if not outright discomfort with Roman culture, at least a complete disinterest in Roman visual culture and the conventions of Roman sarcophagus sculpture on the part of the patron. Both sarcophagi share not only a total avoidance of Roman motifs and symbols (to say nothing of Roman figural imagery), but flout completely the conventions and styles of Roman sarcophagus decoration. The first sarcophagus of this group, a large example found intact with its lid on the grounds of the Villa Torlonia, is one of the best preserved of the corpus (Fig. 4.64). The sarcophagus is of uniquely massive proportions, measuring 2.20 m long by 1.20 m high with a depth of 1.06 m.\textsuperscript{103} The lid of the sarcophagus is likewise substantial, and overhangs the sarcophagus on all sides. In its proportions, the sarcophagus mirrors more closely the limestone sarcophagi of Beth She’arim than the marble ones of Rome.

\textsuperscript{101} See above, Chapter 1, and Noy 1995.
\textsuperscript{102} Goodenough 1953b, 25.
\textsuperscript{103} Konikoff 1986, 40-1.
Quite in contrast to its grand size, the visual program of the sarcophagus is decidedly underwhelming, taking up less than a third of the available space on the front panel. At the center is a seven-branched menorah, rendered in simple but consistent detail with regular proportions. At the base, the menorah rests on a tripod depicted in shallow, flat relief, while at the top of the menorah the branches appear clipped.\textsuperscript{104} To the right of the menorah is a single etrog with leaves still attached. To the left of the menorah are depicted a shofar and a lulav, arranged vertically. These Jewish ritual symbols are displayed in a smaller scale and shallower relief than the menorah in the center of the composition. The symbols reflect ritual offerings associated with the biblically warranted festivals of the Jewish temple. The remaining two thirds of the front panel are unornamented, as are the sides, rear and lid.

Together with the uniqueness of the visual program and form of the sarcophagus, the abrupt termination of the menorah and the overhanging lid suggest that the workshop was fulfilling a special order and was inexperienced with both the form and content of the sarcophagus.\textsuperscript{105} Nothing about the visual program of this sarcophagus points to the use of Roman sculptural workshops. The sculptural program includes none of the motifs or features that are characteristic of Roman sarcophagus sculpture (columns, strigils, tabula ansata or other framing mechanisms for instance, see further below, Chapter 6). Rather, all signs indicate that this sarcophagus was specially

\textsuperscript{104} There is no indication that the tops of the branches were incised on the lid.
\textsuperscript{105} See Koch 2002, 194.
commissioned from the outset, with only minimal effort expended on its completion. In fact, so unusual is this sarcophagus that it has been suggested that it may have been produced outside of Rome and imported to the city. Unfortunately, the sarcophagus has subsequently been lost, and while the form and decoration are suggestive, petrographic analysis cannot be used to determine whether this example was imported.

The second sarcophagus of this group (Fig. 4.65) was discovered in situ in the Vigna Randanini catacomb by Herzog in 1859. While also unique, it shows much more care and effort in its execution than the first. This sarcophagus bears a repertoire of Jewish ritual symbols across its front panel similar to the one discovered at the Villa Torlonia, but the whole is much more elaborate. The panel was 1.91 m long and is preserved to a height of .58 m. At the center of the panel is a menorah, rendered in shallow relief but with significant detail. Two branches of the menorah remain, diminishing in size at the upper extremes, with each side ending in a flat pedestal on which rests a lit oil lamp facing inwards.

The top and base of the panel have been lost, but based on analogy with surviving depictions of menorahs from the catacombs, including several on other sarcophagi, the menorah would have rested on a tripod base and terminated in a single, small stand for an oil lamp, with seven lamps in all. Two irregular vertical bands on either side of the

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107 Herzog 1861, 99.
menorah separate this dominant symbol from the remainder of the composition. Mirrored on either side of these are a set of Jewish ritual symbols separated by four palm trees. Moving outwards from the menorah, these are a shofar, a lulav and an etrog. At the extremes on either side are two shallow rondels, one empty and the other containing an unclear and poorly preserved motif. The palm trees and bands which divide the panel into vertical registers are significant for their high relief, while the other motifs were all executed in low relief. However, none of the elements are particularly detailed.

What is unique then about these two sarcophagi is not the symbols themselves (these suggest no different sense of what it meant to be Jewish than the symbols found on the Seasons Sarcophagus or the sarcophagus of Faustina above), but the absence of any of the well-established visual language of Roman sarcophagi. They show, by way of contrast, the remarkable use and even mastery of the visual koine of the Roman world by other Jewish patrons in Rome that we will encounter below (Chapters 6 and 7). Furthermore, the fact that these sarcophagi, the most unambiguously associated with Jewish patrons, depart so substantially from Roman conventions is probably no coincidence. Here we have one extreme of the spectrum of sculptural options open to Jewish patrons in Rome: an avoidance not only of Roman figural imagery, but also of Roman conventions and style. Where some sarcophagi we will encounter below eschew markers of Jewishness in favor of an uncomplicated adoption of Roman visual culture and sarcophagus conventions in their visual programs, these sarcophagi elect the
opposite response. To an ancient viewer in the city of Rome, Jewish or not, these sarcophagi would have appeared foreign, perhaps even bizarre, where most sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons would have appeared utterly conventional and pleasantly familiar. Indeed, these last two sarcophagi must be considered ‘outliers’ and it should be cautioned that “[e]xceptional cases should not be taken as arguments against the system as a whole.”

4.6.3 Jewish ritual symbols and Jewish identities in Palestine and diaspora

The particular Jewish objects displayed on these sarcophagi—the menorah, lulav, etrog and shofar—are commonly found on other artifacts from the Jewish catacombs of Rome. We have seen also that they appear with some frequency in the catacombs of Beth She’arim—especially in communal spaces—and are ubiquitous in Jewish communities across the Mediterranean world in Late Antiquity. It is clear, as Goodenough put it, that they are “by no means ‘merely decorative.’” Given their prominent, strategic placement it seems much more likely that the use of such visual markers were intended

109 Hölscher 2004, 2.
110 The symbols can be found everywhere, from synagogue mosaics in Palestine (Jericho, Sepphoris and Tiberias, to name a few) to the frescoes of Dura Europos. In the catacombs of Rome, they were found on every class of artifact—on gold glasses, on frescoes and on loculi sealing plates.
111 Goodenough 1953b, 9. At the same time, the argument that the use of such symbols—at times found in place of inscriptions or portraits—was motivated by a theological belief in anonymity in death, also made by Goodenough (1953b, 9) is belied by the expense and elaboration of the sarcophagi they are found in and the inherent individualism of the sarcophagus form itself. Not to mention the fact that such symbols are even more frequently found coupled with inscriptions proclaiming the name and relevant details of the individual.
as concrete statements about the identity of the deceased, part of the self-narrative of the visual program. But what, precisely, did such symbols communicate?

On the one hand, the fact that the use of these objects was biblically mandated and connected to both Temple and synagogue worship suggests that the objects could have symbolized the actual Jewish praxis of the patron. The ritual objects depicted on these sarcophagi, and commonly throughout the catacombs, were ones that were likely familiar to the patron from Jewish religious life in the synagogue, and possibly the home.\footnote{Goodenough 1953b, 9.} In other words, it is enticing to believe that, in choosing this repertoire of familiar ritual objects, the Jewish patron may have been making a symbolic statement about their real practice of Judaism. This possibility has been carried even further by some, with the suggestion being made that these were the sarcophagi of especially observant Jews.\footnote{Geller 1983, 76.}

Yet their widespread popularity in Jewish settings across the Mediterranean suggests that their meaning was neutral enough to have appealed to diverse individuals and contexts. More likely is the notion that, by recalling biblical law and Temple worship, the objects may have provided a symbolic link to Jewish religion and history. By including these Jewish ritual symbols the Jewish patron may have been indicating less about their religious practice and more about their cultural Jewishness. In other words, the claim made by the objects as symbols may correspond less with the patron's

\footnote{Goodenough 1953b, 9.} \footnote{Geller 1983, 76.}
habitual practice and more with his or her cultural identity. Adopting a motif with such widespread popularity may have been seen as a way to cultivate a symbolic link between the patron and the pan-Mediterranean Jewish world. What motivated the selection of these particular objects then, was most likely not a symbolization of Jewish religious observance, but rather their straightforward recognizability as ‘Jewish’ objects.

Indeed, we should probably avoid suggesting that the patrons of these sarcophagi in Beth She’arim or Rome were more or differently Jewish (e.g. ‘observant’ or ‘orthodox’). Not only were these sarcophagi interred in the same catacombs as other Jewish individuals in both communities, but the patrons employed the same limited set of ritual symbols that appear over and over again throughout the catacombs and across the Mediterranean. By depicting this familiar group of Jewish objects, the patrons were visually marking Jewishness and symbolically linking themselves to the global Jewish community. This linkage, indicated by the adoption of this omnipresent motif, was at once a link with the present and the biblical past, since the biblical origins of these objects and their use in the long abolished temple cult could not have been unknown to the Jewish viewer.

In any case, sarcophagi with sculptural programs and Jewish ritual symbols from Beth She’arim draw largely on contemporary local traditions of stone sculpture. In Rome, the relationship between the use of Jewish ritual symbols and reliance on Palestinian or Roman traditions of stone sculpture is less clear. Two sarcophagi are otherwise indistinguishable from non-Jewish parallels, while the opposite is true of two
others, which appear alien in comparison to other sarcophagi from Rome. Ultimately, what is most significant about these examples of sarcophagi with Jewish ritual symbols is what they reveal, by comparison, about the rest of the corpus and by extension the majority of Jewish sarcophagus patrons in both communities: most Jewish sarcophagus patrons perceived little need to mark their sarcophagi with Jewish ritual symbols.

4.7 Summary

Much like the ossuaries before them—which naturally reflected the contemporary relief sculpture of the Jerusalem tomb facades\(^\text{114}\)—the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim draw inspiration and influence from the relief sculpture of the monumental buildings of the Galilee region, as well as from earlier traditions of stone sculpture from the Second Temple period. However, observing the ‘local’ traditions present in the sarcophagus sculpture at Beth She’arim should not lead us to diminish the creativity of the artisans and sarcophagus patrons.\(^\text{115}\) Sed-Rajna was quite right when observing that it is ‘inappropriate’ to call Jewish art and artifacts like these “simple reflections of the great artistic trends” or “occasional products of popular crafts.”\(^\text{116}\) Not only are such characterizations inaccurate—they ignore the meaning and significance invested in

\(^{114}\) Rahmani 1994.

\(^{115}\) As, for instance, Avigad (1976a, 163) does when he writes by way of conclusion that: “There is nothing particularly impressive or creative in the artistry of the decorations on the sarcophagi of Beth She’arim. On the contrary, they display the low standard and inferior talent of the Jewish artists responsible for the carving. They were obviously provincial, inexperienced craftsmen, who were unable to achieve high artistic standards.”

these visual objects by patrons, viewers and artisans alike—they deny the great amount of creativity and mastery with which the artisans approached their task, as well as patrons, to whatever extent they may have been involved.

The foregoing reassessment, which has established the significant weight given to local traditions in stone sculpture on the visual programs at Beth She‘arim, fits into what was known about the development of visual and funerary culture across the region in the Roman period. In some places,\textsuperscript{117} the entry into the Roman marble trade and the adoption of imported marble as a primary building material was accompanied by a shift away from local styles.\textsuperscript{118} In these places, marble was used generally to the exclusion of local materials; marble facades on public buildings became \textit{de riguer}. Notably, as Jong has shown, this was not the case in Roman Syria.\textsuperscript{119} There, local styles continued to exist and be combined with imported influences throughout the Roman period. The same was the case in Roman Palestine, where local stone and local styles were used in public building projects throughout. De Jong concludes that: “The people in Roman Syria mixed symbols and materials that were part of a Mediterranean or imperial style of architecture with local forms, and perhaps also with motives originating from outside the Roman world. The tombs in Syria were hybrid buildings in their outward

\textsuperscript{117} In particular Tripolitania, Pamphylia and the Black Sea. See Ward-Perkins 1980a, 331.
\textsuperscript{118} Ward-Perkins 1980a, 331; 1980b, 49ff.
\textsuperscript{119} De Jong 2001; 2007; 2010.
appearance and represent not a Hellenized or Parthian but a local, Syrian-provincial way of burial.\textsuperscript{120}

In other words, across Roman Syria, ‘Roman’ influence was frequently filtered through local traditions and in the process inflected with new styles, paradigms and, quite possibly, assigned new or different meanings. This is the very definition of adaptive acculturation. Though the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim we have just encountered borrow at times elements of Roman motifs and visual koine, they combine them in ways that are unfamiliar to sarcophagus sculpture outside of Beth She’arim and are indeed, quite unique to it. They more clearly betray the influence of contemporary architectural carving than of imported sarcophagi. And they show the strength of local traditions in stone carving, as well as the creativity with which local craftsmen approached their task.

This understanding of stone sculpture, is in fact, characteristic of much contemporary work in the region. For instance, May and Stark characterized the work of Workshop II at Chorazin on the inner friezes, including many of the figurative scenes, in this way: “The range of motifs is extremely broad and most unusual. Even common ornaments like the acanthus and vine scrolls, dentils, ovoli and others are interpreted in an unconventional manner, not in the tradition of the medium.”\textsuperscript{121} Many of the motifs that are typically associated with ‘pagan’ and non-Jewish influence seem therefore to

\textsuperscript{120} De Jong 2007, 37.
\textsuperscript{121} May and Stark 2002, 228.
have entered the repertoire and visual koine of Jewish art of the period not through sarcophagus imports, but through architectural relief sculpture instead.

In the next chapter, we will encounter imported and local sarcophagi that in fact emulate imported models. Yet, when we evaluate the local influence on sarcophagi at Beth She’arim, it becomes abundantly clear just how discrete and easily identifiable the influence of imported models is; true copies of imported sarcophagi are a rare and well defined group at Beth She’arim, and the sarcophagi exhibiting local influences show limited if any direct influence from imported models. Occasionally, a framing garland is used in ways that may allude to contemporary imported styles popular in the larger region, yet this is about the extent of the observable influence of sarcophagi imported from the broader Roman world. Even in these cases, such motifs are used in new ways that bear little resemblance to their use on imports and their copies, and furthermore, are combined with other visual elements and motifs drawn from local traditions.
Chapter 5. Roman Syria and the Provincial Context of Sarcophagus Patrons at Beth She’arim

In this chapter I situate the sarcophagi and sarcophagus patrons of Beth She’arim in the context of the sarcophagus trade in the province of Roman Syria (Maps 8, 9). I demonstrate how broadening our perspective to the provincial level and considering the patterns of sarcophagus patronage in Roman Syria can offer a corrective to more isolated analyses of the Beth She’arim corpus. I compare and contextualize the sculptural programs and the visual and funerary practices associated with the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim to those at Tyre. In doing so, I reveal the extensive degree to which sarcophagi and sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim participated in the funerary landscape of Roman Syria.

On publishing the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim, Avigad observed already that their sculptural programs borrowed heavily from imported Roman influences.¹ Avigad’s observation has been echoed by many other since.² Yet this widespread observation is rarely elaborated on with any precision.³ Furthermore, it is inexact in that it ignores the fact that ‘Roman’ visual culture and objects such as sarcophagi were not monolithic, rigid categories of cultural resources. Like the Roman Empire itself, the dominant matrix

¹ Avigad (1976a, 136) writes: “The locally produced stone sarcophagi are essentially imitations of the imported marble ones which were frequently decorated with garlands.”
³ The closest is perhaps the short article of Foerster (2012).
of Roman culture was pluralistic, varied and differently expressed in different places.\(^4\)

Across the empire the cultural forms and resources associated with Rome and Roman influence were flexible, incorporating and even borrowing from local traditions. Thus, we saw in the previous chapter that many of the ‘Roman’ influences identified on the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim were filtered through local traditions. It should come as little surprise that Roman cultural influence was also mediated by Beth She’arim’s location in the province of Roman Syria, to which we turn now.

5.1 The Galilee region and Beth She’arim in the context of Roman Syria

The importance of the provincial perspective derives from the fact that, for most citizens of the ancient world, as today, their cultural (and religious) identities were intimately bound up with their immediate, local and regional contexts. On first glance, the dominant cultural currents of the Late Ancient Mediterranean and Roman Empire can seem global in reach and scale. However, they were rarely encountered by local peoples except as mediated through interaction at the local level (see above, Chapters 3 and 4), and filtered through the provincial social and cultural networks that are the subject of this chapter.\(^5\) Thus, a few words on the political and cultural history of the


\(^5\) For a description of the Roman Empire as a “large, multi-cultural, and pluralist domain,” see Elsner 2003.
Galilee region and Beth She’arim as part of the province of Roman Syria are in order (Map 10).

On the one hand, like any other town of its size in Roman Syria, Beth She’arim had its own local history and traditions, and its own local and customs, practices and preferences, as we saw above in Chapters 3 and 4. On the other hand, Beth She’arim was politically and culturally a part of the larger Roman province of Syria. While Roman Palestine and the Galilee region are often isolated from the broader province as unique, they were subject to the same political and cultural developments as the rest of the province. Indeed, it is important to emphasize that, whatever the religious practices of its inhabitants, in most regards Beth She’arim was neither richer nor poorer, better or worse connected, or more or less diverse, than the majority of provincial towns that made up Roman Syria (Map 10). Moreover, many aspects of its material culture reflect broader patterns and practices observable across the province. In this chapter we will see that this is particularly true of the sarcophagi and their patronage practices.

The region of Roman Syria has been the focus of imperial conflict and expansion for millennia. Its location between ancient centers of culture and empire—Egypt on the one hand and Mesopotamia on the other—put it squarely on the map as a place where competing cultures would converge. It was also a region of extensive trade, connecting

6 Thus, while it is common for scholars of the province of Roman Syria to avoid treatment of Palestine, and for scholars of Roman Palestine to ignore the issue of its integration in the larger province, some of the more nuanced treatments of the region do a better job of integrating Roman Palestine with the broader province. See especially Butcher 2003; Millar 1993; Sartre 2005.
the western Mediterranean to the industries and goods of Mesopotamia, India and China; and as a region it was also renowned for the export of textiles, wines and oils throughout much of antiquity.

When the region came squarely under the influence of Rome in the middle of the 1st century B.C.E. and further throughout the first centuries of Roman rule, cultural change was "superficial" and confined mostly to elite circles coopted into the program of Roman rule. Rome left intact the patchwork of client kingdoms and local peoples ruled by local tetrarchs and Hellenistic city states inherited from the Seleucids. This state of affairs was more or less maintained for the first century or so of imperial rule, and only gradually phased out in a piecemeal way in the latter half of the 1st century C.E. but accelerated in the time of Trajan or Hadrian in the early 2nd century C.E. The region of Roman Syria underwent a series of political restructurings as the Empire transitioned to more direct rule in the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E., and the region was increasingly subdivided into administrative territories. Under the emperor Severus in the late 2nd century C.E., the region was divided into three provinces: Syria Coele, Syria Phoenice and Syria Palestina (see Map 9).

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7 Sartre 2005, 261.
9 Sartre 2005, 42. These included not only Herod the Great and his successors in Judaea, but the client kings of Apamea, Emesa, Nabataea and many smaller, isolated client states throughout the province.
10 Sartre 2005, 153. See also Butcher 2003, 83.
The Galilee region and the village of Beth She’arim were located in the northern extreme of Syria Palaestina, an administrative unit that included a heterogeneous population of Jews, pagans and (later) Christians. There is a general consensus that the evidence of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. reveals little in the way of Romanization in the Galilee. Though some still date the theater at Sepphoris to the 1st. c. C.E. (along with several other possible civic structures), the Duke University excavations on the summit and the Hebrew University excavations have been firm in their dating of the structure to the beginning of the 2nd century C.E.\textsuperscript{11} Indeed, by some accounts, the Galilee lagged behind the rest of Palestine and Roman Syria even into the Roman period.\textsuperscript{12} Rather, it was only well into the Roman period that urban institutions and architecture, mosaic and painted figural images and Greek inscriptions, \textit{inter alia}, became common in the Galilee. While important outposts of Roman culture could be found in the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias already in the early Roman period, it was the middle Roman period (2nd to mid-3rd centuries C.E.) that witnessed the flourishing of the visual vocabulary and architecture of the Galilee.

By the late Roman period (late 3rd to 4th centuries C.E.), when the Beth She’arim catacombs were at their apogee, the Galilee looked more or less the same as the rest of Roman Syria from the perspective of the archaeological record. While some important

\textsuperscript{11} See Meyers, Meyers, and Gordon 2017, Chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{12} Studies of Romanization (and Hellenization) in Palestine and the Galilee include: Chancy 2005; Goodman 2007; Hengel 1974; Lapin 1998; Levine 1992; 1999; Meyers ; Meyers and Chancy 2012; Richardson 2004; Schwartz 2001; Tcherikover 1959.
local differences in material culture can be located, for example, in the persistence of ritual baths and stone vessels, many of the same signs of cultural change and urbanization appear in the Galilee as elsewhere in Roman Syria. Civic architecture, including temples, synagogues, baths and basilicas dot the urban environment; their lintels and facades were decorated often in marble worked with Greek and Roman motifs.13

Excavations of the village of Beth She’arim, however, revealed much more meager evidence for the inroads of urbanization. While there is no question that urbanization in the Roman mode had spread to some neighboring towns and cities, Beth She’arim itself shows only limited evidence of developing a civic plan on the lines of a Roman town. Beth She’arim was never, by any definition, an ‘urban’ center. While over time it did accumulate a few Roman style civic buildings (namely a synagogue and a basilical building). Beth She’arim was, for all intents and purposes, an unremarkable, squarely average village in the Galilee in Late Antiquity. Moreover, the subregion of the Galilee experienced only limited effects of urbanization. The limited nature of urbanization in the Galilee has been emphasized in more nuanced treatments of subject such as the assessment of M. Chancey:

“Apparently, neither Sepphoris nor Tiberias constructed nymphaea, monumental fountains elaborately decorated with columns, carvings, and often statues, though nearby cities like Hippos, Scythopolis, and Gadara did. No tetrapyla stood at the intersections of Galilean city streets, unless a large square pillar at Tiberias was once part of one. As already observed, temples, a standard feature in the empire’s cities, were rare

13 See Fischer 1988, 161.
in Galilee. No amphitheatres, the characteristic building for Roman combat sports, were built within Galilee, though they were constructed at nearby Beth Shean, Caesarea Maritima, and perhaps Legio. Nor did Galilee see the construction of any circuses or Hellenistic hippodromes to supplement the old stadium at Tiberias and hippodrome at Taricheae, though such facilities appeared at Caesarea Maritima, Tyre, Gadara, and Scythopolis (the one at the latter site rebuilt as an amphitheater in the fourth century).”

Yet despite these notable differences that are observable at the regional level, archaeology overall suggests that the Jewish experience of Roman rule in Palestine was much the same as the experience of other provincial peoples in the region, and moreover was accompanied by many of the same changes in economy, and material culture. Thus, while the Jewish experience of Roman rule is often treated as unique and isolated by both scholars of Jewish history, who tend to ignore evidence from outside of Palestine, and scholars of the Roman East, who tend to ignore evidence from Palestine, the material record suggests a different perspective: namely, that a contextualized view of the Galilee within the broader province of Roman Syria is appropriate. It is remarkable, in fact, how uniform the picture looks from an archaeological perspective across all of Roman Syria. Thus, it should come as little surprise that that the visual culture from burial sites, Jewish and non-Jewish, in the Roman Syria, confirms the similarities.

15 See Sartre 2005, 89.
16 Only a few have avoided the temptation to avoid Judaea. See, for example, Millar 1993; Sartre 2005. Sartre (2005, 77), in fact, states that the temptation from his perspective is to avoid giving too much space to Judaea given the ample literary and historical evidence from the region and its outsized role in political unrest of the early Roman period in Syria.
5.2 The Roman stone trade and the province of Roman Syria

While the region of Roman Syria is rich in many resources, it possesses few deposits of marble. What little local marble exists is of inferior quality. While extensive use was made of local stone material—including limestone, sandstone and basalt—for ‘luxury’ stones, ancient citizens of the region had to rely on the established stone trade of the Roman Empire. Marble and other such stone was sourced from quarries across the Mediterranean (Map 11). This stone trade—a term that encompasses the entire scope of the Roman economy that emerged around the quarrying and production of stone products in antiquity, including architectural forms and sarcophagi—had begun already in the 2nd century B.C.E., bringing marble from eastern quarries to Rome. By the 1st century C.E. it had grown sizably, in large part connected with the growing power and wealth of the Roman Empire and imperial building projects, particularly in the city of Rome itself.

By the following century demand for marble encompassed the entire Roman Mediterranean and especially the Roman East, including the cities and towns of Roman Syria. Ward-Perkins cited this empire-wide increase in demand for sculpted stone

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17 Dodge 1988, 222; Russell 2013, 151.
18 This is the sense in which Russell (2013) employs the term in his excellent study of the economics of the industry.
20 The oft-cited quote from Suetonius’s Life of Augustus that Augustus “found [Rome] built in brick and left it in marble” betrays, in fact, a real and marked increase in civic expenditure and building that was a defining feature of the early imperial period. It would drive much of the demand for imported marble products.
21 Butcher 2003, 204.
products including sarcophagi and architectural forms as responsible for an important reorganization of the stone industry in the first centuries of the common era.\textsuperscript{23} New production methods, including production-to-stock, evolved and quarries were organized with greater efficiency. Certain quarries gained virtual monopolies over particular export markets, and the largest quarries—the true centers of production for the stone trade—were in the eastern Mediterranean,\textsuperscript{24} with the Attic quarries in Greece and Proconnesian quarries in Asia Minor dominating the market (Map 11).\textsuperscript{25}

The participation of patrons at places like Beth She’arim and Tyre in the Roman stone trade was enabled by this reorganization. Before these developments, stone materials were purchased on a need basis directly from quarries and for specific purposes. Such was the case with individual projects such as civic statues and commemorative monuments, all the way to large public building projects like the Parthenon. For each, marble was sourced directly from quarries and to the exact specifications and quantities demanded by the project.\textsuperscript{26}

The exact lines along which the marble trade was organized in the early imperial period is still a matter of some debate, but certain fundamental features brought about by the expansion of the Roman Empire and identified by Ward-Perkins are generally

\textsuperscript{24} Russell 2013, 90.
\textsuperscript{25} In the western provinces, especially on the Italian peninsula and in Rome, marble from the Luna quarries was produced and consumed at a scale rivaling the eastern centers of production, though it was never exported to the same degree. See Russell 2013, 91. On the Attic quarries, see the following chapter.
\textsuperscript{26} Ward-Perkins 1980b, 24.
agreed upon. These include the existence of a few 'major' sources of quarried material, the presence of new markets without natural marble resources and, crucially, some level of imperial economic investment in the system that enabled the efficient functioning of the larger stone trade. Subsequent developments in the trade included some manner of economic rationalization of quarrying methods, a new and less direct relationship between quarry and customer that included the stockpiling of materials, the emergence of specialized workman that were available at the quarry level to complete projects either at the quarry or at destination, and the existences of "overseas agencies." One result of the reorganization of the Roman stone trade modeled by Ward-Perkins was the production of stock products with standardized visual programs, which accounts for the proliferation of common visual forms and motifs across the Roman Empire and is therefore vital for our discussion.

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27 Ward-Perkins 1980a, 327. Subsequent research, especially of Fant (1993a, 1993b, 2001) and more recently Russel (2010, 2013) has largely confirmed Ward=Perkin's model, while refining certain aspects such as the involvement of Rome (Fant) and the agency of consumers (Russell). Imperial building projects probably played a role in the initial formation of the market and trade network during the first centuries C.E. See Butcher 2003, 203. The extent to which the trade was subject to direct control or interference from the emperors, is much less clear. For the argument for imperial control, see Butcher 2003. For a more skeptical reading of the evidence, see Russell 2013.

28 The efficiency improvements introduced in the Roman system, in other words, separated and specialized the processes of quarrying and using marble and allowed for the production of excess raw material, not only to order. Excavations have shown stockpiles of just such marble excess quantities at the quarries themselves, at a number of ports, and at various marble yards throughout the empire. Marble yards have been excavated in Italy for example in the so-named Marmora quarter of Rome, at Ostia, and Puteoli. See Ward-Perkins 1980b, 39-40. However, Russell (2010; 2013) has recently refined Ward-Perkin's model in an important way to allow for additional responsiveness to local demands at the quarry level, as well as more agency on the part of consumers.


30 See also Russell 2013, 3.
runs quite counter to the pluralism and variety of culture of the Roman Empire and its local populations.\textsuperscript{31} It should be understood less as an intentional propagation of a dominant visual language accompanying Roman rule, than as a natural consequence of the fact that the reorganization of the Roman stone trade ensured that that stores of raw marble blocks and other stone materials were built up in so-called 'marble yards.' There, stone products could wait for as long as a century before being purchased and used in building projects or other venues.\textsuperscript{32}

The resulting network of the stone trade that spanned the Roman world constituted, according to Butcher, “one of the most improbable consequences of the Roman Empire.”\textsuperscript{33} Russell explains:

"What Roman rule stimulated was an investment in stone on an unprecedented level, introducing a language of images and a framework for display and worship in which the ideology of stone was paramount."\textsuperscript{34}

The emergence of the stone sarcophagus in Roman Syria is integrally bound up in this ‘ideology of stone’—from the socio-cultural forces of urbanization and display that drove it on one level, to more practical and economic dynamics that gave the stone trade its shape, including factors of access to and the availability of raw stone materials, as well as reliance on established trade networks. We have discussed already in Chapter 1 the roles that urbanization and the elite consumption and display played in the

\textsuperscript{31} See Elsner 2003.
\textsuperscript{32} Ward-Perkins 1980a, 327.
\textsuperscript{33} Butcher 2003, 203.
\textsuperscript{34} Russell 2013, 12.
phenomenon of Romanization. It is worth considering, however, how these processes connected the region of Roman Syria to Roman stone trade and further set the stage for the emergence of sarcophagus burial in the same region.

Across the provinces, and particularly in the cities of Roman Syria, growing demand for local and imported stone material is a highly visible phenomenon in the archaeological record (see Map 8). The processes of urbanization underway already in the early centuries of Roman rule in Roman Syria were clearly the driving factor through which the cities of the region were linked into the trade network of the Mediterranean generally and to the marble trade more specifically. Across the region, civic building programs transformed the urban landscape with new types of buildings, institutions and entertainments and spurred demand for the materials and skills associated with the stone trade.

Another of the major driving forces of Romanization in the provinces was the spending of local elites, another subject we discussed in Chapter 1. As we have seen, the Roman imperial system generally left in place local social structures and coopted elites into the maintenance of Roman rule. In this context, Russell has suggested that ‘permanence’ and durability of stone as a material “made it the perfect medium in which socio-cultural priorities of the status quo were monumentalized…” For such wealthy individuals, the use of exotic imported stones—primarily marble but also pink

36 Russell 2013, 12.
granite from Aswan, grey granite from Troad, and volcanic ‘lapis sarcophagus’ stone from Assos, to name a few—were luxury items that signaled the wealth of communities and of individuals.\textsuperscript{37} Butcher has even speculated that if Herod had lived just a century later, after the reorganization of the Roman stone trade identified by Ward-Perkins, his palaces would have taken full advantage of the Roman stone trade and been veneered in marble, rather than imitation stucco.\textsuperscript{38} In the context of linked processes of urbanization and the conspicuous consumption and display required to achieve and demonstrate a high social status, exorbitant spending on marble and stone monuments, statues and sarcophagi made particular sense as a visible strategy.\textsuperscript{39}

In line with broader patterns of distribution in the Roman East, marble products were imported to Roman Syria primarily from quarries in a few places (Map 12). Among these, the largest exporters of both raw material as well as finished and semi-finished marble products to markets in Roman Syria were the quarries and workshops of Proconnesus in Asia Minor (Map 13).\textsuperscript{40} Proconnesus was the single largest producer of marble products in the eastern Mediterranean, and its marble was one of the cheapest stones listed on the Diocletian Price Edict.\textsuperscript{41} Proconnesian marble was particularly favored in Roman Syria, having a ‘virtual monopoly’ on the supply of marble for

\textsuperscript{37} Butcher 2003, 203.
\textsuperscript{38} Butcher 2003, 204-5.
\textsuperscript{39} Smith 2001, 16.
\textsuperscript{40} These sourced prized, fine grained white ‘Pentelic’ marble from Mt. Pentelos in the Attic region.
\textsuperscript{41} Russell 2013, 33-6.
architectural purposes, as well as an outsized share of sarcophagus market (Map 14). What stone products did not come from Proconnesus were either a small trickle of a few imports from other regions, in addition to locally produced columns, capitals and other forms that frequently imitated imported types in locally available materials including limestone and basalt.

The import of marble products in Roman Syria was centered on coastal cities like Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelon and Caesarea Maritima. At these ports of call in the stone trade, marble products were imported en masse—sometimes even stockpiled and sold in marble yards in everything from raw blocks to finished capitals and sarcophagi. In all of these cities one finds large quantities of imported marble, especially from Proconnesus, but also supplemented with rarer imported stone that was used for especially important sculptures and architectural elements. Imported marble tended to be used in architecture for column capitals and bases, which were often used with imported granite columns, while local materials were used for other parts of buildings, including the entablatures. The concentration of imported marble along the coastal

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43 Other major quarries existed at sites such as Aphrodisias and Dokimeion, but these produced marble products that were largely traded within Asia Minor. See below, Chapter 6. Nevertheless, provincial architecture in Roman Syria mixes local and imported stone with regularity. See Fischer 1988.  
44 For a good reconstruction of the dynamics and trade routes of imported marble to Palmyra, for instance, see Dodge 1988, 227.  
45 For example, around 50% of the marble imported to Palestine is Proconnesian in origin. See: Fischer 1995, 148-9; 1998, 254; Pensabene 1997; Russell 2013, 152.  
46 Russell 2013, 151.  
47 Russell 2013, 151-2.
region of Roman Syria no doubt has much to do with factors of access and the relative ease of water transport for such heavy material as stone. It has also led some to suggest that Roman culture was more prominent along the coast than among inland cities, a judgment called into serious question by the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim—which lay some 35 km from the nearest port at Caesarea—as we will see below.48

The marble from the 3rd century C.E. renovation of the basilica at Ashkelon is illustrative of these trade patterns.49 The majority of the marble facade was built of marble imported from Proconnesus, while four sculpted figural pilasters that were added to the facade in this period were of marble sourced from Proconnesus, Aphrodisias, and Athens.50 The use of exotic imported stone in special architectural features—especially columns and statues—was common practice in Roman Syria, and served to supplement the use of cheaper local materials and imported Proconnesian marble, which were used for the majority of building material.51 The pilasters from the basilica at Ashkelon are particularly interesting in this regard, because they not only highlight the patterns and variety of marble being imported in the Severan period, but they also indicate the existence of capable local stone workshops on the coast of Roman Syria. While the four pilasters were carved of different kinds of marble, all four were

48 Butcher 2003, 204-5.
49 On the dating of the basilica, see Boehm, Master, and Le Blanc 2016.
50 Fischer 1995, 149. On the addition of the pilasters in the Severan period, see Boehm, Master, and Le Blanc 2016.
sculpted with the identical techniques and complimentary motifs. Whether this workshop existed at Ashkelon is unclear, and it is possible the pieces could have been finished elsewhere on the Syrian coast on commission. What matters, however, is that they must have been produced from imported raw marble material by provincial artisans who had a very high level of ability.

Much of the marble imported to the province did remain in the coastal cities. Less imported marble ever reached the interior of Roman Syria, to cities like Beth Shean-Scythopolis, and still less to smaller villages like Beth She’arim. For example, the overwhelming majority of imported column capitals known in Roman Palestine comes from only two cities: Ashkelon and Caesarea Maritima on the coast. Most inland cities, with the exception of Beth Shean-Scythopolis, made do with copies in local stone, often of varying degrees of faithfulness. In light of this, the presence of any marble sarcophagi at all at Beth She’arim is a rather remarkable attestation on the one hand to the wealth of at least some patrons at Beth She’arim, and on the other, to the efficiency and extent of the Roman stone trade. The reach of this trade was long and stretched all the way to Palmyra, for instance, which took part in the trade network by importing Roman marble on no small scale. It also reached smaller inland cities and villages like Beth She’arim and Beth Shean-Scythopolis as well, though the amount and scale of interaction could vary especially according to the size of the city and local demand.

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52 Fischer 1990.
5.3 The sarcophagus trade in the province of Roman Syria

The sarcophagi from Beth She'arim have most often been approached as a unique, almost unexpected phenomenon by scholars working within the fields of Jewish history and archaeology of Palestine. This approach has tended to isolate the corpus from the broader context of sarcophagus burial and sculptural programs in the region, which is necessary for any holistic understanding of the patronage practices and visual culture at Beth She'arim. Indeed, the visual culture encountered in the sarcophagi at Beth She'arim—as well as the visual and funerary practices in which they are embedded—can only be explained in light of cultural tastes and practices formed at the provincial level. In this regard, the excavation of the necropolis of Tyre in the middle of the 20th century,54 and the subsequent work of Ward-Perkins on the marble trade of the Roman East,55 have expanded our understanding of the economic and cultural forces behind the sarcophagus trade in this region.

De Jong’s study of the funerary practices of Roman Syria has convincingly demonstrated that sarcophagus burial is geographically closely linked with cities and regions in the Roman cultural orbit.56 Indeed, stone sarcophagi in Roman Syria are

56 De Jong 2007, 119. By contrast, stone sarcophagi are rarely found in Parthian controlled areas or further east.
exclusively found in areas under Roman political rule. Moreover, patterns of distribution and consumption of specific types of sarcophagi follow the patterns characteristic of the broader stone trade. For instance, De Jong’s study, which considered only excavated data, included nearly 500 stone sarcophagi from Roman Syria. Of these, more than three quarters were found in coastal regions, especially at Tyre and Beirut. The discovery of sarcophagi concentrated in coastal cities like Tyre and Beirut confirms that the patronage practices surrounding sarcophagus burial in Roman Syria were linked not only with the influence of Roman imperial culture, but especially with broader stone trade and the marble economy of the Mediterranean. The broader stone trade determined not only the availability of materials and styles, but also influenced the tastes and preferences of local patrons. The local industry in local materials seems to have followed the practice of importing sarcophagi and other marble goods. What was available and where it was adopted was determined by broader forces at work, and, as we will see, patrons across Roman Syria—from coastal cities like Tyre to inland towns like Beth She’arim—were often constrained by factors of supply and availability related to the larger stone trade of the Roman Empire.

57 The few stone sarcophagi found were excavated in liminal areas, on the boarders between the two empires and in towns associated with inter-regional trade, while in cities further to the interior of Mesopotamia saw no stone sarcophagi at all. See further De Jong 2007, 119-33.
58 For these numbers, see De Jong 2007, 48ff., esp. 123-4, n. 233.
59 This is true not just for sarcophagi, but also for other stone objects as well including grave stelae and honorific inscriptions for example. See Russell 2013, 17.
At the same time, though monumental civic building activity tapered off rather sharply from the 3rd century C.E. on in many places and the demand for architectural stone generally decreased, the demand for sarcophagi and other stone objects with more private uses had a much longer afterlife, far outlasting and outpacing demand for architectural materials.\(^{60}\) Production centers in Rome, Ravenna, Aphrodisias, Proconnesus and Tyre all continued to produce sarcophagi into the 4th and even 5th centuries, even as the production of building materials declined drastically.\(^{61}\) Perhaps this was because the sarcophagus industry was more responsive to individual demand and was stimulated by the patronage of private citizens. Sarcophagi also had the virtue of being smaller and more affordable monuments of display relative to entire civic buildings or even most public statues. The importation of stone was expensive, and importing sufficient quantities of stone for civic building projects even more so. It required a scale of investment that was within the means of only a select group of Roman elites including the imperial family (who indeed founded cities and built civic buildings throughout the empire) and more often, the pooled resources of civic benefactors represented by a select few local elites and client kings.\(^{62}\)

The trade in sarcophagi, both of marble and of local materials, displays not just the market dynamics of the Roman stone trade though, but also the cultural dynamics that

\(^{60}\) See Russell 2013, 17.  
\(^{61}\) See Russell 2013, 17-8.  
\(^{62}\) See Russell 2013, 18-21.
fostered it, especially the forces of urbanization and the elite display bound up in the ‘ideology of stone.’ Common across all developments related to elite display and the stone trade in Roman Syria was an increase in visibility of stone products corresponding to elite display relative to earlier practices and forms. Sarcophagi were no exception to this pattern. Earlier sarcophagi discovered in the region and dated to periods prior to Roman rule were generally not intended to be viewed after deposition; they were functional means of interment. They were most often buried in pit graves where they could not have been seen after burial. Only a few were decorated, typically with sparse geometric reliefs.\(^63\) The new emphasis on elaborate visual programs and display witnessed across the funerary sphere in Roman Syria was a development exclusively linked to the Roman period, which saw not only the importation of marble carved sarcophagi, but also the introduction of other forms of funerary visual culture as well including funerary stelae and decorated tomb facades.\(^64\)

In this light, the sarcophagus appears to be a singularly efficient and effective scaling of the politics of display and urbanization from the communal level to a more individual and intimate scale. The same factors and dynamics at work in the larger trade were in operation on this smaller scale as well. The use of stone in private contexts typically

\(^{63}\) De Jong 2007, 166. According to De Jong (2007, 159-66.), the same phenomenon was visible in the architectural decoration of tomb structures as well. In the Hellenistic period, the vast majority of tombs in the region were undecorated while in the Roman period nearly three times as many had some kind of ornamentation.

