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# Roman Strigillated Sarcophagi

*Art & Social History*



Janet Huskinson

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JANET HUSKINSON

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## PREFACE

Strigillated sarcophagi, with their characteristic curving flutes, are familiar and constant companions to those of us who work on the private art of Rome in the later empire, turning up in sites and museums, and reused in many contexts around the city. Across nearly three centuries of production their low-key decoration hardly changed, with its reassuringly conventional subjects and harmonious symmetries—qualities which also made them attractive to later societies.

But such predictability has worked against them when it comes to modern scholarship. As historical source material they have as much to offer as Roman mythological sarcophagi (for instance), with their elaborate and challenging figured scenes, yet to date they have received nothing like the same attention.

So my purpose in writing this book is to celebrate their virtues and demonstrate how they can advance our understanding of many aspects of later Roman culture, material, conceptual, and influential. When I began this project someone queried (not unreasonably) whether so much could be made to hang on this one particular sarcophagus type, and now at the end, I am even more convinced that it can. Several other studies have already identified the distinctive contributions made by strigillated sarcophagi to topics as diverse as the Roman sarcophagus trade, the emergence of Christian iconographies, or the reuse of antiquities in post-classical societies; but what has been lacking is a dedicated survey which can consider them within a wider framework.

In responding to this gap, I have chosen to take social and cultural factors as a general frame. By emphasizing the contributions of makers and users, this should yield rich outcomes: the imagery used on these sarcophagi reflects the great changes that took place in Roman society over a period of critical change, while their adoption by later cultures suggests what was valued about the Roman past.

As a result, this book is perhaps more of an ‘ethnography’ than a traditional or definitive study of the particular sarcophagus type. It leaves plenty more for further studies to address, especially in the areas of critical dating or formal typology, or detailed accounts of production and reception. I have aimed to introduce the material (and the potential of Roman sarcophagi for study in this way) to a wider readership than a small band of sarcophagus specialists; and so I have included some brief background surveys, and tried to focus as far as possible on examples that are already published or illustrated. (The availability of images in the photographic collection of the German Archaeological Institute in Rome through the digital collection on *Arachne* makes this easier than before.)

Writing a wide ranging book has left me indebted to many different individuals and institutions. In the first place, much is owed to those who have contributed,

across decades, to the catalogues of *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs* (ASR) and the *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* (RS), which are the foundations of Roman sarcophagus scholarship and have provided so much of my material.

For sharing ideas, expertise, and generous access to unpublished work, there are many colleagues to thank, including Rita Amedick, Stine Birk, Barbara Borg, Amanda Claridge, Janet DeLaine, Björn Christian Ewald, Caroline Goodson, Martin Henig, John J. Herrmann Jr, Frances van Keuren, Guntram Koch, Michael Koortbojian, Katharina Meinecke, Zahra Newby, Simone Perna, Evan Proudfoot, Eliana Siotto, Hannah Snell, Peter Stewart, and Susan Walker. Robert Coates-Stevens, Jessica Hughes, Zahra Newby, Diana Norman, Nancy Ramage, Ben Russell, Margaret Williams, and Susan Woodford have taken time and trouble to read and comment on particular sections. But my special thanks are due to Jaś Elsner, who not only read a draft of the whole text and commented on it with his usual generosity and perception, but has been so encouraging throughout. The text has greatly benefited from everyone's suggestions, and any deficiencies are entirely my own. Last, but certainly not least, there are family and friends (they will know who they are) to thank, who have cheered, prodded, and organized me on my way.

For funding and the chance to make numerous field trips to look at material, my thanks are due to the Arts Faculty of the Open University, the British Academy, and the Leverhulme Foundation (for an Emeritus Research Fellowship). Since retiring from a full-time post in the Department of Classical Studies at the Open University I have been a Visiting Research Fellow there, and in autumn 2009 had the pleasure and benefit of a visiting post at Aarhus University. At a time when publishing illustrations can involve high costs, I have been very grateful to colleagues, family, and institutions who have given photographs or waived fees. The main source of my images has been the German Archaeological Institute in Rome, where Daria Lanzuolo has been very helpful. Finally, for their help and expertise in publishing this book, I should like to thank staff at Oxford University Press, especially Emily Brand, Annie Rose, and Pat Baxter and Gail Eaton.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
Albani	Bol, P. C. and A. Allroggen-Bedel (eds) (1989–98). <i>Forschungen zur Villa Albani: Katalogen der antiken Bildwerke</i> . Berlin: Mann
AM	<i>Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts Athenische Abteilung</i>
Aquarius	<i>La catalogazione automatica dei sarcofagi reimpiegati. La stampa dei documenti</i> (user name: F. Martorana) Pisa, 4.8.1982
Arachne	<a href="http://arachne.uni-koeln.de">http://arachne.uni-koeln.de</a> . Image Grid DAI Rome
ASR	Robert, C. (ed.) <i>Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs</i> . Berlin: G. Grote, 1890–
ASR I, 2	Andreae, B. (1980). <i>Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben. Die römischen Jagdsarkophage</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR I, 3	Reinsberg, C. (2006). <i>Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben. Vita Romana-Sarkophage</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR I, 4	Amedick, R. (1991). <i>Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben. Vita privata</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR III, 1	Robert, C. (1897). <i>Einzelmythen—Actaeon bis Hercules</i> . Berlin: G. Grote
ASR III, 2	Robert, C. (1904). <i>Einzelmythen—Hippolytos bis Meleagros</i> . Berlin: G. Grote
ASR III, 3	Robert, C. (1919). <i>Einzelmythen—Niobiden bis Triptolemos</i> . Berlin: G. Grote
ASR IV, 1	Matz, F. (1968). <i>Die dionysischen Sarkophage. Die Typen der Figuren. Die Denkmäler 1-71B</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR IV, 2	Matz, F. (1968). <i>Die dionysischen Sarkophage. Die Denkmäler 72-161</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR IV, 3	Matz, F. (1969). <i>Die dionysischen Sarkophage. Die Denkmäler 162-245</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR IV, 4	Matz, F. (1975). <i>Die dionysischen Sarkophage. Die Denkmäler 246-385</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR V, 1	Rumpf, A. (1939). <i>Die Meerwesen auf den antiken Sarkophagreliefs</i> . Berlin: G. Grote
ASR V, 2, 1	Kranz, P. (1999). <i>Die stadtrömischen Erogen-Sarkophage 1: Dionysische Themen: Ausnahme der Weinlese- und Ernteszenen</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR V, 2, 2	Bielefeld, D. (1997). <i>Die stadtrömischen Erogen-Sarkophage—Weinlese- und Ernteszenen</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR V, 3	Wegner, M. (1966). <i>Die Musensarkophage</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR V, 4	Kranz, P. (1984). <i>Jahreszeiten-Sarkophage. Entwicklung und Ikonographie des Motivs der vier Jahreszeiten auf klassischen Sarkophagen und Sarkophagdeckeln</i> . Berlin: Mann