\(^{64}\) De Jong 2007, 125-6, 66.
followed on the heels of patterns of urbanization and elite expenditure on civic
buildings and monuments, as is widely observed in the archaeological record.\textsuperscript{65} Indeed, relationship between the phenomenon of urbanization in Roman Syria and sarcophagus burial was recognized early on by Ward-Perkins, who wrote that:

"On the evidence currently available it seems reasonable to regard [sarcophagi] as a product of the same factors as led to the widespread adoption of architectural marble in provinces which had previously been content with local materials. A wealthy provincial who could afford to build or to restore a public monument in imported marble could also afford the self-indulgence of a sarcophagus or a funerary monument in the same material… they were a tangible expression of the economic well-being and social ambitions of the ruling classes of the provincial cities, and as a response to the same social pressures we might reasonably expect them to have become available at about the same time."\textsuperscript{66}

Ward-Perkin’s insight not only connects the activities of the same patrons across different spheres, urban and funerary, but also the motivations and goals underlying these activities. The ‘social pressures’ he alludes to in the abstract are a direct outcome of the prestige economy of the Roman Empire. In a similar way, Russell suggests that “the use of stone for domestic building and decoration, sculpture, and funerary monuments was connected to this [same] idea of permanence” and the buttressing of the (social) status quo that motivated the use of stone in public projects.\textsuperscript{67}

In sum, the intangible economy of prestige created a tangible counterpart in the marble monuments of the region by spurring demand for marble products, which

\textsuperscript{65} See, for example, Russell 2013, 12.
\textsuperscript{66} Ward-Perkins 1980b, 61. Ward-Perkins was speaking specifically of Proconnesian sarcophagi, though his comments are true of all imported styles and the use of sarcophagi in general.
\textsuperscript{67} Russell 2013, 12.
resulted in the development of a parallel market for imported and locally produced stone sarcophagi across Roman Syria. Here, as was the case across the Roman world, acquiring a sarcophagus was a display of social status. In this context, Ward-Perkins observed concerning sarcophagi that “the mere initial cost of quarrying and importing one must in itself have represented, and been seen to represent, a very considerable cash outlay” which made such imports an effective “status symbol.”

5.3.1 A hierarchy of sarcophagus types in Roman Syria

The types of sarcophagi imported and produced across Roman Syria were diverse. Sarcophagi were imported from many producers and fashioned out of many different kinds of stone including not only marble and local limestone but imported porphyry and granite. Indeed, in comparison with other provinces in the Roman Empire, the sarcophagus corpus of Roman Syria is particularly heterogeneous. Despite this, a clear hierarchy of the status and wealth signaled by the sarcophagi can be discerned, from the most elite to the most accessible forms: 1) sarcophagi imported from Athens and from workshops in the interior of Asia Minor (a topic of the next chapter), 2) sarcophagi imported from Proconnesus, and 3) sarcophagi produced in local stone and in local workshops with locally inspired compositions (encountered in the previous chapter) or which emulated the Proconnesian imports.

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68 Ward-Perkins 1969, 137. See above, Chapter 1.  
69 Birk 2012, 120, emphasis added; Ward-Perkins 1969, 137.
Attic and Asiatic sarcophagi, which occupied the top of the hierarchy, were produced in the area of Athens and the interior of Asia Minor (especially Dokimeion) respectively. Attic and Asiatic sarcophagi were both carved of pure and fine grained stone that was given to deep carving and contrast. They were the pinnacle of what the wealthiest patrons could aspire to and were imported in small numbers and as special commissions which were proudly and prominently displayed. Attic and Asiatic sarcophagi exercised a limited influence on the sarcophagus economy of Roman Syria, both because they were not widely available on the local market and because they were imported with their sculptural programs either completely or mostly finished. We will therefore return again to them again in the next chapter, when we consider influences beyond the province of Roman Syria.

At the other end of the hierarchy were locally produced sarcophagi carved from locally available materials. Sarcophagi carved in local stone provided the most affordable, and also the most common means of gaining access to the prestige and status associated with sarcophagus burial. We have seen already in Chapter 4 that locally produced sarcophagi could reflect local sculptural and visual traditions in important

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70 See Russell 2013, 170-6, 278-5. See also Russell 2010. On the association between the quarries of Dokimeion and Asiatic sarcophagi, see further Waelkens 1982; Waelkens, Paepe, and Moens 1988.

71 Attic sarcophagi were carved of Pentelic marble quarried around Mt. Pentelicus, while Asiatic sarcophagi were carved of marble local to Asia Minor, especially from Dokimeion. Asiatic sarcophagi are sometimes referred to as ‘Dokemeian sarcophagi’ on this basis. See, for example, Russell 2010.

72 Russell 2013, 284-5. See also Russell 2010. At Tyre, as we will see in the next chapter, Attic sarcophagi were prominently and conspicuously displayed. See Ward-Perkins 1969.

73 See further, Chapter 6. On the export of Attic and Asiatic sarcophagi as finished products, see especially Russell 2010.
ways. On the other hand, we will see below that many of these locally made sarcophagi also borrowed from marble imports, indicating that their patrons wished to be buried in a manner as close as possible to those higher up in social standing who could afford to import their sarcophagi from abroad.

Occupying an important, even predominant position in the middle tier of the sarcophagus trade, at least across Roman Syria, were imported sarcophagi from Proconnesian workshops. A word of clarification is in order here. Though the island of Proconnesus (modern Marmara in Turkey) is nominally in the region of Asia Minor and might geographically be considered an Asiatic producer, most scholars treat Proconnesian sarcophagi as a separate, or at least special group.\(^74\) This is done on the basis of several dynamics intrinsic to the Proconnesian industry. The marble of Proconnesus was relatively easy to quarry, and the island was situated in the Sea of Marmara with easy access to the Aegean and Mediterranean trade routes beyond. Such factors gave Proconnesian marble in general, and the sarcophagus forms produced in workshops on the island in particular, a natural edge in the interregional market of the eastern Mediterranean.\(^75\) For these reasons, Proconnesus, a small island off the coast of Asia Minor, became renowned across the ancient world—and particularly in the Roman

\(^{74}\) Eg. Russell 2010; 2013; Waelkens 1982; Ward-Perkins 1969; 1980a; 1980b. Koch and Sichtermann single out the Proconnesian sarcophagi as a special group within the Asiatic producers. See Koch and Sichtermann 1982. This decision was subsequently reaffirmed by Koch (1982), who separated out Dokimeion sarcophagi also.

\(^{75}\) Ward-Perkins 1969, 113; 1980a, 329.
East—as one of the largest centers of marble quarrying and fabrication. Indeed, the Proconnesian marble industry was especially prominent in its output—not only of sarcophagi but of architectural stones such as columns and capitals.

However, the dominance of Proconnesian marble in the stone trade of the Roman world is perhaps most obvious in the preference for Proconnesian sarcophagi and the imitation of their styles in local stone across the Roman Syria and even more broadly across the eastern Mediterranean (Map 14). Proconnesian products may have been a step below their sarcophagi from Athens and other producers in Asia Minor in cost and rarity, but they were still an imported luxury item that signaled significant social standing. Proconnesian sarcophagi were consumed in numbers that dwarf all other kinds of imports in the regions of Asia Minor, Syria, and parts of Northern Africa. They even obtained a virtual monopoly on the trade in places like Alexandria and the Black Sea. It would be very difficult indeed to understate the profound and direct role of the Proconnesian sarcophagi forms in shaping the regional tastes, and moreover, local production at any number of cities and towns of the eastern Mediterranean and particularly in Roman Syria.

76 The Proconnesian garland sarcophagus was itself most likely a copy of a finer garlanded sarcophagus from Asia Minor. Possibly the sarcophagus of C. Julius Celsus, which was discovered in a family heroon in Ephesus and predates the earliest known Proconnesian examples by at least a decade, served as a model. See Ward-Perkins 1980a, 333.
77 Ward-Perkins 1980a, 328-9.
Unlike Attic and Asiatic producers, the Proconnesian marble workshops produced a number of types for export that were tailored to suit the local tastes of multiple regions.\(^7^9\) While the Proconnesian garland sarcophagi are the most recognizable of the Proconnesian exports, there were, in fact, at least three kinds of sarcophagi simultaneously produced in Proconnesus for export to different markets.\(^8^0\) One, with enlarged proportions, a gabled roof and plain styling, was exported almost exclusively to the western market, and was locally imitated in the towns of northern Italy and Dalmatia.\(^8^1\) The other two styles were popular in the eastern Mediterranean. They included the garlanded style in both quarry-state and finished forms (Figs. 5.1, 5.2), as well as a simple gabled type, sometimes referred to as the ‘pedimental gable’ style and found, for instance at Tyre (Fig. 5.3). The pedimental gable sarcophagus seems to have been produced exclusively for export to Roman Syria,\(^8^2\) and it was surely this sarcophagus type which inspired the many simple limestone sarcophagi of Beth She’arim (see below).

The most famous export of the Proconnesian workshops was unquestionably the Proconnesian garland sarcophagus, which is also one of the most well studied of the

\(^{79}\) Russell 2010, esp. 137. Russell highlights this responsiveness to local markets as a prime example of his ‘reconsideration’ of Roman sarcophagus workshops as “proactive enterprises.”

\(^{80}\) Ward-Perkins 1980b, 42.

\(^{81}\) Ward-Perkins 1969, 113.

\(^{82}\) Butcher 2003, 210.
ancient sarcophagus industry. This form was consumed almost exclusively in cities across the eastern Mediterranean, finding its way only rarely to Rome and places west (Map 14). Garlanded sarcophagi from Proconnesus were pre-carved at the quarry to varying degrees. At minimum, the basic shape of the sarcophagus was established and its body hollowed out, to save precious weight during shipping. Most were further carved with abstract geometric shapes in low relief that served to block-out the design in preparation for a garlanded motif to be completed at local or regional workshops after shipping. These sarcophagi are sometimes referred to as “halbfabrike”, or “half-completed,” in order to indicate that they were exported with the intention of being completed later according to the tastes of the patron. Only occasionally were Proconnesian exports more fully carved at the quarry, in which case they received at least the beginnings of the garlanded motif and maybe some secondary motifs as well, such as human figures holding the garland, or bulls’ heads.

83 Inter alia Asgari 1977; Gersht 1996; Gersht and Pearl 1992; Koch 1989; 1993, 163-5; Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 486-92; Russell 2013, esp. 170-75; Ward-Perkins 1957; 1969; 1980a; 1980b. In fact, the garlanded sarcophagus form closely associated with Proconnesus in broader Roman sarcophagus trade was related to forms that were extremely popular across Asia Minor and produced by workshops in Aphrodisias, Ephesus, and Caria. On these, see especially Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 476-557. The products of these inland workshops were consumed locally, and not widely exported like Proconnesus sarcophagi.

84 Though a group of sarcophagi from Rome do imitate the garlanded style, they do not hew closely to the content or form, showing instead a much greater variety of decoration in everything from the number of garlands across the front to the secondary motifs employed. See, for instance, the garlanded Metropolitan sarcophagus in the Met collection, carved in marble from the Luna quarries (MMA 90.12a, b).


86 Ward-Perkins 1980a, 38; 1980b, 61.

87 Koch 1993, 162-8, esp. 3.

In fact, they were so often left unfinished that, overtime, the quarry-state form seems to have become desirable style in its own right.\textsuperscript{89} A lack of local talent may have been partly to blame for so many 'unfinished' examples of the form known across Asia Minor and Roman Syria,\textsuperscript{90} at least initially. Foerster suggested that the popularity of the quarry-state form arose because imitating sarcophagi imported in quarry-state was easier for local artisans than figural decoration.\textsuperscript{91} Yet the regularity with which ‘unfinished’ Proconnesian sarcophagi in quarry-state style are encountered, and especially the fact that the geometric design was locally copied in limestone and other local stone at places like Tyre and Beth She’arim (see below), suggests that the quarry-state design became recognizable, and even desirable as a ‘status symbol.’\textsuperscript{92}

A case in point example is found in the form of a Proconnesian sarcophagus from Pamphylia. It is in the quarry-state form, and bears an inscription mentioning its Proconnesian source. According to Ward-Perkins, the mention of Proconnesus demonstrates the ‘anxiety’ of the patron "to put on record that they too could afford to use imported marble, rather than local stones available to their less fortunate neighbors."\textsuperscript{93} More to the point, the inscription was not in the \textit{tabula ansata}, which was

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{89} An inference made by Ward-Perkins (1969, based on his consideration of the corpus from Tyre. We will see that this is corroborated by the evidence from Beth She’arim as well. \\
\textsuperscript{90} Ward-Perkins (1969, 116) speculates that “when these sarcophagi were first introduced there may have been a shortage of local craftsmen trained in carving the elaborate garland motifs in unfamiliar material.” \\
\textsuperscript{91} Foerster 2012, 200. \\
\textsuperscript{92} Ward-Perkins 1969, 137. \\
\textsuperscript{93} Ward-Perkins 1980b, 32. 
\end{flushleft}
left blank; rather, it was carved across the top edge of the sarcophagus front. It seems likely that the abstract geometric form of the *tabula ansata* had evolved beyond functional usage into an inseparable part of the visual program itself. Carving an inscription on it would have marred the recognizability of the form.

The choice to go beyond the quarry-state program with its abstract framework of geometric shapes entailed an extra expense on the part of the consumer that required further carving to realize the garlands, and to introduce supporting elements and motifs. The elaboration of the garlands varied little and was based only on skill and degree. Once this expense was accepted, two basic options were available concerning the motifs framing and supporting the garland theme. Ward-Perkins has suggested that the easiest and first option available was to employ a motif of animal heads. These are almost always bulls’ heads with the occasional ram’s head appearing. The use of human figures with garments and flowing ribbons to support the garlands—putti most often, but sometimes a mix of putti and *nikae*—would have required extra carving beyond what was required for animal heads.94 Thus, there may have been levels of expense to consider as well, with tiers of entry into the market beginning at the quarry-state form and ending at examples with elaborately carved garlands supported by figural motifs.

5.3.2 A Proconnesian sarcophagus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art

A marble garlanded sarcophagus in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum provides an instructive example of garlanded sarcophagi produced in the workshops of Proconnesus and serves to illustrate several of the features and forms just discussed (Fig. 5.4).95 Discovered in Tarsus, in Asia Minor, the sarcophagus was in fact the very first object gifted to the museum.96 Its monumental size and the gabled lid are typical of the type, and the sculptural program illustrates many of the characteristics of the finished programs. The front and sides bear a garlanded composition with putti and nikae. The rear panel of the sarcophagus remains in the quarry-state form with the familiar geometric blocking that Koch and Sichtermann associated with the ‘halbfabrikate’ type (Fig. 5.5).

Carved on all four sides, with the rear left in blocked out or geometric form, the body of the sarcophagus exemplifies the hallmarks of the ‘finished’ Proconnesian garland style and is almost an identical match for the composite drawing used by Koch and Sichtermann to illustrate the pinnacle of the garlanded style, the nikae type.97 Across the front, three heavy swags of oak and acorn garland are held aloft by four figures: two nude and winged cupids adopt mirror image poses in the middle, while winged

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95 On this identification, see McCann 1978, 31.
96 It was accepted from J. Abdo Debbas, who served as American vice-consul in Tarsus. The gift was made in 1870, the same year that the board of trustees was officially formed and while the Met still existed mostly on paper. It is one of the few pieces that has been continuously exhibited by the Museum since its inception. On this last point, see Tomkins 1989, 43.
97 Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 491, Abb. 12:2b.
victories with articulated feathers and robes cinched at the waist raise the garland at either end. All the figures stand on a simulated plinth with ogee molding, as if they are statues and not living figures. From the base of each swag, a full grape cluster is suspended by a ribbon. The relief is deep, with moderately undercut figures with pleasing and ample proportions and significant drilling in the garland. Above the swags at the center is a blank *tabula ansata* with room for a small inscription, while a *gorgoneion* is situated on either side. Ribbons swirl evenly and pleasingly above and below the garland, filling the blank space. Such ribbons are an additional feature that must have added to the expense of this sarcophagus—they could not have figured in the original blocking out as indicated by the rear and would have required additional undercutting.

The sides of the sarcophagus continue the themes of the front, though the depth of carving is shallower and there is no drilling in the garlands (Fig. 5.6). The lid of the sarcophagus is gabled, with four massive acroteria, the curved tops of which are only roughly pick dressed, with faces holding pair of winged, naked cupids in mirror-image poses. The front pitched roof panel of the lid was carved with a repeating or layered pattern of ivy leaves, though only partially finished. The rear panel of the lid is comb dressed with empty acroteria. At the front, below the acroteria, a hunting scene with cupids and various vicious animals plays out. In the gabled frames on either side of the lid are a pair of scenes of Eros and Psyche in sequence. The scenes are especially poignant for the funerary context, as they almost certainly reference a sequence of events in Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses*, specifically the dramatic conclusion that sees Psyche
escape the underworld only to fall into a deathlike sleep, and Cupid and Psyche reunited and Psyche granted everlasting life.\textsuperscript{98} There is ultimately more creativity here on the lid than in the rather formulaic program of the body.

The sarcophagus is also an excellent example of the minutiae of production. While the sculptural program of the front face was more or less complete, the sides and lid are at varying stages of finishing: McCann identified four stages of carving on the uncompleted leaves of the lid alone.\textsuperscript{99} The fact that the first stage (the tracing of leaves and rows) was not even complete before the final stage (the carving of stems and smoothing) was begun may also be a sign that more than one sculptor worked on the same surface at once.\textsuperscript{100} The fact that the rear is not finished is perhaps support for Russell’s reconstruction of the trade in the eastern provinces, where the finishing was completed often in local or regional workshops and according to the needs of the market.\textsuperscript{101} While in some regions of the Roman East, the previous Greek custom of setting up sarcophagi as free standing monuments that could be viewed from all sides was retained, in many places—Tyre and Beth She’arim included—sarcophagi were more

\textsuperscript{98} McCann’s (1978, 33) contention that the scene had “lost its original eschatological implication through mass production” is questionable, especially since it figured prominently in Roman literature as late as Apuleius’s \textit{Metamorphoses} in the late 2nd century C.E., roughly contemporaneous with the sarcophagus workshops of Proconnesus.

\textsuperscript{99} McCann 1978, 33.

\textsuperscript{100} Just because it was incomplete does not mean we should conclude it was unused. It was found outside of proper excavations, but it’s find spot on the eastern side of a bridge over the Berdan river (ancient Cydnus) that would have been outside the ancient city but nearby suggests that it probably came from a necropolis. A brief description of its discovery and subsequent transfer is found in Davies 1879, 31-2.

\textsuperscript{101} Russell 2013, 171-5.
commonly installed against walls in enclosures (whether in catacombs or above ground structures). In these instances, the rear side of the sarcophagus need not have been carved at all, as it would not have been visible to the visitor.

5.3.3 Proconnesian sarcophagi as a provincial form?

For a variety of reasons, different marble quarries and production centers obtained virtual monopolies on the markets of cities and even entire provinces in the Roman world. The division of the Roman Empire into discrete import markets means that the sarcophagus style(s) that dominated the local and provincial stone trade tells us as much or probably more about the cultures that imported them, as they do about the cultures at their place of manufacture. For the province of Roman Syria, the main source of imported sarcophagi was unquestionably Proconnesus. By the end of the 2nd century C.E. there were ‘marble yards’ where imported stone pieces were stockpiled, displayed and traded at major port cities in Roman Syria. Some have suggested further that quarries set up permanent sculpture workshops in the respective regional markets in order to fulfill orders and complete shipped pieces, and it may very well be that there was such a workshop on the coast of Roman Syria, possibly at Ashkelon or Tyre.

In Roman Syria, those same basic factors, complicated by issues of transport and access specific to the province, combine to make sarcophagi a potent means of social display. De Jong relates that the acquisition of a sarcophagus in Roman Syria was a

102 Butcher 2003, 204.
“time-consuming affair,” pointing out that it required not only the importing or acquiring of material, but also overseeing the process of finishing and installing—a building project in miniature requiring many of the same materials and labor and signaling therefore, the same “access to labor and expensive material.\textsuperscript{103} In fact, in many ways it must have been more time consuming because of the complications of geography and access that marked the provincial market. Even sarcophagi of local limestone would have been costly to carve and install.\textsuperscript{104}

The existence of several styles produced at once and marketed by the same Proconnesian quarries shows the degree to which workshops in Proconnesus responded to demand at the level of the regional tastes. Much more than the workshops of Athens, the exported Proconnesian form left ample room for the expression of local tastes and preferences.\textsuperscript{105} What’s more, none of the styles produced in these workshops were standardized to the point of being assembly line pieces; there were significant variances between examples, even down to the dimensions themselves which could vary as much as 25% in any direction.\textsuperscript{106} Taken together with the form itself—which left considerable room for customization on delivery—this responsiveness on the part of Proconnesian

\textsuperscript{103} De Jong 2010, 624.
\textsuperscript{104} De Jong 2010, 624.
\textsuperscript{105} Even Ward-Perkins, who generally emphasized elements of standardization in the industry, recognized this. See Ward-Perkins 1969, 114-5, 34.
\textsuperscript{106} Ward-Perkins 1969, 116.
workshops is just one way that this popular sarcophagus form opened the door for the expression of local traditions.

More to the point, the import of Proconnesian examples often stimulated the production of ‘copies’ in local materials.\textsuperscript{107} At Tyre, local ‘copies’ inspired by Proconnesian sarcophagi easily outnumbered the imports 4:1.\textsuperscript{108} The same seems to have been the case at Beth She’arim, as we will see below. Seen in this light, we could easily regard the Proconnesian form as a potential vehicle for local traditions and adaptive acculturation.\textsuperscript{109} If this is true, it may partly account for their widespread appeal. Indeed, Proconnesian sarcophagi would seem to be an apt illustration of the kind of “creative synergism” and even syncretism associated with the spread of Roman culture and indeed, the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{110}

Ultimately, while the Roman stone trade made sarcophagus burial more accessible and common, the system also introduced certain convergences and constrictions on the market as well. While a particularly wealthy customer at Beth She’arim could always make a special order (as we will see in Chapter 6), "the ordinary well-to-do purchaser

\textsuperscript{107} Ward-Perkins (1969, 134) pointed this out already. Avigad as well was aware at least generally of the phenomenon, though the typology had not yet been refined. See Avigad 1976a, 156. This typology was especially clarified after the excavations at Tyre by Chéhab (1968; 1983; 1984; 1985; 1986). The work of Ward-Perkins (1969; 1980a; 1980b) was also vital.

\textsuperscript{108} Based on the most recent estimates by De Jong of 89 imported marble sarcophagi and approximately 350 locally produced ones.

\textsuperscript{109} On the phenomenon of adaptive acculturation and the adoption of Roman material culture more generally, see especially: Gardner 2007; Webster 2001; Woolf 1994; 1998.

\textsuperscript{110} Elsner 2003; Meyers 1992, 91.
had to be content with what the local market offered.” 111 Indeed, simple availability—access to material goods—is one often overlooked factor that plays an outsize role in determining demand, which we often in hindsight reconstruct as ‘cultural taste.’ 112 In the provinces, the smaller size of regional—not to mention local—markets would have often been insufficient to sustain either the import of sarcophagi styles from more than a few production centers, or the development of a standalone local tradition in sarcophagus production. This meant that, by and large, sarcophagus patrons in Roman Syria were constrained by their provincial location to a restricted selection of readily available sarcophagus styles.

Ultimately, local sarcophagus patrons in Roman Syria—at Tyre, Beth She’arim or elsewhere—would have had three options in front of them. They could, using a local agent, purchase a sarcophagus in imported Proconnesian marble from a marble yard on the coast or in local materials. Or, if they were unsatisfied with what was available locally and had sufficient resources, connections and knowledge, they could have sent abroad to Athens or Asia Minor to commission a sarcophagus type not readily available locally in Roman Syria (the subject of the following chapter). 113 Finally, if they had neither the means nor the need for an imported sarcophagus, they could purchase or

112 Cooper 1996.
113 For this reconstruction, see Ward-Perkins 1969, 137-8. Regarding Attic sarcophagi in particular, Russell (2013, 285) suggests that the patrons “were high-status individuals who no doubt had a range of contacts on which they could draw.”
commission a sarcophagus in local materials that drew on local sculptural traditions (Chapter 4) or approximated imported forms with varying degrees of faithfulness and creativity. Each of these options visibly communicated wealth and social status—the act of acquiring a sarcophagus itself was a means of signaling of social status—though probably with varying degrees of effectiveness. It is the Proconnesian sarcophagi and their influence on provincial tastes and production that concern us here.

5.4 Tyre and Beth She’arim: two necropoleis of Roman Syria

We indicated already that in Roman Syria the sarcophagus trade—together with broader patterns in funerary practices reflecting elite display and monumentalization—was intimately connected to the process of urban change that Roman Syria underwent in the middle and late Roman periods. This pattern is equally visible at the two places on which we will concentrate in the discussion that follows: Tyre and Beth She’arim. It bears emphasizing however, that these two cities are not perfect comparisons by any means, not the least because they are of starkly different sizes and are located in very different areas. Tyre lay on the coast of Roman Syria along major trade routes and Beth She’arim sat well inland on minor trade routes (Map 8).

Yet, despite their obvious differences, both cities shared in the predominant dynamics and changes that came to characterize funerary sphere in Roman Syria. I will argue that the interconnected processes of change at the urban and funerary levels are visible at both Tyre and Beth She’arim, where they were connected by the social practice
of the same social actors, local elites. At Tyre, De Jong has studied the architecture of the funerary compounds as evidence of this connection, writing that “physically, chronologically, and conceptually, the cemetery was connected to urban space and in particular to public architecture.”

The Roman city of Tyre was centered around an artificial isthmus—built in the time of Alexander—that juts out from the mainland. The city grew gradually but steadily into its prominent role on the coast of Roman Syria beginning in the early Hellenistic period. It became the capital of the Phoenician client kingdom in 64 B.C.E. and then the capital of the province of Syria-Phoenicia when the region was administratively subdivided by Severus in the late 2nd century C.E. It gained the official title of 'Metropolis' in the late 1st century C.E., and it featured prominently as a city of manufacture and commerce. By the Severan period the city overtook earlier and more established cities such as Sidon and Beirut in regional importance, achieving the status of *colonia* and a major role in the trade of linens, dye and glass in the region. Tyre boasted two ports from which trade could flow, and the approach to the city from the east included a series of Roman arches, proclaiming the growing status of the polity.

114 De Jong 2010, 598.
115 Sartre 2005, 199.
117 De Jong 2010, 114.
118 See Chéhab 1983.
Excavations by Chéhab beginning in 1949 focused on a colonnaded Roman road in the southern tip of the isthmus. Beginning in the 2nd century C.E., this area acquired a succession of Roman style civic and public buildings along the road, including a pair of baths, a market and a smaller square building with seating on the order of a theater or arena.\(^{119}\) The facades of these buildings made extensive use of marble, particularly from Proconnesian quarries. On the outskirts of the city, associated with the columned causeway that directed traffic to the isthmus from the east, were one of the triumphal arches, a portico, and a circus, as well as several small shrines and later structures that included a Byzantine arch and an additional bathhouse. The evidence for urbanization at Tyre, then, is quite extensive, and includes a variety of monumental public buildings arranged according to the precepts of Roman urban planning, as well as extensive use of architectural marble.

The necropolis of Tyre was located on the mainland, to the east of the city and along the major causeway noted above. Excavations began here in 1959, and continued for over 15 years until 1975 and the start of the Lebanese civil war, which forced a closure to the excavations,\(^{120}\) and gravely impacted the publications as well. The necropolis consisted of around four dozen open-air compounds, each typically containing one or more raised masonry platforms into which loculi were built, and on top of which (and...

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\(^{119}\) For a more detailed overview of the history of urbanization in the Roman period at Tyre, see De Jong 2010, 598-602.

\(^{120}\) Leaving part of the site unexcavated. De Jong (2010, 602) suggests that at least 9 tomb complexes were never excavated, and that the final number of tomb complexes could be as high as 60.
besides) sarcophagi could be placed (Fig. 5.7). These open air compounds seem to have been used by multiple families or extended social networks, and were largely constructed between the 1st and 3rd centuries C.E., coinciding chronologically with the major building and growth of the city of Tyre itself. Few if any tomb enclosures were built after the 3rd century, however this does not mean that the necropolis went out of use. In fact, one of the notable things about the necropolis at Tyre is the extensive reuse of the cemetery—including sarcophagi—that spanned several generations from the 3rd to 6th centuries and possibly even into the 7th century C.E.

As we noted above, elite display is one of the most visible the changes to the funerary landscape in Roman Syria. In the Roman period, across the region, the placement of tombs was constructed in order to maximize their visibility along the routes of daily life. Likewise, new burial forms introduced in the Roman period to the region were typically above ground and highly public. Above ground mausolea, funerary stelae, and most importantly, open air sarcophagi were highly conspicuous and visible public monuments to the deceased. De Jong writes:

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121 For a fuller description of the tomb compounds, along with their relationship to the urban environment, see De Jong 2010, 602-11.
122 Birk 2012, 120-5.
123 Though many saw several phases of expansion, often taking place centuries after their initial construction. Ultimately, the construction of the necropolis was contemporaneous with the urbanization of the city. See De Jong 2010, 604-23.
124 De Jong 2010, 610.
125 Birk 2012, 122; De Jong 2010, 610.
127 De Jong 2007, 151, 5-7.
"The increased visibility of Roman tombs is related to the provincial level. The people in Roman Syria constructed tall, stone tombs surrounded by smaller stelae and sarcophagi alongside the roads leading to the cities and towns of the province... The tombs were encountered by the inhabitants of the cities and villages as they walked to their agricultural fields, gardens, and sometimes the circus, as well as by travelers on their way to markets, family members, or other business."\textsuperscript{128}

When it comes to Tyre, there is no question about the role that civic display played in construction and funerary practices of the necropolis.\textsuperscript{129} The tomb compounds were not only large in size and imposing in shape, they were conspicuously and prominently placed along the major route leading to and from the city. At the most fundamental level, even the process of building, ongoing renovations and decorations\textbackslash of a tomb compound at Tyre itself was a kind of display, an “active and visible process” signaling wealth and status as De Jong points out. This “performance of access to labor and expensive material” was mirrored on a smaller scale too in the deposition of sarcophagi in the necropolis, which, as De Jong points out, would have necessitated a “small army” to accomplish.\textsuperscript{130}

What’s more, De Jong has argued that at “the walls of the tomb became the locus for the display of wealth and access to resources... a new phenomenon of the first centuries C.E.”\textsuperscript{131} The entrances to the compounds faced the causeway and provided the ‘first encounter’ of any visitor to Tyre; since the city on the isthmus was accessed via this causeway, the location of the necropolis suggests that Tyre’s “deceased citizens were on

\textsuperscript{128} De Jong 2007, 169.
\textsuperscript{129} This is the primary argument made by De Jong (2010).
\textsuperscript{130} De Jong 2010, 623.
\textsuperscript{131} De Jong 2010, 604.
display.” At the same time, it is important to note that the funerary compounds at Tyre were surrounded by walls of varying heights that would have prevented passersby from seeing certain elements of the interior. Much of the visual program of ‘display’ orchestrated by the patrons was thus viewable only by entry into the compound, or perhaps through open doorways by the particularly curious. The mosaic floors, the majority of the sarcophagi and the plastered and marble walls of the platforms would not have been immediately visible from the road.

In light of this, it is all the more important that the compounds appear to have been used by more than one family or social group. Moreover, Birk suggests that that the compounds were “a place of social gatherings.” Thus, while not everything was visible to the casual passerby on the road, there was still ample opportunity for viewing which would have fostered not just ‘collective commemoration’ but also the opportunity for social competition and competitive display. Part of this display would have been visible to the casual passerby, while the remainder would have been visible to all who entered the tomb complexes, either on occasions of burials or during the celebration of rites indicated by certain architectural features. At Tyre, many of the

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132 De Jong 2010, 622.
135 Birk 2012, 125. The preponderance of inscriptive evidence existing at Tyre indicates that the open air enclosures were subdivided and burials were grouped by close social ties, typically families. See Birk 2012, 122.
136 Birk 2012, 125.
complexes had benches lining the walls, as well as water installations and occasional altarpieces that indicate the observance of grave-side rituals.\textsuperscript{137}

A few words concerning the necropolis at Beth She'arim are in order in light of the evidence from Tyre. First, it is important to observe some of the differences between the two sites. While the case for the connection between processes of urbanization and the adoption of sarcophagus burial is crystal clear at Tyre, it is less so at Beth She’arim as we saw above, and in Chapter 2. Where Tyre was a prominent and relatively cosmopolitan port city, with a full suite of Roman civic institutions and monumental public buildings to match, it is important to reiterate that the catacombs at Beth She’arim are out of all proportion to the meager evidence for urbanization and monumental architecture from the village itself.\textsuperscript{138} Moreover, at first glance, the interment of the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim underground, out of public view, seems to be a notable departure from the conspicuous display that governed Roman cemeteries elsewhere in the Roman Syria.

Yet the funerary practices at the necropolises of Tyre and Beth She’arim share more than meets the eye, and too much should not be made of the difference between open-air and subterranean burial at Tyre and Beth She’arim respectively. De Jong notes that the internal plans, burial types and layout of necropoleis in Roman Syria were varied and marked by 'heterogeneity', in such a way that suggests that the planning and conceptualization of space were still locally determined (sometimes by physical and

\textsuperscript{137} Birk 2012, 120-1; De Jong 2010, 608-9.
\textsuperscript{138} We considered some possible reasons for this above, in Chapter 2.
The continued practice of secondary burial, amply attested to at Beth She'arim and even among sarcophagus patrons, is one excellent example of the persistence of local practices and culture in the midst of cultural change. Given the heterogeneity of burial practices across the Roman Syria, we should not overstate the significance of this difference.

Indeed, in many ways the burial practices at Tyre and Beth She'arim are parallel. Tyre and Beth She'arim both take part in the preference for communal or group burial that was characteristic of the transition to the Roman period in the region. Moreover, at both necropoleis only part of the funerary display was immediately visible to the casual passerby, while another part was reserved for those who entered the tomb complexes or catacombs. Thus, the tombs complexes at both Tyre and Beth She'arim show publically oriented aspects of display, particularly monumentalization of the tomb form. At Beth She'arim we noted the elaborate facades of Catacombs 14 and 20 and the mausoleum above Catacomb 11 (Chapter 3, Figs. 3.31-39) as well as the decorated lintels and doorways of some burial halls (Figs. 3.40-43).

At both necropoleis there were also important forms of display reserved for more intimate viewing. Most conspicuously at Tyre the walled enclosures would have

139 De Jong 2007, 102, 6, 48.
140 De Jong 2001. Earlier in the Hellenistic period, there was a preference for individual graves (pit, cyst) and monumental tombs were used by individuals and or close family. At the same time, in the early Roman period in Palestine we have the first evidence of communal burial grounds in the necropolis of Jericho. At Beth She’arim this practice is clearly the rule. Many unrelated groups and even communities from outside of the region were buried in the communal necropolis there.
restricted the visibility of the interiors and contents of funerary compounds—including sarcophagi—as we have noted. The subterranean nature of the catacombs at Beth She’arim would have had a similar effect, restricting the viewing of the sarcophagi and other forms of visual culture and display to visitors. And yet we also noted that in both places, the funerary spaces often incorporated places for ceremonial gatherings. At Beth She’arim, for example, both Catacomb 14 and Catacomb 20 featured large forecourts and spacious burial halls with space for meetings of groups and special gatherings, on which occasions the sarcophagi would have been viewed.\footnote{141}

Thus, despite the certain differences, there are significant commonalities in the layout of the necropoleis and in the funerary practices that would have governed the viewing of sarcophagi at both Tyre and Beth She’arim. This is corroborated especially by the way that sarcophagi were installed at both sites: in heterogeneous groupings exhibiting little internal logic, and often one in front of the other. It is also corroborated by parallels in the sarcophagi and their sculptural programs themselves, to which we now turn.

### 5.4 Sarcophagi at Tyre

The excavations by Chéhab of the necropolis of Roman Tyre (1959-1967) brought to light a group of sarcophagi rivaled in their number and diversity of visual culture only by the corpus of Beth She’arim. Though the city of Tyre was much larger and more

\footnote{141 On Tyre, see Birk 2012, 120.}
prominent than Beth She’arim, the patterns and forms of the sarcophagi from its
e Necropolis share more with those of Beth She’arim than they differ. For this reason, we
will explore Tyre as not only a useful parallel, but as an instructive case study. As a city
with a diverse population, well connected to the Roman stone trade by virtue of its
prominent port, the corpus at Tyre provides a good measure of the possibilities open to
sarcophagus patrons of all religious and ethnic persuasions in Roman Syria.

The sarcophagi from Tyre were published in several stages, and information about
them must be gleaned from multiple sources. Two publications were written
concurrently, and deal primarily with the imported sarcophagi and especially with those
with reliefs. The first to appear in 1968 was the excavator’s own initial report which
dealt exclusively with imported Attic and Asiatic sarcophagi bearing narrative scenes.142
The second, appearing in 1969, was written by Ward-Perkins, early in his career and
after his visit to the site in 1964.143 This publication dealt more broadly with the imported
marble sarcophagi, and included brief comparisons to the local sarcophagi. The
remainder of the sarcophagi, including the ones of local limestone, were published in the
excavation reports grouped with the compounds in which they were discovered. These
appeared between 1984-1986, with a brief summative report appearing in the final
volume.144

142 Chéhab 1968.
143 Ward-Perkins 1969.
The piecemeal manner of the publications, which were never completed and were complicated by interruptions of war and accessibility,\textsuperscript{145} makes arriving at concrete numbers and statistical comparisons difficult.\textsuperscript{146} There is no doubt however, that in the corpus of sarcophagi from Roman Syria, Tyre figures prominently. The counts vary, due primarily to the partial and scattered nature of the publication, but recent estimates agree that the sarcophagi numbered somewhere north of 350.\textsuperscript{147} Of these, most sarcophagi from Tyre were carved in local stone—mostly limestone but also sandstone\textit{(ramle)}—with another 89 (or roughly one-third) in imported marble.\textsuperscript{146}

With the exception of Ward-Perkin’s article,\textsuperscript{149} most research on the sarcophagi of Tyre has focused on the handful of Attic imports to the site, all of which were narrative sarcophagi. In doing so, scholarship has displayed an understandable but in many ways unfortunate bias towards these examples shared by ancient and modern viewers alike. We will return to these again in Chapter 6. For the moment our discussion will focus on the much more common and more accessible Proconnesian imports and on the sarcophagi fashioned out of local stone.

\textsuperscript{145} Birk 2012, 119.
\textsuperscript{146} For instance, in his summary publication of the sarcophagi, Chéhab (1986, 32) imprecisely refers to “un certain nombre” of Attic sarcophagi discovered since the publication of the ten sarcophagi published in 1968.
\textsuperscript{147} Through probably not exceeding 400. De Jong, the most recent scholar to treat the necropolis, put the number at 357 in one recent study, and 381 in another. See De Jong 2007, 123-4, n. 233; 2010, 608.
\textsuperscript{148} De Jong 2007, 123-4, n. 233; 2010, 608.
\textsuperscript{149} Ward-Perkins 1969.
5.4.1 Sarcophagi at Tyre and the predominance of the Proconnesian forms

On one level, the sarcophagi at Tyre illustrate a diversity of tastes and preferences on the part of local citizens. Ward-Perkins described the port city as “catholic in its tastes and commercial connections... evidently happy to be able to import from several difference sources at once.” Thus, we will see in the following chapter that particularly wealthy patrons at Tyre with the will and the means also had the option to purchase rare and unique sarcophagi from Attic and Asiatic producers as well. On the other hand, we should be careful not to exaggerate the evidence. The Proconnesian imports had a clear dominance in the necropolis, not only in their share of the import market, but also in their influence on the locally produced sarcophagi as well.

Indeed, the Proconnesian imports to Tyre significantly outnumber Attic imports roughly 8:1. Two types of Proconnesian sarcophagi were found at Tyre. The first and most common were plain, mostly undecorated sarcophagi called the ‘pedimental gable’ style because of the simple molding at the base and lip of the lid on many examples (e.g. Fig. 5.8). This group accounts for roughly two thirds of the Proconnesian imports.