ASR VI, 1	Stroszeck, J. (1998). <i>Die dekorativen römischen Sarkophage. Die Löwen-Sarkophage. Die Sarkophage mit Löwenköpfen, schreitenden Löwen und Löwenkampfgruppen</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR VI, 2, 1	Herdejürgen, H. (1996). <i>Die dekorativen römischen Sarkophage. Stadtrömische und italische Girlandensarkophage. Die Sarkophage des ersten und zweiten Jahrhunderts</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR XII, 1	Grassinger, D. (1999). <i>Die mythologischen Sarkophage. Achill, Adonis, Aeneas, Aktaion, Alkestis, Amazonen</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR XII, 2	Sichtermann, H. (1992). <i>Die mythologischen Sarkophage. Apollon, Ares, Bellerophon, Daïdalos, Endymion, Ganymed, Giganten, Grazien</i> . Berlin: Mann
ASR XII, 6	Koch, G. (1975). <i>Die mythologischen Sarkophage. Meleager</i> . Berlin: Mann
BABESCH	Formerly <i>Bulletin Antieke Beschaving</i>
Bildkatalog II	Andreae, B., K. Anger, M. G. Granino, J. Köhler, P. Liverani and G. Spinola (eds) (1998). <i>Bildkatalog der Skulpturen des Vatikanischen Museums II, Museo Pio Clementino—Cortile Ottagono</i> . (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut). Berlin and New York: De Gruyter
Bull.Com.	<i>Bullettino della commissione archeologica comunale di Roma</i>
CBCR	Krautheimer, R. (ed.) <i>Corpus basilicarum christianarum Romae</i> . Vatican City and New York: Pontificio istituto di archeologia Cristiana and Institute of Fine Arts. Vol. I: 1937; Vol. III: 1967
CIG	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i>
CIJ	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
DAIR	Deutsches archäologisches Institut, Rome
JbAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JdI	<i>Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
KS	Koch, G. and H. Sichtermann (1982). <i>Römische Sarkophage Handbuch der Archäologie</i> . Munich. Beck
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> . Zurich and Munich: Artemis Verlag. 1981–
MAAR	<i>Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome</i>
MEFRA	<i>Mélanges de l'école française de Rome</i>
MNR Cat	Giuliano, A. (ed.) (1979–88). <i>Museo Nazionale Romano. Le Sculture</i> . Rome: De Luca
NSc	<i>Notizie degli scavi di antichità</i>
Ostia IX	Calza, R. (ed.) (1978). <i>Scavi di Ostia IX. I Ritratti. Parte II Ritratti romani dal 160 circa alla metà del III secolo d.c.</i> Rome: Libreria dello stato
Ostia XII	Paroli, L. (ed.) (1999). <i>Scavi di Ostia XII. La basilica cristiana di Pianabella Parte I</i> . Rome: Libreria dello stato
Pisa I	Arias, P. E., E. Cristiani and E. Gabba (eds) (1977). <i>Camposanto Monumentale di Pisa. Le antichità I Sarcofagi romani, iscrizioni romane e medioevali</i> . Pisa: Pacini

<i>Pisa II</i>	Settis, S. (ed.) (1984). <i>Camposanto Monumentale di Pisa. Le antichità II</i> . Pisa: Edizioni Panini
<i>RAC</i>	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> . Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–
<i>RACr</i>	<i>Rivista di archeologia cristiana</i>
<i>Reimpiego</i>	Andreae, B. and S. Settis (eds) (1983–4). <i>Colloquio sul reimpiego di sarcofagi romani nel medioevo Pisa 5–12 September 1982. Marburger Winckelmann-Programm</i>
<i>RM</i>	<i>Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung</i>
<i>RPARA</i>	<i>Atti della pontificia accademia romana di archeologia. Rendiconti</i>
<i>RS I</i>	Deichmann, F. W., G. Bovini and H. Brandenburg (eds) (1967). <i>Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage. Band I Rom und Ostia</i> . Wiesbaden: Steiner
<i>RS II</i>	Dresken-Weiland, J., T. Ulbert, G. Bovini and H. Brandenburg (eds) (1998). <i>Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage. Band II Italien mit einem Nachtrag Rom und Ostia, Dalmatien, Museen der Welt</i> . Mainz: von Zabern
<i>RS III</i>	Christern-Briesenick, B., T. Ulbert, G. Bovini and H. Brandenburg (eds) (2003). <i>Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage. Band III Frankreich, Algerien. Tunesien</i> . Mainz: von Zabern

## NOTE TO THE READER

All dates are AD unless otherwise stated.

To keep footnote references to specific sarcophagi as brief as possible, I usually cite the most recent or comprehensive sources in which further references and information (such as museum inventory numbers) are available. Where catalogues are arranged in a single scheme of continuous numbering (as in the volumes of *RS* and many of *ASR*) I have given only the relevant entry number for a sarcophagus (omitting the pages).

As so often, habits of speech make it hard to be consistent in the language of proper names. But as a rule I use the Italian version when they occur as Roman place names, and English (or Latin) for the names of saints (e.g. the basilica of S. Prassede in Rome, but St Praxedis). Throughout, St is used as the English abbreviation for 'Saint', and S. for the Italian.

By using quotation marks around the 'Good Shepherd' throughout I intend to signify the figure type, and to avoid automatic attribution to it of any Christian significance.

## Introducing the Questions

What links the young Publia Aelia Proba, Aurelius Andronicus (a stone merchant from Nicomedia), S. Cecilia, Captain Cook, and Napoleon's sister-in-law, Christine Boyer? One—and probably the only—answer is that each has a funerary memorial decorated with the curved fluting characteristic of a particular type of ancient Roman sarcophagus.<sup>1</sup> How this gained such an appeal in different societies and across centuries is the central question of this book.

These 'strigillated sarcophagi' are a large group of marble sarcophagi defined by their decoration, which combines conventional figured scenes and architectural features with panels of 'S' shaped fluting.<sup>2</sup> Whether they had any special designation in antiquity is unknown, but their standard modern name is derived from the curved strigil with which Roman athletes and bathers scraped oil from their bodies in flowing strokes.<sup>3</sup> Ponderous and prosaic, it suggests nothing of their elegant appearance, or of their special and enduring importance in the material record and collective imagination of the city of Rome.<sup>4</sup>

Decoration with this kind of curved fluting was not exclusive to Rome, as it occurs on sarcophagi from Attica and Asia Minor, for instance, and on copies of Roman sarcophagi made in nearby parts of Italy.<sup>5</sup> But for around two and a half centuries, strigillated sarcophagi were hugely popular with customers in Rome as a

<sup>1</sup> Cecilia, Publia Aelia Proba, and Aurelius Andronicus (and wife) were buried in Roman strigillated sarcophagi (see Chapter 13, Figure 7.5, and Figure 2.5 respectively). Cook and Boyer had cenotaphs imitating ancient sarcophagi: see Lord 1997: 74–5 (at Brocklesby Park, Lincs.) and Item 2014a, 2014b (in Canino, Viterbo). (Thomas Banks also designed a memorial to Cook that was never erected, based on a strigillated sarcophagus: Bryant and Dorey 2005: 48, no. 54.)

<sup>2</sup> From the third century some versions used vertical flutes, usually infilled up to about a third of their height: see Sichtermann in KS 242, and here, e.g. Figure 7.7. Although these are often described as 'fluted' to distinguish them from those with strigil-type flutes, they will be included here since they otherwise use similar designs.

<sup>3</sup> Antiquity: Sichtermann in KS 241 n. 1. 'Strigillated' (and its variants) is the term used in most modern languages, and in German, 'Riefel-Sarkophage'. Strigils: Yegül 1992: 34, 493.

<sup>4</sup> Panofsky 1964: 34 (elegance); Baratta 2007: 208 (collective imagination).

<sup>5</sup> Italy: Koch in KS 278. Attica: Koch in KS 446–51; Goette 1991. Asia Minor: Koch in KS 477. Dalmatia: Cambi 1977: 446, and 2004. Also Koch in *ASR* XII, 6: 56 nn. 27, 28. Also made elsewhere in local limestone: e.g. Christern-Briesenick in *RS* III: nos 627–31 and 633–6 (Carthage); Gütschow 1931 (Albano); Coombe et al. 2015, no. 86 (Britain). See Chapters 3 and 14.



FIGURE 1.1 A fountain in the Largo di Porta Cavalleggeri, Rome. (Janet Huskinson.)

means of representing contemporary social values. This continued after antiquity, as the sarcophagi came to be prized for their associations with ancient Rome and what it stood for; across Italy and southern France, for instance, they were reused as tombs of civic and ecclesiastical leaders. In the townscape of Rome today they play a small but distinctive part as fountain basins and planters (see Figure 1.1).<sup>6</sup>

## OPPORTUNITIES, PROBLEMS, AND SOLUTIONS

For nearly three hundred years after inhumation replaced cremation as the more usual funerary practice in Rome in the early second century, marble sarcophagi were the tomb of choice for well-off Romans, who commemorated themselves through the imagery which was sculpted to their tastes in local workshops.<sup>7</sup> Its themes demonstrate what they valued in life and felt about death and its

<sup>6</sup> Largo di Porta Cavalleggeri fountain: D'Onofrio 1986: 167; Pulvers 2002: 590, no. 1276a.

<sup>7</sup> This link to the local market is distinctive to the city of Rome: Walker 1990: 9.

consequences; as values changed in emphasis over time, so did the subjects depicted.<sup>8</sup> For this reason sarcophagi are a potentially rich source of historical evidence for social and cultural change in Rome.<sup>9</sup> They are one of the largest bodies of private art from the city to survive, particularly from the third and early fourth centuries, and deal with experiences upon which contemporary written sources rarely touch.

Strigillated sarcophagi, as a very popular type, have particular opportunities to offer. They survive in large numbers, depict a wide range of subjects, and have an exceptionally long time span. Production runs from the mid-second century, when sarcophagus use was being established in Rome and when Roman engagement with Greek culture was at a height, right through to the early fifth century, by which time the city was a leading Christian centre within a very different empire.

With this long historical perspective they can track developments in Roman culture and society that were deep-rooted and long-lasting. In particular, they bridge the divide which scholarship created between ‘classical’ and ‘early Christian’ material, and so reveal (for instance) artistic continuities between Roman funerary altars of the later first century AD and early Christian tombs made some three hundred years later. Yet at the same time they also enable close focus on short-term concerns, such as Christian moves to create a separate identity in the visual culture of late third and early fourth century Rome.

The critical factor in the special opportunities which they offer is their characteristic decoration of figures and fluting, for the two elements work together to expose the essential values of the image. Figures are reduced to fundamental forms by the limited size of the panels which they occupy, and are linked into various relationships by the intervening fluting; an architectural framework contains them all, within a structure of mouldings, columns, or pilasters.<sup>10</sup> The facility with which all these features could be varied made the imagery especially responsive to changing times, while always working within the traditions of Roman visual culture.

### *Past problems*

Yet despite this potential and prominence in the material record of Rome, strigillated sarcophagi have had limited attention from scholars. There is no major study of them as a group, and discussion has been confined to articles (usually involving

<sup>8</sup> Introductions to themes, see Koch and Sichtermann in KS 61–267. Also Borg 2013: 161–211. This connection with the needs of patrons meant that thematic preferences often changed within a generation: Ewald 2012: 45.

<sup>9</sup> e.g. most recently, Birk 2012a: 10, and Borg 2013: 1–3 and 6 (for Rome’s unique social position which justifies focus on its material culture).