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150 When Ward-Perkins visited the site, the Proconnesian sarcophagi totaled 29, while the Attic imports totaled 4. See Ward-Perkins 1969, 111. An updated count of the Attic sarcophagi, totaling nine examples, is offered in the following chapter.
151 This grouping collapses two groups identified by Ward-Perkins, who separated those with molding from those without. The difference however, is small and unlikely to have signified anything in economic terms. Much less does the difference allow us to reconstruct anything of the cultural identities of the patrons. See Ward-Perkins 1969, 115.
Some featured a rondel with a Medusa head or rosette in one or both gables or on the front panel (e.g. Fig. 5.9); most did not.

The second type of import is the better-known garlanded form. Most of the Proconnesian garlanded sarcophagi at Tyre were used in the quarry-state style. Quarry-state sarcophagi account for nearly two dozen examples. Some of these did not even receive a final dressing to smooth the surface (e.g. Fig. 5.10), while others were finely smoothed (e.g. Fig. 5.11). There were also just over a dozen examples of finished garland sarcophagi. While fewer of the imported Proconnesian sarcophagi were carved in finished garlanded form, their sculptural programs capture the range of possibilities discussed above, including secondary motifs of both animal and human forms (e.g. Figs. 5.12, 5.13).

These imported Proconnesian sarcophagi share several features. They are all topped with lids in the same gabled form with prominent acroteria. Little effort was typically expended to decorate the available surfaces of the pitched panels, acroteria and gables. The pitched panels of most are smoothly dressed, with only a small handful receiving further treatment. One has a scaled pattern, such as the one begun on the Met example

152 Chéhab 1984, 10-2, S166-7, S2-3.
153 De Jong 2010, 608.
154 Chéhab 1985, 495, S931-2.
156 De Jong 2010, 608.
157 See, for example Chéhab 1984, 85-7, S637-8; 1985, 516-7.
above. Two others have a ‘tiled-roof’ pattern.\textsuperscript{158} The gables of around one-third have a simple rosette or other motif (e.g. Fig. 5.14),\textsuperscript{159} while most are empty. The acroteria are even less often decorated; only two have any carving.\textsuperscript{160}

The Proconnesian garlanded sarcophagi at Tyre also shared a somewhat curious preference relating to \textit{tabulae ansatae}. Most of the examples of garlanded sarcophagi imported to Tyre—particularly those in the quarry-state form but also some in more finished forms—bore a \textit{tabula ansatae} above the central garland on one side, in place of a central rondel or other motif.\textsuperscript{161} In only one case was the \textit{tabula ansata} actually used for an inscription.\textsuperscript{162} The absence of an inscription is in keeping with a general lack of inscriptions throughout Tyre’s necropolis in fact, which had very few prior to the 5\textsuperscript{th} century C.E.\textsuperscript{163} This seemingly odd propensity to leave \textit{tabulae ansatae} blank, along with the general move away from inscriptions, may actually fit in with broader trends across the Empire that saw a general decline in the epigraphic habit beginning in the 4\textsuperscript{th} century C.E.\textsuperscript{164} The taste for the blank \textit{tabula ansata} is unique though, and it has been suggested that this inclusion is one visible way in which the Proconnesian exporters customized

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{158} Ward-Perkins 1969, 116.
\item\textsuperscript{159} Chéhab 1985, 733, S45-6.
\item\textsuperscript{160} Ward-Perkins 1969, 116.
\item\textsuperscript{161} Ward-Perkins 1969, 115.
\item\textsuperscript{162} Ward-Perkins 1969, 115.
\item\textsuperscript{163} De Jong (2010, 114) counts seven only.
\item\textsuperscript{164} Gardner 2007, 123; MacMullen 1982. However some other possible explanations are explored by Carroll (2006, 113-25).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
their products for the market in Roman Syria. As we will see, the same preference, as well as the patterns of use, held true at Beth She’arim as well.

Demand for sarcophagi exceeded the import market, though, and probably extended also to social groups who could not afford the high costs associated with importing Proconnesian sarcophagi (not to mention the more expensive Attic and Asiatic types). The gap between supply and demand was filled by the local production of sarcophagi in native stone. While lacking in marble resources, the region of Tyre had rich stores of fine white limestone, basalt and sandy local stone called ramle.165 Approximately two-thirds of the more than 300 sarcophagi excavated at Tyre were carved out one of these local materials. These locally produced sarcophagi take their sculptural and decorative cues exclusively from the Proconnesian models.166 In other words, unlike the strong evidence of continuation of local sculptural traditions seen on locally produced sarcophagi at Beth She’arim in the previous chapter, the corpus at Tyre offers no evidence of the persistence of local stone sculpture traditions.

Most locally produced sarcophagi are simple, borrowing from the Proconnesian pedimental form that lacked the garlanded motif in either its quarry-state or finished forms (e.g. Fig. 5.15). Apart from the difference in material, the locally produced examples of the type are well executed and closely replicate in proportions and form the regular, even faces and gabled lids with prominent acroteria of the style. Part of the

166 Chéhab 1986, 43; Ward-Perkins 1969, 131.
reason that these sarcophagi predominate the group must be that they were the easiest to produce, requiring very little beyond basic cutting and smoothing of the surfaces.

Yet there are also a few local limestone sarcophagi that are more ambitious in their sculptural programs. Many imitate the quarry-state form.\textsuperscript{167} For example, one locally produced sarcophagus bears a \textit{tabula ansata} in the central panel just like Proconnesian imports (Fig. 5.16).\textsuperscript{168} Curiously, the placement of the sarcophagus was such that the face with the \textit{tabula ansata} was turned against the wall of the compound and thus out of view for the visitor.\textsuperscript{169} Perhaps this fact highlights just how much the quarry-state form had become its own recognizable style, and how secondary even the empty \textit{tabula ansata} had become to the recognizability of that form. Taken together with the preference for blank \textit{tabulae ansatae} among the Proconnesian imports noted above, this suggests that the \textit{tabula ansata} had devolved into a vestigial motif without function from its original use as an inscription frame. A smaller group of locally produced sarcophagi of hard limestone emulate the ‘finished’ Proconnesian garlanded form and adopt the rams’ heads commonly found on imported examples (e.g. Figs. 5.17, 5.18).\textsuperscript{170}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{167} Ward-Perkins 1969, 131, L2.
\textsuperscript{168} S213-4
\textsuperscript{169} Ward-Perkins 1969, 131.
\textsuperscript{170} Chéhab 1985, 503, S3881-2. See also Ward-Perkins 1969, 137-8.
\end{flushleft}
5.4.2 Patronage practices and sarcophagus patrons at Tyre

As we saw above, the funerary practices at the necropolis of Tyre were linked to urbanization and particularly “new forms of conspicuous display.”  

On both counts, the sarcophagi from the necropolis are illustrative. Their prominent placement either directly along the roadside, or more commonly on raised platforms in complexes, is part of this new pattern of display. The imported and local sarcophagi were not grouped together in any special way according to either material or decoration. Rather they were placed together in compounds that contained sarcophagi of local and imported stone alike.

The groupings probably had much to do with family structures, as Birk has suggested, or other close social ties. At most, a compound would contain a pair of imported sarcophagi, complemented by several more local limestone examples. It is true that some of these imported sarcophagi, and particularly the Attic and Asiatic ones, were prominently positioned to draw the attention of the visitor to the burial compound; but in many more instances the carved panels of even the imported sarcophagi were partially or completely blocked from view by the placement of other, often ‘inferior’ sarcophagi. Given the fact that the same phenomenon was observed at

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171 De Jong 2010, 617ff.
172 De Jong 2010, 621-2.
173 See, for instance, the group of four sarcophagi in Compound 1. Two of these sarcophagi were Proconnesian imports in the pedimental style, while the other two were local basalt sarcophagi carved to emulate the quarry-state form. These were deposited in alternating order. Chéhab 1984, 10-2, Pl. IV.
174 Birk 2012, 124.
Beth She’arim already, we might suggest that, for whatever reason, this was not regarded as problematic by patrons at either site.

Who were these patrons at Tyre? Inscriptions and the kinds of decoration found on the sarcophagi at Tyre lack indications of familial relationships and other ties of patronage common on Roman sarcophagi. Birk suggests that this absence of patronage information indicates that in Tyre the sarcophagus patron and the deceased were frequently one in the same. If this is the case, the sarcophagi not only tell us about cultural identifications at the communal and familial levels, but very directly at the individual level too. But the picture of patronage is complicated by evidence of extensive reuse, part of a broader phenomenon throughout the necropolis. In some sarcophagi the remains of as many as 13 persons were found. A particularly good example of this phenomenon is a sarcophagus that bears three inscriptions, one on the front and one on either side panel. Only two of the inscriptions are legible. Both provide first names and (related) professions: grain merchant and baker, and one of the two bears a cross. The remains of at least six individuals were found together in the sarcophagus, which may suggest that the sarcophagus was reused by a family unit.

175 Birk 2012.
176 Birk 2012, 122; De Jong 2010, 619.
178 Chéhab 1984, 22-3, S152-3, 753-4, S231-2. See also Birk 2012, 122; Ward-Perkins 1969, Pr. 2. Another example may be found in Chéhab 1984, 474, S883-4.
179 Birk 2012, 122.
The legibility of several inscriptions indicating different individuals as well as the use of only given names is especially suggestive of reuse within a single family.

While the presence of sarcophagi carved out of local limestone and *ramle* probably indicates that there was a local workshop at Tyre capable on some level of sarcophagus production, it is an open question as to whether this workshop was able to finish finer imported marble products. The local sarcophagi at the site are quite simple, but then so too are most of the imports. Sarcophagus patrons at Tyre by and large purchased Proconnesian sarcophagi that were on the simpler end of the spectrum. They were, as Ward-Perkin’s puts it, “content with a bare minimum of sculptured detail…”\(^\text{180}\) As we have observed above, few of the Proconnesian imports went beyond the quarry-state form in their visual programs. Among the limestone sarcophagi there was even less effort expended on sculptural programs, with most not even mimicking the quarry-state form and imitating only the basic, monumental form of the imports.

The fact that that majority of Proconnesian garland sarcophagi were not finished suggests that Tyre probably had few if any skilled workman, much less a local workshop, capable of finishing marble sarcophagi to a high quality.\(^\text{181}\) By contrast, at Alexandria where Proconnesian imports had a similar monopoly on the market, most were finished, and finished according to a unique local type at that.\(^\text{182}\) On these grounds,

\(^\text{181}\) Ward-Perkins 1980b, 44.
\(^\text{182}\) Ward-Perkins 1980b, 45.
Ward-Perkins doubted whether Tyre had its own sculptural workshop, suggesting instead that for the few imported Proconnesian pieces that show significant sculpting, patrons in Tyre would have turned to their “more progressive neighbors” to the north.\textsuperscript{183} He identifies Beirut as a possible site of such a workshop.\textsuperscript{184} However, Rockwell has argued that stone workshops in antiquity were highly specialized, both in the roles and skills of the artisans and in the materials they worked.\textsuperscript{185} Thus, it seems equally likely that the local workshop at Tyre was set up to produce different forms, out of different materials.

Ultimately, the corpus of sarcophagi excavated at Tyre fit in with what we can reconstruct about sarcophagus patronage in Roman Syria as a whole. While no other site has yielded as many sarcophagi as found at the necropoleis of Beth She’arim or Tyre, sarcophagi have been discovered in the region at Beirut, Tripoli, Ashkelon, Samaria-Sebaste, Neapolis, Beth Shean-Scythopolis and Caesarea (Map 8). Piecemeal though the evidence may be, the scattered sarcophagi found elsewhere in the region—including several dozen Proconnesian sarcophagus of simple, quarry-state and completed garland forms—confirm that Tyre was far from unique in its practices patterns of consumption.\textsuperscript{186} The “catholic tastes” of Tyre especially, were not unique to this city; rather, the impression that emerges from any survey of the funerary sphere in Roman

\textsuperscript{183} Ward-Perkins 1969, 137.
\textsuperscript{184} Ward-Perkins 1969, 137.
\textsuperscript{185} Rockwell 1993, 178-82. My thanks to Tolly Boatwright for pointing this out.
\textsuperscript{186} See Ward-Perkins 1969, 137, 40-45.
Syria is one of heterogeneity and diversity. As we will see next and in the following chapter, the Jewish sarcophagus patrons of Beth She’arim shared the same “catholic” tastes as other patrons in the province.

5.5 Sarcophagi at Beth She’arim

On almost every level, the corpus of the sarcophagi from the necropoleis of Tyre and Beth She’arim are remarkably comparable. Not only are the relative proportion of imports to locally produced sarcophagi similar (3:1 at Tyre, and 5:1 at Beth She’arim), from their sculptural programs to their deposition the corpus sarcophagi from Beth She’arim looks much like that of Tyre—even, as we will see, down to a preference for blank tabulae ansatae. Most notably, at both necropoleis Proconnesian imports enjoyed an important position in the hierarchy of types favored by patrons and influenced the composition of locally produced sarcophagi as well.

5.5.1 Imported marble sarcophagi from Beth She’arim and the Proconnesian form

As was the case at Tyre, the popularity and influence of the Proconnesian form in Roman Syria is amply attested to across the corpus at Beth She’arim, from imported marble sarcophagi fragments of Proconnesian sarcophagi to locally produced copies in

\[\text{De Jong 2001. By contrast, Ward-Perkins (1969, 132) notes that other nearby provinces showed considerably more homogeneity in their patronage patterns. In Roman Egypt in the same period, all of the imported sarcophagi are from Proconnesus, while in Cyrenaica, Attic sarcophagi reign supreme and there is only one garlanded Proconnesian sarcophagus.}\]
fine white limestone. The evidence of marble sarcophagi at Beth She’arim is based only on fragmentary examples; no complete marble sarcophagus was excavated at the site, which, as noted already, was extensively looted. Avigad collected and published fifty marble fragments. Of these, six were clearly fragments of imported garlanded sarcophagi. The forms, content and material—the coarse, bluish marble easily recognized as Proconnesian—of these indicates that marble sarcophagi from Proconnesus reached Beth She’arim.

The fragments also suggest strongly that both quarry-state and finished garlanded forms were imported, and even raise the possibility of finishing undertaken in local workshops. Of course, this should not come as a surprise, given the appearance of both types at Tyre. Sadly, the fragments from Beth She’arim do not preserve enough evidence of the secondary motifs commonly used on finished forms, which would allow us to learn whether the patrons at Beth She’arim preferred, for example, rams’ and bulls’ heads to putti and nikae in between garland swags. As we have seen in the previous chapter, all of these motifs (with the exception of rams’ heads) occur in local limestone sarcophagi, and it may be that both featured on imported Proconnesian sarcophagi as well.

Two fragments can be identified with absolute confidence as fragments from a quarry-state style Proconnesian import (Fig. 5.19). The fragments are diagnostically

188 Avigad 1976a, 164-73.
significant and allow for a reconstruction of the whole, which Avigad offered (Fig. 5.20). They preserve large sections of both an upper right corner with the raw shape of a garland swag and blank tondo above, as well as the center with part of a blank *tabula ansata*. The blank *tabula ansata* and the geometric shapes illustrates well the desirability of the quarry-state form in its own right, as we have pointed out above. This is especially confirmed by the fact that the main panel has been smoothed, and the geometric forms have received planing and molded edges themselves, transforming them from potential garland swags to finished, abstract motifs. Interestingly, the rim above is only pick dressed.

Several other fragments indicate that Proconnesian garland sarcophagus was imported in finished form also. Two of these are clusters of grapes of the exact sort that hang from garland swags (Fig. 5.21). These were in a bluish-grey marble of a coarser kind, which is in keeping with marble quarried from Proconnessus. Avigad correctly identified a third fragment as showing a “garland tied with a ribbon” (Fig. 5.22). In fact, it shows the place where two swags would have met, with the center and left swag preserved. Only the ribbon wrapping at the top of the swag is preserved, meaning we cannot identify the makeup of the garland itself. A ribbon hangs down in undulating curves from the joint, with a shallow line bisecting the ribbon and giving a rough

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189 Avigad (1976a, 168) calls the surface “delicately stippled.”
190 Avigad (1976a, 168) identified as marble type “c”.
191 Avigad 1976a, 168.
impression of depth. The carving looks suspiciously like some of the limestone sculpture at Beth She’arim, raising the possibility that a local workshop undertook to finish a marble sarcophagus imported in quarry-state form.

Another fragment shows a winged victory with a garland draped over her shoulder (Fig. 5.23). Winged victories were common motifs on the most elaborate garlanded sarcophagi from Proconnesus, and this particular example has a parallel, as Avigad pointed out, in the Proconnesian garland sarcophagus at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (both wear necklaces, see above Fig. 5.4).\(^{192}\) The description of the marble type corresponds to Proconnesian, further confirming the identification.\(^ {193}\) It seems likely then, that this fragment comes from an imported Proconnesian sarcophagus in the most costly finished form, with *nikae* and putti supporting the garland swags. A further piece clearly is a corner fragment of a gabled lid (Fig. 5.24). This piece preserves both sides of the acroteria—carved with stylized half-palmettes in shallow relief—as well as part of the side pediment and the layered, cyma recta molding beneath. This final fragment cannot be absolutely tied to a Proconnesian import, since other Asiatic and even Attic sarcophagi featured lids with acroteria (see below, Chapter 6) but its content is paralleled in many Proconnesian exports.

\(^{192}\) Avigad 1976a, 165.
\(^{193}\) Avigad 1976a, 165.
5.5.2 Locally produced sarcophagi and the imitation of imported styles

As we discussed above in the preceding chapter, the costs and difficulties of transporting imported marble sarcophagi overland to inland sites like Beth She’arim made for a “greater incentive to ‘do it yourself’ inland, rather than import the elements ready-made.”194 We have also discussed many of the locally produced limestone sarcophagi in the previous chapter, and noted that their sculptural programs drew heavily on local traditions in stone sculpture. Here we will see that the Proconnesian quarry-state form also exerted a strong influence on the sculptural programs of local sarcophagi.

Such sarcophagi were given only two paragraphs in Avigad’s treatment, where they were discussed as a group called the “tabula-ansata” sarcophagi.195 Such short treatment runs counter to the fact that these sarcophagi form the second largest identifiable group of sarcophagi, after the plain, unornamented style. Five such sarcophagi, which cleave closely to the quarry-state form, were found. Four were found in a single room (XI) in Catacomb 20—the same room were the ‘Eagle’ sarcophagus was prominently displayed in fact (see above, Chapter 4)—while a fifth was found in Catacomb 23.196 All those discovered in Room XI were sculpted of hard, meleke limestone and featured the same basic sculptural program. Across the front, large and prominent empty tabulae ansatae

195 Avigad 1976a, 156-7.
196 This fifth example is somewhat different than the others. In place of a central tabula ansata, it continues the garland and rondel motif across the entire front.
are flanked on either side by a stylized garland swags with floating rondels (e.g. Figs. 5.25, 5.26). On the sides, a single garland swag with an inset rondel continues the theme of the front. *Cyma reversa* molding separates the central sculptural band from the thick plinth and top of the body.

As was the case at Tyre, however, some local producers were more ambitious in their pursuit of the Proconnesian form and attempted to copy or at least imitate imported garlanded sarcophagi in the finished style. Such is the case with the two ‘acanthus’ sarcophagi, as they were called by Avigad. These two sarcophagi, which are better described as locally produced ‘garlanded’ sarcophagi, were discovered in close proximity to each other towards the rear of the catacomb: the first in one of the central rooms off the main corridor (Room XVIII), the second in a chamber off this room and to the left (Room XIX). They were of similar design, with primary motifs of garlands, acanthus leaves and rosettes, and of the same hard limestone as the other local imitations of the Proconnesian forms. Both were found in pieces, a fact Avigad speculated was because later tomb robbers mistook them for marble sarcophagi (prized as spolia and for raw material) because the quality of their carving exceeds all other locally produced sarcophagi.198

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197 After the ‘Eagle’ sarcophagus was removed from Room XI, sarcophagus no. 55 was moved to more or less the same spot.
198 Avigad 1976a, 152.
The first ‘acanthus’ sarcophagus was discovered in pieces in one of the rear rooms (XIX) of the catacomb (Fig. 5.27). Enough fragments remained to reassemble a sizable portion of it and to reconstruct the sculptural program (Fig. 5.28). The carving was done in high relief and the level of the detail was equally high. Both of these could be accomplished because of the hardness of the material. The base of the sarcophagus is thick and gives the impression of being unfinished, yet the sarcophagus is an excellent representative of the potential for exceptionally high quality possible in local imitations of the Proconnesian garlanded sarcophagus model.

The primary motif hues closely to the original: three heavy swags of garland running horizontally across the front panel. The central and right garlands are composed of individual scale-shaped petals, while the left is of a different design, indicated by individual lines that may indicate wheat stalks. Where the garlands join, a tassel made of acanthus fronds with a round object at the center—likely a grape cluster—is suspended between them. The whole composition is framed by large acanthus stalks whose foliage faces inward. Along the top of the sarcophagus was a horizontal band composed of a repeating egg pattern. This too was carved in relatively high relief, but not in the familiar egg and dart motif. Instead, the 'eggs' were separated by a curlicue shape, what

199 Avigad 1976a, Sarcophagus No. 101.
200 Avigad (1976a, 151) suggests that this round object was intended to be a grape cluster, but left unfinished.
Avigad calls an ‘egg-and-S’ pattern. The sides of the sarcophagus bear wreaths that frame a central krater or vase with scalloped walls.

In this example, the two far swags frame a double layered rosette of a type found commonly at Tyre. Only a small portion of the rosette on the left was preserved, though the one on the right was better preserved. Both layers consist of five petals, and the depiction is naturalistic, not stylized as on ossuaries. The central garland swag has the figure of a lion, only the lower half of which is preserved (Fig. 5.29). He emerges from the right, his rear half cloaked by a garment with folds, and partially obscured by the garland. His pose is familiar, with his right paw raised and resting on a round object. His left paw rests on a cluster of grapes. A portion of his mane is preserved and visible, flowing above his paws. Every aspect of this figure is paralleled by the lions emerging from acanthus scrolls seen at Chorazin (see above, Chapter 3) as well as by another local limestone sarcophagus discovered at Yoqneam, only 5 km to the south of Beth She’arim. These local parallels demonstrate that, even when the intent was to mimic popular imported forms, familiar and practiced local sculptural traditions could still be employed.

The substitution of acanthus leafs at the joints of the garlands and at the corners of this sarcophagus is interesting. More commonly on Proconnesian sarcophagi of such detail these spaces are used for figured forms, whether bulls heads or putti and nikaes.

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201 Avigad 1976a, 150.
Such figural forms are not uncommon at Beth She‘arim either. We know that humans and animals alike were popular motifs in the sarcophagi, as well as in other forms across the necropolis (see Chapters 3 and 4).

A second sarcophagus bearing many similarities to this one was discovered nearby in Room XVIII (Fig. 5.30, 5.31, 5.32). It is of similar dimensions, though shorter and slightly more narrow. Also partially destroyed with fragments looted, in this case parts of the gabled lid were also preserved. Like the first garland sarcophagus, this one was also carved of hard, meleke limestone in detailed, high relief. It too has a band running along the top edge. The lower half is a familiar egg-and-dart pattern left unfinished (only the left portion was completed), while the upper half is a series of framed geometric arches.

The three swags of the garland on this example are uniform, with the individuated scales representing petals coming to a small flower at the bottom of the swag. The swag on the right has two flowers at the center, likely an improvisation on the part of a sculptor who miscalculated their spacing. From the joints of the garland, tassels of acanthus fronds hang from flowers, with a cluster suspended at the center. Like the first sarcophagus, two large acanthus leaves frame the composition. However, in this case, the leaves frame the entire sarcophagus itself, as they are sculpted into the corners,

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202 Avigad 1976a, Sarcophagus No. 97.
203 Avigad (1976a, 152) suggests pine cones, but that the departure from grape clusters may have been accidental.
which follow the contours of the leaf in a naturalistic way. Above the two garland swags on either side, a rosette was carved in a naturalistic style. Only the one on the left was finished, while the one on the right appears abstract and roughed out. The left rosette has five petals, and the indications of an ovule at the center. Avigad speculates that there was a rosette above the central loop as well, but we cannot be sure of this; many such sarcophagi feature a different motif in the center loop. On the sides, more typical than the vase and wreath motif of the first sarcophagus, a single garland loop framed a rosette.

The local limestone sarcophagi discussed so far—the ‘tabula ansata’ and ‘acanthus’ forms—emulate, to varying degrees, the motifs and styles of sarcophagi imported from Proconnesus. But the influence of the imported garlanded form in both quarry and completed states did not end there: it is felt more broadly in many more of the sculpted sarcophagi of local limestone at the site. Thus, some limestone sarcophagi draw deeply on the Proconnesian imports without copying its form so precisely. Such is the case with the “Mask” sarcophagus (Fig. 5.33). The ‘masks’ on this sarcophagus (e.g. Fig. 5.34), which are visible also on some lintels elsewhere in the necropolis (see above, Chapter 3), most likely here replicate the Medusa heads and gorgoneions common on Proconnesian sarcophagi imported to Tyre (see Fig. 5.9).

204 Avigad 1976a, Sarcophagus No. 94.
Other sarcophagi produced locally at Beth She’arim suggest that sculptors and patrons could be syncretic in determining a sculptural program by mixing styles and motifs drawn from both local and provincial sculptural traditions. Such sarcophagi creatively combine elements such as garlands and bucrania in new combinations and with local elements in ways unique to Beth She’arim. We have already seen several such examples in the group of sarcophagi with garlands and animal motifs identified in the previous chapter. Indeed, the garland in particular seems to have been adopted and creatively adapted for use on local sarcophagi of designs that are unique to Beth She’arim, as seen above in the case of the ‘Eagle’ and related sarcophagi (Chapter 4).

Another example seems to have drawn on both ossuaries and Proconnesian sarcophagi (i.e. both local and ‘Roman’ traditions). On first glance, the sarcophagus—which is badly broken—looks like a straightforward imitation of the Proconnesian quarry-state style, with a triple swag across the front, single swags on the side, and rosettes atop each swag (Fig. 5.35). Yet, some of these rosettes were naturalistic—such as the rosette on the left side—while others were in the schematic style characteristic of ossuaries with relief carving (Fig. 5.36). Moreover, the variety of rosettes employed on this single example may be a nod to the heterogeneity that marked ossuary decoration. Such examples serve to show that the multiple sources—local and regional—could be

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205 Avigad 1976a, Sarcophagus No. 119.
drawn on by local artisans to create the sculptural program of a single sarcophagus, and that no hard boundary between styles or influences should be reconstructed.

Another likely influence of the Proconnesian form is observed across the entire group of local limestone sarcophagi, sculpted and undecorated alike, without exception: the gabled lid. The vast majority of the 125 sarcophagi discovered in Catacomb 20 were found with their stone lids in situ or nearby.206 In fact, enough were recovered to conclude that all the stone sarcophagi at Beth She’arim had one feature in common: the gabled lid with acroteria at the corners, with only minor variations in form.207 These common features are perhaps no surprise, as the gabled lid, as well as other architectural elements (especially columnar motifs, which also appear in the Beth She’arim corpus, see below), were first developed in the eastern sarcophagi industry and enjoyed an enduring popularity there.208 Indeed, the gabled lid with acroteria was the single feature that united the various forms produced in the workshops of Proconnesus, for instance.209 While many sarcophagi produced in the eastern provinces went beyond the tendrils to include figural motifs in the gabled pediment and on the acroteria, especially in Asia Minor but also at Tyre and in Roman Syria,210 the acroteria of the sarcophagi at Beth

206 Avigad 1976a, 136. Most robbing of sarcophagi was done through holes created in the space between lid and body.
207 Avigad 1976a, 163.
208 McCann 1978, 17.
210 See examples in Koch 1993, 113-22, 73-80, and especially an example of a garlanded sarcophagus from Tyre, Abb..
She’arim are most often plain, and only occasionally employ floral designs.\(^{211}\) Ultimately though, in the form and elaboration of both the acroteria and gabled space, the sarcophagi of Beth She’arim are closely keyed in to trends of sarcophagi styles of the Roman East, and particularly to the trends in marble sarcophagi produced in Proconnesus.

5.5.3 The plain sarcophagi at Beth She’arim and the Proconnesian pedimental form

While Avigad and scholars since have devoted most of their discussions to the decorated sarcophagi, the overwhelming majority of sarcophagi at Beth She’arim—some 80% of the corpus—are simple, local sarcophagi in local white limestone (Fig. 5.37). With very few exceptions, these are plain, lacking in ornament entirely. Indeed, to this day when one meanders through the long corridors of Catacomb 20, probably the most striking aspect of the sarcophagi contained therein is the relative absence of visual programs. There can be very little doubt however, that these were based in form on the pedimental style of Proconnesian imports.

Were these plain sarcophagi in local limestone that borrowed the Proconnesian pedimental gable style simply an entry-level option for sarcophagus burial, commissioned by families with only enough means to afford a stock sarcophagus and

\(^{211}\) Avigad (1976a, 166) argues that a marble putti in the round could have been on the corner of a lid. This would be a unique arrangement however, unprecedented, and it seems more likely that the kneeling putto came from the face of the sarcophagus body or lid, where they are commonly seen.
unable to pay an artisan to decorate it? Avigad seems to conclude as much when he judges the plain sarcophagi to be of “inferior in workmanship.”212 However, aside from the absence of decoration, there is in reality no distinguishable difference in fit and finish between the plain and decorated sarcophagi.213 The plain sarcophagi are well constructed with even proportions and generally finished to a high standard with smoothed surfaces and sharp edges. Their gabled lids are every bit as well-crafted as those on that top the decorated sarcophagi.

Indeed, all indications are that a similar level of care and attention to detail went into these sarcophagi as did the decorated ones, at least up to a certain level, and their placement around the halls of Catacomb 20 would indicate the same. Far from being shoved into corners or hidden behind more elaborate examples, the plain sarcophagi are in prominent places. Of three sarcophagi that are set apart in niches at the westernmost end of the first hall in Catacomb 20, the only decorated sarcophagus is the ‘Lion’ sarcophagus (see above, Chapter 4). The other two sarcophagi are completely undecorated, yet their special treatment—being set apart in a specially hewn niche—shows that their simplicity was probably not motivated by any cost-cutting.214

212 Avigad 1976a, 137.
213 It would also be easier to explain the sarcophagi with respect to cost-saving concerns if we found more transitional forms, sarcophagi that were simply or crudely decorated, perhaps with graffiti instead of well executed relief work. But the aesthetic gap between the plain sarcophagi and the decorated ones is a wide one.
214 The cost of hewing what are essentially large arcosolia to hold the sarcophagi must have been at least comparable with the cost of a simple decoration. Moreover, the dressing of the sarcophagi shows care, with simple molding.
One possible alternative explanation is that the local industry simply could not keep up with the local demand. If there was only a single workshop with a few artisans capable of sculpting sarcophagi, perhaps many sarcophagus patrons simply did not have the option to have relief sculpture on their sarcophagi. In a similar way, the number of decorated sarcophagi in Catacomb 20 that appear unfinished (e.g. the ‘Daughters’ sarcophagus above, Chapter 3) might be interpreted as the result of rushed work on the part of a workshop.

On the other hand, we should be equally open to the fact that perhaps the majority of Jews at Beth She’arim did prefer plain, unornamented sarcophagi. This explanation is, in all likelihood, probably the most plausible one. It may have been the case that the majority of Jewish patrons considered decorative programs unnecessary or beside the point. The monumentality of the limestone sarcophagi was an imposing sight on its own, with or without visual programs. Simply put, these were massive sarcophagi. They were typically just over two meters long, about a meter wide, and a meter and a half tall.215 Had they been building blocks they would have been considered monumental ashlars. The evidence from Tyre, where the simple pedimental gabled style predominates both among imported Proconnesian sarcophagi and locally produced sarcophagi, proves furthermore that we need not resort to presumed aniconic tendencies on the part of Jewish patrons in order to explain the popularity of plain sarcophagi.

215 See Avigad 1976a, 136.
5.6 Summary

The foregoing comparison of the necropoleis at Tyre and Beth She’arim, and particularly the sarcophagus corpuses of each, suggests that Jewish sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim were deeply influenced by regional patterns of patronage and broader dynamics at work in the stone trade of Roman Syria. Indeed, evidence surveyed so far suggests that the community at Beth She’arim was thoroughly engaged and immersed in its immediate local (Chapters 3 and 4) and provincial cultural contexts. The provincial trade in imported stone sarcophagi was an important influence on the sculptural programs of sarcophagi—both imported and local—at the site. The impact of Proconnesian sarcophagi especially on local production is observed not only at Beth She’arim, but as a general and defining characteristic of the sarcophagus trade in Roman Syria. On myriad levels, this imported sarcophagus style shaped local tastes and local products throughout the region, such that the popularity of the Proconnesian form and copies thereof is better considered a regional phenomenon than an imported one.216 This pattern is not unique to sarcophagi either; regional trade and provincial tastes define the consumption of a wide variety of material goods, from ceramics to textiles, in cities across the region.217

When looking at the corpus from Beth She’arim from this perspective, what is surprising about it is how little it differs from other groups of sarcophagi, most notably

217 Cooper 1996.
at Tyre. How little any special sense of Jewishness, or difference is marked in the sculptural programs observable, for example, in the almost total absence of menorahs. Far from seeing this high degree of confluence as a problem to be solved, we should celebrate how much it illuminates about the visual programs of the sarcophagi and the patterns of patronage that emerge therein. The regional influence explains many of the most conspicuous and sometimes puzzling aspects of the corpus.

The far reaching influence of the Proconnesian form at both Tyre and Beth She’arim is an obvious aspect of the corpus that we explored above, but there are other, less obvious ways in which the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim mirror patterns observable in the broader corpus from Roman Syria as well. For instance, the absence of portraiture at Beth She’arim is in fact not particularly conspicuous considering regional trends. While portrait busts are found in Roman funerary sculpture of Syria, they are concentrated primarily in northern Syria and Palmyra, well away from Beth She’arim geographically. Portrait sculpture is not especially common at Tyre. Evidence for it consists primarily of a scattering of busts carved in place of gorgoneions above garland swags. The absence of portraiture then, at Beth She’arim and Tyre as well, may have much more to do with constraints of the import economy and the technical abilities of local workshops than any cultural or religious aversion to portraiture. At the very least, the general lack of

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218 This too is unremarkable in light of the Tyrian corpus, in which only two crosses appear. Menorahs appear on only a single sarcophagus from Beth She’arim, which we will discuss in the next chapter.
portrait sculpture on sarcophagi from Beth She’arim is not particularly conspicuous in light of provincial patterns.

Neither is the preference for local materials at Beth She’arim at all unique against the backdrop of Roman Syria. Across the region, the construction of all kinds of funerary forms using mostly local materials began in the Hellenistic period and continued into the Roman period without abatement. No doubt this was due mostly to the costs associated with overland transport of marble and other luxury stones to Roman Syria, and especially to interior cities and towns such as Beth She’arim. The consumption of marble materials was centered primarily around the coastal cities as we have seen, where transport could be accomplished over water.

The expense of importing marble was something that may have been undertaken for collective expenditures on public buildings at the interior cities of Roman Syria, but probably only rarely for the wealthiest individuals for private burial. At Beth She’arim, the fact that any marble sarcophagi are present at all, such as the Proconnesian imports encountered here, is in fact a testament to the wealth of some patrons. This is especially the case when the sarcophagi were to be interred not in open air compounds visible to passersby on the road, but in catacombs nestled into the hills surrounding a village somewhat off the beaten track. We have no inscriptions at Beth She’arim such as the remarkable one from Pamphylia proclaiming its Proconnesian origins mentioned above

\[\text{De Jong 2007, 157-9.}\]
(p. 271), but we can assume that there too the use of marble was a marker of an elite social status, a luxury good that carried with it prestige in the eyes of one’s neighbors.

Regional influences account for many of the visual programs and motifs employed on sarcophagi at Beth She’arim. They also account for some of the cultural practices of deposition and viewing they were embedded in as well. Both the compounds at Tyre and burial halls at Beth She’arim in which the sarcophagi were deposited and which dictated the manner in which they were viewed were semi-private. They had architectural features furnished for the gathering of groups on special occasions, but relatively little of the visual programs within, including the sarcophagi, was visible to the casual passerby.

Moreover, the way in which sarcophagi were placed in these compounds is parallel. At Tyre and at Beth She’arim sarcophagi were deposited in groups that mix local and imported materials, or plain and ornate programs that suggest burial was by family or the close social ties, with family members being accorded different sarcophagi depending on their role or status within the family. The use of raised platforms was also common to both necropoleis, though the platforms at Tyre were much larger in proportion. Concerning the platforms at Tyre, Birk has argued that the elevation of sarcophagi “adds an air of high social standing to the monument” on parallel to Roman civic statuary.\(^\text{220}\)

\(^{220}\) Birk 2012, 122.
The similarity between locally produced sarcophagi and imported examples we have explored above is not a new observation. But those who have pointed it out, from Avigad,221 to Foerster more recently,222 have drawn only very broad conclusions from the parallels. For example, Foerster wrote that:

"It seems that local craftsmen and sculptors were acquainted with and inspired by the decoration of contemporary sarcophagi produced all over the Roman world. They were copying and imitating the schemes and content of these sarcophagi leaving out mainly figural representations and particularly the human images. The quality of their work is generally quite modest as one can expect from provincial workshops."223

This explanation, while generally true, seems to miss the mark in more than one way. In contrast to Foerster’s assessment,224 figural representations were common on the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim, the ‘tabula ansata’ sarcophagi are actually of very high quality craftsmanship, and the ‘acanthus’ sarcophagi are even finer still.225 Moreover, Foerster’s broad characterization of the influences ignores the outsized influence of Proconnesian styles on the sarcophagi, to say nothing of the way in which Beth She’arim drew on patterns of consumption characteristic of the region of Roman Syria.

Far from being special then, as Beth She’arim often appears to be when studied from the isolated view of the Archaeology of Palestine, contextualizing Beth She’arim in the

221 Avigad 1976a.
222 Foerster 2012.
223 Foerster 2012, 204.
224 See also Foerster 2012, 200.
225 Avigad (1976a, 152-3) ultimately concluded that the sarcophagi are ‘first-rate work’ of a local workshop, that was skilled at “attractively blending motifs borrowed from local and foreign art.” This conclusion is unassailable. While the primary motifs and overall form of the acanthus sarcophagi would have been familiar across the eastern Mediterranean, they are nonetheless remarkable for the creativity and skill with which the artisans approached their tasks.
broader contexts of Roman Syria and the empire-wide marble and sarcophagus trades reveals that no appeal to special circumstances is required to explain the appearance of the greater part of the visual culture at Beth She’arim. Engagement and interaction with trade and culture at a regional, provincial level, stimulated by urbanization in the region and the patronage practices of local elites, particularly those revolving around competitive or conspicuous display, accounts for much of the form and content of the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim, as well as the patronage and viewing practices behind them.

We cannot know for certain where exactly the patrons of Beth She’arim imported their sarcophagi from, or where they learned of the motifs and sculptural programs from Proconnesus. We do not even know which coastal city (or cities) served as the major port of import for sarcophagi and other stone goods along the Syrian coast, but Tyre is certainly a possibility. A good case could be made that the port of Tyre that probably played the largest role in the diffusion of imported sarcophagi and styles to the region, by virtue of its proximity to major exporters. Furthermore, we know that the

227 In many respects, Tyre’s position in the stone trade of the Syrian coast may have been parallel to that of Nicomedia, which served as the basis for Ward-Perkin’s seminal study of the Roman stone trade (1980a; 1980b). Tyre was certainly similarly located in a geographically strategic position. By virtue of its prime location at the nexus of major sea and land routes—and without any significant quarries of its own—Nicomedia effectively controlled the import of marble to the markets of central and North-West Asia Minor, as well as the Black Sea.
228 Though we know that some sarcophagi were imported to Caesarea as well—and possibly to other coastal cities such as Ashkelon—none of these sites has offered evidence for the import of marble sarcophagi on the scale of Tyre. See Foerster 2012; Gersht 1996; Gersht and Pearl 1992.
economies of the Galilee and Tyre were connected through intraregional trade of other goods. In rabbinic literature of the period, the cities of the coast—from Ashkelon to Sidon—are frequented. According to Sartre, much of the fabric for the dyeing industry in Tyre originated south; linen from the Galilee and wool from the hill country of Judaea. The linen and flax industry of Galilee was mentioned by Pausanias, and featured at the top of a list of empire-wide price controls proclaimed by Diocletian. Moreover, the lead sarcophagi from Beth She’arim, almost undoubtedly produced in Tyrian workshops, suggest that our suspicions about trade connections between Tyre and Beth She’arim connections are not misplaced.

Ultimately, the limited evidence encountered thus far for direct or unmediated influence of Roman or imperial culture calls into question the extent to which we may read the sarcophagi at Beth She’arim as evidence for “Romanization.” So far, the vast majority of sarcophagi, including all locally produced ones, draw on sculptural traditions and resources local to the Galilee or popular in the broader region of Roman Syria. For a sarcophagus patron at Beth She’arim—or Tyre for that matter—there must have been more effective means of ‘becoming Roman’ than purchasing such sarcophagi as these. Indeed, we will counter sarcophagi in the following chapter that communicate quite powerfully their patrons’ cultural sophistication and mastery of the Roman

231 See Sartre 2005, 244.
cultural world. The sarcophagi encountered here and in Chapter 4 on the other hand, seem more generally to communicate the wealth and social standing of their patrons and the deceased within the contexts of their local communities and their provincial setting. In doing so, they draw on the motifs and styles appropriate and even unique to those contexts.

The local and provincially derived nature of most of the sculptural programs especially undermines conclusions such as Levine’s which treat the sarcophagi as evidence of new and direct ties between Imperial Rome and the Patriarchate and ‘Galilean aristocracy.’ Levine’s reconstruction of the Patriarchate at Beth She’arim suggests an outsized role for it in stimulating acculturation at the site, especially in driving the emergence of Roman visual culture in the catacombs. Such conclusions are on to a basic fact, that the politics of display and commemoration among local elites spurred much of the creation of visual culture in Palestine and Beth She’arim in this period, but they strain the evidence by positing the direct influence of Imperial Rome and the Roman government in ways that are reminiscent of older models of Romanization.

Moreover, while there was indeed a strong rabbinic presence in the necropolis of Beth She’arim (see Chapter 2), it is hardly the simplest or most natural explanation for the various changes in Jewish funerary culture and practices that Beth She’arim attests

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too. Rather, we have seen that the politics of display were not unique to Beth She’arim and that they do not require appeals to Roman Imperial influence from across the Mediterranean. Neither do they require the presence of a powerful rabbinic Patriarchate with close ties to the Roman government and a predilection for Roman culture. A grasp of the sea changes in culture that swept the Roman Syria in precisely this period, especially on the coastal plain at cities like Tyre, Beirut and Ashkelon, shows that the patrons of Beth She’arim were far from unique. In fact, the patrons of Beth She’arim were merely participating in regional changes in culture and funerary customs.

The formative influence on the foregoing sarcophagi then was from the regional sarcophagus economy of Roman Syria, and particularly Proconnesian imports. But such influences were not adopted uncritically or wholesale, and, as we saw in the previous chapter, they do not deny the influence of local traditions as well. For now, suffice it to say that there is little evidence that the Beth She’arim patrons were uncritically or wholesale adopting and copying local imports, as is suggested by Avigad. In this context, it is important to recognize also that stylistic influences in the Roman world are not one directional, and there was more than one (competing) source of influence in the cultural world(s) of the late ancient Mediterranean. Important stylistic influences came not just from Rome, but from other areas of the Roman world as well including Greece and Asia Minor, as we will see in the following chapter.233

233 De Jong 2010, 626.
Chapter 6. Roman Models and Marble Imports: Jewish Patrons at Beth She’arim and Rome

In this chapter, I examine sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons from Rome and Beth She’arim with sculptural programs that are drawn from sarcophagus styles with broad, pan-Mediterranean appeal. The majority of evidence for such sarcophagi among Jewish patrons naturally comes from the Jewish community of Rome, though patrons at Beth She’arim were by no means immune to the allure of such sarcophagi. In order to understand this more direct mode of cultural interaction, I first survey major trends in the sarcophagus trade and the styles and conventions that were popular across the Roman world and outside of Roman Syria.

I then discuss two groups of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons from Rome that make ready use of Roman sarcophagus styles. The first group are those that employ popular Roman figural motifs in their visual program. The second group are eight sarcophagi bear inscriptions that indicate that the deceased or their family held official or honorary positions in the Jewish community of Rome. Next, I turn to the evidence of imported marble sarcophagi from Beth She’arim. Though fragmentary, these remains indicate that some patrons at Beth She’arim were not constrained to locally or regionally available material and visual resources, but had the means and ability to acquire more expensive imported marble sarcophagi from Attic and Asiatic producers. These imports signify not only the wealth of the patrons but their sophistication and appreciation of pan-Mediterranean Roman culture. Much more than the sarcophagi we have
encountered so far, the sarcophagi we will encounter in this chapter from both Beth She’arim and Rome signal their patrons adoption of modes of representation associated with the dominant culture of the Roman world.

Across the Roman Mediterranean, several major marble quarries and production centers were particularly renowned for their sarcophagi. These include the ‘Metropolitan’ sarcophagus industry of the city of Rome as well as the producers of the Attic and Asiatic sarcophagus styles centered around the Athenian quarries at Mt. Pentelos and those in Dokimeion in Asia Minor especially. In contrast to Proconnesian producers, who tailored their exports to regional markets including Roman Syria, part of the appeal of these sarcophagi was their recognizability. They therefore appeared the same in every place they were imported. In light of this, approaching the sculptural programs of the certain sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons from Beth She’arim and Rome requires a better understanding of the basic expectations with which a typical Roman viewer would have approached the same corpus.Attempting to generalize about Metropolitan, Attic and Asiatic sarcophagi is a tough but necessary task if we are to draw some meaningful comparison between the programs of sarcophagi belonging to the Jewish patrons of these industries and their non-Jewish neighbors.

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1 See above, Chapter 5.
2 See Birk 2013, 13.
6.1 Metropolitan sarcophagi: major trends and motifs

We have already indicated above that the sarcophagus industry in the city of Rome was a diversified one which not only generated a number of popular motifs and forms, but imported and incorporated styles from other regions of the Roman world as well. Here, I discuss the general conventions of Metropolitan sarcophagi produced for and around the city of Rome. I discuss narrative, mythological sarcophagi and consider their allegorical interpretation as well as the most popular themes and motifs and the emergence of ‘fads’ in the sarcophagus economy, including, for instance, the Seasons sarcophagus style and the strigilar form. Finally, I consider how Christian patrons in Rome subtly reworked existing conventions to better express their religious identities as a preview to possible Jewish, creative uses of popular Roman sarcophagus styles.

Several differences between sarcophagi from Metropolitan producers and workshops in the Roman East are immediately observable. Sarcophagi produced in Rome tend to be smaller in size by a third and lower to the ground. They rarely exhibit the thick plinth found at the base of most sarcophagi produced in the Roman East. The lids of sarcophagi produced in Rome also differed in form and style from sarcophagi produced in the workshops of the Roman East. Flat lids, occasionally with antefixes or frieze panels, are more common on sarcophagi from Rome than the gabled lid popular in the Roman East.
Sarcophagi discovered in Rome and its environs were typically sculpted on only three sides, with most attention given to the front panel. The sides are often carved in lower relief, or appear unfinished. This reflects the fact that sarcophagi in Rome were typically deposited in subterranean hypogea and catacombs and against walls. As we have seen, sarcophagi encountered in the Roman provinces of the eastern Mediterranean were more often used as freestanding monuments along roadsides, or in open air tomb enclosures as at Tyre. Beyond these differences in form and execution, there are important differences in the themes and styles that were popular among the workshops and patrons of the Metropolitan sarcophagus industry.

6.1.1 Mythological sarcophagi from Rome

With the greater surface area on sarcophagi (as opposed to cinerary urns and stelae), Roman sculptors were able to convey entire narrative sequences in intricate detail. Countless examples of ‘mythological’ sarcophagi have been discovered from the Roman catacombs that depict narrative scenes drawn from Greek and Roman myth. These sarcophagi were particularly popular in Rome in the 2nd and 3rd centuries C.E. While they

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3 See Bartman 1993, 58.
4 The rear could be left with quarry marks and uneven surfaces, or even used for planning the sculptural program of the front, as on the ‘Triumph of Dionysus’ sarcophagus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA.55.11.5). See Bartman 1993.
5 However, see Thomas 2012.
6 Newby (2010, 191) has recently estimated the total number of surviving mythological sarcophagi at 1,200.
declined in relative popularity in the 4th century, they never went completely out of
style.

The myths used were typically Greek but occasionally Roman as well, and included
scenes from the myths of from Hercules, Achilles, Meleager, Dionysus, Ariadne,
Endymion and Persephone to name a few. Debate over precisely how to understand
such scenes is longstanding preoccupation in the study of Roman sarcophagi. Do they
express hopes for the afterlife by tying the deceased to an immortal figure, or do they
offer a reflection on the deceased’s character and qualities? A consensus has emerged
that whatever their theological significance, at least on one level such mythic scenes
appear to encourage identification of the deceased with one of the heroes of familiar
mythic narrative.

According to Koortbojian, mythic scenes recall for the viewer specific attributes of
the deceased. "By means of myth," he writes, "the virtues and values by which the
deceased wish to be recalled are played out on a heroic scale." Along these lines,
according to Ewald, the stories of Greek and Roman myth provided a “matrix for these

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7 Greek myths utilized on Roman sarcophagi could also be reworked according to Roman retellings, as is the
case with the Pianabella Sarcophagus at Ostia. See Huskinson 2010, 59.
8 Newby (2010, 190) offers some further possible interpretations as well as a brief history of the scholarship
behind them.
9 For instance, Jongste (1992, 11) has interpreted the phenomenon of Hercules’ prevalence on sarcophagi as
owing to the ease with which one could identify with the mythic character. In such examples, Hercules
provides an example of virtue and action which signify and praise the deceased. Koortbojian (1995) takes a
similar approach when it comes to the Endymion sarcophagi, suggesting that the viewer is to identify the
youth Endymion with the deceased, and in doing so, to understand a particular(Ry Roman) message about
love and/or the afterlife. See also Birk 2013, 14.
narratives about the dead, their surviving relatives and their relationships...”\textsuperscript{10} At the same time, Ewald points out that mythological scenes idealize (or ‘fictionalize’) the life and virtues of the deceased in familiar and formulaic ways. They were not intended to represent the true experience of the individual. Thus, Ewald notes that “on the sarcophagi, death does not serve as an opportunity to portray the deceased as he or she ‘had really been’, but it rather... locate[s] the truth of the self in the—often inherently transgressive—fantasies of myth.”\textsuperscript{11}

If surviving epitaphs and funerary addresses from Rome are any indication, allegorical comparisons of the deceased with mythological heroes were commonplace.\textsuperscript{12} This lends credence to the idea that sarcophagi with mythological motifs and narratives were understood allegorically, as representation of the character and virtues of the deceased. Seen in this light, mythic scenes served as a vehicle for the sepulchral message of the patron and representation of the deceased.\textsuperscript{13} Their narrative contours "offered conspicuous analogies for the commemoration of the dead.”\textsuperscript{14}

The analogy between the deceased and the mythic hero or god could be suggested in one of two ways: through explicit use of portraiture (when the facial features of the

\textsuperscript{10} Ewald 2011, 263.
\textsuperscript{11} Ewald 2011, 264. See also Zanker and Ewald 2012, 44-7.
\textsuperscript{12} Zanker and Ewald 2012, 30.
\textsuperscript{13} Koortbojian 1995, 48.
\textsuperscript{14} Koortbojian 1995, 22.
central hero were carved to represent the deceased), or via association, sometimes by the juxtaposition of a portrait bust or inscription. The case of the Endymion sarcophagus from the Louvre would seem to support Koortbojian’s contention that viewers of mythic sarcophagi were expected to understand an analogy being drawn between the hero(es) and the deceased. On this sarcophagus, as we saw already in Chapter 1, the faces of Endymion and Selene, were left blank, either awaiting a patron, or leaving visual space for the viewer to recall the features of the deceased.

Indeed, this sarcophagus is one example of a particularly popular sarcophagus type which depicted the myth of Endymion, wherein the young shepherd receives a nocturnal visit from the goddess Selene. On Metropolitan sarcophagi from Rome, the narrative is encountered again and again in the same basic composition. The Endymion sarcophagus in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum follows the formula closely (Fig. 6.1). The sarcophagus is in the lenos form common in Rome and characterized by its tub-like shape. It has a flat lid with continuous panel across the front formed of individual antefixes. At the center of the front panel of the sarcophagus body, Selene descends from her chariot towards a reclining Endymion on the right. The tone of the scene is set by the inclusion of pastoral motifs on the rear panel in low relief, and by the inclusion of a bearded shepherd surrounded by his flock on the front left side. Tellus

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15 There are approximately 70 such examples. See Birk 2013, 122, Graph 7. On this strategy, see also Zanker and Ewald 2012, 39-43.  
16 See Zanker and Ewald 2012, 44.  
17 MMA 47.100.4
appears twice on the sarcophagus body and Oceanus once, both as secondary motifs. On the right side of the sarcophagus, Selene is shown again, ascending in her chariot and in contrast with the descent of Helios and his quadriga on the left. Further scenes related to the Endymion story fill the antefixes that make up the vertical panel of the lid.\textsuperscript{18} To the right of the inscription on the lid, which records the purchase of the sarcophagus by a daughter for her mother, a portrait bust is sculpted in an antefix.\textsuperscript{19} A more rudimentary example in the Metropolitan Museum nevertheless follows the same basic composition, down to the shepherd and flock on the left hand side (Fig. 6.2).\textsuperscript{20}

On such sarcophagi it is generally accepted that the viewer is to identify the youthful and immortal Endymion with the deceased, and in doing so, to understand a particular(ly Roman) message about their virtues.\textsuperscript{21} On the Endymion sarcophagus from the Metropolitan Museum, the identification is suggested by the central inscription and the portrait bust beside it on the lid. On other examples, which include portrait likenesses sculpted on the faces of central mythological figures, the identification is all the more secure.\textsuperscript{22} According to Koortbojian, the sculpting of individual features on mythological characters "intensifies and particularizes" the analogy drawn by the

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\textsuperscript{18} See McCann 1978, 43.
\textsuperscript{19} The unusual patronage practice indicated by the inscription probably did not detract from the allegorical association of the deceased with Endymion made by the inclusion of portrait sculpture, along with whatever virtues and values such associations conveyed.
\textsuperscript{20} MMA 24.97.13
\textsuperscript{21} For a sustained treatment of this trope, see Koortbojian 1995, Chs. 4-5.
\textsuperscript{22} On the Metropolitan Museum example, neither Selene nor Endymion have been carved in the likeness of the deceased. The features of their faces are more or less the same as those of other secondary figures on the sarcophagus.
\end{flushright}
sarcophagus.\textsuperscript{23} Still, whether the pagan sarcophagi make use of this sort of mythic allusion or not makes little difference for our current exploration; what is relevant is that in all cases such scenes implicitly invoked certain conceptions and values systems that operated within Roman society; the images ‘opened up’ the figured worlds of Roman myth and their associations.\textsuperscript{24}

Mythological scenes were popular but typically reserved for what must have been the most expensive examples. They exhibit the most skillful technique and elaborate compositions. Some sarcophagi make more limited use of mythological narratives, however, and may have been less costly. On a Metropolitan garlanded sarcophagus from the Metropolitan Museum, for example, three scenes from the myth of Theseus float above the garlands (Fig. 6.3).\textsuperscript{25}

Greek myth predominates on ‘mythological’ sarcophagi, though there are occasional uses of Roman narrative myths as well, particularly of Mars and Rhea Silva and Tellus and Oceanus.\textsuperscript{26} More often, Roman gods and myths form secondary parts of the composition alone or in pairs, and are not part of the primary content or narrative. Such

\textsuperscript{23} Koortbojian 1995, 18. See also Zanker and Ewald 2012.
\textsuperscript{24} On figured worlds, see above, Chapter 1. The concept of figured worlds is developed especially in Holland et al. 1998.
\textsuperscript{25} MMA 90.12
\textsuperscript{26} For example, the narrative of Mars and Rhea Silva was the primary theme of a sarcophagus from Rome, a fragment of which is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA 18.145.50). For description and parallels, see McCann 1978, 74-5.
is the case on the Endymion sarcophagus from the Metropolitan Museum above, where Tellus and Oceanus appear at the bottom of the composition in non-narrative ways.

Ewald has convincingly argued that the intelligibility—to patrons and their intended audience alike—of the sculptural programs of such sarcophagi with mythological narrative was subject to several preconditions. The most basic of these was familiarity with the content of the narrative, which was probably gained by most ancient patrons and viewers not through reading literary accounts but by attending the theater, games and other forms of entertainment.27 However, the success of mythological sarcophagi as visual programs rests on several other ‘preconditions’ too. These included the “recognition of the cultural authority of Greek myth and a willingness to employ a mythological idiom as a means of dramatising the act of ‘speaking about oneself.’”28 It also required “a considerable facility in the application of mythological imagery to individual’s self-images…”29 Patrons of sarcophagi with narrative mythological sarcophagi, in other words, must have been familiar with using myth as an allegory against which to plot their lives, and expected the same of their intended audiences.

29 Ewald 2011, 263-5. See also Zanker and Ewald 2012, 34-6.
6.1.2 Other developments in Metropolitan sarcophagi

Narrative mythological scenes are less common than they would seem from the amount of scholarly attention they receive and the space that is devoted to them in museum galleries.\textsuperscript{30} Far more common than mythological sarcophagi are those with more abstract, non-narrative visual programs involving strigils and garlands, ‘neutral’ motifs and one-off figures from Greek and occasionally Roman myth. Indeed, perhaps the most recognizable and widely disseminated of the Metropolitan forms is the strigilar sarcophagus.\textsuperscript{31} The strigilar form is characterized by the deep, wavy fluting called ‘strigils’\textsuperscript{32} that predominate the sculptural program. Though the form was occasionally imitated in the provinces, strigilar sarcophagi were produced especially in and for the Roman market for three centuries—almost the entire time when sarcophagus burial was practiced in Rome.\textsuperscript{33} Huskinson, in a recent monograph on the form, characterizes their decoration as ‘low key,’ comprised of “reassuringly conventional subjects and harmonious symmetries...”\textsuperscript{34}

Strigilated sarcophagi often featured familiar components such as the clipeus and the \textit{tabula ansata}, or secondary motifs that were not unique to the type but shared across the visual repertoire of sarcophagus sculpture.\textsuperscript{35} These included architectural elements

\textsuperscript{30} See also Huskinson 2015, 4.
\textsuperscript{31} In German, ‘Riefel-Sarkophage’ is used (‘ripples’).
\textsuperscript{32} After the shape of the ancient grooming tool.
\textsuperscript{33} Huskinson 2015, 1-2.
\textsuperscript{34} Huskinson 2015, v.
\textsuperscript{35} Huskinson 2015, 91.
and facades, stock figures and vignettes of putti and shepherds, lions and lion’s heads, masks and cornucopia. More elaborate examples could include portraits—either full body or busts—as well as mythological figures and single scenes drawn from narrative myth. The side panels typically included ‘conventional’ themes of “shields and crossed weapons, baskets, and exotic creatures such as griffins [and] winged horses.”

A strigilated sarcophagus in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art provides an excellent example of the basic form and decoration. The sarcophagus was sculpted in a Metropolitan workshop out of marble imported to Rome from Proconnesus, illustrating the interconnectedness of the Roman stone trade. It features deep and regular strigilations across the front and continuing to the sides (Fig. 6.4). The strigils are interrupted only by a pair of lions heads at either end in the form of door knockers, carved with deep drilling in high detail, a common feature on the form. At the center, where the strigils meet, a small vase is depicted in the negative space.

Other developments in the Metropolitan sarcophagus industry include a shift towards ‘neutral’ figures and themes in the 3rd and 4th centuries. Pastoral or bucolic scenes, figural representations of the four seasons, philosophers, muses and sirens,

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36 See further Huskinson 2015, 75-102.
37 On the latter, see Huskinson 2015, 164-8.
38 Huskinson 2015, 90-1.
39 MMA 2005.258.
41 Sometimes referred to as ‘Good Shephard’ figures, although many examples do not seem to have had Christological associations. See Huskinson 2015, 183-4.
winged victories and putti are commonly encountered on sarcophagi of this period. All these enjoyed a broad range of associations and lacked links to specific (narrative) myths. Some may have had Dionysiac associations, but the mythology of Dionysus and allusions to it were an incredibly flexible theme that was broadly used across funerary art in the Roman world and seems to have sustained more polysemy than many other themes, as we will see below.

At root, this shift may have been an economizing response to the growing popularity of sarcophagus burial, which enabled a broader group of possible patrons and sub-elites to purchase sarcophagi. Tellingly in this regard, the 3rd century C.E. also saw a corresponding decline in the popularity of narrative mythological scenes. At the same time, the shift—which corresponds more or less with the Christianization of Rome—may be linked to changes in the needs and beliefs of new Christian patrons (see below). McCann for example suggests that this shift was a ‘direct’ visual expression of an “intensified belief in an afterlife.”

The pièce de résistance and main attraction of the Metropolitan Museum’s sarcophagus collection, the Badminton sarcophagus from Rome, is a good illustration of this shift. Dating to the late Severan period, this Metropolitan sarcophagus is sculpted in high relief with extensive under drilling; it was certainly not the result of any

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42 Huskinson 2015, 16-7.
43 McCann 1978, 21. This is perhaps ironic given that the subject matter seems increasingly ambivalent.
44 MMA 55.11.5.
economizing tendency. Its complex and heterogeneous figural program with more than three dozen human and animal figures includes representations of Dionysus, the Seasons, and Tellus and Oceanus, interspersed with putti at play, making wine, and shepherding (Fig. 6.5).

Clearly, no single mythic narrative is indicated here. Although the references to Dionysus and the Seasons as well as the playful, wine-making and bucolic putti suggest a Dionysiac theme, the free mixing of figures and motifs resists any attempt to read the program in a linear or monolithic way. Rather, the sarcophagus and the broader shift provide a good example of Zanker and Ewald’s conceptualization of Roman funerary art as driven by ‘visual abundance’ and demanding ‘free association’ on the part of the viewer.\(^\text{45}\)

At the same time, representation of the four seasons as nude youths together with their positioning, poses and accoutrements, establish this sarcophagus as one example of the popular Seasons sarcophagus style. We already encountered a sarcophagus in this style belonging to a Jewish patron from Rome in Chapter 4. On that example, the clipeus was sculpted with a large menorah. This style was popular in Rome especially from the beginning of the 3\(^{\text{rd}}\) to the mid-4\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries C.E. and is known from over 100 examples.\(^\text{46}\)

\(^{45}\) Zanker and Ewald 2012. See also above, Chapter 1.
\(^{46}\) Hanfmann 1951, 17.
More common still were simpler compositions using neutral motifs and figures as framing devices for portraits and inscriptions. For example, another sarcophagus in the Metropolitan Museum collection has a central portrait clipeus, carved with the bust of a Roman woman, that is held aloft by two winged, nude putti (Fig. 6.6).\(^\text{47}\) Below the putti, Tellus and Oceanus recline. To either side, figures of Eros and Psyche embrace. All these are stock figures in the visual repertoire of Roman art and no narrative or linear reading can be reconstructed. Examples like this abound in the Roman corpus, and are as varied as they are numerous.

6.2 Sarcophagi from the Roman East: ‘Attic’ and ‘Asiatic’ exports

Attic sarcophagi, produced in Athenian workshops around Mt. Pentelos, and Asiatic sarcophagi, produced in several major centers in Asia Minor, especially at Dokimeion, are the two sarcophagus styles from the provinces that would have been most familiar to patrons across the Roman world. Attic and Asiatic sarcophagi, together with Metropolitan sarcophagi, represent the top end of the sarcophagus trade in the Roman world. They were the height of the market, and the acquisition of an imported sarcophagus from one of these producers was a marker of significant social standing and wealth. Dokimeion marble from Asia Minor, for instance, was among the most expensive stone on the Diocletian Price Edict (ca. 301 C.E.).\(^\text{48}\) They showed not only the

\(^{47}\) MMA 56.145. Compare this to the winged victories that appear on the sarcophagus from Beth She’arim (Chapter 4).

\(^{48}\) Russell 2013, 33-6.
cultural sophistication, but the significant resources and connections of the individual or family that could afford to special order such a funerary monument.

Unlike most other sarcophagi that were sculpted according to the tastes and preferences of local (and export) markets, Attic and Asiatic sarcophagi were prized for their distinctive and recognizable styles. Aside from the Proconnesian sarcophagi, which we have already singled out as a special case in the previous chapter, the sarcophagi produced in the workshops of Athens and Asia Minor do not bear the imprint of regional and local tastes. They look the same wherever they are encountered, from Rome to Tyre, to Beth She’arim. Evidently, patrons did not import these sarcophagi in order to alter them according to local styles. Rather, their purchase signaled their desire to be directly associated with the pinnacle of Roman funerary customs and culture that spanned the Roman Mediterranean. Öğüş explains:

“These sarcophagi were purchased by a varied but wealthy clientele that was proud of owning sarcophagi produced in a well-known and esteemed center of production. They appealed to widespread imperial tastes and aligned the owner with the broader elite of the empire.”

Furthermore, these sarcophagi were rarely imitated by local workshops. Their sculptural programs and motifs required such a high degree of technical skill that local artisans working in local materials outside of Greece and Asia Minor could scarcely

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49 Proconnesian marble cost less than a quarter of Dokimeion marble in the Diocletian Price Edict for example. See Russell 2013, 33-6.

50 Öğüş 2014, 114; Russell 2013, 278-85. See also Ward-Perkins (1969, 134) who notes that: “The principal difference is that in contrast to the marked uniformity of the Attic series, the products of the Proconnesian quarries indicate a greater readiness to take account of local tastes and preferences.”

51 Öğüş 2014, 114.
attempt to recreate them. Therefore, where Attic and Asiatic sarcophagi are found throughout the Roman world, they were closely associated with these famous production centers and offer evidence of more direct, or unmediated cultural exchange with cultural centers of the Roman world.

Attic sarcophagi, produced of Pentelic marble in workshops near Athens, were widely imported across the late ancient Mediterranean (Map 15). They were prized for their exquisite narrative scenes drawn (exclusively) from Greek mythology and epic narrative, especially scenes of battle. These were sculpted in extremely high relief, often with deep under-drilling, and typically in multilayered, complex compositions. Many of the narratives used had content that overlapped with scenes appearing on Roman Metropolitan sarcophagi, which similarly tended to prefer Greek over Roman mythological content. However, the narratives were often imagined in different ways, and different events from the same myths could be depicted. Moreover, where the Roman Metropolitan examples tend to closely follow an established formula, Attic

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52 They were, however, occasionally imitated by local producers based in the same region. The sarcophagus workshops at Aphrodisias produced a number of columnar sarcophagi similar though not identical to those of Dokimeion. See Öğüş 2014, 124-5.
54 See, for example Ewald 2011. Nudity for example, may have had different valences on Attic and Metropolitan sarcophagi. On Attic examples, the body was seen as an aesthetic ideal. See Ewald 2011. On Roman Metropolitan examples, they more likely were considered ‘proper’ representations of bodily maintenance and the status associated with it. See Zanker 2016, 3-4.
55 According to Ewald (2011, 279), the translation of Greek myth onto Roman sarcophagi “greatly reduced the myths’ inherent complexity and polysemy, but made them more intelligible and palatable for a Roman understanding...” Ewald (2011, 282) calls this a “Roman grid of intelligibility.”
sarcophagi show more freedom and flexibility of composition within depictions of the same events.

In addition to Proconnesian sarcophagi, patrons in Tyre imported sarcophagi from Attic producers. Including fragmentary remains, there were eight such sarcophagi found in the necropolis excavated by Chéhab.56 Among the patrons of Attic sarcophagi at Tyre, battle scenes were particularly popular, dominating the sculptural programs of six of these sarcophagi. Especially popular were those that depict Achilles or otherwise draw on the epic of the Trojan war. Scenes included the arming of Achilles (Fig. 6.7), Agamemnon’s attack, and the defense and final battle over Troy (Figs. 6.8, 6.9).57 The only ‘battle’ sarcophagus not depicting a scene from the Trojan war showed an Amazonomachy instead (Fig. 6.10).58 Two other narrative sarcophagi draw on the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus (Fig. 6.11).59 All of these sarcophagi present familiar scenes selected from well-known myths, common on Attic sarcophagi. In fact, ‘Achilles’ sarcophagi and Amazonomachies from Attic producers were the two most common types produced.60

56 Ward-Perkins (1969.) made an initial survey of these while excavations were still underway. Several more were discovered in subsequent seasons, and were included in the final reports by Chéhab (1984; 1985; 1986).


60 Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 382-92.
In open air tomb enclosures that held sarcophagi of different types the Attic ones were always given pride of place. Six of the imported Attic sarcophagi at Tyre featured *kline* lids with full-body portrait sculpture, mostly of couples (Fig. 6.12). Though all featured a sculptural program of some kind on the rear, these were carved in lower relief and less detail than the programs on the front and sides. Some depict scenes related and subsequent to those on the front, such as one that shows the corpse of Hector being dragged behind a chariot towards a seated Achilles (Fig. 6.13). The relief is relatively low and the details minimal but regular. Others employed neutral imagery, especially paired animals such as lions and griffins (Figs. 6.14, 6.15).

The sculptural programs of Attic sarcophagi required a high level of skill within the capabilities of only a small number of workshops. They were either finished in the workshops of Greece, or by a very small number of provincial workshops that may have been able to supply capable artisans. Ward-Perkins suggests that there may have been a single such workshop somewhere on the coast of Roman Syria. Transporting them must always have been an exceptionally risky and difficult—not to mention expensive—proposition not only because of the distance separating the islands of Greece from the coastal cities of Roman Syria but also due to their more fragile sculpture programs, characterized by high relief and deep under-drilling. Indeed, Russell convincingly

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61 See further Ward-Perkins 1969, 112; 1980b, 44. In fact, at least one Attic sarcophagus was the sole occupant of its enclosure. See Ward-Perkins 1969, 112.


argues that because of precisely those factors just described, Attic sarcophagi must always have been special commissions by individual patrons.\textsuperscript{64}

In addition to the garlanded form most closely associated with Proconnesus and explored in the previous chapter,\textsuperscript{65} the workshops in Asia Minor were known especially for their columnar sarcophagi, which were exported across the Roman Mediterranean and quite possibly the most famous product associated with the province.\textsuperscript{66} They are found in large numbers throughout Asia Minor as well as at a number of places in the Italian peninsula and on the coast of Roman Syria (Map 16). Among these producers, the inland workshop at Dokimeion was perhaps the most famous (Map 17). The marble of Dokimeion quarries was fine-grained with a slightly yellow cast. Like Pentelic marble, the fine-grain marble lent itself to complex sculptural programs executed with great detail, deep drilling and high relief. The sculptural programs, typically found on all sides, were framed by elaborate bands of molding. The most recognizable Dokimeion exports featured a main frieze comprised of a series of Corinthian columns forming a façade (Fig. 6.16), which showed the influence of contemporary monumental civic buildings in the region.\textsuperscript{67} The central columns were typically crowned with a gabled

\textsuperscript{64} Russell 2010.
\textsuperscript{65} Proconnesian sarcophagi are treated as a special, discrete group of sarcophagi by most scholars, as we have seen. See Koch and Sichtermann 1982; Russell 2013; Ward-Perkins 1980a; 1980b; 1992.
\textsuperscript{66} See: Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 497-509; Waelkens 1982; Wiegartz 1965. Öğüş (2014, 124) writes that “The high-quality marble and the elaborate decoration differentiated Dokimeion sarcophagi from all other products available in Asia Minor....”
\textsuperscript{67} On the close parallels between monumental architecture and Dokimeion sarcophagi, see Öğüş 2014.
pediment, often with an inset conch.\textsuperscript{68} Between the columns human figures were sculpted in active and seated positions. The figures were often drawn from Greek and Roman myth, but also included ideal, full-length portraits, often in the guise of philosophers with scrolls (Fig. 6.17).\textsuperscript{69} The lids were either in the familiar gabled form, or featured a full length kline portrait, frequently of couples.

Not counting the Proconnesian imports we explored in the previous chapter, fewer sarcophagi at Tyre seem to have been imported from Asia Minor. One sarcophagus at Tyre suggests that sarcophagi from Dokimeion, or other producers of Asiatic columnar sarcophagi, were imported by local patrons. The front panel of this gabled sarcophagus shows a triptych of dancing Maenads between four columns. The triptych form is unusual. Most Asiatic columnar sarcophagi have at least five frames between columns. The sarcophagus was attributed by Koch and Sichtermann to a workshop nearby on the coast at Tripoli,\textsuperscript{70} which may have indeed been the case. No petrographic analysis was conducted, but whether it was imported from abroad or produced in a provincial workshop in Roman Syria, this sarcophagus shows at least the knowledge and close emulation of the columnar style made popular by Asiatic producers. Another sarcophagus, depicting several groups of putti engaged in various acts of ‘horseplay’ across the front (Fig. 6.18), corresponds to the Asiatic ‘Torre Nova Type’ identified by

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{68} The so-called “normaltypus” identified by Koch and Sichtermann (1989, 503-5).
\textsuperscript{69} See below, Chapter 7, for a discussion of the ‘learned figure’ motif.
\textsuperscript{70} Koch and Sichtermann 1982.
\end{flushright}
Wiegartz and characterized by figures in shallow relief between two columns or other framing elements.\textsuperscript{71}

The fewer numbers of Asiatic sarcophagi at Tyre relative to Attic examples (with the exception of the Proconnesian imports) is not surprising. While there were important marble quarries throughout Asia Minor, most of the sarcophagus producers in that region—including those at Dokimeion, Acmonia and Aphrodisias—were located along inland trade routes (Map 18). Dokimeion was located relatively close to a minor river that could have enabled the transport of its products to Nicomedia, though it is unclear that the route would have been feasible due to the depth of the river (see above, Map 17).\textsuperscript{72} As we saw in the previous chapter, among the Asiatic producers, only Proconnesian products enjoyed a truly widespread distribution across the Roman world by virtue of the island’s location in the Sea of Marmara with easy access to the Aegean and the Mediterranean beyond. By contrast, Asiatic sarcophagi from other producers are known from only three sites in the region of Roman Syria: Tyre, Caesarea Maritima, and Beth She’arim.\textsuperscript{73}

Ultimately, while Asiatic sarcophagi produced in Dokimeion were prized and known from necropoleis across the empire, the majority were consumed within the

\textsuperscript{71} Compare for example, to the sarcophagus from Antalya in Wiegartz (1965, Antalya I, Taf. 28). See further the example in Waelkens (1982, 53-4, No.10, Taf. 5). See also Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 500-2.

\textsuperscript{72} On the possible role of Nicomedia in facilitating the marble trade of the eastern provinces, see Ward-Perkins 1980a; 1980b. On the feasibility of the route from Dokimeion to Nicomedia, see Russell 2013, 138-9.

\textsuperscript{73} Russell 2013, 172. For the example from Caesarea Maritima, see Gersht and Pearl 1992, 225, 32, Fig. 20.
By contrast, Attic sarcophagi were much easier to transport long distances by virtue of the region’s location on the coast. This fact alone probably accounts for the fact that they enjoyed a much broader distribution than the sarcophagi of producers in Asia Minor (again, with the exception of sarcophagi from Proconnesus; cf. Maps 14-16). Pentelic marble sarcophagi from Attic producers are, in fact, the most commonly encountered imported sarcophagi across Roman Syria after Proconnesian imports. It should be no surprise then that Attic sarcophagi were imported by patrons at Tyre, and at Beth She’arim as we will see.

6.3 Christian sarcophagi in the Roman world

On sarcophagi belonging to Christian patrons, Roman pagan conventions were often reworked to fit the ideological needs and beliefs of the early Christian community. Sufficiently neutral and popular pagan motifs were still frequently included in the Christian sarcophagi programs. For instance, a full side of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus is given over to putti harvesting grapes for wine making, which suggests that Christians saw no need to avoid such stock characters. More importantly, portraiture remained prominent and often featured close family members, either husband and wife

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74 Russell 2013, 172-3, Fig. 5.5.
75 See Russell 2013, 172-4, Fig. 5.6.
76 Russell 2013, 172.
pairs, or even a group portrait of immediate family. In this way at least, Christian sarcophagi do not differ significantly from their pagan counterparts.

Pagan and Christian sarcophagi alike also increasingly emphasized the human figure from middle of the 3rd century C.E. on through a variety of techniques. These included elongated proportions, enlarged eyes, gilded details (especially clothing and hair), and most importantly, deep drilling and undercutting of the figures, creating multi-layered compositions and (partially) freeing the most important figures from the background.\(^78\) Indeed, the similarities and continuity between Christian and pagan sarcophagi has prompted McCann to observe that "[w]here the pagan religious world ends and Christianity begins is often difficult to distinguish in this realm of sepulchral art."\(^79\)

At the same time, there are a few differences in the corpus of Christian sarcophagi that are hard to miss.\(^80\) While still abundant, sarcophagi with putti are relatively fewer than those without; small children (lacking wings and often fully dressed) more frequently fill the spaces given over to putti on pagan sarcophagi. When putti are shown, they are typically of secondary importance to the composition, and often relegated to parts of the sarcophagus that may have been pre-finished. The human figures shown on Christian sarcophagi are also more frequently (and more fully)

\(^{78}\) McCann 1978, 22.
\(^{80}\) The most thorough documentation treatment of which is by Koch (2000).
clothed. Divergences such as these may suggest a difference in values or beliefs on the part of Christian Rome.

More significantly however, mythic scenes so popular on pagan sarcophagi were increasingly displaced by biblical narratives. The parade example of this is the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (ca. 359 CE), a senator of Rome, which was produced in a Metropolitan workshop (Fig. 6.19). The inscription on this sarcophagus, which records the civic title (prefect) and social title (vir clarissimus) of this man, bears note for the message it conveys about the public and civic identity of the deceased. But it is the iconographic program, which brings together elaborate scenes from both the Hebrew Bible (including the Binding of Isaac, Job, Adam and Eve, and Daniel in the Lion’s Den) and New Testament (inter alia the Trial of Jesus, Martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, as well as various miracles of Jesus), which is truly remarkable.

This program has been thoroughly dealt with by a number of scholars, and need not be treated at length here. What is critical to note in this program is the way in which the Roman trend for narrative programs on sarcophagi was adopted and reworked in order to portray Christian mythic narratives. Like sarcophagi that portray the twelve labors of Hercules, the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus captures snapshots of critical moments in

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81 The columnar form on this and many other Christian sarcophagi from Rome in the 4th century is another example of the significant cross-pollination that occurred between the workshops of the Roman West and East.
82 Including a full monograph by Malbon (1990).
the Christian mythic past. The model for such narrative sculpture was clearly drawn
directly from pagan precedent, a fact not surprising given the religious heritage of most
Roman Christians. At the same time, popular and sufficiently neutral motifs were
included in the program: a full side of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus is given over to
putti harvesting grapes for wine making for instance. The Dogmatic sarcophagus, also
from Rome, provides a parallel example of the same trend (Fig. 6.20).

If scholars like Jongste and Koortbojian are correct in arguing that such programs in
pagan contexts offer an analogy for the values and virtues of the deceased, then we
would be justified in assuming the same holds true for Christian narrative sarcophagi.
Indeed, nothing in such subtle Christian adaptation works against an identification of
the deceased with certain celebrated characters of biblical narrative. In fact, one might
argue that the 'senatorial' pose of Jesus that takes pride of place on Bassus's sarcophagus
is a thinly veiled allusion to the senator himself, and to his honorable political
occupation.

On the sarcophagi of Christian patrons across the provinces, the Roman sarcophagus
form remains more or less unaltered, while the message and precise content is subtly
reworked to allow for an expression of Christian identity. Only a shift in content to
appropriate myths is entailed in the adaptation of Roman convention to Christian

contexts.\textsuperscript{85} Indeed, according to Huskinson, the use of familiar Roman motifs and styles still “represented these Christians as active participants in Roman society—wealthy, learned, and secure—and indistinguishable in their personal images from their non-Christian contemporaries.”\textsuperscript{86}

6.4 Sarcophagi from the Jewish community of Rome: Jewish patrons, Roman themes and narrative scenes

As we saw in Chapter 2, all signs indicate that the Jewish community of Rome was well integrated into the fabric of the city, sharing fully in its daily life and culture and living (and dying) among non-Jewish neighbors. Even if Jewish dead were buried in exclusively Jewish catacombs, as seems to have been the practice, these catacombs were never more than a stone’s throw from Christian or Pagan ones, and often adjacent (Map 5). Simply put, aside from a few tendentious reports of (limited) expulsions in the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} century C.E.,\textsuperscript{87} there is nothing to indicate that the Jewish community as a whole either felt or was forced into any isolation or disadvantaged social position.\textsuperscript{88}

Instead, the wealth of evidence—from the epigraphic and onomastic evidence to the very locations of the catacombs—suggests a community secure in its diaspora

\textsuperscript{85} Elsner (2010a, 380) has argued that more is at work here than a subtle shift in content, and that the Christian sarcophagi made a ”powerful investment in issues of apology and polemic” by their openly confessional nature and their choice of content that reflects “Christian triumph” over the pagan cults of the empire. Elsner (2010a, 359-60) points in particular to scenes of the trial of Jesus, though he notes that ”apology and polemic” are themselves a carrying on of the Roman tradition of rhetorical art.

\textsuperscript{86} Huskinson 2015, 234.