<sup>10</sup> This potential was noted long ago, e.g. by Rodenwaldt 1938: 62–4. Cf. Zanker in Zanker and Ewald 2012: 249; Borg 2013: 197.



specific examples), brief surveys in handbooks, and entries in catalogues of wider topics.<sup>11</sup>

In practical terms the reasons for this neglect are not hard to see, as they are a challenging group to examine. Surviving examples (including countless fragments) are impossible to quantify and hard to date or classify precisely in terms of stylistic development or decorative detail (given the range of possible variations).<sup>12</sup> These factors make it difficult to develop systematic typologies or dating schemes for them, and practically impossible to deliver a definitive catalogue. In other words, they were very hard to treat in a mode of scholarship which privileged such approaches.<sup>13</sup>

Traditional historiographies of ancient art, which concentrated on ‘masterpieces’ and monuments with extensive figured imagery, left them undervalued.<sup>14</sup> Collectors and scholars generally preferred to focus on frieze sarcophagi, or even on the figured panels of strigillated sarcophagi at the expense of the rest.<sup>15</sup> In some museum displays their fluted sections were edited out as being, quite literally, ‘a waste of space’, while strigillated sarcophagi were more likely than those with figured friezes to be kept outdoors, exposed to the elements in museum gardens.<sup>16</sup> In short, they did not inspire much consideration or questioning.

### *Changing approaches*

But the ‘cultural turn’ that took place in art history during the second half of the last century has altered that. Its substantially different approach helps to transcend some of these traditional difficulties—and indeed to turn them into positive opportunities for thinking anew about strigillated sarcophagi.

It has shifted the focus away from typologies, connoisseurship, and style to broader-based questions about the social and cultural contexts in which art and

<sup>11</sup> The volume planned for the *Corpus of Antiken Sarkophagreliefs* (ASR VI, 3) seems unlikely to appear. Cf. Koch 1998: 319; Elsner 2011: 12, n.48. Articles: e.g. Baratta 2007; Piekarski 2012. Handbooks: e.g. Sichtermann in KS 73–6, 241–5. In catalogues of ASR they are often treated as sub-groups of a particular image type: e.g. Wegner in ASR V, 3: 133–8 (Muse sarcophagi); Sichtermann ASR XII, 2: 174 (the Three Graces). For brief discussions of specific aspects, e.g. Gütschow 1931; Rodenwaldt 1938; Walker 1985a; Sapelli 1986; Kirchler 1990; Wrede 2001.

<sup>12</sup> My sense is that nearly 1,000 strigillated sarcophagi may survive. For general issues in dating strigillated sarcophagi see Chapter 2. Birk 2010–11 reviews dating schemes for third-century sarcophagi.

<sup>13</sup> Useful summaries of past scholarship on sarcophagi: Koortbojian 1995a; Baratte 2006; Elsner 2011.

<sup>14</sup> e.g. as ‘monotonous and lacking in content’: Calza 1972: 484–5.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 13 for collections. For a stated preference for frieze sarcophagi see Franzoni 1984: 324, n. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Editing-out of panels, see Spinola 2001: 561–2 (and Chapter 13). Museum gardens, see Stuart Jones 1926: pls 94, 95. Also Baldassare 1996 who records the locations at that date, of the three sarcophagi found in Tomb 34 at Ostia: the figured *lenos* was kept in the museum, while the two strigillated pieces were in its garden. Many, of course, ended up in lime-kilns.

artefacts were made and used, and especially about the roles of various agents. To look for answers it uses a wide range of methodologies drawn, for instance, from semiotics, discourse analysis, and audience roles; and these open up the possibility of multiple readings for imagery, within specific historical contexts.<sup>17</sup>

For Roman sarcophagi in general, this is a promising approach as it means that their various aspects can be addressed within the same interpretative framework.<sup>18</sup> (They were simultaneously sacred resting places for the dead, sites for mourning or social display, tradable commodities, and works of art involving questions of form and subject matter; but traditional art history left many of these roles unaddressed.)

Recent studies, which have taken this cultural perspective, have covered a broad spectrum of cultural interests. Some have focused on sarcophagi as artefacts, in the marble trade, or installed in Roman tombs;<sup>19</sup> others have related their representational imagery to contemporary social and cultural concerns.<sup>20</sup> At the same time work on other branches of Roman visual culture, such as patterned ornamentation or monumental architecture, has also widened the context in which sarcophagi and their decoration may be viewed.<sup>21</sup>

For strigillated sarcophagi, therefore, the time is ripe to apply these new approaches, and to investigate what they have to say about Roman society (and post-classical societies that promoted its ancient values).

Many of the new questions to be asked concern the various human agents who were involved in their production and use, both as tombs and as art works with meaningful imagery.

## STRIGILLATED SARCOPHAGI AND HUMAN AGENTS

The production, use, and viewing of sarcophagi involved a chain of people who had roles that were different but interlinked; and each of these craftsmen, customers, and viewers would add personal responses, shaped by their own

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Smith 2002: 72–4. Rose 2012 surveys the range of ‘visual methodologies’.

<sup>18</sup> Assessments of this approach: Smith 2002: 90–1; Ewald 2004, especially 229–31. Also Ewald 2003: 570–1 noting the limitations of a ‘socio-historical approach in the narrow (status-specific) sense’; and Hallett 2005b: 160 and Platt 2011: 342 on the danger of stressing self-representation at the expense of religious aspects of mythological imagery on sarcophagi.

<sup>19</sup> Trade: e.g. Walker 1985a, 1988b; Russell 2011, 2013. In tombs: e.g. Bielfeldt 2003; Dresken-Weiland 2003; Meinecke 2012, 2013; Platt 2012; Borg 2013. For recent volumes stressing the variety of new approaches: e.g. Elsner and Huskinson 2011; Galinier and Baratte 2013.

<sup>20</sup> e.g. Koortbojian 1995b (viewing mythological sarcophagi); Ewald 1999c, 2005 (high culture and gender roles); Zanker 2000; Zanker and Ewald 2004, 2012 (social factors in the use of mythological imagery).

<sup>21</sup> Swift 2009; Thomas 2007.

experiences.<sup>22</sup> All this amounts to a wide variety of historical factors to consider, and many questions (which may have no single or straightforward answer).