\textsuperscript{87} See above, Chapter 2.

environment. For this reason, our starting position should be to assume that the Jewish community of Rome broadly and freely partook of Roman culture, including the visual and cultural resources of the funerary sphere. We should also expect that as a rule, such cultural engagement will be reflected in the sculptural programs of the sarcophagi used by Roman Jews.

6.4.1 Popular ‘Roman’ figural motifs and themes on the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons in Rome

The most obvious and well-known sarcophagus belonging to a Jewish patron using Roman themes and motifs is the Seasons sarcophagus with a menorah, which we encountered above in Chapter 4 (see also below). A number of other fragments from sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons further demonstrate that many, and perhaps most Jews in Rome bought in (literally and figuratively) to the visual koine of Roman sarcophagus sculpture. The range of figures, human and animal, included on these sarcophagus fragments was quite wide. They include several with dolphins,\(^89\) with lion’s heads (e.g. Fig. 6.21), one with a fragment of a male torso (Fig. 6.22), two with theater masks (Fig. 6.23, see also the sarcophagus of Faustina below),\(^90\) several with griffins, one with a bucolic scene (Fig. 6.24), and another sarcophagus fragment depicting a bathing

\(^{89}\) These include one from Monteverde and one from Vigna Randanini. Another one from the grounds of Torlonia, is of questionable provenance. See Goodenough 1953b, 14; Müller 1912, 41.

\(^{90}\) Konikoff 1986, 46-9, Pl. 12-III. Found near the Vigna Randanini catacomb and attributed to it by Frey (1936a, 199). Frey identified as Jewish on the basis of the symbols included on the epitaph, see further below. A second possible example, also with a griffin and the head of a ram on the side, and possibly dancing figures identified as maenads was included by Goodenough (1953b, 41). See further Beyer and Lietzmann 1930, Pl. 23a.
scene (Fig. 6.25). Most of these are identified as sarcophagi of Jewish patrons by their modern discovery in the catacombs of Torlonia, Vigna Randanini, and Monteverde, though the sarcophagus of Faustina was identified on the basis of its use of Jewish ritual symbols, as we saw in Chapter 4.

By far the most common inclusions on the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons of this group were putti (in contrast to the sarcophagi of Christian patrons, which increasingly avoided putti). In the broader corpus of Metropolitan sarcophagi, the variety and number of sarcophagi with putti can be 'overwhelming.' Likewise, on sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons, these characters can be seen engaged in a variety of activities: at play (Fig. 6.26), reclining with cornucopias and baskets of fruit (in two examples, one from Monteverde Figs. 6.27, 6.28, and the other from Torlonia, Fig. 6.29), and picking grapes (Fig. 6.30). Putti are also depicted stomping grapes in a vat below the clipeus on the Seasons sarcophagus, another common motif.

All these sarcophagus types and their motifs were chosen from among the most popular visual programs available in Rome. The example of cupids at play, for instance,

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91 Published by Goodenough (1953b, 29, Fig. 795). Only a portion of the bottom of the scene survives, but it is enough to establish the elements of a bathing scene, including a woman partially reclining with her back turned to the viewer, wearing a loosely draped cloak that reveals her back and upper buttocks, and a nude standing figure, probably a cupid.
92 Descriptions of these modern discoveries can be found in Beyer and Lietzmann 1930; Fasola 1976; Goodenough 1953b; Leon 1960; Müller 1912. This list excludes certain sarcophagi that were found on the grounds of the catacombs, but not inside.
93 Huskinson 1996, 41.
94 Beyer and Lietzmann 1930, Pl. 25a, d.
adopts one of the most common subtypes of the style, the hoop race.\textsuperscript{95} The imagery of the latter three sarcophagi, on the other hand, is often associated with the Dionysus cult on account of the allusions to banqueting, abundance and wine. We will consider the identification and use of motifs with Dionysiac associations below.

It is also worth noting that these sarcophagi are excellent examples of the production-to-stock nature of much of the Metropolitan sarcophagus industry. On such sarcophagi, produced without a specific commission and in advance of a buyer, cupids were favored as extremely versatile characters that could appeal to many different patrons. They are undoubtedly the most flexible figures in the repertoire of Roman figural forms. Huskinson explains that putti “transcend the boundaries of human experience such as time, gender and social behavior,” they never age, they are timeless.\textsuperscript{96}

There are also some indications that personified seasons were as popular as putti among Jewish patrons. Of course, the Seasons sarcophagus with a menorah is a clear cut example of this possibility (Fig. 6.31). On that sarcophagus, the clipeus is held aloft by two winged victories who are flanked on either side by two personified and nude Seasons depicted as young men. The left side of the sarcophagus is missing, but can be confidently imagined on the basis of many parallels of the same basic type. Putti are interspersed in the remaining space of the composition, and a triplet of these characters can be found making wine below the clipeus, in a tub notably decorated with lions’

\textsuperscript{95} Huskinson 1996, 44.
\textsuperscript{96} Huskinson 1996, 105.
masks (reminiscent also of the tub shape of a *lenos* sarcophagus). The motif closely follows a well-known type produced in Metropolitan workshops in the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E.\(^97\) The enduring popularity of this style was centered particularly in the city of Rome itself,\(^98\) and over 50 examples of the type exist today.\(^99\) Aside from departing in one, prominent feature (the menorah in the clipeus, rather than a portrait), our example is otherwise nearly indistinguishable in workmanship, composition and content from its nearest Roman parallels.

Goodenough published an additional example of the Seasons motif in his discussion of Vigna Randanini (Fig. 6.32).\(^100\) Moreover, the several sarcophagi with putti holding baskets and cornucopias mentioned above may well have been a variation on the theme, with putti in the guise of the Seasons.\(^101\) The depiction of seasons and seasonal motifs was a common “crossover” genre of Roman sarcophagus sculpture; as Hanfmann put it, Seasons sarcophagi are not a ‘homogenous’ style, rather seasonal motifs incorporate and extend to many other popular sarcophagus styles.\(^102\)

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\(^97\) See above, Chapter 3. See also Hanfmann 1951, 17.
\(^98\) Hanfmann (1951, 18) wrote that: “This survey leads to the conclusion that, apart from a very limited effect in North Africa and Egypt, the Season sarcophagi exercised practically no influence upon the funeral sculpture of the provinces.”
\(^99\) Hanfmann 1951, 17. Though the style even made it to Israel, as demonstrated by a single example. See Hanfmann 1951, No. 457.
\(^100\) Goodenough 1953b, 29, Fig. 796, 8. The figure here is identified by Goodenough (1953b, 29) as a putti in the guise of a season, however it seems more likely to have been a later example of the sarcophagus style where the features took on a more rounded and fuller aspect. The clothing and pose argues against the identification as a putti.
\(^101\) See Cumont 1942, 496; Goodenough 1953b, 13.
\(^102\) Hanfmann 1951, 18.
Personified seasons are often encountered in Jewish contexts in late ancient Palestine as well, especially on the mosaic floors of six synagogues where they figure as secondary motifs on Zodiac panels. Here, however, the depictions are very different. Rather than appearing in the guise of putti and nude youths as on sarcophagi, the seasons are most often depicted as women and wear jewelry. In many instances, in addition to signs of the season, they sometimes hold Jewish ritual implements. Some suggest a functional meaning of such zodiac figures as a calendar, though the debate over the meaning and cultural significance of these motifs in a public, Jewish context is far from settled.

6.4.2 On the use of putti and seasons by Jewish sarcophagus patrons

These themes—especially putti—are often regarded as allusions to the cult of Dionysus, which grew in popularity particularly in the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E. Indeed, so-called ‘Dionysiac’ themes and motifs were some of the most popular iconography in sarcophagus decoration. Yet, due in part to the ubiquity, Dionysiac imagery is among the most difficult not only to interpret, but to identify. Part of the reason for this is that, as Huskinson explains, the Dionysiac themes used in sarcophagus sculpture operated on several levels. On one level are clear depictions of Dionysiac myth and cult (including Dionysiac rites). On another level, images and motifs with less direct connections to the

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103 For example, Autumn (tishrei) at Na’aran and Huseifa holds shofar.
104 Perhaps related to the priestly courses. See Avi-Yonah 1964, 56-7; Hachlili 1988, 309.
Dionysian myth and cult are used in a variety of ways. Sometimes they complement core motifs, and other times they function independently and in ways that seem “entirely decorative” and to have lost their connection with the cult.106 On this more common and abstract level, images of feasting, drinking and abundance associated with the cult could put a joyful face on a sad occasion and perhaps suggest wishes for a good afterlife.107

In other words, it is often difficult to distinguish whether a particular motif or image should be considered an allusion to the Dionysiac cult. Easily identifiable Dionysiac motifs that occur on sarcophagi are those at the ‘core’ of the repertoire of Dionysiac imagery. These include scenes of Dionysian mythology (particularly popular were scenes of Pentheus and Ariadne), and thiasoi (banqueting processions). Notably, no such scenes occur on the sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons discussed above. On the other hand, in the ‘second level,’ a variety of motifs have been interpreted as alluding to Dionysiac cult based on their thematic resonance or appearance on some sarcophagi with ‘core’ themes. These include motifs of garlands, wine-making and putti, all of which do occur on sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons in Rome.

Given the widespread and enduring popularity of such imagery in the funerary sphere, it should be no surprise that the Jewish community of Rome also made use of some of the visual language associated with the Dionysian cult to convey similar

107 Huskinson 1996.
sentiments and wishes about and for the deceased. Yet a close reading of the Roman corpus also suggests that the Jewish examples should be counted among the most neutral or ambiguous uses of "Dionysiac" imagery. The putti encountered above offer a good illustration of this.

Huskinson refers to examples of putti engaged in viticulture as representing the "meeting of Dionysiac imagery with the 'everyday' generic." She goes on to note the difficulty in interpreting the ideology of the ambiguous imagery. The ambiguous ideological message of such scenes is nowhere more apparent than in the scene of putti holding baskets of fruit, which is at once 'vaguely Dionysiac,' and 'vaguely seasonal.' Indeed, the absolute connection between stock characters such as putti or seasons and the Dionysiac cult has become less clear in the years since Goodenough analyzed the images on the sarcophagi of the Jewish community of Rome in 1953. Set in the broader Roman corpus, the Jewish use of these putti seems ambiguous at best; certainly, as Goodenough puts it, putti were indeed "accepted by Judaism," but we can no longer be sure whether such programs were chosen to evoke Dionysian themes or instead, precisely for their neutrality and widespread popularity.

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108 Huskinson 1996, 44.
109 Huskinson (1996, 44) describes a similar example.
110 Koch (1993, 84-7), for instance, separates out the sarcophagi with putti as a category in its own right, with a subcategory of Dionysiac examples. This apart from his discussion of more explicit themes of Dionysiac cult. See further Koch 1993, 80-1.
111 Goodenough 1953b, 34.
112 Indeed, this ambiguity may be an integral part of the appeal of these characters.
All the same, scenes such as these are often assumed to have been problematic for a Jewish patron on account of their Dionysian resonance. Earlier scholars offered a variety of solutions to this perceived dilemma, ranging from a mystical Jewish religion in diaspora, to assertions that sarcophagi such as these were either non-Jewish or purchased by unobservant Jews. Ultimately, such readings and the problems they create seem more like projections of modern fixation than dilemmas that existed for the ancient Jewish patrons of these sarcophagi. Indeed, when considered from the perspective of representation and the self-narratives on sarcophagi, the most well-known sarcophagus of this category that belonged to a Jewish patron, that of the Seasons sarcophagus, ought to put to rest permanently any notions that such sarcophagi belonged to less observant (or alternatively observant) Jews.

Indeed, the popular ‘pagan’ motifs like putti or Seasons employed on examples like the Seasons sarcophagus suggest that the Jewish community in Rome did identify on some level with certain elements of the Roman symbolic vocabulary. Yet various attempts to interpret the precise meanings attached to such motifs have reached little consensus. This lack of consensus may in fact be a product of the inherent ambiguity of the figures themselves, which, as Huskinson points out, “can make them elusive to

114 Cumont and Goodenough interpreted the symbols eschatologically, while Hanfmann concluded it was a neutral theme, an interpretation followed by Leon. See Cumont 1916, 6ff; Goodenough 1953b, 41; Hanfmann 1951, 192-6; Leon 1960, 211-2. See also Zanker and Ewald 2012.
discuss.” At the same time, despite (or perhaps because of) their neutrality, these figures—including putti, seasons and shepherds—became extremely popular on Metropolitan sarcophagi beginning in the 3rd century at precisely the time during which more concrete mythological subjects began to decline in popularity. Moreover, their neutrality made them highly flexible motifs capable of mediating meaning not only on sarcophagi belonging to pagans, but of Christians and Jews as well.

Newby suggests figures like putti in particular "present a generic mythological world rather an a specific mythological narrative." They are, in other words, neutral, stock characters that speak in generalities, conveying little more than scenes of love, joy, festivity and play without deeper meaning. They are particularly open to interpretation by the viewer, and reveal relatively little concrete about the deceased. According to Huskinson, while cupids like those holding grapes or fruit baskets are "vaguely Dionysiac," they are also “a useful 'filler' motif, which can bring a little touch of Dionysus to a particular setting.”

Their presence on the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons is unlikely to reflect anything of the religious practice or beliefs of the patron, especially when such figures are so casually combined with Jewish ritual objects, as on the Seasons sarcophagus. More

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115 Huskinson 2015, 17.
116 Huskinson 2015, 16-7.
117 On Christian usage of ‘neutral’ figural motifs, see Huskinson 2015, 17, 194-203.
118 Newby 2010, 192.
119 Huskinson 1996, 44.
generally, such figures fall into the category of ‘generic’ figures that were familiar through their repetition across media but, significantly, which “could be invested with different qualities over time, to suit new cultural, social, or religious priorities.”

Hanfmann recognized this already when he included Seasons together with Tellus and Oceanus, psyches, winged victories and putti as “nonmythological figures of ‘neutral’ character, preferably with allegorical or symbolic implication, often universal or cosmic in scope.”

Moreover, a framework for the reinterpretation of such motifs may have existed already in Jewish history and literature. Christian patrons and viewers not only adopted new sculptural programs from biblical narratives, they also invested new meaning in familiar tropes, read through Christian beliefs and theology. Thus seasonal imagery as vines and grapes could be seen as allusions to the renewal of life in Christ, or the pastoral motif and the ‘Good Shepherd’ figure as allegorical models of Christ. It seems likely that Jewish patrons and viewers did the same.

Along these lines, when considering the lead sarcophagi stamped with vine scrolls and grape clusters from Beth She’arim, Avigad held that such images did not necessarily allude to Dionysiac symbolism. Viticulture was an important industry in ancient Palestine and grapes are numbered among the ‘seven species’ mentioned in

\[\text{\textsuperscript{120}}\text{Huskinson 2015, 12.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{121}}\text{Hanfmann 1951, 22.}\]
Deuteronomy (8:8). In fact, the lead sarcophagi—which utilized scrolling vines extensively—are a good example of the inherent danger of interpretative overreach in analyzing such images with ambiguous Dionysian associations. As we saw in Chapter 4, they were produced in workshops on the coast of Roman Syria that served pagan, Christian and Jewish patrons with more or less the same set of flexible, multivalent motifs. Customization of the visual programs by patrons was limited to the inclusion of a menorah or cross stamp.

The figures and motifs on the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons from Rome discussed so far—putti and seasons—are also those least likely to be allegorically identified with the deceased in the same way that heroes and gods were. The ambiguity of these figures renders them nondescript. While thematically such groups of figures and scenes may have had some allegorical associations, the individual figures were incapable of sustaining a direct identification with the deceased. On the Seasons sarcophagus at least, the implicit point of this aversion is made explicit by the substitution of a menorah for a portrait in the clipeus (see further, Chapter 7). At the same time, these fragments suggest that many Jewish sarcophagus patrons in Rome did employ figural sculptural programs on their sarcophagi, and selected from among the most current and popular styles in the Metropolitan industry.

6.4.3 Narrative sarcophagi and Jewish patrons

Several sarcophagi discovered in the Jewish catacombs of Rome include figural programs that depict narrative (and possibly even mythological) scenes that might have invited an allegorical identification of the deceased by allusion to central figures. These include the bucolic scene mentioned above, but also three others with more overtly narrative content. The three fragments (four if one counts the bucolic scene) suggest that at least some Jewish patrons did employ narrative friezes on their sarcophagi. Unfortunately, none of the fragments can be conclusively identified with a specific narrative myth, though some guesses can be made.

From Torlonia comes a fragment depicting the nude upper half of a male figure (Fig. 6.33). A cloak is draped over the left shoulder and down the back of the figure, and the left arm is raised in gesture. Because of its fragmentary nature, we should be wary of over interpreting, but the hair, cloak and the muscular and active posture of the figure are all strikingly reminiscent of narrative sarcophagi depicting scenes from the myth of Hercules.\(^\text{123}\) If this identification were accurate, this fragment would provide evidence for Jewish use of a specific Roman or Greek narrative myth in the visual programs of the catacombs.\(^\text{124}\) The features of the face do not show indications of being carved as portrait

\(^\text{123}\) See for example the 'architectural' sarcophagus with scenes from the myth of Hercules housed in the Rome's Museo Nazionale (Koch 1993, Fig. 45). The figure on the far right is styled similarly with a nearly identical pose. Alternatively, Goodenough (1953b, 41) identified the figure as a dancing satyr with wine-skin.

\(^\text{124}\) A few other fragments, documented by Konikoff (1986, Pl. 8-10) but not discussed, show figures that might be part of a narrative scene. No clear narrative myth can be identified from the fragments, but particularly prominent on these fragments are pastoral or bucolic scenes and motifs. The figures in these
sculpture; rather all signs suggest that the face was carved by the same hand, together with the torso.

A fragment of a hunt scene (Fig. 6.34),\(^{125}\) also from Torlonia, is an even more likely candidate for a Jewish example of a popular Roman narrative tradition. Sarcophagi with lion or boar hunting scenes were among the most popular narrative scenes on Roman sarcophagi,\(^{126}\) so it should come as no surprise based on what we have seen so far that a Jewish patron might have chosen such scenes. The fragment is too small to be definitive and the prey is missing, but the scene could easily have been drawn from the myth of Meleager and the Caledonian boar.\(^{127}\) Here, as in the example above, the central figure shown stabbing the prey is also not distinguished by signs of portraiture.

The third fragment bears the figure of a bearded man engaged in some kind of activity and facing a vertical pillar (Fig. 6.35). Goodenough confidently read the scene as ‘Moses striking the rock.’\(^{128}\) However, this identification is far from clear. Undoubtedly the fragment is part of a sarcophagus with a narrative scene. Whether this scene drew from narrative myth, Jewish or pagan, cannot be absolutely determined.

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fragments are not central characters, and could not be considered portrait sculpture. They do, however, suggest that Jewish use of mythic narrative very probably extended beyond the single example above. The highly fragmentary nature of these pieces and the fact that the scenes cannot be positively identified makes it best to avoid further interpretation.

\(^{125}\) Beyer and Lietzmann 1930, Pl. 24b.

\(^{126}\) With over 60 and 200 surviving examples respectively. See Koch 1993, 74, 8.

\(^{127}\) On this identification, see Goodenough 1953b, 41. For a comparable, if finer example, see the Meleager sarcophagus housed in Rome’s Palazzo dei Conservatori (Koch 1993, Fig. 47).

\(^{128}\) Goodenough 1953b, 29-30.
6.5 The sarcophagi of Jewish communal leaders in Rome

When looking at the overall corpus of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons from Rome collectively, one of the more striking phenomena is the popularity of simple, largely undecorated sarcophagi lacking completely or almost completely in figural decoration. While Huskinson has recently called attention to the strigilar examples of this group, the sarcophagi have generally gone unremarked or are noted only in passing, their significance drawing little comment or interpretation. With no fewer than nine examples, this group forms the largest portion of our corpus for the Jewish community of Rome.

These sarcophagi are typically very plain, with prominent *tabulae* for inscriptions, and sometimes carved with strigilations. Those that do have figural decoration opt exclusively for animal figures (sometimes mythical and fantastic creatures), and typically employ them in places where they are of lesser importance to the visual program (especially the sides). Sarcophagi in this group range from the sarcophagus of Caelia Domnina (Fig. 6.37), a strigilar sarcophagus of a well-known type with griffins

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129 Huskinson 2015, 239-41.
130 See, for example Goodenough’s (1953b, 33) brief note of the strigilated sarcophagus from Vigna Cimarra, without illustration.
131 This group includes the following: 1) sarcophagus of Gerusiarch Julianus, 2) sarcophagus of Mniaseas, 3) sarcophagus of Archon Jonathan (Cimarra), 4) sarcophagus with a lion mask (Torlonia), 5) sarcophagus of Archon Caelius Quintus, 6) sarcophagus of Archon Domnus, 7) sarcophagus of Marcella mater synagogue, 8) sarcophagus of Gerusiarch Silicius, 9) sarcophagus of Caelia Domnina.
carved on the ends, to the completely undecorated sarcophagus of Mniaseas (Fig. 6.38), a
lenos or trough form sarcophagus which even lacks the lions heads common to the form.

Throughout, the absence of portraiture and other human figural imagery coupled
with a clear preference for simple visual programs unites these examples as a cohesive
alternative to the sarcophagi described above which extensively employ conventionally
Roman figural imagery. This alternative was clearly preferred by a particular subset of
the Jewish community of Rome. At the same time, aside from the avoidance of human
figural imagery, the sarcophagi otherwise adhere to stylistic trends in Roman funerary
culture. They would scarcely have aroused the curiosity of the average Roman viewer.

6.5.1 The sarcophagi of Caelia Domnina and Mniaseas

The well-preserved sarcophagus of Caelia Domnina makes limited use of animal
figural sculpture, and bears strigilations and an inscribed tabula. The inscription assists
in positively identifying the artifact and the deceased as Jewish, reading "Julia Caelia
[D]omnina, wife of Julianus, archon of the Siburesians." The Siburesians is generally
understood as a reference to a Jewish community and synagogue known elsewhere in
the inscriptions of the catacombs and located in the Suburra area of Rome. The term
archon was a popular, if generic title of the synagogue leadership. The discovery of the
sarcophagus on the grounds of the Villa Torlonia suggests a probable provenance from

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\[\text{\textsuperscript{132}}\] The single line, Greek inscription, was copied by Leon, (1952, 413). It reads:
ΚΑΙΛΙΑΟΜΝΙΝΑΙΓΥΝΗΙΟΥΛΙΑΝΟΥ . . . . . ΧΟΝΤΟΣ ΣΙΒΟΥΡΗΣΙΩΝ. Leon reconstructed it to read:
Καιλια Ομνινα γυνη Ιουλιανου [του αξιοντος Σιβουρησιων]
the catacombs below.\textsuperscript{133} This sculptural program illustrates the multiple, at times competing tendencies among the Jewish patrons of the sarcophagus industry of Rome including a desire for fashionable styles, limited engagement with figured forms, and the centrality of the Jewish community in regard to the identity of the deceased.

This sarcophagus is but one example of a form extremely popular in non-Jewish circles beginning in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century C.E. The front is taken up entirely by strigils, with the inscription running in a single line in a horizontal band spanning the top of the front panel. Most interesting are the two griffins expertly carved on either end of the sarcophagus. Both are standing with raised wings and tail, while the figure on the left end has its far forepaw raised above the head of a ram. In the funerary context, often on strigilar sarcophagi, griffins may sometimes have served an apotropaic function,\textsuperscript{134} but by adopting this form and its content, the Jewish patron was most probably simply following fashionable custom.\textsuperscript{135} Many strigilar sarcophagi include a central portrait bust in a clipeus or \textit{tabula}, but examples without portraiture are not uncommon either.

If the sarcophagus of Caelia Domnina should be positioned somewhere near the border between this group and the figural sarcophagi we have just examined on account of its (limited) use of figured sculpture, the sarcophagus of Mniaseas\textsuperscript{136} represents the opposite pole of this category in its total avoidance of a sculptural decoration of any

\textsuperscript{133} Konikoff 1986, 58.
\textsuperscript{134} Huskinson 1996, 60.
\textsuperscript{135} Rutgers 1995, 80. See also Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 73-6.
\textsuperscript{136} A Hellenized form of the Hebrew name Manasseh.
kind. This sarcophagus was discovered in a monastery in Trastevere, near the Porta
Portuense and the Jewish catacomb of Monteverde, where it was being used as a
planter.\textsuperscript{137} It was last seen by Müller, the original excavator of Monteverde at the turn of
the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, after which it went missing.\textsuperscript{138} A drawing of the sarcophagus was made
prior to its disappearance, and accompanied the original description of the artifact by
Lupi.\textsuperscript{139} The sarcophagus was a Travertine example of the \textit{lenos}, or trough type, and
completely undecorated save for a \textit{tabula ansata} on the front. This included a Greek
inscription that confirms the Jewish identity of the deceased. It reads, "Here lies
Mniaseas, a disciple of the sages and a father of the synagogue."

The \textit{lenos} sarcophagus was a form popular in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century C.E. Its shape imitates
that of an ancient wine trough, and examples frequently display lions’ heads at the ends
which replicate in form, if not in function, the spigots of a trough.\textsuperscript{140} Given the
widespread popularity and distinctiveness of this sarcophagus type, in choosing this
shape the patron (possibly Mniaseas himself) must have been conscious of their decision
to take part in a Roman funerary fad. At the same time, it is impossible to miss the fact
that the patron chose as restrained an example as possible of the type. This example not

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{137} Konikoff 1986, 17.
\textsuperscript{138} Müller 1912, 39.
\textsuperscript{139} Reproduced in Konikoff 1986, 17.
\textsuperscript{140} McCann 1978, 39. Highlighting the viticultural origins of the type, McCann (1978, 39) goes on to note that
the shape may be a reference to Dionysiac rites and eschatological hopes. If so, the choice of this
sarcophagus type by one Jew may be connected with the popularity of wine-making motifs in other
examples belonging to Jewish patrons (see below) which have been interpreted in similar ways by scholars
\end{flushleft}
only avoids the lion’s heads common to the type, but also any other form of
ornamentation, even geometric strigilations. The sarcophagus of Mniaseas then, takes
part in a popular sarcophagus form, but largely eschews the conventional content of that
form while its inscription emphasizes the Jewish communal role of the deceased.

6.5.2 Other sarcophagi belonging to Jewish communal leaders from Rome

Other sarcophagi of this group fall somewhere in between those of Caelia Domnina
and Mniaseas. For instance, there is at least one example of a strigilar lenos sarcophagus
replete with lions’ heads, discovered in the Torlonia catacombs (see Fig. 6.21). While
only a small fragment of this sarcophagus is preserved, it nonetheless provides a
counterpoint to the sarcophagus of Mniaseas where the lion’s head spouts common on
lenos sarcophagi were lacking. Most sarcophagi of this group, however, look much like
the fragment of the sarcophagus of Caelius Quintus, a ‘Hebrew boy’ who held the
position of archon twice. This inscription was contained in a prominent tabula ansata
framed by strigils (Fig. 6.39). Several other examples of the strigilar form exist from
Rome that bear inscriptions naming the deceased as an honored member of the Jewish
community, and least three other fragments of strigilar sarcophagi remain in the
catacombs of Vigna Randanini (e.g. Figs. 6.40, 6.41, 6.42), unpublished.142

141 Konikoff 1986, 32, Fig. II-9. This fragment, like so many others, was originally considered intrusive by the
excavators, based on the presumed aniconism of ancient Judaism.
142 Personal communication, Jessica Dello Russo.
One remarkable aspect of this group of sarcophagi is the way in which they depart from the standards of their types, most obviously by avoiding portrait sculpture. Not a single known Jewish example of the strigilar form—the most popular if not the most fashionable style among Roman sarcophagi—departs from this pattern, while in pagan and Christian examples portraiture is common on similar sarcophagi and takes pride of place in either a clipeus or tabula. Indeed, the overall simplicity of the strigilar form and its popularity in wider Roman culture may suggest that it was commonly viewed as a way to prominently display portraiture free from the distractions. What’s more, as we will see in the following chapter, there is ample evidence that at least some members of the Jewish community in Rome participated in the ‘portrait boom’ of the period.

At the same time, it seems that this strigilar form was considered uniquely suited both to the leadership of the Jewish community and the particular message they wished to convey regarding Jewish interaction with Roman culture, and further, that that message precluded portraiture. In the corpus of sarcophagi of Jewish patrons from Rome, it is entirely from this group of simple sarcophagi that the Jewish leadership (as identified by their epitaphs) chose their sarcophagi. Of the nine examples in this group, eight have clear indications that the deceased (or their spouses) held a leadership role in the Jewish community of Rome in the inscriptions, titles which were not found on sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons outside of this group.

Why these sarcophagi—simple but popular forms, especially the strigilar style—in particular? Huskinson has suggested that they were particularly popular among Jewish
patrons simply “because they could include inscriptions.”\textsuperscript{143} While this may be true and the ability to ‘highlight’ inscriptions may have at least partly motivated the preference for these sarcophagi,\textsuperscript{144} the explanation does not push far enough in that it fails to account for the absence of portrait sculpture and the total lack of human figural imagery. It is especially important to consider this in light of the fact that other Jewish patrons at both Rome and Beth She’arim readily made use of sarcophagi with figural sculpture, as we have just seen, as well as the fact that some Jewish patrons did commission portrait sculptures, as we will see in the following chapters.

Just as figural motifs are relatively absent in the visual programs, Jewish ritual symbols are also absent from this group of sarcophagi. Only the inscriptive evidence allows us to read the visual silence. The prevalence of allusions to the Jewish community and roles within the synagogue hierarchy make it clear where and how the deceased identified. Moreover, the epigraphic focus on commemorating the place of the individual within the Jewish community may suggest a reason for the conspicuous avoidance of portraiture and human figural imagery characteristic of this group. If the most important aspect of the identity of the deceased was understood as their involvement in the Jewish community, then, simply put, their identity may have been conceived primarily along communal lines; portraiture as a conspicuous display of

\textsuperscript{143} Huskinson 2015, 18, 241. Huskinson deals with Jewish patrons of strigilated sarcophagi, as a brief (3 pp.) appendix to a much longer chapter on Christian patrons.

\textsuperscript{144} Huskinson 2015, 241.
individuality may have been at odds with such a message. Similarly, these patrons may have avoided other forms of human figural imagery because it ran the risk of inviting allegorical interpretation.

This reconstruction of the motivations behind the avoidance of portrait sculpture and human figural imagery on the part of certain Jewish sarcophagus patrons does not resort to aniconism as a motivating factor. Instead, it suggests only that such patrons did not view conventionally Roman modes of representation as fitting or appropriate means to communicate the messages and self-narratives they wished to convey through the sculptural programs on their sarcophagi—particularly representations of Jewish communal identity. But neither can we rule out some limited observance of aniconism either. It may in fact be the case that the leaders of the Jewish community observed some level of aniconism that proscribed the use of human figural imagery especially.

When using inscriptional evidence thus, it is also important to reiterate the limitations of the evidence which we observed at the outset (Chapter 1). Most significantly, we may be missing sarcophagi that belonged to other Jewish communal leaders either because of looting or because they lack an identifying inscription. If this were the case, and such (lost) sarcophagi made use of portrait sculpture or other human figural imagery, our picture would be substantially altered. However, we can take at least some confidence from the fact that this group of sarcophagi is a relatively large one (9 examples) by the standards of the Jewish corpus. Furthermore, the cohesiveness of the
group is corroborated by the shared inscriptional and visual practices we have just observed.

Whatever the reason behind the notable absence of portraiture and human figures among sarcophagi belonging to leaders of the Jewish community, I suggest that these sarcophagi are evidence of patterns of participation in Roman funerary culture and sarcophagus styles that delimit a middle ground staked out by a certain group of the Jewish sarcophagus patrons in Rome. The ‘Jewishness’ of this middle ground existed in the appropriation of Roman cultural forms within certain limits—drawing borders around acceptable appropriation and not. These borders were intended to preserve a particular conception of Jewishness while allowing the patrons to also participate in Roman culture.

6.6 Reviewing the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons from Rome

Before turning to the evidence of imported marble sarcophagi at Beth She’arim, let us review briefly the major findings about Jewish sarcophagus patrons in Rome that we have uncovered so far. Firstly, the majority of sarcophagi belonging to patrons from the Jewish community of Rome overwhelmingly draw on the conventions of Roman sarcophagi for their sculptural programs. These conventions inform the basic content of every sarcophagus encountered in this chapter, including the motifs and themes, as well as the style and manner in which they are composed. Yet we have also encountered a spectrum of responses within this sweeping cultural influence as well. On one end of the
spectrum are sarcophagi, like the one with a hunt scene, that engage narrative themes and wield the visual vocabulary of Roman sarcophagi in ways that demonstrate the patron’s ‘sophisticated’ Roman tastes. At the other end of the spectrum was the sarcophagus of Mniaseas; still partaking of the Metropolitan sarcophagus industry but in a more restrained and limited way.

The sarcophagi of the majority of Jewish patrons in Rome fell somewhere in the middle, suggesting a balancing act enacted in sculpture. The easiest group to distinguish here are the leaders of the Jewish community, who preferred relatively simple sarcophagi that make little to no use of Roman figural imagery, while still adhering to the broader styles and conventions of Roman sarcophagi. Sarcophagi with inscriptions that herald a position in the Jewish community are united in adopting popular Roman sarcophagus forms like the lenos sarcophagi and employing strigils and tabula ansata, while avoiding portraiture, human figures, and most other figural imagery as well. The relative cohesiveness of this group in its avoidance of certain visual elements common on Roman sarcophagi suggests that there was a commonly perceived mode of visual representation that was considered 'appropriate' for Jewish patrons by at least a leading segment of the community. This mode established limits to the Jewish adoption of Roman cultural forms, primarily by avoidance of portraiture, of narrative scenes or stock characters, but also, surprisingly of symbols of Judaism.

Yet outside of this group of sarcophagi, it seems that the remainder of the Jewish community in Rome was much more flexible in its response to Roman (visual) culture,
and the sculptural programs of their sarcophagi suggest a community actively engaged in the ongoing process of figuring out how to maintain their Jewish identities while engaging actively in Roman society. This is to be expected among the cultural forms of any minority community, particularly one in the diaspora, anxious to engage with and secure status within the dominant culture but also to eager to preserve a sense of difference and tradition. And so, we see on many sarcophagi fragments from the Jewish catacombs what may at first glance may seem like an anything goes attitude towards Roman visual culture and representation—the 'phantasmagoria' and 'madness' identified by Goodenough.\textsuperscript{145}

On some points, this assessment seems to be accurate. As we have seen, no pattern or consensus can be discerned governing the use of Jewish ritual symbols. We saw already ready in Chapter 4 that Jewish ritual symbols appear only rarely on the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons from Rome. Throughout the of sarcophagi we have just encountered, which engage some of the more popular visual programs and conventions of Roman sarcophagi, the decision to include Jewish ritual symbols in the visual programs does not seem to have been governed by any kind of convention. Jewish ritual symbols appear (or not) irrespective of the nature of the rest of the visual program. They appear together with figures such as putti and Seasons at times, at other times on

\textsuperscript{145} Goodenough 1953b, 3.
sarcophagi with no Roman motifs at all (see Chapter 4). Over and against this, they seem curiously absent from the sarcophagi of the community leaders.

There also seems to be little distinction made between animal and human figural imagery among most Jewish sarcophagus patrons. On sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons from Rome we find depictions of human figures, not infrequently nude, and including ‘neutral’ figures like putti, personifications of the seasons, theater mask. We also find possible narrative scenes that may have drawn from pagan myth. The evidence clearly indicates that many, maybe most in the Jewish community deemed figural imagery—both human and animal—broadly acceptable for use on sarcophagi.

On the other hand, this broad acceptance may have had its limits. Though there are several fragments that clearly show general narrative scenes, there is no unambiguous evidence of Jewish use of specific narratives with identifiable heroes or central figures. The two fragments we have encountered, showing a hunt and a bucolic scene, need not have been derived from any specific myth. They occur also on Roman sarcophagi without recalling particular narratives, presenting only a general scene for the viewer. The other two fragments, which we raised as possible depictions of Hercules and Moses, are clearly from narrative sarcophagi but cannot be securely identified. In any case, even if these identifications are correct, the limited evidence we have suggests that Jewish

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146 Bucolic scenes could be neutral like cupids and seasons, though they could also be an integral part of popular narrative scenes such as those depicting the myth of Endymion. Lion hunt scenes occur at least as often as boar hunts, and reference no known myth. Recall that in our example, the prey was not preserved.
patrons as a rule did not adopt the Roman practice of memorializing the deceased with images of mythic and heroic figures whose faces were carved in likeness of the dead.

That said, the general Jewish avoidance of narrative sarcophagi in Rome probably did not render Jewish patrons unfashionable. Neither would the absence necessarily have been conspicuous to an ordinary Roman viewer. In the broader corpus of Metropolitan sarcophagi, non-narrative sarcophagi, especially the strigilar and garlanded 'abstract' styles, overwhelmingly outnumber the narrative examples.\textsuperscript{147} They clearly enjoyed a fashionable standing in their own right. It has also been suggested that narrative scenes of Greek and Roman myth fell out of favor in the third century, while "allegorical" scenes, exemplified by the wildly popular Seasons sarcophagi, outstripped them.\textsuperscript{148} If this were indeed the case, then the fact that Jewish patrons seem to have preferred motifs of putti and seasons over and against narrative scenes could be evidence of yet another trend in Metropolitan sarcophagi adopted by the Jewish community.

\section*{6.7 The imported marble sarcophagi from Beth She‘arim}

No marble sarcophagi were found in situ, or even intact in the catacombs of Beth She‘arim.\textsuperscript{149} Despite this, there were more than enough marble fragments in Catacomb

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{147} Elsner 2010b, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{148} See, for example, McCann 1978, 21.
\item \textsuperscript{149} The bulk of these were lost to the activities of tomb robbers in Catacomb 20, who were more aggressive with their looting of the marble sarcophagi than of the limestone ones. Marble, a more valuable material in its own right, also held more finely carved reliefs that may have been highly prized. The fact that more
\end{itemize}
20 to conclude that imported marble sarcophagi were a relatively common feature in the catacomb, and to further suggest a corpus of around 20 examples.\textsuperscript{150} We have already encountered several fragments in the previous chapter that indicate that patrons at Beth She’arim imported Proconnesian garlanded sarcophagi. As we saw, these were almost certainly imported from a city on the coast of Roman Syria, most likely from Tyre and probably also from stock. These marble examples and the local limestone ‘copies’ they inspired indicate that many patrons at Beth She’arim wished to take part in the funerary culture of the broader region of Roman Syria by acquiring the sarcophagus styles most closely associated with it.

We also noted, however, that nothing prevented a particularly wealthy or knowledgeable consumer from commissioning a sarcophagus directly (or through an intermediary) from an alternative source that was not represented or readily available on the local market. Indeed, at Beth She’arim other fragments of imported marble sarcophagi indicate that some patrons had broader knowledge of Roman funerary fashions beyond provincial fads, as well as sufficient resources to import marble sarcophagi from Asiatic and Attic workshops. Since their discovery, the identification of fragments were found in the central hall of the catacomb than anywhere else only proves this fact; it also suggests that the central hall was a convenient workspace for the processing of robbed materials. See Avigad 1976a, 164. Most of the marble fragments that derived from robbing activity sat on a deposit half a meter thick, showing that the marble robbing took place later than the first wave of robbing of the catacombs. One theory, advanced by Avigad (1976a, 165) is that the empty rooms encountered in excavation may originally have contained large numbers of marble sarcophagi.

\textsuperscript{150} Avigad 1976a, 164.
these fragments as the remains of imported sarcophagi has never been in doubt. They were, without question, imported in finished form to the site.\textsuperscript{151} There was no local marble in the region, as we have seen, and the skill and depth of carving far exceeds anything else seen in the stone sculpture from Beth She’arim. A full petrographic analysis was never conducted on the fragments from Beth She’arim, although several samples were submitted for microscopic examination by Avigad. Two samples were appeared to be Proconnesian marble, while a third sample was described as a “finely crystalline, white marble with a yellowish tint,”\textsuperscript{152} which corresponds well to marble quarried at Mt. Pentelos. Working from one of Ward-Perkin’s earliest publications of his model,\textsuperscript{153} Avigad already correctly identified this as the likely source of many of the fragments from Beth She’arim.\textsuperscript{154}

Since the excavation and publication of Beth She’arim, however, new knowledge of the sarcophagus trade in the eastern provinces has come to light, particularly through the excavations of Chéhab at Tyre. The work of Ward-Perkins, Koch (and Sichtermann), and, in Palestine, Fischer, Foerster, Gersht and Pearl, has allowed us to clarify further their origins and to say more about the industry and trade to which they attest.\textsuperscript{155}

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\textsuperscript{151} See also Avigad (1976a, 171), who entertains no doubt that the sarcophagi were all imported, asking only to what extent they may have been carved or finished in Palestine.
\textsuperscript{152} Gross 1976, 294.
\textsuperscript{153} Ward-Perkins 1957.
\textsuperscript{154} Avigad 1976a, 171-2.
Current modelling of the sarcophagus industry of the Roman East suggests that sarcophagi produced in Attic and Asiatic workshops were roughed out and at least partially finished at the quarry. After shipping they may have been finished by artisans at the place of import in order to avoid damage.\textsuperscript{156}

In places like Beth She'arim, where there was not sufficient or constant demand for a highly skilled atelier, Avigad suggested that skilled, itinerant artisans—and not local workshops—would have completed the work. In fact, we know that in some cases, marble products were accompanied by skilled sculptors from the quarry region who knew how to work the material and in what style. The names of several such ‘itinerant sculptor-salesmen,’ as Ward-Perkins called them, are mentioned in several inscriptions on sarcophagi from Asia Minor.\textsuperscript{157} In that region it was common for sculptors to accompany marble products from Dokimeion and other quarry sites to their final destination for finishing; apparently information relevant enough to include on a sarcophagus as an additional marker of status.\textsuperscript{158}

As we suggested above, there could also have existed small workshops capable of finishing imported sarcophagi to high standards on the coast, possibly at Caesarea, Ashkelon, Tyre or Tripoli.\textsuperscript{159} In Roman Syria, Caesarea is the most likely place for this, as

\textsuperscript{156} Russell 2010; 2013. See also Ward-Perkins 1980a; 1980b; 1992.
\textsuperscript{157} Ward-Perkins 1980b, 32, 60.
\textsuperscript{158} Ward-Perkins 1980b, 32. See also Öğüş 2016.
\textsuperscript{159} See further Avigad 1976a, 171.
the largest number of marble fragments come from the region, though workshops at Tyre and Tripoli are also possible. Close parallels exist between the few sarcophagi known from Caesarea and those from the better preserved necropolis at Tyre, commonalities that the imported sarcophagi at Beth She‘arim also appear to take part in.

Indeed, in importing marble sarcophagi like these produced Greece and Asia Minor, the sarcophagus patrons of Beth She‘arim were engaging in the same funerary and patronage practices as other, non-Jewish consumers in the major cities of the region. We have seen already similar patterns and possibilities of sarcophagus patronage and import at Tyre. At the same time, if the tastes of patrons at Beth She‘arim were not particularly unique, their ability to fulfill them was at least slightly more remarkable.

Simply by virtue of its inland location in the hills of the lower Galilee, approximately 35 km from the nearest port (Caesarea), the transport of marble and stone materials to Beth She‘arim would have been prohibitively expensive for all but the wealthiest of patrons. The significance of the additional overland transport entailed in bringing a marble sarcophagus to Beth She‘arim cannot be underestimated; it may have been the single most important factor determining the quality and scarcity of these imports. The cost of transporting goods even small distances overland is considerably higher than by water (as much as 40 times higher than sea transport for instance), consistently

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160 See: Gersht 1996; Pensabene 1997; Russell 2010, 152-3.
161 Russell 2013, 96. For a detailed discussion of the costs associated with various means of transport of stone products, see Russell 2013, 95-140. See also Duncan-Jones 1977.
underestimated, and complicated further by the condition of roads and the weight of the goods.\textsuperscript{162}

Indeed, the wealth required to gain entry into the sarcophagus market must have varied from place to place depending on the connectedness of the locale to the Roman stone trade. It must have been far cheaper and easier to acquire a sarcophagus, for instance, at places nearer the Syrian coast like Caesarea, Ashkelon, Tyre or Beirut. In smaller, inland cities, towns and villages, the cost of importing a sarcophagus must have been much greater, given the lower level of connectivity to the interregional trade network. In fact, at no other inland site in Roman Syria were imported marble sarcophagi found in such quantities as at Beth She’arim. This holds true even at Palmyra and Beth She’an-Scythopolis, where substantial quantities of marble and exotic stones have been found in architectural applications.\textsuperscript{163} In these cases, it seems that marble was most often imported for public projects instead, and possibly through the pooling of resources by multiple patrons. At Beth She’arim, by contrast, expensive marble from Attic and Asiatic quarries was imported by individual patrons and single families for private (if still visible) use.

\textsuperscript{162} According to Horden and Purcell (2000, 11), “sea transport so far surpassed land communications in ease as to make of the Mediterranean a milieu of interlocking routes onto which the coastlands and harbors faced.” This perspective is reflected in geographical literature and maps of the Roman period, which view the Mediterranean as a ‘great river’ rather than a sea. In more modern times, for instance, the US Senate discovered that in 1817 the cost of moving a single ton of goods just thirty miles by land (the same distance, give or take, as Beth She’arim from any water routes) was the same as moving it clear across the Atlantic by sea. See Stiles 2009, 33.

\textsuperscript{163} See: Dodge 1988; Pensabene 1997; Russell 2013, 153-4.
6.7.1 The Leda and the Swan sarcophagus from Beth She’arim

The most famous of the imported marble sarcophagi discovered at Beth She’arim is an Attic sarcophagus depicting a narrative scene of Leda and the Swan that was discovered by Mazar in the initial excavations. Now on display at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, the sarcophagus was discovered in fragments in the collapse of the mausoleum above Catacomb 11. The left short side was the best preserved. A sizable portion of the front panel was also discovered in fragmentary form, as well as some fragments from the rear.

The front and rear panels contained narrative scenes composed of over a dozen figures on multiple registers each. The scene on the front was carved in higher relief and further detail than that on the rear and is better preserved, with most of the top and portions of both ends intact (Fig. 6.43). The contents of the scene were reconstructed and identified with great accuracy by Avi-Yonah. At either end are niches, resting on square columns, in front and between which nine figures are preserved in a variety of active postures. Nude youths, bearded and helmeted men, a trumpeter and several women make up an energetic scene. Two horses, at either end of the scene, add to the visual diversity of the program.

\[\text{Initial publication of the sarcophagus was made by Mazar (1940; 1941); 1942. Goodenough (1953a) published a description of the fragmentary short side. Avi-Yonah (1981b) published the first substantive interpretation.}\]

\[\text{Avi-Yonah (1981b, 264) put the number at fewer than ten. However, based on parallels, and the indications of multiple registers on the preserved left side, this figure seems too low.}\]

\[\text{Avi-Yonah 1981b.}\]
Avi-Yonah compared the program to a remarkably similar composition on a Metropolitan sarcophagus that depicts Achilles at the court of King Lycomedes in the Louvre, and concluded that they showed the same narrative. Avi-Yonah’s comparison was astute. Since then, an Attic sarcophagus was discovered at Tyre also bearing a front panel with a scene of Achilles at the court of Lycomedes (Fig. 6.44). While the content of the side and rear panels differs from the example from Beth She’arim, the two front panels are astonishingly close, down to the horses at either end and seated, bearded figures on the left. The example from Tyre, independently identified by Chéhab and Ward-Perkins, conclusively confirms Avi-Yonah’s identification of the main frieze through a parallel from the same region. What’s more, the parallel indicates that the tastes of some sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim were similar to those of patrons at the wealthier, more cosmopolitan port of Tyre.

Only a few fragments of the rear panel are preserved, but they seem to indicate that the narrative scene on rear of the sarcophagus depicted a hunt, probably the well-known story of the Meleager and the Caledonian boar. On one fragment, a hunter on horseback is shown with a raised spear (Fig. 6.45). The horse is reared and the hunter is poised to throw his spear at what seems to be a boar below. Behind, a tree with

167 The ‘Borghese’ sarcophagus, now at the Louvre (Inv. No. Ma 3570).
171 Avi-Yonah (1981b, 265), whose interpretation concurs, cited a detail below the horse’s barrel that appears to have been a boar’s mane.
individuated leaves is sculpted. On another fragment, the legs of two figures stand in an active pose (Fig. 6.46). One figure is shown wearing a knee-length robe and hunting boots. Behind this figure, the hindquarters of a dog are visible.

It would be a mistake to call the rear side ‘unfinished.’ Rather, the level of detail and relief probably reflects cost-cutting measures and the knowledge that the sarcophagus would be used in a context where the front was more visible. This was common practice on sarcophagi in Roman Syria, as we have already seen in examples from Tyre. This information could have been conveyed to a workshop in Athens by an intermediary on the commission of the sarcophagus, or to a local workshop on the coast where the sarcophagus may have received the final, sculptural touches and details.\textsuperscript{172}

It is the well preserved panel from the left side of the sarcophagus that lends this sarcophagus its name. This panel shows a nude, standing Leda attempting to fend off the god Zeus in the guise of a swan (Fig. 6.47). The composition and pose is familiar from similar sculptures across the Roman world.\textsuperscript{173} Leda is turned away from the viewer and partially exposed. Her right hand is extended to the neck of the swan, while her left clutches her robe, torn from her body and falling around her knees. The face appears to have been left unfinished, though it is questionable whether a portrait would have been added on a side panel given the content. Zeus, in the guise of a swan to Leda’s left, is

\textsuperscript{172} Levine (2013) has suggested that it may have been produced in workshops at Caesarea and Tyre. This is in fact quite plausible, as it would avoid the risk of damage to finished sarcophagi inherent in shipping long distances.
\textsuperscript{173} For parallels, see Avi-Yonah 1981b.
carved in exquisite detail, with individuated features on the body and wings, and with a long neck curved in a characteristic “S” shape. The figures are framed on the left by a tree, and on the right by a square column. How did the Jewish patron of this sarcophagus regard its explicitly pagan mythological content? We will return to this important question, shortly, after we review the evidence for similar imported sarcophagi with narrative scenes and mythological content from the site.

6.7.2 Reconstructing the sculptural programs of imported marble sarcophagi at Beth She’arim

Most of the other remains of imported marble sarcophagi from Catacomb 20 are so fragmentary—a knee here, a hand there—that it is impossible to reconstruct the intended figure, let alone the narrative scene or sculptural program. However, the high relief and detail (occasionally with under-drilling), the fine grained marble and the use of elaborate moldings on many fragments (Fig. 6.48) demonstrate without a doubt that other Attic sarcophagi were imported for use in Catacomb 20 at Beth She’arim. Several fragments of conch shells of the kind often featured between columns on Asiatic columnar sarcophagi (Fig. 6.49), as well as a possible arch (Fig. 6.50) suggest that sarcophagi were imported from Dokimeion or other producers in Asia Minor as well.

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174 Which did not always stop Avigad and others from trying to identify, sometimes with less than convincing results. For example, the ‘caryatid’ identified by Avigad (1976a, 166, Pl. LIV.3), in all likelihood, a depiction of one of the Seasons. The ear and hair is a giveaway, and though they do resemble the features of a caryatid as well, the caryatid is extremely rare in sarcophagus sculpture.
Fragments with human figures in long robes and static poses (Fig. 6.51) may also have been part of Asiatic columnar sarcophagi, as Avigad suggests.\textsuperscript{175}

Such sarcophagi must have specially imported in each instance.\textsuperscript{176} The evidence indicates that such elaborate and fine examples were not kept as stock by the marble merchants and workshops of the coastal cities, though these may very well have served as intermediaries facilitating the acquisition. Moreover, these fragments typically show very fine workmanship. Fragments of acroteria suggest that they shared the gabled lid ubiquitous in the limestone sarcophagi at Beth She‘arim and marble sarcophagi produced in the Roman East more generally. As to their sculptural programs, if the preserved pieces were at all representative, it is clear that the sarcophagi were characteristic of the trends in marble sarcophagi among Attic and Asiatic producers. The fragments collected suggest battle scenes were especially prominent among the imported sarcophagi at Beth She‘arim, as at Tyre.

The general state of undress (bare feet and knees) and the active poses indicated by the numerous bent arms and knees is indicative of narrative and mythic content. The naked male torso of one fragment (Fig. 6.52), and the female head tilted to its left are also suggestive (Fig. 6.53). Among these, fragmentary scenes of battle are unmistakable and the difference in marble grain and depth of relief noted by Avigad confirms that multiple sarcophagi carried such fierce scenes. Military accoutrements (shields, spears

\textsuperscript{175} Avigad 1976a, 171.
\textsuperscript{176} See also Russell 2010.
and axes) on a number of fragments are the most suggestive in this regard (e.g. Fig. 6.54). The chlamys and tunic on one male torso (Fig. 6.55), and the high sandals of another suggest military garb (Fig. 6.56), and further indicate battle scenes on one or more sarcophagi. The manner in which several horses heads are shown braying, with nostrils flaring and teeth exposed, is also indicative of action and battle (Fig. 6.57).

For some of the figured fragments there are sufficient number or large enough fragments to more precisely reconstruct the content of a narrative scene. More than one imported sarcophagus at Beth She’arim depicted an Amazonomachy. The tilted female face of the fragment mentioned above is almost certainly that of a dying Amazon as Avigad suggests, and the parallels identified by Avigad between the fragments with body parts—particularly the bent knee with a military boot—and horse heads discovered at Beth She’arim and the program on the Amazonomachy sarcophagus in the Louvre are compelling (Fig. 6.58). These fragments represent more than one sarcophagus according to Avigad, who noted differences in the marble and size of the figures. At least one sarcophagus from Tyre likewise featured an Amazonomachy.

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177 The chlamys and tunic was often worn by barbarian military on sarcophagi with battle scenes to differentiate them from Roman.
178 As opposed to more static depictions of horses.
179 He also identified a fourth sarcophagus as depicting the “Rape of Persephone”, based on a single fragment that showed, in his opinion, the head of one of the monsters drawing Demeter’s chariot. See Avigad 1976a, 171. The figure in question however, is too fragmentary to support such a confident identification.
180 Avigad 1976a, 166.
181 Avigad 1976a, 169-70.
182 Avigad 1976a, 170. Avigad also identifies several additional fragments as parts of an Amazonomachy, however the identification is not secure and they are not included in this discussion.
Another Attic sarcophagus, discovered near Caesarea, features a similar scene of Amazonomachy on the front and side panel. In fact, the examples from Caesarea and Tyre share an almost identical rear panel of griffins facing each other across a column.

It seems likely that other battles were depicted also. As we have seen, warfare was a common motif on Roman mythic sarcophagi and battle scenes figured prominently in the sculptural programs of Attic sarcophagi imported to Tyre. Most of the imported sarcophagi at Tyre showed scenes related to the mythic hero Achilles and the Trojan war, often of battles. The possible barbarian on the fragment just described cannot be associated with either an Amazonomachy or scenes from the Trojan war.

6.8 Approaching mythological sculptural programs at Beth She’arim

Many questions concerning the origins of these fragments and the identification of their content were well handled already by Avigad. New information has continued to clarify the basic picture without substantially altering it: some sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim had the means and capability to acquire not just Proconnesian sarcophagi, which were extremely common in the province of Roman Syria (see Chapter 5), but also rarer and more expensive Attic and Asiatic imports. At the same time, the larger

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383 Gersht 1996, 227, Fig. 12. Now with the Leda sarcophagus from Beth She’arim at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem.

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question—”What would a Jewish patron have made of the mythological content of such a sarcophagus?”—has never been satisfactorily answered.

Most interpretations of these sarcophagi have tended to reduce their cultural significance in one way or another, most often arguing that they were simply fashionable designs—pretty pictures that were reused by Jews and devoid of their original meanings. Sed-Rajna, for example, suggests that the appearance of such sarcophagi in a catacomb with rabbinic burials indicates that their themes, “*which had lost their religious significance for the Jews, were part of the Hellenistic cultural heritage that the cultivated elites had adopted…*”184 Considering the Leda sarcophagus in particular, Avi-Yonah wrote that such scenes were viewed by Jews simply as “literary or artistic expressions of ‘modern’ culture...”185

Implicit biases about Jewish interactions with the Roman world and visual culture aside, such interpretations fail to contextualize the Jewish uses of such sarcophagi. Not only do they ignore the substantial evidence within rabbinic literature of permissive attitudes towards Roman visual and material culture (as well as Roman manners and modes of entertainment),186 they needlessly interpret Jewish patronage practices in a

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184 Sed-Rajna 1997, 78, emphasis added.
185 Avi-Yonah 1981b, 268. And yet, Avi-Yonah believed also that this sarcophagus went “beyond what was permitted even in a period when the stringent regulations against figurative are were much relaxed.” He went on to suggest that the sarcophagus may have been placed in a niche that hid the side panels and the Leda scene. See Avi-Yonah 1981b, 267-9.
186 This evidence has been thoroughly treated by a number of scholars, including: Eliav 2002; 2010; Neis 2013; Schwartz 1998; Stern 1996; 2013; Weiss 1999; 2010b; 2013. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 2, some scholars, particularly Levine, have gone so far as to argue that it was the rabbinic class that was responsible
cultural vacuum by ignore the evidence of patronage practices from the broader Roman world. These suggest that not only was there a great deal of intentionality behind the acquisition and use of such expensive signifiers of social status in the Roman world—these sarcophagi especially could not have been last minute or spur-of-the-moment acquisitions—but that their use also broadcasted certain things about the social location and cultural values of the deceased.

In this connection, we should not forget the ‘preconditions’ that Ewald has reconstructed as key to the successful use of mythological sarcophagi. Not only can it be assumed that the patron and likely viewers would have been familiar with the basic plot of the myth, but the patron also must have recognized “the cultural authority of Greek myth” and expected his intended audience to do the same. Moreover, the patron must have wished to “employ a mythological idiom as a means of dramatising the act of ‘speaking about oneself’”187 and furthermore, been accustomed to doing so.188 Based on the similarities between sarcophagi belonging to Jewish and non-Jewish patrons seen in this and the previous chapter, we should be wary of any analysis that assumes that Jewish patronage practices differed drastically from those of non-Jews.

The context in which the Leda and the Swan sarcophagus was found is suggestive in this regard, and in many ways confirms Ewald’s conception of the preconditions behind

187 Ewald 2011, 263.
188 Ewald 2011, 263.
successful mythological programs. The sarcophagus was discovered in the ruins of the mausoleum building above Catacomb 11. A remarkable Greek inscription on a marble plaque, probably affixed to the outside of the mausoleum, was discovered in the same collapse and published by Schwabe and Lifshitz:

Here I lie, son of Leontios, dead, Sappho’s son, Justus,
Who, after I had plucked the fruit of all wisdom Left the light, my poor parents who mourn endlessly
And my brothers, alas, in my Beth She’arim [Besara].
After descending to Hades, I, Justus, lie here With many of my kin, since mighty Fate willed it.
Courage, Justus, no one is immortal!

Several things about this inscription, recording a resident of the town of Beth She’arim, are worth drawing attention to beyond the literary Greek it uses. It records the name of the deceased as Justus, a good Latin name. The Greek names of his father (Leontios) and grandfather (Sappho) indicate that the cultural interaction of the family with the Greco-Roman world went back several generations. Its contents indicate the familiarity and comfort of the deceased not only with Roman funerary conventions, but with Roman philosophy and conceptions of the afterlife. The mention of a descent to Hades, fate (µοῖρα) and the exhortation at the conclusion (Courage, Justus, no man is immortal!)

189 Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974, 97-110, no. 27.
190 Translation and reconstruction after Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974, 97.
191 Though this aspect too is important. As Nagakubo (1974) observes, “language, as a vehicle of thought, reflects the particular culture to which it belongs…”.

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immortal!) are indicative in this regard. If this were not enough to suggest that
‘acculturation’ on display here went beyond the superficial level, the epitaph is
composed in Homeric hexameter. As Schwabe and Lifshitz suggest, “it is obvious that
the author of the epigram had enjoyed a Greek education, was familiar with Homer, and
had learned to compose epigrams...”. All this suggests certain families and patrons at
Beth She’arim had sufficient cultural literacy and deep knowledge of Roman ideas—
and not only practices and popular motifs—to engage mythological sarcophagi on the
same terms as non-Jews.

Who were these patrons? The sarcophagus fragments themselves bear no
inscriptions that would give us further insight into the social or cultural background of
the deceased. The most that can be said about the patrons of the marble sarcophagi was
that they were wealthy persons who were not only comfortable with a conspicuously
high level of figural content, but also with pagan myth and narrative as well. Avigad
attributes the import of marble sarcophagi to diaspora Jews, but conclusion is
completely speculative and nothing in the finds supports it. Indeed, as we saw above in
Chapter 2, the overwhelming evidence is that the sarcophagus patrons of Catacomb 20

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192 This formula appears in at least four other inscriptions at Beth She’arim, including once in Catacomb 20,
as well as ten times in short form (Θάρσει). Nagakubo (1974, 164-9) has demonstrated that the formula “was
avowedly pagan in origin as well as in implication,” and expressed a hope for ‘astral immortality.’
194 On the local origins of the families buried in Catacomb 11, which held mostly primary burials, see further
Nagakubo 1974, 178.
195 Presumably because of the mythic content. See Avigad 1976a, 171-72.
were local, if not to Beth She’arim (like Justus of Catacomb 11), than at least to the Galilee region.\textsuperscript{196}

Indeed, these patrons must have been quite well off in order to afford such imported sarcophagi, yet no evidence in Catacomb 20 suggests that their wealth was displayed beyond the panels of their sarcophagus. There are no family rooms or hypogea parallel to those of Rome or Tyre, nor are there any lavishly decorated spaces that would have highlighted the elite status of the individual and visually distinguished the deceased from the mass of generally plain limestone sarcophagi. Furthermore, the few niches hewn for sarcophagi (at least one of which stands empty, possibly originally holding one of the above marble sarcophagi) were used for plain and decorated sarcophagi alike. It seems then, that the surfaces of the marble sarcophagi were considered space enough to emphasize the social status of the deceased and family.

These imported marble sarcophagi also give us an excellent chance to reflect on the provincial setting and the differences between mediated and direct cultural influence in the Roman Empire. Are the marble sarcophagi bearing mythological scenes in some way more clear cut signs of acculturation and taste than the other sarcophagi, as Sartre suggests?\textsuperscript{197} There is no question, on the one hand, that many of the marble sarcophagi show the influence of narratives from Greek and Roman mythology and a visual koine that could have connected the patron to pan-Mediterranean Roman culture of the most

\textsuperscript{196} See above, Chapter 2. See also Nagakubo 1974, 184-8.
\textsuperscript{197} Sartre 2005, 277.
elite strata. At the same time, it is an open question as to how much these ‘Roman’ influences were mediated by Beth She’arim’s provincial setting in Roman Syria. As we have seen, similar sarcophagi appear imported from Attic and Asiatic workshops appear at Tyre and Caesarea.

To what degree were the tastes of these sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim informed by provincial tastes on display at these and other more cosmopolitan cities? It seems likely that, at least to some extent, provincial tastes must still have guided the selection of these sarcophagi. Regional patterns of consumption probably dictated to some degree what imported sarcophagi were even available for the Jews of Beth She’arim to examine or import, and even what sarcophagus styles they were familiar with. These sarcophagi, which must in each case have been specially ordered, were probably purchased through local ‘agencies’ or ‘private initiatives.’ The location of these agencies as the middle-men in the transaction granted some control over the supply of material and its marketing to agents other than the patrons (or the quarries). At least by constraining the choice to certain models that could be or were already imported, then, the choices of even these most sophisticated sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim must have been mediated by the provincial location.

\[198\] Much in the way that certain sets of Jewish symbols were shared by Jews in Roman Palestine and diaspora alike.

\[199\] On these, see Ward-Perkins 1980a, 329, 34.

\[200\] Ward-Perkins 1980a, 329, 34.
At the same time, we have seen that dynamics of the patronage practices we have reconstructed suggest significant intentionality, agency and cultural fluency on the part of the patrons of Attic and Asiatic sarcophagi. This should caution us against assuming that Jewish patrons would not have been aware of the mythological meanings of these scenes, or would have somehow divorced them from their broader cultural associations. Indeed, the success of these sculptural programs as signifiers of status and identity must have hinged at least partly on approaching them through the conventions associated with their use in non-Jewish contexts. We should be suspicious then of reading the appearance of narrative mythological sarcophagi at Beth She’arim simply as adoption of Roman material and visual culture without the underlying values and meanings associated with it.

6.9 Summary

It is often suggested that sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons and discovered in Beth She’arim or Rome originally belonged to non-Jewish patrons and were reused by Jews. This is particularly the case with sarcophagi like the Leda and the Swan example, which bears narrative scenes of pagan mythological content. Implicit in this suggestion is that a Jewish patron could not conceivably have commissioned such a sarcophagus and thereby have been ‘responsible’ for its content. Yet the number of Jewish patrons who were comfortable with using such sarcophagi an ‘pagan’ imagery in

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201 See, for example, Avi-Yonah 1981b, 267-8.
the first place belies this notion. While we can never rule out that some sarcophagi were reused, a few observations may be made about the phenomenon of reuse as it relates to sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons.

First, the notion of ‘reuse’ is little more than a smokescreen that should not obscure the fact that many Jewish families and individuals selected such sarcophagi, whether on a secondary market or not, and saw them as desirable and appropriate burial vessels to use in Jewish contexts, amidst Jewish funerary practices, for Jewish deceased. Second, the precise patronage practices of sarcophagi and other visual artifacts of antiquity are difficult to pin down. While we have reconstructed some likely aspects here, we have no ancient text that records the dynamics of a sarcophagus sale. When a patron commissioned a sarcophagus directly or through an intermediary, it is entirely unclear to what degree the patron also specified the program. Did they merely indicate the theme of the sarcophagus (an Achilles sarcophagus for example)? The style? Or did they also select the individual motifs and programs of the various panels? Indeed, it is unclear that patrons who commissioned sarcophagi such as the Achilles sarcophagus with the Leda and the Swan panel at Beth She’arim would have controlled anything more than the general theme or known of the composition of individual panels prior to delivery. It is therefore also unclear that the purchase of a ‘used’ sarcophagus would have entailed significantly less agency than the commission of a new one.

Moreover, while the reuse of sarcophagi is a well-attested phenomenon known, for example, at Rome and Tyre, it is not nearly as common as the impression one might get
from reading frequent references to Jewish reuse of non-Jewish sarcophagi. At Tyre at least, much of the reuse seems to have occurred within family units.\(^{202}\) Though in rabbinic law and ‘common Judaism’ dating back at least to the late Hellenistic period stone was viewed as a material resistant to impurity, we might also suspect that popular Jewish conceptions of corpse impurity might further advocate against reuse. Thus, while we cannot rule out that some of the sarcophagi above were indeed reused by Jews, we certainly should not assume this was the case \textit{a priori}, especially since we have no clear evidence to indicate even one instance of sarcophagus reuse among the Jewish communities of either Beth She’arim or Rome.\(^{203}\)

Some of the sarcophagi we have just encountered combine popular non-Jewish motifs and themes with Jewish ritual symbols or inscriptional evidence that linked the deceased (and the patrons) with the Jewish community. Most do not. More to the point, while some of the sarcophagi can occasionally be identified as belonging to a Jewish patron by the use of visual markers or inscriptions, their sculptural programs and forms overwhelmingly employ motifs, themes and styles popular in the broader corpus of Roman sarcophagi. Reused or not, they are no more remarkable or non-Roman than Christian sarcophagi of the same styles. Not one, for a moment, suggests a Jewish patron or community at odds with the cultural environment of the Roman world. Rather, they

\(^{202}\) Though not all. See Birk 2012.
\(^{203}\) Reuse is typically identified through either competing inscriptions with multiple identifications, or obvious rescultping of motifs or portraits. No sarcophagus belonging to Jewish patrons includes any of these indicators.
represent patrons and communities that were intensively and actively engaged with the funerary culture of Rome and Roman Syria, and the material and visual culture of the broader Roman world.

Practical considerations about the success of a visual program may have played a role in fostering the similarities in the sculptural programs of sarcophagi used by Jewish and non-Jewish patrons. As we have seen, for all its visual abundance, sarcophagus sculpture was comprised of a highly conventional visual language. For an individual sarcophagus program to be understood by the average Roman viewer, it needed to adhere to these conventions. While the incision of menorah in an inscription, or a few Jewish ritual symbols on an entablature would not significantly impact the effectiveness of message in the Roman funerary context too much, extensive substitutions and shifts in content would run the risk of rendering a sculptural program unintelligible to other viewers, Jewish or not.

Along these lines, the Seasons sarcophagus with the central menorah must have provided something of a shock to the system of most Roman viewers. While the main theme would have been familiar, the menorah would have raised uncertainty for most Roman viewers about what message was being conveyed, possibly even some Roman Jews. The two other sarcophagi from Rome with sculptural programs composed exclusively of Jewish ritual symbols encountered in Chapter 4 depart even further from these conventions. They are only interpretable when approached from the Jewish context; from the non-Jewish perspective, they must have had very little meaning at all.
Perhaps this was effective in the Jewish funerary context they were intended for, but it certainly was not the choice of most Jews in Rome or Beth She’arim, who opted to adhere by and large to the conventions established in the broader corpus of sarcophagi.

The use of the same workshops by Jewish, Christian and pagan sarcophagus patrons also helps us to explain the themes and motifs these sculptural programs share with those of non-Jewish patrons. The use of common workshops serving clientele without distinction is well established as “one of the most outstanding characteristics of both Jewish and non-Jewish artistic production in Late Antiquity.” Indeed, it is an incontrovertible fact that Jews, Christians and pagans across the late ancient Roman world all used the same workshops to commission, design, execute or procure the sundry burial items required by widespread funerary culture.

At both Beth She’arim and Rome the similarities between Jewish and non-Jewish funerary cultures are striking and found at every level, from the techniques employed in manufacture to the decorative elements used to complement the main theme or content of a piece. Aside from the occasional outlier, the overwhelming majority of sarcophagi, frescoes, gold glasses and inscribed sealing plates of the Jewish catacombs of Rome bear more than a passing resemblance to those found in Christian and Pagan contexts.

Likewise, the Asiatic and Attic marble imported sarcophagi from Beth She’arim...

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204 Rutgers 1998, 58.
205 In some cases, the similarities are unique and frequent enough to suggest tracing them to a single workshop, as in the case of certain gold glasses for instance that share a common border motif. See Rutgers 1998, 77.
encountered above (and the Proconnesian imports discussed in Chapter 5) were
undoubtedly produced in the very same workshops as similar sarcophagi found at Tyre
and other necropoleis in the region. Moreover, as we have seen above, it seems likely
that at least some of the sculptors responsible for the sculptural programs of locally
produced sarcophagi at Beth She’arim were itinerant sculptors who worked across the
region on stone sculptures for Jewish and non-Jewish patrons alike.

At the same time, the majority of the sarcophagi encountered here indicate little
desire on the part of Jewish sarcophagus patrons to explicitly mark Jewishness. As we
have seen, sarcophagi could be customized to the needs and circumstance of individual
patrons. This could be done in the Metropolitan workshops of Rome, or by local
workshops on the coast of Roman Syria that may have finished Attic and Asiatic
imports. It seems likely that many, though possibly not all of the patrons of the
sarcophagi encountered here could have afforded customizing their sarcophagi to
further suit Jewish burial contexts. Ultimately, for whatever reasons, they must not have
deemed such customization desirable, necessary, or even appropriate.

Perhaps this has something to do with the social strata of the patrons we are
discussing. Not all elite members of Jewish and non-Jewish communities opted for a
sarcophagus burial, but the purchasing of a sarcophagus was undeniably a powerful
and visible marker of elite status. It has been suggested the relative prevalence of the
menorah in Jewish burials in the diaspora comes from a need to mark (and to maintain)
difference in the context of being a minority community among a pagan and Christian
The Jewish patrons of the sarcophagi discussed above occupied a unique position in the contexts of the city of Rome and the village of Beth She’arim, and within the Jewish communities therein. They were undoubtedly among the most elite members of their respective Jewish communities (a fact sometimes alluded to in sarcophagus inscriptions at both Beth She’arim and Rome). We might speculate that this elite status (and the wealth required to purchase a sarcophagus) was achieved in part by the patron’s mastery of the Roman culture, and by their achievement within the Roman social system. Certainly, the evidence encountered here indicates such mastery. If this was the case, the elite sarcophagus patrons encountered above were likely among the most versed and adept in Roman culture, and perhaps also therefore the least likely to commission departures from the conventions of sarcophagus sculpture or to mark their sarcophagi with Jewish ritual symbols.
Chapter 7. Portrait Sculpture on the Sarcophagi of Jewish Patrons

In this chapter, I examine the evidence for the use of portrait sculpture on sarcophagi belonging to members of the Jewish community of Rome. I highlight the use of the “Learned Figure” motif commonly employed in Roman sarcophagus portraiture and by Jewish patrons and raise possible creative appropriations of the trope in Jewish contexts. I argue that among Jewish patrons, the decision to include funerary portraiture went hand in hand with the decision to adopt popular and conventional Roman styles and motifs, and to engage Roman cultural and visual resources. In other words, Jewish patrons who chose sarcophagi with portraits also seem to have been the readiest to avail themselves of the entire scope of the visual resources of Roman funerary culture in order to orchestrate self-narratives on their sarcophagi. Finally, I caution that while the limited examples (five) suggest a mastery of Roman culture and correspondingly high degree of acculturation among certain Jewish patrons, we should be wary of reading such sarcophagi as evidence of certain Jews abandoning a Jewish identity in favor of a Roman one—or the Jewish community in favor of the Roman polis and its civic structures—as the narratives of funerary art never capture the totality of the deceased’s identity.

In contrast to the longstanding Jewish engagement with stone sculpture—on ossuaries, rock cut tombs and monumental buildings—there is no tradition of Jewish portrait sculpture that Jewish patrons in either Beth She’arim or Rome could draw on. The models for portrait sculpture on Jewish sarcophagi could come only from the
Roman world, and from Rome in particular. There, since at least the 4th century B.C.E.,
portraiture was created in a variety of mediums and contexts both public and private. In
years up to its use on sarcophagi, portraiture in the Roman world increasingly captured
a broader class of subjects, and portrait sculpture in funerary contexts especially had a
long and prominent history.

Perhaps primarily for this reason—because there is not earlier tradition of portrait
sculpture in Jewish culture—evidence of Jewish portrait sculpture in Late Antiquity has
often been dismissed as intrusive, mentioned only in passing, or otherwise swept under
the rug. The field has typically been preoccupied instead with the more overt examples
of acculturation, especially Jewish uses of ‘pagan’ tropes and motifs such as those
encountered in the previous chapter. While a tombstone reused by Jewish patrons and
bearing a couple’s portrait and an incised menorah from Pannonia has received some
welcome attention, the evidence of portrait sculpture on the sarcophagi belonging to
Jewish patrons of Rome has yet to be brought into the conversation about Jewish
attitudes towards visual culture and representation in the Roman world.

This evidence, explored below, is revealing not only for the study of the variety of
Jewish attitudes towards visual culture, but also for the cultural experience of a certain

1 Zanker 2016, 9. The tradition of Roman portrait sculpture probably emerged out of sustained cross-cultural
contact with Greeks in the late 4th century B.C.E.
2 Zanker 2016, xiv.
3 For example, see Levine 2013, 152.
4 Fine 2013.
group of Jewish citizens of Rome. The portrait styles and sarcophagi they chose reflected the latest in Roman funerary fashions. Jewish patrons who opted for portraiture also do not seem to have cared to mark their Jewish identity on their sarcophagi by means of Jewish ritual symbols seen elsewhere in the Jewish catacombs of Rome. Where Jewish ritual symbols appeared with little rhyme or reason on the sarcophagi encountered in the previous chapter, here they are absent entirely. We will explore possible reasons for this below.

Of course, not all Roman Jews opted to include portrait sculpture on their sarcophagi—it must have been a considerably expensive customization—and there is evidence in at least one example that suggests that portrait sculpture was purposefully and consciously avoided. Furthermore, there is no evidence for portrait sculpture on the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim, even among the fragments of imported Attic and Asiatic sarcophagi discussed in the previous chapter. Many Attic sarcophagi at Tyre, as we have seen, included a kline style lid that carried a portrait of the deceased, sometimes of a couple.

While the remains of Attic sarcophagi from Beth She’arim are entirely fragmentary, the few portions of lids that are preserved do not exhibit the kline form. Instead, they include acroteria that indicate the gabled form popular on sarcophagus styles throughout the eastern provinces. Of course, it cannot be ruled out that one or two patrons at Beth She’arim may indeed have acquired sarcophagi with kline portraits that

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5 See above, Chapter 4.
have not been preserved. However, the general absence of portrait sculpture on sarcophagi throughout Catacomb 20 and the fact that none of the fragments of imported marble sarcophagi can be identified as portraiture suggests that it is equally likely that sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim did not opt for portrait sculpture, and perhaps consciously avoided it. Until further evidence should come to light, the phenomenon of Jewish portraiture on sarcophagi seems to have been restricted to patrons in the city of Rome, and its discussion reflects on that community and its members.

7.1 Portrait sculpture on Metropolitan sarcophagi

One of the characteristic features of Metropolitan sarcophagi from Rome is the inclusion of a portrait, especially from the 3rd century C.E.\textsuperscript{6} The presence of portrait sculpture on sarcophagi intensifies the individualized identity narrated on sculptural programs of sarcophagi panels.\textsuperscript{7} Whether used on sarcophagi, or in other civic or private contexts, portraits were “intended to promulgate the stature and merits of their subjects.”\textsuperscript{8} In other words, portraits were used as a way of emphasizing both the social standing and the character of the individual. They were a powerful means of elite display that could be paired with the sarcophagus form—itself a vehicle for the display of status and self as we have seen—to create a particularly potent representation of the individual.

\textsuperscript{6} Birk 2013, 10, 4; Newby 2010, 192.
\textsuperscript{7} See Birk 2012, 109-10.
\textsuperscript{8} Zanker 2016, 1.
The desire for portraiture on sarcophagi was particularly strong in Rome and found expression on a wide variety of Metropolitan sarcophagus styles, from simple strigilar sarcophagi to mythological sarcophagi. The faces of Roman portraits were carved after the sale and thus intended on some level to reflect the deceased individual. On such sarcophagi and other forms of portrait sculpture Zanker suggests that, where depictions of the body in portrait sculpture are increasingly standardized over time, the face was emphasized across portrait genres as a result of a cultural disposition to “read the subject’s personalities and capabilities in faces.”

At the same time, Roman portraits were rarely if ever conceived of as realistic likenesses of the deceased. Instead, elements such as facial expressions, hairstyles and clothing serve in Roman funerary portraits far more to connect the individual to Roman society and culture than to individuate them. Birk has argued that portraits on sarcophagi were intended as symbolic images meant to represent the character and virtues of the deceased and to preserve their memory. This was accomplished by

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9 Newby (2010, 193) further suggests that this widespread appeal was concurrent across types, beginning in the later half of the 2nd c. C.E.
10 The bodies or busts were typically carved in advance, one aspect of the mass-market culture that came to prevail in the sarcophagi economy of the third and fourth centuries. There are more than enough examples of “unfinished” sarcophagi with fully and exquisitely carved figures but blank faces to prove the point; Birk’s (2013, 199) catalog counts 200 such examples. Moreover, as Birk (2013, 17) explains, “the generic bust meant that the sarcophagus could be purchased for either a man or a woman,” it was typically ‘asexual.’
11 Zanker 2016, 11.
12 Zanker 2016, 13-4. Through the faces on portrait sculptures, Zanker writes, ancient viewers could “get to know them personally” and “communicated with them.”
13 As indicated not only by the lack of individuality in the features and expressions of Roman funerary portraits, but also by the reuse of some sarcophagi without recarving of the features. On this last point, see Birk 2013, 15.
14 Birk 2013, 14-7.
various means, whether through the inclusion of elements that indicated the deceased's social identity (tools of the trade, hairstyle, dress, etc.) or via association with myth or other allegorical motifs.

Rather than being a true portrait then, the symbolic nature of the sculpture and its representation of the ideal individual renders it, in Birk's words, "an image of a portrait." For this reason, portraits on Roman sarcophagi reveal much more about the cultural identity and social status of the patron in the way they make use of the visual vocabulary than they do their individual personality, tastes or beliefs. In short, Roman funerary art served first and foremost as a way of commemorating and immortalizing the social identity of the deceased, and to demonstrate that the interred individual was a successful Roman citizen as measured against popular conceptions of social status and achievement.