Probably the most important of these is one question which has dominated recent theoretical debates on visual culture: what was the relative importance of the different agents in bringing meaning to depicted imagery? But trying to pursue this in respect of Roman sarcophagi is thwarted by big gaps in the historical evidence: we know very little about even basic transactions. For the relative contributions of patrons and craftsmen (whose historical circumstances are better documented than those of viewers), many questions remain unanswered. How much choice did patrons have in the imagery, for instance, even when they bought the sarcophagus in preparation for themselves? Did they have to make do with the workshop's specialities, or could they dictate something more individual?<sup>23</sup> Analyses of trade and production may give some general indications, but specific scenarios are virtually impossible to retrieve: what personal story lies behind the redesigned imagery of the 'Brothers' sarcophagus in Pisa, and the resulting array of portrait figures?<sup>24</sup> We can only speculate.

Such problems with the evidence suggest that it is more useful to consider the input of each type of agent separately, rather than attempt a relative evaluation that is bound to be flawed, and this approach will shape discussions in later chapters. But one figure needs some further introduction at this point—the viewer.

### *Viewers*

Earlier discussions of sarcophagus art were usually concerned with the intrinsic value of the images, figured and otherwise, and not with what viewers made of them. But in the last two decades this balance has changed, and the processes of viewing and the kinds of meanings that viewers were encouraged to invest in the imagery have become lively topics.<sup>25</sup> The great importance of this change is that it challenges the possibility of single or static interpretations; it moves away from examining the (usually text-based) knowledge ascribed to patrons who generated the images to considering the multiple viewing responses of those who looked at them.

<sup>22</sup> Most recently discussed by Galinier 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Birk and Poulsen 2012: 7–12 (focusing on patrons and viewers). Birk 2012c: 108–9 implies an iconographical distinction between imagery chosen by patrons for themselves, and what survivors used for the commemoration of dead relatives.

<sup>24</sup> Figure 3.9. See Chapter 3 for further discussion.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g. Elsner 1995, 2003, 2007; Bielfeldt 2003: 117–19; Birk and Poulsen 2012: 9–10 (all with further references).

One (relatively early) discussion of the viewer's role insisted on the clear distinction 'between on one hand the rather simple, generalized visual language of the craftsmen, and on the other the almost infinite subtlety of visual interpretation available to the client'.<sup>26</sup> But this 'almost infinite subtlety' was itself shaped and ordered by influences on the viewer which included the kinds of associations conveyed by the imagery, its arrangement on the sarcophagus, and also the context in which viewing took place. These all then need to be considered.

Strigillated sarcophagi fit particularly well with this altered perspective, as there are several inherent reasons why viewer response is a critical factor in the visual impact of their imagery. First and foremost, they offer viewers the chance to develop their own interpretations of the given imagery, by reading disparate scenes together or giving specific values to the many generic figures which they used. Such options make it clear just how far 'Meaning was in the eye of the beholder'.<sup>27</sup>

A second reason is the long life of these sarcophagi, both as a decorative type and (so often) as individual objects that were visible and valued long after the original intentions of patron or craftsmen had been lost in time. The active engagement of later viewers with the ancient imagery is well attested for some sarcophagi reused in the Middle Ages, where the portrait busts of ancient Romans were given new identities, and the fluting was open to new interpretations.<sup>28</sup> The same thing must have happened in antiquity itself, when sarcophagi were claimed for new burials and their original owners long forgotten by new viewers.

But although the figure of 'the viewer' will prove a useful device in examining strigillated sarcophagi, it too has its problems and pitfalls. By the nature of things 'the viewer' is always as much an artificial figure as the 'the patron'. This is the case when it is applied to historical contexts (such as viewing sarcophagi in the sometimes difficult physical settings of a Roman tomb), and when used in more abstract discussions of viewer reception: we are inevitably using the term to pin general assumptions on to Romans whose minds we cannot know and whom it is all too easy to credit with omniscience.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ward-Perkins 1978: 646.

<sup>27</sup> Ward-Perkins 1978: 646. For reasons why patrons or craftsmen may have chosen open imagery, see Bisconti: 2004: 57 (on the ideological value of 'collages' of imagery); Squarciapino 1943–44, especially 278 (enhancing commercial possibilities).

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 13, nos 45 and 47.

<sup>29</sup> Dangers of ascribing omniscience: e.g. Bielfeldt 2003: 117–18. Cf. Sande 2012: 287 who notes (in discussing the Arch of Constantine) how scholars tend to 'dumb down' their expectation of the Constantinian viewer while allowing for sophisticated responses from Augustan counterparts.

## FORM AND STYLE

Form and style have been enduring topics in earlier work on Roman sarcophagi which emphasized aesthetics, typological classification, and symbolism, particularly where large-scale figured decoration was involved.<sup>30</sup> But they still have a central role to play in discussing strigillated sarcophagi with their reduced array of figures—even here where the prime focus will be on their social production and use.

This is because their very format—the combination of figures and fluting which defines them as a group—plays directly into a semantic use of imagery, and creates the pictorial language in which the social and cultural messages are delivered.<sup>31</sup> In this process the necessarily limited form of their figures is a positive virtue (rather than a lamentable reduction). Abstracted from larger-scale compositions, they can represent essential values, which are highlighted and counterbalanced by the fluting; and while they change in subject matter and significance over time, its enduring form provides a meaningful reminder that some fundamental things remain the same.<sup>32</sup> Thus dynamics of form enable strigillated sarcophagi to deliver messages that sing out loud and clear.<sup>33</sup>

*Fluting: Form and content*

Fluting, therefore, is not an inert or passive part of strigillated designs, but has an active role in shaping the forms of decoration, adding sensory appeal (with its ripples of light and shade), and cognitive signals. It also helps to suggest symbolic possibilities.

**Symbolism**

What the curved fluting symbolizes (or not) is often one of the first questions asked about strigillated sarcophagi, as if there were some single categorical answer. Instead (as I shall argue throughout) viewers would appreciate it in their own way. But even so, the fluting suggests several possibilities which would shape these individual responses.

One is an array of references to the man-made, built environment. In effect, the panels of curved fluting recall spirally fluted columns rolled out across the flat walls

<sup>30</sup> See Birk 2010–11 for a recent summary of the history of this approach, which gathered momentum after Rodenwaldt 1936; and Elsner 2011: 8 for its fall from fashion in the last thirty years.

<sup>31</sup> To follow the ‘linguistic’ terms used by Hölscher 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Mitchell 1983: 126: ‘Immutable forms contrast with and thus provide us a stable measure that reveals the nature of mutable intentions, interpretation, and content.’