Among the profusion of portrait styles available to the Roman patron, none was more popular than the so-called “Learned Figure” trope. The widespread popularity of this trope coincided with the height of the popularity of the sarcophagus burial and the “portrait boom” of the third-century. It also corresponded with the emergence of the Second Sophistic movement, a perfect storm of conditions that fostered the proliferation of this particular trope of self-representation. Not only were portrait

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15 Birk 2013, 15.
16 Birk 2013, 73, 94 n. 380, 122 Graph 7.
17 Birk 2013, 75.
sculptures in the “Learned Figure” style the most popular form of representation, but corollary tropes and motifs from the ‘learned sphere’ were a very close third in the running for most popular secondary motifs on the sculptural programs of sarcophagi, behind only cupids and personifications of the seasons.\textsuperscript{18} Indeed, in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} centuries, the ‘Learned Figure’ motif was chosen by an ever expanding group of sarcophagus patrons in the city of Rome. No longer the province of an elite minority, the trendy motif was used by patrons of from wide ranging backgrounds and all walks of life.\textsuperscript{19}

In the category of portraits assuming the ‘Learned Figure’ style are depictions of the deceased in the guise of philosophers, in the company of muses, and, most commonly, holding a symbolic scroll.\textsuperscript{20} One element common to most depictions of ‘learned’ males is the beard. According to Zanker, beards operated as a ‘occupational identification’ ever since Alexander the Great appeared beardless in his official portraiture to emphasize his youth (and thereby set off a centuries long fad of going beardless).\textsuperscript{21} While earlier the beard had been associated more generally with adult males, afterwards it became almost exclusively associated with philosophers for several centuries, until the ‘Learned Figure’

\textsuperscript{18} Secondary motifs being defined as “scenes that add extra meaning to the primary motif (the portrait figure).” See Birk 2013, 128, Graph 8.
\textsuperscript{19} Zanker 1995, 267, 82-84. This popularization occurs, perhaps ironically, at precisely the time when imperial portraiture moves away from intellectual beards and towards military \textit{virtus} beginning with Caracalla.
\textsuperscript{20} Birk 2013, 73 n.299.
\textsuperscript{21} Zanker 2016, 7.
became a fashionable trope in Roman portrait sculpture. Even into the later Roman periods, beards in portraiture were closely associated with the tradition of philosopher portraits and evoked concepts of learning and paideia.\textsuperscript{22}

The precise motifs and elements employed on ‘Learned Figures’ may have been diverse, but the effect was everywhere the same. The use of the trope represented the cultured status—and cultural literacy—of the individual in a very general way, without drawing explicit references towards any one particular realm of Roman literature or learning.\textsuperscript{23} Employing the ‘Learned Figure’ motif communicated the patron’s upholding (and achievement) of the Roman ideal of the intellectual. This was an ideal that achieved broad appeal in the culture of Rome—the motif is found on sarcophagi belonging to patrons of all ages and of both sexes\textsuperscript{24}—and continued into Christian art (and Christian sarcophagi) well after the third century.\textsuperscript{25} Much like the inclusion of pets on children’s sarcophagi (see below), such motifs can be seen as signifiers, in this case of a cultural world in which social standing and character was achieved through learning.\textsuperscript{26}

The practice of depicting patrons and deceased as philosophers and Muses began already in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century C.E.,\textsuperscript{27} and was adopted from the eastern Mediterranean.

\textsuperscript{22} Zanker 2016, 7.
\textsuperscript{23} See Birk 2013, 76. Though Zanker (1995, 268-72) suggests that it is ‘literary learning’ in particular that is singled out, and further that the learning depicted may have had some basis in real life experience(s).
\textsuperscript{24} See Birk 2013, 86, Graph 4.
\textsuperscript{25} McCann 1978, 139; Zanker 1995, 267ff..
\textsuperscript{26} In contrast, for example, to scenes of military virtue. The ‘learned figure’ has long been a topic of research in the field of sarcophagus studies, including a monograph by Ewald (1999). For a summary of the relevant literature, see Birk 2013, 73ff..
\textsuperscript{27} Birk 2013, 74.
Portraiture showing men and women in Greek garb and engaged in reading and other learned pursuits seems to have first reached Rome through the import of Attic mythological and Asiatic columnar sarcophagi. The trope found a ready home among the Roman populace where it was subject to ‘imaginative adaptation’. Earlier representations of the intellectual theme were largely allegorical or symbolic, such as narrative depictions of the muses. Thus many of the ‘Learned Figure’ motifs of the 3rd and 4th centuries draw stylistically on earlier sarcophagus sculpture. Some motifs were drawn from type-scenes common on biographical sarcophagi, others from myth. However, by the 3rd century C.E., the ‘Learned Figure’ motif as depicted in Rome showed significant differences with its continued uses on Attic sarcophagi. In contrast to Attic examples, where the (nude) body is the focus of paideia, Roman sarcophagi with the ‘Learned Figure’ motif typically depicted the learned persons robed and holding scrolls, a shift towards philosophical learning as the ideal.

This translation of the motif in Roman contexts was part of the adaptation of the motif to fit the “Roman grid of intelligibility” and the concept of virtutes. The ‘Learned Figure’ appears in new combinations and with new meanings and associations. The motifs are depicted divorced from contexts that would give them more specific

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28 Zanker 1995, 270.
29 Zanker 1995, 269.
30 Zanker 1995, 270.
31 For example, the depictions of Birk 2013, 73.
32 See Ewald 2011, 279-82, 98.
meanings, such as earlier scenes of *dextrarum iunctio*.\textsuperscript{33} Rather, the ‘Learned Figure’ trope on sarcophagi from Rome emphasized more vague and general virtues associated with the intellectual world of the Roman world; virtues that were harder to pin down but nevertheless related “more with individual qualities and personal identity than with institutional norms.”\textsuperscript{34} The examples of the motif on the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons in Rome that we will encounter below follow the Roman model in this regard.

The “Sarcophagus with a Greek Physician” in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 7.1)\textsuperscript{35} is a good example of the motifs that define the trope and narrated a learned identity “through virtues and qualities mediated by the appearance of an individualised figure.”\textsuperscript{36} It also demonstrates the widespread appeal of the ‘Learned Figure’ as a funerary motif and as a cultural ideal on Metropolitan sarcophagi. The sarcophagus was discovered in Ostia, the port of Rome at the mouth of the Tiber river.\textsuperscript{37} Its execution—regular and even but unremarkable—and its uncomplicated visual program demonstrate that the ‘Learned Figure’ motif was available at all levels of the sarcophagus market.

This particular sarcophagus should be dated stylistically to the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century C.E., around the time when the motif of the ‘Learned Figure’ was rising dramatically in

\textsuperscript{33} Birk 2013, 73.
\textsuperscript{34} Birk 2013, 88-9.
\textsuperscript{35} MMA 48.76.1
\textsuperscript{36} Birk 2013, 75.
\textsuperscript{37} A lid, since lost, is reported to have recorded the name of the deceased. See McCann 1978, 139.
popularity.\textsuperscript{38} Its sculptural program combines this popular motif with the equally popular style of the strigilar sarcophagus. The front is simple, with only a central frame interrupting a series of well laid out, undulating strigils. On the left of the frame, the deceased sits in a chair engrossed in a reading scroll. The pose, clothing—even the shape of the chair—are familiar from other sarcophagi of the type,\textsuperscript{39} including many, more elaborate examples and fragments.\textsuperscript{40} The beard and himation that the deceased wears are standard fare, and further establish the genre.\textsuperscript{41} The scroll is opened but has no markings or text on it anywhere. To the right sits an open scroll cabinet, containing a handful of other rolled scrolls. Atop the cabinet sits a case of surgical tools, some of which can be positively identified.\textsuperscript{42}

In keeping with the non-specificity of the ‘Learned Figure’ trope, the scrolls held by such figures are never identifiable on Metropolitan sarcophagi.\textsuperscript{43} The learning embodied within is left to the imagination of the viewer, as is the case on the “Sarcophagus with a

\textsuperscript{38} Though McCann (1978, 140) attributes it to the early fourth on the basis of bodily proportions in the figured panel.

\textsuperscript{39} An almost identical, strigilar example comes from Pisa. In the central frame, the seated ‘philosopher’ is accompanied by his wife. See Birk 2013, 81 Fig. 39.

\textsuperscript{40} See, for example, the fragment of a “Poet-Philosopher sarcophagus” from Asia Minor in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA 18.108). See also McCann 1978, 130-2.

\textsuperscript{41} The himation here should not be read as an indication of ethnicity, as McCann (1978, 140) does, but as a more general marker of the philosopher type.

\textsuperscript{42} See McCann 1978, 138. It is possible that the inclusion of the surgeon’s tools may mark this program as a transitional form between the biographical sarcophagi and later examples of the ‘learned figure’.

\textsuperscript{43} However, on the 1\textsuperscript{st} century funerary monument of Q. Sulpicius Maximus, discovered in Rome, a full body portrait depicts the young deceased boy declaiming from an open scroll. On the scroll are Greek letters that can be deciphered as the end to a poem composed by the child which won a context, and was inscribed on the front face of the monument. For an early, but thorough discussion of this monument see Nelson 1903. My thanks to Tolly Boatwright for calling this example to my attention.
Greek Physician” above. This being the case, the scroll and the figure holding it could very well be an excellent illustration of the 'imaginative space' offered by images through their inherent ambiguity and polyvalence.\textsuperscript{44} Zanker suggests that the figure indicates only that “the deceased had cultivated a philosophical way of life,” and should not be read as a statement of a deeper engagement in learned pursuits and activities on the part of the deceased.\textsuperscript{45} In other words, the use of the ‘Learned Figure’ trope to represent the deceased did not imply that the deceased had abandoned their profession or civic roles in order to deeply pursue philosophy, or even had more than a passing familiarity with the genre.

### 7.2 The kline monument of Monteverde

In 1907, Nikolaus Müller discovered the lid of a small kline sarcophagus in his explorations of the Monteverde catacombs.\textsuperscript{46} Müller provided a rather lengthy and detailed description of the sarcophagus in his excavation account,\textsuperscript{47} and the first photographs were published by Goodenough.\textsuperscript{48} Sculpted in marble of unknown provenance, the lid measures 0.75 m long, 0.325 m wide and 0.24 m high and bears the reclining likeness of a young child (Fig. 7.2).

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Elsner 2001, 269.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Zanker 1995, 272.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Müller 1912, 39-41.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Müller 1912, 39-41.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Goodenough 1953b, pl. 736.
\end{itemize}
This small and unassuming artifact is the perfect starting place for our discussion; its visual program provides an excellent entry into the choices made by Jewish patrons of sarcophagus portraiture in Rome, while the scholarly history of this artifact mirrors the larger debate over Jewish attitudes towards visual culture. In fact, had this artifact not been found in a Jewish catacomb, like many other sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons from Rome it would never have been associated with a Jewish patron. The stylistic conventions and visual motifs deployed on the lid bear all the hallmarks of Roman children’s sarcophagi of the *kline* type, with many direct parallels among sarcophagi of non-Jewish patrons (for example, a similar *kline* portrait of a young girl now in the Getty Museum; see below). Yet while this sarcophagus lid is entirely unexceptional in the larger Roman corpus of portrait sculpture, it is remarkable among sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons as the most complete example of portrait sculpture belonging to a Jewish patron.

The portrait and figural elements rest atop a plain and simply rendered couch with raised, overhanging edges that encircle the child at his head, feet and back, leaving the front of the sarcophagus open to the viewer. These sculpted elements sit atop a narrow plinth or undecorated band. The child lies on his left side, propped up on his left elbow, his head at a three-quarter turn to the viewer gazing calmly towards his feet in a posture that would be at home at a Roman banquet. The youth has short, smooth hair with just a hint of curls around his ears, set atop a round face with exaggerated, doughy cheeks. He wears a simple Roman toga draped over his left shoulder that collects gracefully in loose
circular billows around his right knee and leg. His hands and right foot emerge from the toga, while his left leg is hidden beneath its folds.

Near the child’s exposed right foot, at the extreme forefront of the composition, a small bird sits facing the opposite direction, mirroring the child’s gaze; a second bird rests at the head, beside the couch. Both are clutching grapes in their beaks. A small dog of similar size sits playfully below the child’s right hand, which crosses his body to pet the animal. Under his left hand is a cluster of grapes, which the child appears to be plucking one by one with his thumb and forefinger. Though simply rendered, the technical execution of the piece suggests a high degree of skill on the part of the sculptor or workshop. The folds of the garment are deeply sculpted and artfully arranged, and the features are proportionately and pleasingly rendered.

Only the find spot indicates that this sarcophagus lid once belonged to a Jewish patron. In light of the absence of an epitaph or any visual markers of Jewish identity, the origins of this artifact have been a matter of debate since its discovery. Müller, who discovered the artifact, was non-committal on the matter, simultaneously used the artifact to prove the existence of Jewish portrait sculpture while expressing the

49 It is possible that such indicators (e.g. a menorah or an inscription) could have been included on the body of the sarcophagus. However, typical children’s sarcophagi of the kline type most often featured simple visual programs of playful cupids in different roles in the frieze of the body, and this sarcophagus lid is nothing if not typical among the larger Roman corpus.

50 In fact, introducing the lid, Müller (1912, 39-40) notes that this fragment provides the only evidence that Jews of Rome did not exclude portraiture from their catacombs. Müller also includes a bust described by Lanciani in 1878 as bearing secondary witness to the practice of Jewish portraiture, however, the Jewishness of this bust is tied only to the ambiguous inscription “[de]um meteuns.”
possibility that the object may have been introduced into the catacomb as spolia, used to close a loculus.\textsuperscript{51} His later inclusion of the piece in the Lateran Museum under the heading of "pagan monuments introduced into the Jewish catacomb," indicates that his view became more skeptical over time.

Frey followed in this assertion, and argued that the lid was introduced into the catacomb from the nearby non-Jewish catacomb of S. Ponziana. He especially pointed to the fact that the head was found removed from the piece and the absence of the sarcophagus body.\textsuperscript{52} More recently, Rutgers omitted this artifact from his discussion of the sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons from Rome because it failed his criteria of containing either an inscription or iconography that positively identified the deceased as Jewish.\textsuperscript{53} We have already discussed above, in Chapter 2, why this set of criteria—which excludes the provenance of an artifact as valuable data—seems unnecessarily restrictive and likely to preclude not only a great number of sarcophagi and fragments, but also a great deal of information about Jewish sarcophagus patrons and their preferences. Although we have noted that Jews and non-Jews were buried in catacombs quite close to each other in late ancient Rome (see Map 5), even Rutgers stops short of suggesting that Jews and non-Jews were buried in the same catacombs.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{51} Müller 1912, 40-1.
\textsuperscript{52} Frey 1936a, CXXV-CXXVI.
\textsuperscript{53} Rutgers 1995, 78.
\textsuperscript{54} Rutgers 1998, 83ff.. Moreover, Rutgers accepts that some ‘intrusive’ materials in these catacombs were actually related to Jewish patrons and deceased. See his discussion of the appearance of ‘intrusive’ materials in these catacombs, including inscriptions using the ‘DM’ formula. Rutgers accepts the conclusions of Frey
Others, like Goodenough accepted the Jewish identification of the fragment, but resisted the idea that the piece was intended as a portrait of the deceased (Jewish) child. Goodenough argued instead that the piece portrayed a generic, stock scene of a “Dionysiac eschatological banquet” and never intended to serve as the likeness of the deceased.55 Only Konikoff, in his catalogue of the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons from Rome, concluded on the basis of the find spot that the artifact had a Jewish patron. However, he declined to press this conclusion further, either by considering the implications for the broader study of Jewish visual culture, or connecting it with general trends in portrait sculpture on Metropolitan sarcophagi or other examples of portraiture in the Jewish catacombs of Rome.

Such skeptical and cautious readings seem too convenient a way to excise from the corpus an artifact that complicates or challenges our understanding of the Jewish encounter with Rome: another example of the scholarly “sweeping under the rug” of evidence that contradicts received wisdom about the ‘ambivalent’ relationship between Jews and visual culture. We have every reason to assume that our *kline* lid belonged to a Jewish patron and depicted a deceased Jewish child. Müller is clear in indicating its discovery inside of the catacomb, and it seems unlikely that the piece could have been and Müller and Bees that these inscriptions are evidence of certain Jews who saw no problem with the use of traditionally pagan formulae in their epitaphs. See Rutgers 1998, 86-7.

55 Goodenough 1953b, 11.
casually introduced to the site. As Goodenough put it simply "[p]eople do not just wander about with such a stone in their hands."

As to the notion that the piece was introduced as spolia for reuse, aside from the fact that the head had been dislodged (it was still discovered in the vicinity), there are no indications that the piece has been retrofitted for any purpose other than its original use. Indeed, its odd and elliptical proportions would make reuse difficult. The fact that no sarcophagus base was found presents no particular problem other than to our interpretative ability, as sarcophagi bases were a favorite quarry of tomb raiders and can be found reused as planters and fountains throughout Rome. In fact, the body of a child's sarcophagus may have been a particularly attractive target: its small size would have made it more manageable to remove, and playful images that commonly occupied the main frieze of children's sarcophagi may have made an attractive visual program for later collectors. Indeed, the fact that the broken head of this example was found nearby all but confirms that our sarcophagus fell victim to the incursions of tomb raiders at some time prior to the modern discovery of the catacomb.

Without any concrete evidence to cast suspicion on the origins of this artifact, it seems that previous scholars have been influenced by biases about Jewish visual culture

56 As to the notion that the piece was introduced as spolia for reuse, aside from the fact that the head had been dislodged (it was still discovered in the vicinity), there are no indications that the piece has been retrofitted for any purpose other than its original use. Indeed, its odd and elliptical proportions would make reuse difficult.
57 Goodenough 1953b, 11.
and that we should rather assume that our *kline* monument bears the portrait sculpture of a young Jewish boy. Though particularly well preserved, this example is certainly not the only portrait sculpture of Jewish patrons from Rome (see below), a fact of which many earlier scholars may not have been aware. In either case, we should consider what such an artifact reveals about portrait sculpture and Jewish patrons in Rome.

The positioning and rendering of the youth, the style of his dress, the grapes in his hand and the accompanying animals (especially the inclusion of a dog at play) all suggest an artisan and patron closely following Roman sculptural conventions—not only for the *kline* sarcophagus style, but for a children's one at that. A review of Roman children's sarcophagi indicates that their sculptural programs were generally governed by the same conventions that determined the visual programs of adult sarcophagi, with children often portrayed as miniature adults, and accompanying motifs that were miniaturized versions of adult counterparts. As Birk points out, children are never

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58 A common secondary motif on Roman children's sarcophagi. A close parallel is illustrated by Birk (2013, 129, Fig. 69). There, the child is shown holding a scroll, with a cupid at his feet. The rest of the composition, from the loose, pooling folds of the garment to the cavorting dog and alert pose, are close to our example here.

59 Birk 2013, 157. For instance, the most popular secondary motifs on adult and children's sarcophagi alike were cupids and personifications of the seasons, and, according to Birk (2013, 161-4), no variation of these themes was reserved exclusively for use on children's sarcophagi. Yet the cupids on children's sarcophagi, and even the season's, often seem particularly playful and childlike, and often it seems that cupids were used precisely so that "adult motifs could be made childish." Certain scenes, among them mythic scenes, hunt scenes that conveyed male *virtus* as well as pastoral scenes, and, for obvious reasons marriage motifs, do however seem to have been considered inappropriate for children's sarcophagi. See further Birk 2013, 166. On children's sarcophagi and funerary monuments more generally, see Huskinson 1996; 2007.
shown at play themselves on sarcophagi, rather childhood games and play are conveyed by putti.\(^6\)

The age of a child on Roman sarcophagi typically cannot be ascertained from the features carved on the portrait, which are idealized in order to convey a general sense of youth. The chubby cheeks, the smooth skin and taciturn expression, and short, ephemeral hair distinguish our example as a young child’s sarcophagus, but do not serve to further distinguish the identity (or age) of the deceased. Aside from the use of youthful physical features, children’s portraits on Roman sarcophagi are typically accompanied by the same motifs and activities as adults, such as the holding of a scroll.\(^6\)

In our example, the young boy holds no scroll (perhaps an important omission, see below), but his posture and gaze otherwise parallel adult examples.

One of the best parallels for our *kline* monument from Monteverde is the *kline* lid of a young woman, now at the Getty Museum (Fig. 7.3).\(^6\) On this lid, the youth is depicted in a manner remarkably consistent with our Jewish example. The reclined but alert pose of the young woman is identical to that of our example, and a small dog plays similarly underhand. At the foot of the portrait are two dolls, elements that further signify the youth of the decease, complementing the same soft, full features on the portrait face seen in the Monteverde example, as well as a hairstyle appropriate to youth.\(^6\) A sleeping

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\(^{6}\) Birk 2013, 164-5.
\(^{6}\) Birk 2013, 164.
\(^{6}\) Wrede 1990.
\(^{6}\) Wrede 1990, 23.
cupid is carved as a secondary motif on the top of the couch. While this example lacks the birds and grapes of our example from Monteverde, the pose, the use of hairstyles to establish age, and the presence of a dog are striking parallels and suggest that the *kline* monument of our Jewish patron adhered closely to the conventions of Roman children’s sarcophagi and the *kline* style.

Certain motifs seem to have been reserved for adult portraiture as opposed to that of children, and these are absent on both the monument from Monteverde and the *kline* monument from the Getty. The absence of a wine cup—a common element in *kline* monuments of adults—in the hand of either youth is one such example of motifs reserved for adult *kline* portraits; on the Monteverde monument, the child holds a bunch of grapes instead, perhaps an allusion to the same underlying theme. On another biographical frieze from a child’s sarcophagus the wine cup is similarly swapped for a garland in hand.64 Such substitutions may indicate that it was not considered appropriate to show children banqueting as (miniature) adults. Other objects though are common to portraits of adults and children alike on *kline* monuments and more broadly in Roman funerary portraiture, such scrolls and musical instruments.65

64 Huskinson 1996, 12-3.
65 As on one example in the Capitoline Museum (Inv. 917). Items for adults may also have had a gendered aspect. We will explore objects like scrolls in particular, further below when we discuss the ‘learned figure’ motif and its appearance on the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons.
But it is the inclusion of animals as pets, whether birds or dogs, that most clearly served to distinguish the youths of these portraits from similar kline portraits of adults.\textsuperscript{66} Such inclusions are exclusive to children’s portraiture. Though birds (especially peacocks) were a common motif in Roman funerary art, and were found frequently among the epitaphs and frescoes of the Jewish catacombs in Rome also,\textsuperscript{67} it is only in children’s portraiture that birds and dogs are shown being held or fed as pets. Such themes have forerunners in Greek sculpture as well, as in the 5\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.E. marble funerary stele of a young girl from Paros at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 7.4). On this monument, a full body portrait of the young girl, the youth is depicted holding two doves, clutching them to her chest and gazing intently down at them. One of the doves returns her gaze and seems almost to kiss her; the other is partly destroyed but must have looked out at the viewer. Similarly, in both our Roman examples, small animals play and feed beside children as pets. Common to both is the pet dog playing underhand, while in our example from Monteverde birds are shown feeding on grapes, another motif seen elsewhere on children’s sarcophagi.\textsuperscript{68}

Images of animals happily inhabiting the same visual field as children can be viewed as indices of the normative cultural values of Roman childhood, and while their

\textsuperscript{66} Birk 2013, 164; Huskinson 1996, 88.
\textsuperscript{67} See, for instance, Goodenough’s (1953b, 17-8, 24) description of birds in the Vigna Randanini catacomb. Goodenough refers to the bird as a ‘Bacchic motif’ but the reference need not be so specific. In fact, the popularity of the symbol argues for a much more neutral and general meaning. See Goodenough 1953b, 11.
\textsuperscript{68} Huskinson 1996, 88.
meaning can be variously parsed, their most important function was to connect the deceased with an appropriate(ly) Roman identity. It is important to remember that the motifs that accompany children’s portraiture were undoubtedly chosen by the adult family members of the child, and as such, they are filtered through an adult perspective on childhood.\textsuperscript{69} Children’s portraiture may have been viewed as a way for the grieving family to “show the world the potential virtues which had been lost when death took a child.”\textsuperscript{70} As such, the motifs sometimes embodied virtues and associations more germane to the world of Roman adults then of children.\textsuperscript{71}

In our example, on the other hand, the deceased child is not shown with the trappings of Roman adulthood. Lacking are evidence of the public life (oratorical poses), learning (scrolls) or banqueting and drinking of adults (wine and goblets). At the most basic level, motifs such as those included on the Monteverde lid probably introduced a playful element appropriate for the remembrance of a child. Huskinson has suggested that birds like those found on our example convey general feelings of “innocence, tenderness, naturalness and elusiveness.” Perhaps her suggestion that they conjure up the "mutual affection that often exists between small children and animals" is a better explanation for their appearance on children’s sarcophagi.\textsuperscript{72} Tropes such as the idealized

\textsuperscript{69} This may in fact be one explanation for the difference in age of representation and reality seen on children’s sarcophagi, and pointed to Goodenough as evidence that our Jewish example could not have been intended as a portrait. On this point, see Birk 2013, 157.
\textsuperscript{70} Birk 2013, 180.
\textsuperscript{71} Huskinson 1996, 93-4.
\textsuperscript{72} Huskinson 1996, 88.
and round facial features, the wispy hair or the inclusion of toys or playful cupids could all operate in a similar fashion, making reference to (or ‘opening up’) common Roman conceptions of childhood.

Whatever their precise valence, in privileging signs and signifiers of a Roman childhood on the sculptural program of their funerary monument, the ancient Jewish patron of the Monteverde kline portrait was deploying visual resources drawn from the Roman cultural world in order to represent an identity for their deceased child. Through the use of these tropes, the Jewish patron of the Monteverde monument orchestrated collectively established meanings and discourses in order to “organize and narrate themselves in practice in the name of an identity.”73 It is true that the circumstances surrounding the (unexpected) death of a child all but guarantee that children’s sarcophagi were selected from pre-fabricated options (and not commissioned during life), meaning that the agency of the family and expressions of the identity of the deceased was constrained to choosing an appropriate sarcophagus from among the options available at one of a number of workshops in Rome.74 Yet, at any given time there must have still been a number of choices available to patrons, even among children’s sarcophagi, and selectivity is a key function of agency in the orchestration of identities, not to mention that there may have been some details that could be

73 Holland and Lachicotte 2007, 134.
74 Birk 2013, 161.
customized by the patron (including the epitaph and facial features). Even a largely or completely pre-fabricated sarcophagus can therefore reveal something of the cultural leanings of the family, as we have discussed above (Chapter 1).

The motifs and conventions found on our Jewish example from Monteverde—the grapes, the leisurely pose, the birds and cavorting dogs—would have offered a familiar and conventional expression of Roman childhood to any family, Jewish or not. In its straightforward adoption of the conventional models of Roman children’s portraiture, the sculptural program of the kline monument from Monteverde makes a potent statement that belies its miniature size. No markers of Jewish difference are offered on this funerary portrait. Instead, any indication of a Jewish identity, practice or belief of the deceased at odds with the dominant cultural values and customs of Rome (and Roman childhood) is eclipsed in favor of presenting a familiar narrative of Roman childhood. The implication, if portrait sculpture on sarcophagi can indeed be read as narratives of self, is that the deceased—or in this case more likely the patrons—held the same ideas about childhood and the appropriate representation thereof that characterize other Roman funerary portraits of children. At least in this single example of Jewish portraiture, there is certainly no evidence that of different conceptions of appropriate modes of representation held by Jewish citizens of Rome and their non-Jewish neighbors.

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75 Birk 2013, 161.
7.3 Jewish patrons and portrait sculpture in Rome: further evidence

Based on the limited evidence we have, it appears that the decision to include funerary portraiture by Jewish patrons often went hand in hand with the decision to adopt familiar styles and motifs that were characteristic, even conventional, of sarcophagus sculpture in the city of Rome. In other words, Jewish patrons who chose to have the sculptural programs of their sarcophagi bear representations of themselves (or their loved ones) also seem to have been the readiest to make use of Roman visual resources to orchestrate a self-narrative on their sarcophagi. This conclusion is suggested by our child’s *kline* sarcophagus and confirmed in the few and fragmentary sarcophagus remains from the Jewish catacombs that include portrait sculpture. Four other fragments from the catacombs at Torlonia and Vigna Randanini bear funerary portraiture, three of which make use of the ‘Learned Figure’ trope.76 These examples are all highly fragmentary, but taken as a group they suggest that some Jewish patrons would not have objected to portrait sculpture and furthermore, made decisions about their visual programs that mirrored those displayed on the *kline* sarcophagus.

From Torlonia comes a fragment depicting the toga-clad torso of a male holding a scroll (Fig. 7.5).77 Behind the partial figure is the nude body of a winged putti. Like the posture, animals, grapes and clothing of the *kline* sarcophagus, the toga-clad, scroll-

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76 Most were described by Fasola (1976) in his brief report on excavations, generally in passing in a short list in the notes. Fasola followed the somewhat unusual practice of affixing the sarcophagi fragments he discovered to the walls of the catacomb where they were found.
77 Beyer and Lietzmann 1930, Pl. 23b; Goodenough 1953b, 41.
bearing figure of this fragment is a well-known trope in Roman sarcophagus sculpture associated with the ‘Learned Figure’ motifs, as we have seen. Furthermore, the putti’s familiar positioning and pose behind the figure ties this example conclusively to central portrait busts on Metropolitan sarcophagi.78

From Vigna Randanini comes a sarcophagus surviving only in descriptions by Herzog79 and Garrucci,80 but which reportedly included figures at either end. On the left, a man in Greek garb played a harp before a muse.81 On the right two men in similar Greek robes held scrolls, one seated, the other standing. The remainder of the sarcophagus was strigilated, with a vase in the center.82 The visual program described by Garrucci is a familiar one. Surviving examples of the type include a sarcophagus with almost identical end scenes (Fig. 7.6). In this case, the portrait is of a woman.83 These exact scenes are two of the more common among the so-called ‘Learned Figure’ portrait sculptures,84 and are typically understood to have demonstrated the culture and learning of the deceased (see above).

In 1951 Goodenough visited Vigna Randanini and during his explorations discovered several unpublished fragments,85 among which was a fragment of a

78 See Goodenough 1953b, 41.
79 Herzog 1861, 98.
80 Garrucci 1862, 19-22.
81 Possibly Urania. See Garrucci 1862, 20.
82 Garrucci 1862, 20-1.
83 Located in the Museo Castello Sforzesco, Milan. See Birk 2013, 78, Fig. 36.
84 Birk 2013, Graphs 3 and 5.
85 Goodenough 1953b, 15, 28-30.
strigilated sarcophagus with a clipeus ringed by a wreath and bearing a portrait (Fig. 7.7). Beneath are cornucopias with fruit, common imagery for a funerary setting. The portrait itself is poorly preserved, and even the gender of the patron cannot be made out, though the left hand is prominent and seems to be holding something, likely also a scroll. A further unpublished piece from the Vigna Randanini catacomb was discovered in 2001 by Jessica Dello Russo during a site visit (Fig. 7.8). Like the fragment discovered and published by Goodenough, this fragment is sculpted with a clipeus containing a toga-clad bust. Only a small portion of this fragment survives. Here also the right hand rests outside the toga but does not seem to have held a scroll.

These fragments have received little attention in scholarship, individually or as a group, but viewed together with the kline sarcophagus they suggest that some Jewish patrons in Rome were not only comfortable with sarcophagus portraiture, but were also eager to emphasize their social status and identity in ways modeled on Roman conventions and modes of representation. They did this not only by choosing or commissioning sarcophagi with portraiture, but by making use of (or at least buying into) the conventional Roman portrait sculpture and its tropes, from modes of dress to accoutrements like cavorting dogs and scrolls. Moreover, nothing in the sarcophagus

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86 A close parallel is found in a sarcophagus at the Villa Doria Pamphilj. In this example, two putti with the trappings of the seasons are positioned at either end, while a clipeus containing a female bust, holding a scroll, is set above two cornucopias with fruit. See Birk 2013, 80, Fig. 38.
87 Personal communication. See also Dello Russo 2010.
fragments surveyed here suggests an effort to alter the visual programs to fit cultural sensitivities different from Roman ones or to mark Jewish difference.

Quite the opposite in fact: the sarcophagi with portraiture that belonged to Jewish patrons draw deeply from the most popular styles in the Metropolitan sarcophagus repertoire. They take full part in the "portrait boom" of the third century⁸⁸ and the visual resources of Roman sarcophagus sculpture. With the exception of the child’s kline sarcophagus, the Jewish examples typically employ the trope of the "learned figure,” by far the most popular portrait type on Roman sarcophagi.⁸⁹ In making use of this extremely popular type, Jewish patrons passed over a number of other common types, including depictions of patrons as mythological figures or hunters, or engaged in ritual.⁹⁰ Instead, the portrait sculpture on sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons employed motifs like the cavorting dogs or scrolls. Like the ‘neutral’ figural imagery of putti and personified Seasons encountered in the previous chapters, these were also tropes without immediate or obvious cult meanings.

Would an ancient Jewish viewer have seen a coded reference to the Torah scroll in these scroll-wielding portraits, and interpret them as a reflection of the deceased’s wisdom in Jewish law and culture? The ambiguity of the scroll, as well as the generic nature of the ‘Learned Figure’ and the idealized virtues it suggests, may have offered

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⁸⁸ Birk 2013, 14.
⁸⁹ See the chart in Birk 2013, 122, Graph 7.
⁹⁰ Birk 2013, 122, Graph 7.
Jewish patrons a way of simultaneously engaging Roman and Jewish conceptions of learning and cultural literacy. Rolled scrolls appear in depictions of Torah Shrines common elsewhere in the Jewish catacombs of Rome. They appear on gold glasses (Fig. 7.9), loculus seals and on wall paintings (Fig. 7.10). In all these cases, the doors of the Torah Shrine are thrown open to the viewer, and a variable number of rolled scrolls are visible to the viewer. In one case, a single scroll even appears as the primary motif in one frame of a wall painting on the ceiling of a hypogeum at Villa Torlonia. In all these cases from Rome, the scrolls, rolled into a single cylinder, appear identical to the scrolls that often accompany representations of the ‘Learned Figure’ trope. They are, moreover, the same as the scrolls that are held in the hands of many of the deceased depicted through portrait sculpture on sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons we encountered above.

At the same time, it is this very ‘imaginative space’ created by the lack of specificity in the motif of the ‘Learned Figure’ that makes it impossible to determine the precise understanding of an ancient viewer, Jewish or not. We can identify the space only as open for multiple and possibly contested meanings, and raise the possibility that Jewish patrons and the Jewish community of Rome may have taken advantage of this space to create meaning specific to their beliefs and values. If they were indeed doing so they

\[^{91}\text{See further Fine 2016b; Meyers and Burrus 2017.}\]
\[^{92}\text{See Fine 2016b, 131, Fig. 6.13.}\]
were in fact still following closely in the footsteps of Roman patrons, who, as we have seen, adopted and adapted the ‘Learned Figure’ trope from Greek culture.

What’s more, there is evidence to suggest that the growing Christian community of Rome similarly adopted and adapted the ‘Learned Figure’ motif in the same period. In Christian visual culture from the same period, the ‘Learned Figure’ motif was applied to figures from Christian biblical narratives. Zanker points out that “Christ himself, the apostles, prophets and saints are all depicted like pagan intellectuals.” The visual trope carried over even into the literature of the early Church Fathers as well. It appears in the writings of Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Augustine, as Zanker has shown. In funerary art, including on sarcophagi, representations of Jesus typically depict him wearing a Greek pallium in a frontal ‘pose of authority’ and instruction. These are familiar “pictorial formulas” that “had long enjoyed such high status in the self-image of the ordinary Roman: learning and a philosophical orientation in life.” Zanker emphasizes that such depictions would have been familiar to non-Christians as well, and positioned Christian literature as a “continuation of a long tradition…”. The long tradition implicitly invoked here is that of the ‘Learned Figure’ trope.

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94 Zanker 1995, 290.
95 Zanker 1995, 290.
97 Zanker 1995, 292.
Among sarcophagi with portraiture belonging to Jewish patrons, the child’s *kline* sarcophagus, our best-preserved example, is somewhat unique in this respect. Its references are to playful pets and Roman childhood, and not to the learned sphere. However, children’s sarcophagi formed a unique subgroup in Roman sarcophagi sculpture, and as we have just seen, our Jewish example wholly subscribed to the conventions of that group. It is curious and possibly meaningful though, that the Jewish patrons did not choose to represent the youth in the trope of the ‘learned figure,’ indicating the education of the deceased. Such motifs were the most popular primary motif even on children’s sarcophagi.98

A child’s *kline* sarcophagus in the Vatican Museum illustrates this well. On the lid young boy reclines on the couch with a rolled scroll in his right hand, and a folded sheaf under his left (Fig. 7.11). A codex lays open in front of the boy, while a dog scratches its ear and paws at the fold of the child’s tunic. On the body of the sarcophagus, the child is shown half-robed and seated in the same ‘pose of authority’ and instruction that would later be associated with Jesus on Metropolitan sarcophagi of Christian patrons. An open scroll is held in his left hand as he declaims to a group of youthful muses.99 According to Birk, the popularity of the ‘Learned Figure’ motif on children’s sarcophagi can be explained by shifting models of status and social position in the 3rd century C.E. that

98 Birk 2013, 162, 8.
99 For discussion of this example, see: Huskinson 1996, 38-9, Cat. no. 5.5, Pl. 10.2; Zanker 1995, 276.
were founded on the acquisition of learning and knowledge rather than on military
prowess.\textsuperscript{100}

For children of this period, an ideal childhood included preparation for a Roman
adulthood, and therefore learning—very much a case of childhood filtered through an
adult perspective. Perhaps the selection of a portrait without a scroll by our Jewish
patron, reveals, by its absence, something of the real practice of education and learning
among Jewish children and the gravity indicated by the inclusion of scrolls on other
sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons. If the scroll was commonly understood by
contemporary Jewish viewers to be a Torah scroll when included on the sarcophagus of
an adult Jew, it may have been a motif (and association) reserved for representations of
Jewish adulthood. In other words, it may have been seen as inaccurate, or even
inappropriate to suggest that a child had attained Torah learning. On the other hand, as
we have suggested before with regards to the inclusion of Jewish ritual symbols on
sarcophagi, it is tricky at best to read the sculptural programs and motifs on sarcophagi
as indications of the real practices of patrons.

\section*{7.5 A portrait sarcophagus without a portrait: reticence towards
portrait sculpture among Jewish patrons?}

The picture emerging from these examples of Jewish patrons who acquired
sarcophagi with portrait sculpture is one of broad acceptance of the conventions and

\textsuperscript{100} As opposed to military roles. Birk 2013, 179.
visual language of Roman portrait sculpture. It may seem strange therefore to conclude with the following example, which has no portrait at all. But the insights gleaned above need to be tempered with an understanding that the question of how to engage with (or even whether to engage) the conventions of Roman portrait sculpture may have been an active issue, one that confronted Jewish sarcophagus patrons in Rome, and one that could elicit different responses. Thus, we conclude by returning again to the most well-known sarcophagus from the Jewish community of Rome, the Seasons sarcophagus with a menorah in the clipeus which we have encountered already several times (Fig. 7.12).

Indeed, this remarkable sarcophagus fragment has followed us through the thread of our discussion of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons in Rome. The prominent menorah in the clipeus drew on Jewish ritual symbols and indices developed in Late Antiquity (Chapter 4), while its seasonal theme and putti were drawn from figural tropes popular on Metropolitan sarcophagi (Chapter 6). We noted already that this example corresponds to a Metropolitan sarcophagus type extremely popular in the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E., and further that, with the exception of one departure, the sculptural program is unremarkable and entirely normative. Yet that single departure is immediately evident to the viewer—the clipeus, the space almost exclusively reserved

301 Most known examples of this style, including the Jewish example discussed here, were collected in two volumes by George Hanfmann (1951).
for portraiture in Roman examples,\textsuperscript{102} is given over in its entirety to a large and skillfully rendered menorah.

In the context of our discussion of the use of portrait sculpture by Jewish patrons, the most prominent feature of this sarcophagus, the large menorah in the central clipeus, illustrates that the comfort with portraiture exhibited in the examples we have examined so far was not shared by all Jews. Indeed, while the patrons of this sarcophagus liberally appropriated Roman figural motifs, and ones with at least vaguely Dionysiac associations (see above, Chapter 6) they seem to have drawn a clear line when it came to portraiture. Perhaps the unique commission makes a statement even more powerful than that of the \textit{kline} sarcophagus: “portraiture is not for me.”

Any attempt to explain \textit{why} a menorah was substituted here for portrait sculpture must account for the uniqueness of this artifact. This was no effort at cost saving or efficiency. It makes little difference whether the sarcophagus was acquired secondhand and recarved with a menorah (erasing a preexisting portrait) as some have speculated.\textsuperscript{103} The working (or reworking) of the clipeus into a menorah must have been at least as costly as carving a portrait blank with features to symbolize the deceased. Furthermore, many examples exist of reworked portraits,\textsuperscript{104} belying any notion that an original portrait could not be changed to suit a second user. Moreover, the menorah motif must

\textsuperscript{102} Even the briefest survey through Hanfmann’s catalog (1951) will confirm the accuracy of this.
\textsuperscript{103} There is no evidence for this in the stone, and it seems an unlikely suggestion.
\textsuperscript{104} For several such examples, including extensive alterations, see Carroll 2006, 113-25.
have been a relatively unfamiliar one to the workshop; it appears rarely in stone
sculpture in Rome, and in any case could not have been as familiar as the highly
idealized facial features of portraits carved with frequency. For these reasons, it may
have been even more time consuming and costly to have the clipeus (re)carved with the
image of a menorah than to have a portrait sculpted.

Neither can this substitution be explained by a simple preference for the image of a
menorah over a portrait. This is a weak and tepid explanation for a choice in
representation that assails the viewer with its difference. Indeed, the oddity of this
choice for an immensely popular sarcophagus style that would have been otherwise
quite familiar to Roman viewers is inescapable. The choice of a Seasons sarcophagus in
the first place illustrates that the preferences of the patron ran towards popular Roman
modes of representation; they were, after all, purchasing a sarcophagus style very much
in vogue. Instead, the substitution of the menorah in place of the portrait seems to me to
be best explained by a deeply felt discomfort or avoidance of portraiture for particular
reasons.