<sup>33</sup> Such dynamics form the central argument of Hölscher 2004.

of the sarcophagus.<sup>34</sup> Like the traditional decorative arrangements on architectural mouldings, the 'S' shaped two-dimensional line which the flutes trace on the surface of the sarcophagus recreates for the eye the rise and fall of their crests and grooves that exist in the third dimension of depth. And like other architectural elements used on the sarcophagi which refer to the built forms of houses, tombs, and temples, they help to contextualize the depicted figures among symbols of civilization.

But the fluting also offers a wealth of associations derived from the organic, and less restrained, forms of nature.<sup>35</sup> Above all, its double-curving line is a contour generally admired for its ability to bring life and energy to compositions. For William Hogarth this was the 'line of beauty' that gives grace to natural forms such as flowers and women's bodies.<sup>36</sup> For the novelist Alan Hollinghurst it was 'the snakelike flicker of an instinct, of two compulsions held in one unfolding movement', and for William Mitchell part of 'the elementary geometry of the force field of desire'.<sup>37</sup>

All these qualities—grace, a 'flickering' tension, and enlivening desire—may be perceived in their use on strigillated sarcophagi. The static surfaces of the sarcophagus are animated with a natural force, as the flutes surge *en masse* in a single direction or converge on a central focal point, like waves ebbing and flowing, or plants rippling in the wind. And translated into bodily terms—after all, the very term 'strigillated' recalls the lines traced by the strigil as it was scraped across the bodies of bathers—they bring a life force to counter the death within.

This symbolic reaffirmation of life and of the living human form, in its vigour and desirability, is spelled out most clearly on sarcophagi where the line of fluting echoes the sinuous curves of figures, whose beautiful bodies, worked in classical style, entice the viewer. The sensuous naked figures of the Three Graces and Narcissus are a stunning example (Figure 1.2).<sup>38</sup>

The scenes on this sarcophagus also celebrate another pleasurable and life-giving force, water.<sup>39</sup> Urns flank the Graces, who prepare to bathe, while Narcissus looks admiringly down at his own reflection in the spring.<sup>40</sup> In these narrative contexts the curving flutes are a visual link to ideas of cleansing, refreshment, and desire.<sup>41</sup>

The reference to water is even more apparent on other strigillated sarcophagi where the flutes echo the lines of water depicted spurting or flowing, sometimes

<sup>34</sup> See Chiarlo 1974: 1341; Arias *Reimpiego*: 10; Turcan 1999: 164.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Thomas 2007:17–18 for architecture and its perceived basis in the natural world.

<sup>36</sup> Hogarth 1753: Chs VII and IX. Cf. Mitchell 1983: 130–6.

<sup>37</sup> Hollinghurst 2004: 200; Mitchell 2005: 59. <sup>38</sup> ASR XII, 2: no. 159.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Zanker in Zanker and Ewald 2012: 123–4 on the 'pleasures of bathing and nakedness', which constitute visions of joy and comfort to sarcophagus viewers.

<sup>40</sup> Urns and contexts they suggest: Sichtermann in ASR XII, 2: 78–9.

<sup>41</sup> Here perhaps any allusions to the strigil, as used in the baths, would become especially relevant.



FIGURE 1.2 Front panel of a sarcophagus showing the Three Graces and Narcissus (displayed in the Bildergalerie of Schloss Sans Souci, at Potsdam. Inv. no. 320.) Later second century. (Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, Hagen Immel, 2002.)



FIGURE 1.3 Fragment of a sarcophagus depicting a fluted urn with small fountain. Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome. Inv. no.124536. Late third century. (DAIR 1964.0609. Como.)

from ornamental vessels which are themselves curved and fluted.<sup>42</sup> (It endures across centuries, in the reuse of strigillated sarcophagi as fountains.<sup>43</sup>)

From these bodily concerns it is a short symbolic step to link fluting to notions of spiritual refreshment and purification.<sup>44</sup> Eschatological values have also been suggested, as its resemblance to waves recalled the soul's symbolic sea journey to the 'Isles of the Blessed'.<sup>45</sup>

Thinking of the flutes as symbolizing a journey is a useful move—if that journey is not explicitly to an afterlife, but one which leads the eye (and thus the mind and spirit) to contemplate things that may lie 'between' or 'beyond' the depicted imagery.<sup>46</sup> In other words, flutes have a liminal value. They alert viewers to transitional spaces that separate different states of existence; and in this they resemble patterns, such as the wave motifs which delineate thresholds in contemporary floor mosaics, or the 'scale' decoration of marble screens around tombs (which was occasionally used instead of curved fluting on sarcophagi themselves).<sup>47</sup> They are fitting decoration for the walls of a sarcophagus that contains the body as it is transformed by death.<sup>48</sup>

The curved fluting thus has various symbolic possibilities: it can evoke the natural environment, with its living forms and elemental forces of wind or water, or refer to the man-made world with its monuments, directed movements, and equivocal spaces. It can work reflexively with the subjects in adjacent figured panels, deriving particular values from them and in turn reinforcing their own significance (as is illustrated by the Potsdam sarcophagus with its sinuous figures and aquatic motifs (Figure 1.2)).

### *Figures: Form and content*

The areas of fluting on strigillated sarcophagi had a big impact on the form and presentation of figures, and, to some extent, on their selection as well.

<sup>42</sup> As in Figure 1.3. Musso in *MNR Cat* I, 2: 106–9, no. II, 15. Fluting imitating flowing movement of water: Wilpert I: 13 and II: 9; Pesce 1957: 53–4; and Chapter 5 for further discussion. Snell 2013 notes a particular association between the use of spiral columns and sites with water.

<sup>43</sup> See Chapter 13. Fischer 2011 emphasizes associations with water, especially in medieval reuse.

<sup>44</sup> Clarac 1841: 990 no. 624 (which I have been unable to confirm); quoted by Marrou 1937: 189; Cumont 1942: 13, n. 1; rejected by, e.g. Calza 1972: 486, n. 1; Turcan 1999: 164–5.

<sup>45</sup> e.g. McCann 1978: 21. Cf. Zanker in Zanker and Ewald 2012: 127–9 who wisely notes that this is not a question to be resolved in terms of 'either/or' (especially perhaps for ancient viewers).

<sup>46</sup> Mitchell 1983: 129 (on the imagery of the spiral and vortex) describes 'the spiral ascent to transcendence'.

<sup>47</sup> Mosaics: e.g. Swift 2009: 49–65. Screens: e.g. Nicolai et al. 1999: 4: 50–1; Guidobaldi 2000: 266. 'Lattice' instead of strigils: *RS* I: nos 406 and 859 (cf. Koch 1990: 70). On subsidiary areas on strigillated sarcophagi, e.g. *RS* I: no. 243 (here Figure 10.8); *RS* II: no. 115; *RS* III: no. 38. Also Chapters 5 and 10.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Platt 2011: 362: the front relief of a sarcophagus is important as an 'interstitial space in which boundaries between the material and immaterial are dissolved'.



The shape and size of their panels meant that the figures tended to be limited in number and static in pose. Any narrative element was highly condensed in treatment, and there was heavy reliance on significant attributes as a means of heightening content and making the abbreviated figures intelligible to viewers.

The figures chosen for these emphatic spaces had great symbolic potential, and tended to idealize human experience through mythological analogies or by the use of types which represented particular social values.<sup>49</sup> Some individual figures (especially on later second-century sarcophagi) were abstracted from narrative groups, mythological or biographical.<sup>50</sup> Many others were generic figures whose bland and predictable forms obscured their symbolic range: though visually familiar to viewers from their replication across the Roman world, they could be invested with different qualities over time, to suit new cultural, social, or religious priorities.<sup>51</sup>

This process of integrating figures from various sources into new contexts and relationships within the fluting was powerfully creative. It could intensify meanings as core values were exposed and emphases varied (between figures in the central and corner panels, for instance), and it increased the possibilities for visual allusion and cross-referencing by juxtaposing protagonists from one discourse with ones from another. It was also to have an important influence on other formal developments in late antique art, such as the creation of icon-like compositions in early Christian religious art which depend on symbolic arrangements of abstracted figures.<sup>52</sup>

This process ties into the idea of a visual language in which elements worked semantically—and especially into the increasing development over the third century of schematic figured images to signify particular ideas. Such ‘image-signs’ (as Grabar called them in his analysis of early Christian iconography) were easily accommodated in the restricted figure panels of strigillated sarcophagi, where they were juxtaposed and could be read together in a simultaneous viewing.<sup>53</sup> How these worked—or not—with the narrative imperative inherent in many of the subjects represented on the sarcophagi will be a recurrent theme in following discussions.

### *Style*

Stylistic analysis has been the basis of much past scholarship on Roman sarcophagi, and especially for work on typology and chronological models.<sup>54</sup> Here, where

<sup>49</sup> As in Figures 1.2 and 2.4 (the latter with both human and mythological figures).

<sup>50</sup> e.g. husband and wife from biographical groups, to be discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>51</sup> e.g. the statue types of the Herculaneum women: see Trimble 2011.

<sup>52</sup> See Chapters 8 and 10.

<sup>53</sup> Grabar 1969: 8 (referring to catacomb art). See also Chapter 6.

<sup>54</sup> See previous n. 13.



FIGURE 1.4 Sarcophagus with Ganymede (centre) and mourning cupids (corners). Vatican Museums, Museo Pio Clementino. Inv. no. PE32. Dated c.200. (DAIR 72.583. Schwanke.)



FIGURE 1.5 Sarcophagus Ganymede (centre), Narcissus (right), and Cupid and Psyche (left). Rome, catacomb of S. Sebastiano. Late third century. (DAIR 75.1437, photographer not recorded.)

content and interpretation of the images are the main focus, it will take more of a back place.<sup>55</sup> Yet even so, strigillated sarcophagi and their figured scenes have contributions to make to major debates about style and Roman art, and especially about the paradigm of stylistic evolution over time which has proved generally problematic for Roman art.

These two sarcophagi (Figures 1.4 and 1.5) provide an opportunity (that is rare for strigillated sarcophagi) to compare stylistic change over time, since they both use the same central composition depicting Ganymede and the eagle. The earlier example preserves the essentially classical styles of the figures and landscape details, both in their sense of volume and proportions and in their spatial relationships with each other.<sup>56</sup> But in the later version these forms are harder and less carefully coordinated, while the figures are scaled according to their narrative

<sup>55</sup> Hölscher 2004: 1; Ewald 2012: 41.

<sup>56</sup> Figure 1.4. Sichtermann in *ASR* XII, 2: 166, no. 143. A third, fragmentary example in Genoa, dated to c.250, still shows a classical approach to the figures: Quartino in Bettini et al 1998: 173–4, no. 74.

significance in the myth and so appear physically inconsistent: it requires viewers to think beyond appearance to the event's inner significance.<sup>57</sup>

But though such individual cases may reflect the prevailing style of their period, strigillated sarcophagi as a group show another, more variegated picture. For even early examples include features usually deemed characteristic of later Roman art, such as the optical effects of light and shade, symmetry, and the schematic treatment of figures.<sup>58</sup> In contrast, many later strigillated sarcophagi continue classical traditions in their treatment of the human body, or have broad, shallow flutes that are not conducive to chiaroscuro effects.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, sarcophagi of the same period may use quite different figure styles, and there is no demonstrable link between style and the patron's social status.<sup>60</sup>

This variability argues against a model of stylistic evolution across strigillated sarcophagi. Instead it lends some support to the thesis that the variety of contemporaneous styles in Roman art arises from the use of different genres for different content, that is 'For each subject—to be precise, for each thematic aspect within a subject—there were established patterns available, which were of diachronically different origins, but . . . became synchronically applicable side by side'.<sup>61</sup> Both figure style and iconography were implicated in this. Thus ordinary men and women were usually represented on the sarcophagi in the more documentary 'citizen' mode found in funerary commemorations across the Roman Empire, while mythological subjects tended to retain classical compositions (if not always figure style).<sup>62</sup>

There are some important cultural and social ramifications to this. The coexistence of radically different styles is often identified as a distinctive aspect of Roman art; and many of the non-classical features seen as characterizing 'late antique' style (such as a condensed figure style, emphatic symmetry, and chiaroscuro effects) had occurred in Roman art of the republic and earlier empire.<sup>63</sup> Their appearance on strigillated sarcophagi of the mid-second century may therefore be seen as part of a wider picture; but it opens up some questions about the

<sup>57</sup> Figure 1.5. Sichtermann in *ASR* XII, 2: 166–7, no. 144. (Cf. also the Narcissus figure with those on the second-century sarcophagus in Figure 1.2.)