The more we try to guess the reasons for this discomfort the further we get from
solid ground however. Was it motivated by a conservative reading of the Second
Commandment? By Jewish traditions and cultural tastes among certain segments of the
community in Rome? Or values particular to the patron’s specific synagogue
community? Or perhaps it came down simply to personal choice or religious
observance? We cannot know the answer to the question of why; we can only state with
a fair degree of confidence based on the conspicuousness of the substitution that this patron—who was otherwise happy to use Roman figural imagery—had strong views about the use of portrait sculpture.

Indeed, the choice to substitute a menorah, the most recognizable symbol of Judaism in antiquity, for a portrait seems most likely to have been highly visible statement made by this particular Jewish patron in favor of rejecting the common representational practice of portrait sculpture on Roman sarcophagi. From this we can conclude that not all Jewish patrons in Rome felt comfortable with the use of portraiture. Our Seasons sarcophagus with a menorah is the most explicit example of this discomfort, but there were many more sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons that did not use portrait sculpture than those that did. It may even be the case therefore that most Jewish patrons in Rome felt uncomfortable with the use of portrait sculpture, though, again, the limitations of the evidence and particularly the size of the corpus must be reiterated.

The evidence surveyed thus far indicates that Jewish sarcophagus patrons in Rome who opted for portrait sculpture chose sculptural programs drawn directly from the visual resources of Roman funerary culture. This being the case, an interesting question to consider is whether Jewish patrons avoided any particular visual content related to this cultural world. Because the body of Jewish portrait sarcophagi is admittedly so small, made up of only a few examples, I am reluctant to push conclusions based on omissions too far. All the same, some observations can still be made that are suggestive of certain patterns of patronage among Jewish patrons. Notably, the Seasons
sarcophagus motif, the most popular secondary motif on portrait sarcophagi, does not appear in this small group, although the several Seasons sarcophagi in the larger Jewish corpus that show that Jewish patrons did use this motif also (see above, Chapter 6).105

Also notable are the other popular motifs that are missing in the sarcophagi with portraiture: pastoral scenes, nymphaid scenes, mythic scenes and scenes of the muses. Such motifs, while less popular than the 'big three' (seasons, cupids and the 'learned sphere'),106 are still popular enough, so that their absence among the Jewish portrait sarcophagi may indicate that Jewish patrons deliberately avoided combining them with portraiture. Like the Season's motif, absent on Jewish portrait sarcophagi only but appearing elsewhere in the corpus of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons, Jewish patrons did not avoid these motifs absolutely. There are enough examples of pastoral and mythic scenes on the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons without portrait sculpture to demonstrate that many Jewish patrons preferred such sculptural programs (see Chapter 6). Yet, if we are to make anything of these omissions, we might tentatively suggest that when opting for portrait sculpture, Jewish patrons preferred to avoid motifs that overtly referenced Roman myth or non-Jewish cultic practice.

105 Even more suggestive is the fact that the patron of one Jewish season's sarcophagus seems to have made the deliberate and obvious choice to avoid portraiture. See discussion of the Jewish Season's Sarcophagus, below.

106 Comprising, together, probably 50% of the secondary motifs on Roman portrait sarcophagi. See Birk 2013.
7.6 Summary

The sarcophagi we have just examined used portrait sculpture to present ideal representations and not real likenesses. It is still remarkable though that the self-representations they contained—and the ideals that they upheld—were common and popular ones in the culture of Rome. In the Roman provinces, some local communities—for example at Pannonia—were a little more playful with conventions in portrait sculpture, opting occasionally to depict local clothing or other signs of local identities, and mixing these with Roman motifs and tropes; using, in other words, a Roman medium to convey local messages.\footnote{For examples from Pannonia, see Boatwright 2005. On the phenomenon of adaptive acculturation of portrait sculpture more generally, see especially Fine 2013; Heyn 2010; Hope 2001. See also the work of the Palmyrene Portrait Project, described in Kropp and Raja 2014.} There is no evidence for this in the Jewish portrait sarcophagi of Rome unless, of course, one considers the Jewish Seasons Sarcophagus a portrait sarcophagus. The portrait sculpture on sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons in Rome made full use not only of the Roman medium, but of conventional motifs and tropes as well. Even if we suggested that certain of these, like the ‘Learned Figure’ motif were ripe for taking on new meanings in Jewish contexts or were considered especially suitable modes of representation by the Jewish community, the picture painted by the sarcophagi just reviewed was one that prioritized the representation of self through Roman visual resources and in Roman modes.
Returning to our original proposition, we should consider what the Jewish portrait sarcophagi surveyed above reveal about the Jewish cultural experience of Rome, and about the Jewish engagement with visual culture in the Roman world. Certainly, the sculptural programs of these examples suggest the pinnacle of cultural coziness and a significant degree of mastery of Roman modes of self-representation and visual koine. In fact, one of the conclusions of this survey is that the use of Roman portrait sculpture and the attendant visual resources of Roman funerary culture was quite a bit more popular and extensive among Jewish sarcophagus patrons than hitherto acknowledged.

At the same time, it would be remiss of me not to reiterate that sarcophagi likely reflect the practices and cultural experience of a certain subset of the Jewish community of Rome, particularly its most elite members (see above, Chapter 2). As we have seen throughout, sarcophagi were expensive burial vessels that displayed wealth and status. Some have suggested that sarcophagi were used not only by elites, but also as an aspirational medium for an upwardly mobile subelite class made up of prominent merchants, artisans and traders. Even so, sarcophagi were still restricted in use to those with considerable financial means. Moreover, while sarcophagi could be purchased from stock from Metropolitan workshops, portrait sarcophagi (and the Seasons sarcophagus with a menorah) required additional customization, an expense that would have further restricted their clientele to an even smaller subset of the elite

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108 See above, Chapters 1 and 2. See also Öğüş 2014; Russell 2013; Smith 2008.
members of the Jewish community. As such, the inclusion of a portrait by a Jewish patron was probably an important marker of great wealth and social standing.

The success of this display of wealth and status evidently hinged on the adherence to Roman conventions observable in the portrait sculpture on the examples examined above. It may even have been an important motivating factor behind the conventional way these sarcophagi make use of Roman styles and tropes. At the same time, by utilizing the sarcophagus form and sculptural programs with portraiture, these patrons embraced not only conventional strategies to display their wealth and status, but Roman modes of representation as well. Their use of portraiture straightforwardly adopting tropes and formulae popular on Metropolitan portrait sarcophagi reveals the receptiveness of certain Jewish patrons to Roman cultural values pertaining to social status and self-representation. In other words, these patrons are engaged—consciously or not—not only in the display of wealth, but also in presenting self-narratives that draw on conventional Roman models.

We have also suggested that it is possible that Jewish patrons may have engaged Roman visual resources especially through motifs such as the ‘Learned Figure’ in order to reflect virtues and values relevant to their practice of Judaism and conceptions of Jewish values. Unfortunately, such ‘adaptive acculturation’ is ultimately unrecoverable based on the limited evidence we have. Yet even if motifs such as the ‘Learned Figure’ took on new meaning in the context of a Jewish patron or viewer, we should be wary of assuming that a Jewish patron was any less aware of the Roman figured worlds that lent
basic meaning to this visual language. The overwhelming evidence from the catacombs points to a community comfortable with and engaged in the culture of Rome.

We should be equally wary of reading such sarcophagi as evidence of certain Jews abandoning a Jewish identity in favor of a Roman one, or the Jewish community in favor of the Roman polis and its civic structures. The simple fact that the five (mostly fragmentary) sarcophagi discussed here were found in Jewish catacombs should be enough to indicate that the patrons still identified as Jewish, and had not adopted pagan or Christian religion. It should also be remembered that the narratives of funerary art could never capture the totality of the patron’s identity, they reflect only what was considered appropriate and important for the immediate environment of the funeral and the catacomb and make use of figured worlds specific to these social environments.

More to the point, it seems likely that the patrons of such examples felt no inherent tension between being Jewish and being Roman. In deciding on these sarcophagi, it is not necessary to imagine the patrons consciously downplaying their Jewishness in favor of 'being Roman,' we need only imagine that they enjoyed the visual programs, found them suited to the self-narrative they wished to tell, and found nothing in them (or the figured worlds they evoke) particularly objectionable, either to their sense of identity or their sense of Jewishness.

Yet it was also observed that those few Jewish patrons that did commission portrait sculpture appear to have avoided certain popular motifs. Moreover, sarcophagi with portrait sculpture remain a minority in the Jewish corpus, while the majority of Jews
seem to have opted for sarcophagi without portraiture, and some conspicuously avoided it (witness the Jewish Season’s sarcophagus). The relative scarcity of portrait sculpture is all the more suggestive when considered against broader patterns in Roman sarcophagus sculpture and may suggest that avoidance here takes on special significance in the construction of Jewish identity. From all of this, portrait sculpture seems to have been a visual category that was approached with caution by the Jewish community, a site around which Jewish identity was being actively negotiated, contested and constructed in the context of Roman visual culture.

A final caveat is in order. A notable pair of children’s sarcophagi from the Christian catacombs of Rome demonstrates the pitfalls of reading the sarcophagi and the portrait sculpture on them as evidence of religious observance one way or the other. These sarcophagi, belonging to brothers, are described by Birk.109 On one sarcophagus, the brother was shown in the guise of a Roman knight (equites) with the accompanying motifs of cuirass and boots, while on the second sarcophagus, the other brother was shown accompanied by Christian motifs instead. The same family chose these sarcophagi, deeming them appropriate commemorations for their deceased children in doing so. They thus provide an opportunity for to observe that in the ancient world, identities were no less complex than modern ones. In this regard, Stern has observed:

“... on the same day in the fourth century C.E., the same woman might identify herself as a ‘Jew’ while entering a synagogue, as a ‘Roman’ of the provinces when participating in Roman legal litigation, and as a ‘Punic-speaker,’ [sic] in the marketplace.”110 

Stern highlights the contextually dependent nature of identity,111 while the sarcophagi of the brothers adds further evidence that even in the same context (the funerary sphere), different identities might be marked and narrated.

110 Stern 2008, 33.
111 Lapin (1999, 239) makes a similar point when we argues that “the expression of [Jewish] ethnicity is complementary to the development of Palestinian synagogues and communal ideals.”
Chapter 8. Summary and Conclusions

Sarcophagus burial was a popular funerary mode widely practiced by elite members of the Roman world for over three hundred years, from the 2nd to 5th centuries C.E. Over this period, tens if not hundreds of thousands of sarcophagi were produced in workshops across the Roman world for export and for local consumption. The spread of the sarcophagus across the Roman Empire in this time was associated with increasing connectivity in the Mediterranean and with significant changes to the Roman stone industry and trade.¹ Major sarcophagus producers whose styles appealed to patrons across the Mediterranean existed in Rome, Greece and Asia Minor.² Local workshops in other regions also proliferated and produced sarcophagi in local materials that emulated the styles exported by the major producers, and often creatively combined them with local visual resources and sculptural traditions.

One explanation for the broad appeal of the sarcophagus form among elite patrons across the Roman Empire is that sarcophagi functioned not only as burial vessels used to protect bodily remains, but also as funerary monuments which efficiently and effectively fulfilled important social functions. They were one tangible product of an empire-wide ‘ideology of stone’ founded in Rome and associated in the provinces with processes of urbanization from the Severan period on.³ As such, sarcophagi were used by wealthy

³ Russell 2013.
patrons across the Roman Empire as an effective medium for communicating their social standing as well as an important vehicle for self-representation to protect their memory against the passage of time.

Beyond the conspicuous display entailed in acquiring and setting up such a monumental burial vessel, the sculptural programs that many sarcophagi bore were widely understood as orchestrations of ‘self-narratives’ that represented the values and virtues of the deceased.\(^4\) The content and form of these self-narratives varied widely, as we have seen; the conventions of sarcophagus sculpture were flexible enough to communicate different meanings for different patrons and for different viewers. At the same time, there is little evidence to suggest sarcophagi and their sculptural programs were ever considered as ‘mere decoration’ for the enjoyment of the deceased in the afterlife. Rather, across the Roman world of Late Antiquity the use of sarcophagi and other funerary monuments was regarded as an important mode of representation and social competition, and their sculptural programs were viewed as visual mediums for communicating messages about self and status to family, friends and passersby. As we have seen, these functions were confirmed in inscriptions, by ancient authors, and even enshrined in Roman law (Chapter 1).

In this study, I have considered the variety of ways in which Jewish patrons participated in the practice of sarcophagus burial. The important role that sarcophagi—

as funerary monuments—played in the processes of mourning and memorialization renders the sarcophagus and its sculptural programs a valuable source of evidence for reconstructing the cultural interaction of Jewish individuals and communities with the dominant culture and visual resources of the Roman world. This examination is a necessary part of the puzzle for any holistic understanding of the cultural history of Jewish communities in the Roman world. While the use of sarcophagi was a practice restricted to the most elite members of these communities, we have also seen that these same individuals were often esteemed members and leaders of their respective communities. Across the Roman world, the choices and tastes of local elites have long been granted a driving force role behind cultural interaction and processes of cultural change.

8.1 Review of the findings

Indeed, it is clear that Jewish sarcophagus patrons were, in every sense, local elites. As we saw in Chapter 2, all signs indicate that the patrons of sarcophagi at Beth She’arim and Rome were among the wealthiest members of their communities. In this context, it is important to reiterate that the acquisition of a sarcophagus was regarded as a visible display of wealth and social status across the Roman world. While more recent scholarship has revealed that in Late Antiquity, sarcophagi and similar funerary monuments appealed to increasingly mobile social classes as a strategy for social advancement and competition, sarcophagus burial was never within the means of more
than a small segment of any community; the use of sarcophagi was restricted to members of the elite and sub-elite. The inscriptive evidence that accompanied the sarcophagi of both Jewish communities amply demonstrated that, in addition to being wealthy, Jewish sarcophagus patrons were often prominent members of their local Jewish communities who held positions of honor and leadership therein.

While Beth She’arim served a diverse group of both local and diaspora Jews, the inscriptions—especially from Catacomb 20 where the vast majority of sarcophagi were uncovered—indicated that sarcophagus patronage was associated with Jewish patrons local to the village, or possibly the Galilee region. While certain aspects of Catacomb 20 differed from other catacombs at the site, commonalities in the burial types and the funerary practices observed within confirmed that sarcophagus burial was practiced as part of—and not apart from—local funerary customs. At the same time, I suggested that the complications and costs of overland transport to a remote inland site such as Beth She’arim must have made the purchase of imported marble sarcophagi an especially expensive proposition. Though some patrons clearly had the wealth and means to import marble sarcophagi to Beth She’arim (Chapters 5 and 6), the majority favored locally produced sarcophagi of limestone quarried nearby: patronage patterns which mirrored those of many other local communities in the Roman world.

Most of the sarcophagi from Beth She’arim did not bear inscriptions, but those that did further indicate that the sarcophagus patrons were prominent members of the local community. While all the inscriptions of Catacomb 20 were in Hebrew, the names of the
deceased and their families were a mixture of traditional Hebrew names and Greek and Roman ones. The title ‘rabbi’ appeared on three decorated sarcophagi, as well as on several undecorated examples, together with other honorifics derived from both Greek and Jewish custom.

A similar picture obtained from the sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons in Rome. These patrons too were among the leading segment of the local Jewish community, a fact amply demonstrated by the inscriptions as well as by the find-spots of the few sarcophagi (mostly in cubiculae) discovered in controlled excavations. Roughly half of the sarcophagi belonging to members of this community bore inscriptions. Almost all of these were composed in Greek, a somewhat unique feature we dealt with in Chapter 2. The sarcophagus patrons and their families in Rome made use of common Latin names more often than Hebrew ones. Many inscriptions on sarcophagi from Rome mention a specific synagogue with which the deceased was associated. Most importantly, nine inscriptions on sarcophagi from the Jewish community of Rome mention one or more communal leadership positions or honorifics such as archon, archisynagogos, gerusiarch, phrontistes, priest, or ‘father’ or ‘mother’ of a synagogue.

Since the practice of sarcophagus burial at Beth She’arim was first and foremost a local phenomenon restricted to members of the Jewish community residing at Beth She’arim and in the Galilee, our examination began by considering the ways in which local traditions influenced the local production of sarcophagi at the site. Three major traditions of stone sculpture existed in ancient Palestine (Chapter 3). Two of these, the
decoration of stone ossuaries and of monumental tomb facades, both emerged in Jerusalem in the late Second Temple period (ca. 1st century B.C.E. – 1st century C.E.). The third tradition, the monumental buildings of the Galilee and their relief sculpture, emerged in the region well after the turmoil of the 1st centuries C.E. and was roughly contemporaneous with the use of the catacombs at Beth She'arim. As we saw, each of these traditions creatively adopted and adapted the visual resources of the Greek and Roman Mediterranean and combined them with motifs with long histories of local use.

I argued that it was through these traditions—and not via the influence of imported marble sarcophagi—that many of the individual tropes and motifs traditionally associated with ‘Roman’ visual culture entered the sculptural programs of sarcophagi at Beth She'arim (Chapter 4). As such, I questioned the extent to which motifs such as winged victories, garlands, eagles and other popular figural imagery can be associated with the influence of Roman culture or interpreted as signs of acculturation. Each was a familiar part of the visual koine of the Galilee, often with a long history of use in Jewish contexts. I also examined additional ways in which the sculptural programs of sarcophagi at Beth She’arim draw on local traditions in stone sculpture, for example in the use of rosettes and wreaths as well as of representations of familiar architectural forms of the Galilee. I concluded that the choices of the patrons and sculptors responsible for the composition of sculptural programs on these sarcophagi demonstrated not only a cultural memory of earlier, Second Temple period sculptural
traditions but a deep stylistic and technical engagement with local visual resources, an indebtedness that is rarely acknowledged.

I also contextualized the sarcophagi of Beth She‘arim and their visual programs within the funerary landscape of Roman Syria and the practices and preferences characteristic of sarcophagus patronage therein (Chapter 5). We saw that across Roman Syria, sarcophagus burial was closely associated with areas of Roman rule. In these places, the use of sarcophagi was associated with certain patterns of cultural and material changes visible in the archaeological record of the region, particularly the ongoing urbanization of the province. Much like monumental civic building projects, the adoption of the sarcophagus form was one aspect of broader process of cultural change, and particularly of the provincial adoption of the ‘ideology of stone’ promoted by the Roman stone trade. Based especially on the research of Ward-Perkins and Russell, I suggested that in Roman Syria the acquisition of a sarcophagus was a form of conspicuous consumption and a particularly effective scaling down of the same cultural dynamics (and pressures) that also promoted elite display in the form of monumental buildings and civic statues.

The sarcophagi excavated at the necropolis of Tyre served as a case study against which to compare the sarcophagi from Beth She‘arim. We saw that, aside from some local particularities, both communities shared many of the same patronage and viewing

5 Russell 2013.
practices that accompanied the use of sarcophagi, from the deposition of sarcophagi in large, heterogeneous groups, to the semi-private nature of their display. We also observed similar patterns of preferences in the style and sculptural programs on sarcophagi at both sites, from the gabled lid to the preference for simple designs in local stone. Above all, we argued that all three forms of imported Proconnesian sarcophagi—‘pedimental gable,’ quarry-state and ‘finished’—occupied such a prominent position in both corpuses, and exerted such an outsized influence on the locally produced sarcophagi at both Beth She'arim and Tyre, that the style should be considered characteristic of sarcophagus trade and burial in the province. This understanding was further supported by several internal dynamics of the sarcophagus production in Proconnesus.

Other sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons demonstrated a broader cultural literacy through the adoption of styles popular across the Roman Mediterranean (Chapter 6). This was particularly the case for members of the Jewish community of Rome. By virtue of their location in the heart of the Roman Empire, Jewish sarcophagus patrons in Rome had access to one of the largest sarcophagus markets in the ancient world. With it came a wide array of popular sarcophagus styles produced in Metropolitan workshops that were famous throughout the Roman Mediterranean. We saw, therefore, that the majority of Jewish patrons in Rome selected sarcophagus styles that were in fashion, with popular tropes drawn from ‘neutral’ figural imagery including representations of the seasons and putti. I hypothesized that the popularity of
such neutral imagery over narrative sarcophagi with specific mythological content may have been driven by a desire to avoid the allegorical association between the deceased and mythic characters. The leaders of the Jewish community, identified by the titles and honorifics in their inscriptions, likewise purchased fashionable Metropolitan sarcophagi, and especially favored the strigilar style. On the whole, however, they preferred more visually restrained examples, with little to no figural imagery and prominent inscriptions.

We also examined fragments of imported marble sarcophagi from Beth She'arim. These indicated that some patrons at the site had the means and ability to specially commission and import sarcophagi from Attic and Asiatic producers. We saw that, like patrons at Tyre, sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim especially imported narrative sarcophagi that included scenes of Greek myth and epic battles, including more than one Amazonomachy. Contrary to traditional interpretations of the evidence, I argued that for the Jewish patrons who acquired these sarcophagi, the sculptural programs must have been more than ‘mere decoration.’ This conclusion was based on evidence for the use of mythological narrative on sarcophagi among non-Jewish patrons. It was confirmed by the inscriptions found in the same context as the Leda and the Swan sarcophagus in the mausoleum above Catacomb 11, which provided additional evidence of high levels of Greco-Roman cultural literacy among Beth She’arim patrons.

We also examined the evidence for the use of portrait sculpture in the Jewish community of Rome, long considered in modern scholarship to be a taboo among
ancient Jews. I especially highlighted the use of the “Learned Figure” motif among Jewish patrons and raised possible creative appropriations of its meaning in Jewish contexts. I argued that among Jewish patrons, the decision to include funerary portraiture went hand in hand with the decision to adopt conventional Roman style and motifs, and to employ Roman modes of representation. As Rutgers observed already, the “most salient characteristic of imagery on sarcophagi found in the Jewish catacombs is not Jewishness, but rather preference for Greco-Roman styles and subjects.” I ended on a cautionary note that while the five examples surveyed suggested a high mastery of Roman culture and acculturation, we should be wary of reading such sarcophagi as evidence of certain Jews abandoning a Jewish identity in favor of a Roman one, or the Jewish community in favor of the Roman polis and its civic structures—narratives of funerary art never capture the totality of the patron’s identity.

8.2 Further remarks

The foregoing narrative has overwhelmingly emphasized the degree to which Jewish sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim and Rome behaved in the same ways as non-Jewish patrons in their adoption of the sarcophagus form and its visual culture. Their sarcophagi, and the sculptural programs that they chose, more often than not indicate shared conceptions about appropriate forms of memorialization and representation. Rarely do they suggest significant points of cultural difference or the representation of

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7 Rutgers 1988, 377.
different identities. Indeed, throughout the corpus we observed only a few differences between the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons in Late Antiquity and those of their non-Jewish neighbors in places like Rome and Tyre.

We observed of course that many of the locally produced sarcophagi from Beth She’arim drew on local sculptural traditions to a deep and generally underestimated degree, occasionally combining them in new and creative ways with conventional forms of sarcophagus sculpture (Chapter 4). However, this persistence of local cultural resources and the creative adoption of Roman material and visual culture was far from unique to Jewish communities in the Roman world. Indeed, the same phenomenon is observable across the Roman provinces in local communities of all stripes. Moreover, as scholars like Elsner and Hölscher have amply demonstrated, Roman culture—especially Roman visual culture—was itself a complex and heterogeneous assemblage encompassing different traditions and influences. Thus, the use of local visual resources on sarcophagi at Beth She’arim hardly marked something unusual or unique about the cultural engagement of Jewish sarcophagus patrons with the broader Roman world.

The first true difference we encountered was the relatively low level of skill and technique evident in the sculptural programs of locally produced sarcophagi at Beth She’arim (Chapter 4). Many of the sculptural programs these sarcophagi are often judged—with much justification—to be aesthetically naïve and of underwhelming

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craftsmanship. Considering this highly visible and undeniable facet of the corpus, I suggested that a close examination of contemporary stone sculpture and a nuanced understanding local workshop practices throws a more favorable light on the level of sculpture observed on locally produced sarcophagi at Beth She'arim. I argued that when viewed in this way, the low evaluations of the quality and execution are tempered somewhat. I also suggested that, whatever their aesthetic deficiencies, the sculptural programs at Beth She'arim were proudly displayed by their patrons and must have been seen as successful in conveying their intended messages.

We also observed that few Jewish sarcophagus patrons consciously incorporated common ‘Jewish’ ritual symbols—the menorah, lulav, etrog and shofar—on their sarcophagi that would have communicated a different, or unconventional identity (Chapter 4). This was exceedingly rare at Beth She'arim—a menorah was sculpted in relief on the side of a single sarcophagus—and only somewhat more common in Rome, where Jewish ritual symbols appear on four sarcophagi. The Seasons sarcophagus with a menorah in the clipeus was especially suggestive in this regard, indicating that at least one Jewish patron had starkly different conception of appropriate modes of representation. Jewish ritual symbols were incised below an inscription on the lid of the sarcophagus of Faustina. Both the Seasons sarcophagus, and that of Faustina otherwise made extensive use of tropes and styles popular among Metropolitan sarcophagi. However, the same set of symbols also predominated on two sarcophagi that were stylistically quite different than sarcophagi produced in Metropolitan workshops.
On the whole though, we observed that the use of Jewish ritual symbols by sarcophagus patrons was extremely rare. Moreover, we discerned no pattern or rule that governed their use. Rather, the use of Jewish ritual symbols seemed to be the (infrequent) decision of individual patrons and generally unconnected with collectively determined norms or communal customs for sarcophagus patronage. We suggested above several possible reasons for the highly individual and infrequent way in which Jewish ritual symbols appear on sarcophagi. These include the fact that the Jewishness of the deceased may have been presumed by their burial in catacombs used exclusively by other Jews, but also that conventions of sarcophagi as a medium of self-representation and the use of the same workshops by Jewish and non-Jewish patrons may have heavily favored the use of conventional Roman formulae and motifs. We also suggested that Jewish sarcophagus patrons, by virtue of their elite social status, may have been among the least likely to employ Jewish ritual symbols. Social achievement and elite display across the Roman world was premised on the successful deployment of Roman cultural resources, and the sarcophagus as a funerary monument was widely regarded as one strategy of social competition.

Finally, we observed certain absences in the corpus. I pointed out for example that in Rome, there is no conclusive evidence of the use of sarcophagi with scenes of Greek or Roman myth. Though there are fragments that suggest narrative scenes, on the whole I suggested that Jewish patrons preferred figured motifs—especially seasons and putti—that were ‘neutral’ and capable of sustaining multiple meanings (Chapter 6). Moreover, I
suggested that these motifs were not only those with the least explicit reference to pagan cult or myth, but also those that were incapable of sustaining an allegorical association with the deceased. The fact that sarcophagus patrons at Beth She’arim felt differently—there is ample evidence that these patrons imported Attic sarcophagi with mythic, narrative content—indicates just how locally determined the preferences and practices of sarcophagus patrons were. In a similar way, the use of portrait sculpture among Jewish patrons was restricted to the community in Rome (Chapter 7). Despite *kline* lids with full body portraits appearing often at Tyre, there is no evidence that patrons at Beth She’arim commissioned portraiture.

For the most part, though, the differences would have been unremarkable and unnoticeable to the average Roman viewer. The possible avoidance of figured reliefs by the leaders of the Jewish community in Rome, for example, is only observable by considering the corpus as a whole. On an individual basis, it must be reiterated that these sarcophagi were selected from among popular Metropolitan styles. Only in a few cases, such as the substitution of a menorah for a portrait in the clipeus of the Seasons sarcophagus, would the departure from conventional modes of representation and sarcophagus sculpture be conspicuous to the average Roman viewer. In these cases, we have suggested that the alteration and manipulation of sarcophagus conventions was intentional, and must be understood as a conscious decision on the part of the patron to signal meaningful differences of identities, ideas or values.
These kinds of differences in the appropriation and use of visual and material culture are characteristic of any number of local peoples in the Roman world. All local communities in the Roman Empire were engaged to some extent in a balancing act to preserve their distinctive culture and traditions while still participating in meaningful ways in the dominant and attractive Roman cultural world. The fact that the foregoing analysis has revealed few differences between the patronage practices of Jews and non-Jews in Late Antiquity is probably not surprising to anyone familiar with the current state of the study of the Roman provinces in the field of classical archaeology. Our findings correspond well to the emerging conceptions of local peoples and the heterogeneity characterizing the Roman provinces.9 From this perspective, the Jewish sarcophagus patrons at Beth She'arim and Rome look more or less like any other local people—especially local elites—negotiating the cultural changes brought on by Roman rule and the increasing connectivity and cultural exchange in the Roman Mediterranean in Late Antiquity. All the same, most previous analyses of the sarcophagi from Beth She'arim and Rome have tended to emphasis one side of the equation—the persistence of local traditions or the adoption of Roman culture—to the exclusion of the other, with little reflection on how the diverse cultural resources of the late ancient Mediterranean were playfully and creatively combined.

Ultimately however, it must be concluded that the differences observed were far outweighed by the similarities. The visual culture of these two communities is stylistically distinct—as Rutgers observes, “it is impossible to mistake the artistic products manufactured for the Jews of Rome with those originating in Roman Palestine”—in large part because sarcophagus patrons in both communities were mostly served by local workshops. Despite this, (or more probably because of it) the sarcophagus patrons of both communities behaved similarly in so far as their patronage practices and preferences mirrored those of their non-Jewish neighbors. In Rome, this most often meant the patronage of Metropolitan producers who created sarcophagi for Jews and non-Jews alike. Not surprisingly then, most sarcophagi of Jewish patrons in Rome evince a desire to partake in the same popular styles and forms favored by non-Jewish Romans. The provincial location of sarcophagus patrons at Beth She'arim on the other hand, meant participating in the same cultural changes as other provincial elites, and being, for the most part, like other Roman Syrians. The sarcophagi and patronage practices of Beth She'arim show significantly more parallels with corpus from Tyre than differences.

More than anything else, this analysis of the sarcophagi from the Jewish communities of Beth She'arim and Rome has demonstrated just how much Jewish sarcophagus patrons from both places participated in the common funerary and visual cultures of the late ancient Mediterranean. On the balance, we saw little evidence of expressions of difference that would indicate that Jewish sarcophagus patrons
approached interactions with the Roman world and its visual and material culture as a source of tension and conflict. Indeed, the extent of the commonalities, and the smallness of the differences that we are able to discern, are powerful reminders that Jewish sarcophagus patrons seldom if ever saw themselves in binary terms as ‘Roman’ or ‘Jewish.’ As far as their adoption of the sarcophagus form and the sculptural programs of their sarcophagi indicate, their identities were not ‘identities of difference’ born out of conflict or tension with their cultural environs. It is for these reasons that I believe that the sarcophagi and their sculptural programs that were acquired and commissioned by Jewish patrons in antiquity indicate much more than the obvious fact that Jewish patrons were familiar with Roman visual culture as it existed in their local environs and comfortable with its use as a means of self-representation. The evidence also indicates a significant degree of cultural literacy and agency concerning the adoption and appropriation of this visual culture.

A remaining task for future scholarship is to integrate these findings with other forms of visual culture and artifacts from the catacombs of Beth She’arim and Rome. Sarcophagi are only one kind of visual artifact produced in these places. Moreover, as we have repeatedly emphasized, their use was restricted to wealthy elites in both communities. Other visual artifacts from both necropoleis—including the wall paintings, gold glasses, lead sarcophagi, lamps, loculus seals and inscriptions—all deserve the same socio-cultural treatment given to the sarcophagi above. The cultural resources they engage and the patronage practices that generated them deserve clarification.
Furthermore, as these artifacts may have been used by different members of the community, including less wealthy Jews, it will be interesting to assess whether we can observe similar patterns of cultural interaction and participation in local, provincial and pan-Mediterranean Roman culture.

8.3 Jewish sarcophagus patrons and the question of ‘Jewish art’

By way of concluding, I want to return to the question I left unanswered at the outset of this inquiry, namely, ‘What is Jewish about Jewish art?’ If the sarcophagi and sculptural programs we have just examined are any indication, if we are looking to answer this question by locating something distinct and different about ‘Jewish art’ we must inevitably be disappointed. Time and time again we saw that sarcophagi of Jewish and non-Jewish patrons look more alike than not.

What’s more, throughout we have seen that the visual resources of the Roman world appear in abundance across the corpus of sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons, whether directly imported or purchased from a major production centers (Chapters 6, 7), or mediated by provincial culture (Chapter 5). Even many of the sarcophagi that drew on visual resources local to Roman Palestine and the Galilee still indicated the influence of dominant visual forms from the Roman world, only mediated through local culture and sculptural tradition (Chapter 4). Moreover, we encountered very little evidence that Jewish sarcophagus patrons wished to signify different religious ideas and practices on the sculptural programs of their sarcophagi. Indeed, we observed that the few Jewish
ritual symbols we did encounter likely operated as much as signifiers of cultural Jewishness as of Jewish religious practice and observance. This is all the more notable given that the sarcophagus, as a burial vessel, was intimately bound up in funerary practices and religious custom. On the evidence of the sarcophagi of Jewish patrons, at least, ‘Jewish art’ can scarcely be defined as a separate and distinct category of visual culture in the Roman world.

And yet, the sarcophagi we encountered above provided abundant evidence of a local peoples negotiating their place in a broader world. This kind of cultural negotiation is timeless, and moreover was simultaneously undertaken by local peoples across the Roman Mediterranean. This should not necessarily surprise us. Seen in this light, as the product of cultural negotiation by a local people, ‘Jewish art’ seems at least as defensible a category as ‘Palmyran’ or ‘Nabataean art.’ Furthermore, we have seen that Jewish sarcophagus patrons were among the most elite members of their communities. In this light, that they would use the same visual culture as their non-Jewish neighbors, and use it in much the same ways, comes as no surprise. Rather, it correlates well with what we know about elite display and consumption as means of social competition in local communities across the Roman Empire. Let us recall that Gardner has pointed out that Roman cultural resources could be used to ‘tell together’ just as much as they could be used to ‘tell apart.’

In this sense, the foregoing analysis amply has amply illustrated an observation that Baigell made concerning his primary objection to the identification and definition of ‘Jewish art.’ He argued that the use of the term ‘Jewish art’:

“… flies in the face of reason unless one sets up very narrow parameters for discussion about an essentialized past and present. It assumes that Jewish experience is static rather than evolutionary and it omits interesting and obviously contradictory possibilities derived from the experience of individual artists and the way they have self-identified as Jews in different countries over the centuries.”\(^{11}\)

It would indeed ‘fly in the face of reason’ if we were to narrowly define Jewish art in antiquity on the basis of the sarcophagi and sculptural programs we have just encountered. Even within this limited corpus, which represents only a fraction of the visual culture that ancient Jews engaged with, we have often observed ‘contradictory possibilities’ adopted by Jewish patrons in the orchestration of their sarcophagi (for example, the use or avoidance of portraiture). If our analysis has been at all successful in meeting its goals, it has steered well clear of reconstructing an ‘essentialized past’ and a ‘static’ or monolithic experience of Jewish sarcophagus patrons in Late Antiquity. Instead, we have emphasized the variety of different ways that Jewish sarcophagus patrons in different places employed the myriad visual resources of the Roman world.

It is worth pointing out that, underlying Baigell’s argument against the construct of ‘Jewish art’ as a meaningful category is a limited definition of art based on modern conceptions. In the world of Late Antiquity however, two aspects of art which matter a

\(^{11}\) Baigell 2005, 83.
great deal today mattered little or not at all: 1) the identity of the artist, and 2) the originality of the composition. Regarding the first, though there are exceptions to the rule and ancient artisans occasionally achieved great renown—for example, the Greek sculptors Phidias and Praxiteles and the painter Makron, or the Roman glassmaker Ennion—these exceptions do not substantially alter the picture. While certain Greek artisans were often celebrated by the Roman authors, we know very few names of Roman artisans. In the Roman world, the patrons and the communities who used and viewed a work seem to have been regarded as much more important than the artist who created it. In this way, Roman conceptions of art may have been a step ahead of the cultural turn in art history in their recognition that the creation of meaning lay as much or more with the patrons and viewers of art as with the producers. We saw, furthermore, that the production of a sarcophagus was more often the work of a team of sculptors with discrete talents and responsibilities than of any one artisan.

Concerning the second aspect of art, originality, we noted already the call from an eminent history of Roman art, Hölscher, to “break free of the expectation of ceaseless innovation.”¹² Similarly, Gazda has observed that “Roman notions of originality… in contrast to our own, were firmly rooted in the traditions of their past.”¹³ In other words, the creativity of Roman art and artisans was rooted in its emulation of (past) visual

traditions.\textsuperscript{14} Emulation (and appropriation) bore none of the negative connotations it bears now, and in fact, carried many positive ones that connected the ‘copy’ to a respected past. Moreover, the extensive appropriation and acculturation that emerged from our analysis of elite Jewish sarcophagus patrons was in fact encouraged by the heterogeneity and syncretism of visual resources of the Roman world.\textsuperscript{15} From this perspective, it seems likely that the best sarcophagi were regarded as those that most skillfully rendered known forms and content with the highest faithfulness and technical sophistication. Furthermore, the status and identity of patrons was probably not primarily conveyed through the originality of their sarcophagi, but by the adept adherence to precedent and the ‘mastery’ (by the artisan or patron) of familiar visual resources evident in the sculptural program.

Given these differences between ancient and modern evaluations of art, which are by no means trivial, it may be that the term ‘art’ itself is a red herring which should be avoided. Such differences create a large separation between conceptions of art ancient and modern. Perhaps it is indeed better if we use the term ‘Jewish visual culture,’ as we have throughout, to avoid confusion. Nonetheless, on the grounds of the same differences between ancient and modern notions, we should continue to include under that term not only the visual culture and artifacts that were created by ancient Jews, but all artifacts and images that were used by Jewish patrons and communities as well.

\textsuperscript{14} Gazda 2002, 14.
\textsuperscript{15} On heterogeneity and syncretism of the visual resources of the Roman world, see Elsner 2003.
In the context of such conceptions—which placed emphasis not on the creativity of artisans and visual cultural but on their faithfulness emulation of conventions, their skillful execution and effectiveness—the cultural, ethnic or religious ‘identity’ of a visual form or object might be better associated with its patron than with the artist who created it. Indeed, if we take our cues from the treatment of images in antiquity, we might find that ‘Jewish visual culture’ in fact, does exist and could be defined as visual culture belonging to and used by Jewish patrons and individuals.

The sarcophagi we have examined were not intrinsically possessed of some quality of Jewishness. Any Jewishness that can be ascribed to them derives through their use by and association with Jewish individuals. This is the case with all cultural forms, which, as we have argued above, are given meaning only in the context of their uses in human practice. If the mosaics of a synagogue floor—many of the artisans of which were almost certainly non-Jews—are properly considered a form of ‘Jewish’ visual culture in antiquity by virtue of their commission and use by Jewish communities, the sarcophagi belonging to Jewish patrons should be considered a form of Jewish visual culture as well. They too attest to the tastes, culture and ideas of the Jewish individuals who used them. In fact, they offer a lot more information about these things than they do about the artists who created them. They indicate Jewish attitudes and uses of visual culture, and are a vital part of the writing of the socio-cultural history of Jewish communities in the ancient world.
Is there such a thing as Jewish visual culture? And, if so, what is Jewish about it?

Where Baigell answers “No,” and “Nothing” (and not without some justification), my answer here is “Yes” and “Everything.” In so far as the visual culture used by Jews in antiquity reflects on their cultural experiences and their negotiation of the diverse world of Late Antiquity, these answers affirm the value of Jewish visual culture as a source of historical knowledge. They are answers that, grounded in the analysis of the artifacts themselves, celebrate the diversity of Jewish experience in the Roman world and the pluralism of the visual culture adopted by Jewish sarcophagus patrons.

Indeed, these answers need not obscure the different experiences and attitudes towards visual culture that emerge from discovering that different Jewish patrons, from different communities and different places, could have appreciated such different sculptural programs as a large and beautiful menorah carved in the clipeus of a sarcophagus, or narrative scenes from the life of Achilles and the myth of Leda and the Swan. Or that Jewish sarcophagus patrons could elect to mark their Jewishness in obvious ways or not at all. Answering these questions in the affirmative does not imply imposing a monolithic response to visual culture on the part of ancient Jewish individuals or communities: throughout we observed no evidence of overriding principles which governed the use of Roman or Jewish visual and cultural resources. Instead, we considered the different ways that varieties of local histories, the cultural

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16 Baigell 2007, xiii.
distance between home and diaspora, and differences of provincial and urban location could impact the choices made by Jewish sarcophagus patrons. Most importantly, the foregoing analysis illustrates the ways in which these choices are a valuable source of knowledge about the historical experiences of Jewish individuals.
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Biography

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