<sup>58</sup> As on the early Meleager sarcophagus (Figure 8.1), with its central *aedicula* and symmetrical presentation of three individual figures (although these are classical in figure-style).

<sup>59</sup> Also *RS* I: nos 243, 687, 821. Cf. 'busy' effect on *RS* I: nos 86 and 240 (fourth-century examples).

<sup>60</sup> e.g. the clumsy figure style on the sarcophagus of a *clarissimus puer*, *RS* I: no. 564. Caution is needed to avoid circular arguments where dating is based on 'style' (in the absence of any other, 'hard' evidence). Against automatic link to specific social status: see Ewald 2003.

<sup>61</sup> Hölscher 2004: 86, also 20–1, 59–85.

<sup>62</sup> Zanker 1992 for the 'citizen' style.

<sup>63</sup> For Roman art this coexistence has been much discussed, e.g. by Bianchi Bandinelli 1970; Brendel 1979 [1953]; Hölscher 2004; Elsner 2007; Swift 2009: 192–6 (for a succinct historiography).

‘Roman-ness’ of the sarcophagi themselves.<sup>64</sup> Can they be seen as a continuation of *Roman* funerary art, as it had operated outside the immediate influences of Hellenistic style? On sarcophagi these Greek influences were at their strongest in mythological friezes, while strigillated sarcophagi, with their architectural framework and capacity for combining inscriptions and eclectic imagery, recall the customary designs of Roman funerary altars.<sup>65</sup> Are they enduring expressions of Rome’s own cultural traditions? This was a major reason why they were reused in later societies, but it might also explain why in ancient Rome strigillated sarcophagi were acceptable to a wide spectrum of society from senators to freedmen, and to religious or ethnic ‘outsiders’ (such as Christian and Jewish customers) all keen to identify themselves as ‘Roman’.<sup>66</sup> Strigillated sarcophagi and the signification of *romanitas* is a recurrent theme in the discussions that follow.

## OUTLINING THE CHAPTERS

This study of strigillated sarcophagi focuses on questions arising from their distinctive decoration and its importance as a potential source of evidence for Roman social and cultural values. Rather than attempting a catalogue or typologies of form, it looks at the ‘real world’ of their production and social use, and the ‘image world’ created by their commemorative representations.

In preparation for discussions that follow it, Chapter 2 introduces the typical decorative formats of Roman strigillated sarcophagi.

The rest of the book is divided into three parts, of which the first two deal with the ancient sarcophagi and their original use, from the second to early fifth centuries, while the third part moves beyond antiquity to survey their reception in various post-classical societies.

The first part is devoted to the pragmatics of the production and use of strigillated sarcophagi and their imagery. Its chapters (3 to 6) examine the activities of the various agents involved, and highlight evidence which strigillated sarcophagi present, either uniquely or particularly well. The aim is to identify the ‘social reality of the images and viewers’, and so create a strong context for understanding the imagery to be discussed in Part II.<sup>67</sup>

Chapter 3 examines aspects of their production, from the sources of imported marble to the completion of the decoration in Rome. It also addresses questions

<sup>64</sup> e.g. they display many of the qualities which Hanfmann 1951 I: 36–7 ascribed to sarcophagi of the mid- to late third century, in terms of light and shade, and placement of individual elements. Also Rodenwaldt 1940a.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Davies 2011: 48. See Chapter 5.

<sup>66</sup> e.g. Wrede 2001 on possible senatorial patronage, and here Chapters 10 and 11 for Christians and Jews.

<sup>67</sup> Stewart 2009: 418.

about the social status of customers, and how far they may have influenced the decoration. Chapter 4 reviews how the sarcophagi functioned within the tomb, given the diversity of Roman burial places, and examines some specific sites which preserve evidence for a considered display. Chapter 5 focuses on particular aspects of the decoration—figures, fluting, and architectural. It surveys their sources and antecedents, looking at their associative value for viewers, and then examines how each component operated within its appointed location on the sarcophagi. This leads on to the discussion in Chapter 6, which considers the strategies used to shape viewers' readings of the figured imagery, presented as it was in discrete panels across the sarcophagus: what prompts and options were available to guide their associations?

In Part II, the focus is again on the contributions which strigillated sarcophagi can make to our understanding of what are much debated subjects in Roman funerary art—self-representation in 'Roman' terms, myth, symbolic imagery, Christian religious subjects, and Jewish memorials.

My decision to discuss these subjects in separate chapters makes sense in terms of identifying what may be distinctive about their treatment on strigillated sarcophagi, but risks obscuring their interrelationships. These are hugely important to the way in which this imagery works: themes flow in and out of each other, depositing and gathering new meanings, and opening the way for visual cross references and intertextual readings. (One pervasive example of this is the theme of a fulfilled life, the *vita felix*, which drew upon a wide range of symbolic imagery and so crosses the chapter divisions.)

Blending and reciprocity may be seen in the imagery of all types of Roman sarcophagi, but are particularly clear on strigillated sarcophagi, with their facility for mixing themes in their separate panels. To demonstrate this, discussions in these chapters repeatedly focus on individual components of the decoration, and how these work together to shape the meanings of the figures. A recurrent feature is the critical relationship between the subjects in the central and corner figured panels, which are manipulated to open up, or close off, the possibility of multiple meanings for the sarcophagus' imagery.

Each chapter in this part ends with a brief discussion of the imagery in a historical context, focusing on aspects of self and community (and especially gender, which enables analysis of other social assumptions and hierarchies).

Such questions are very much to the fore in Chapter 7, which examines how people portrayed themselves as 'Romans' on strigillated sarcophagi. This was an enduring theme, and is therefore an obvious starting point (even though portraits per se were not introduced until the late second century).

Myth, discussed in Chapter 8, was a decorative genre that became prominent on Roman sarcophagi in the later second century but slowly declined during the third. Much has been written on it, but mostly on mythological frieze sarcophagi,



FIGURE 1.6 Tomb of Elizabeth Johnston by John Soane (1784). St Mary Abbots, Kensington. It reproduces a classical *lenos* shape, with fluting. (Janet Huskinson.)

ignoring the far fewer strigillated versions. Their separate figured panels and abstracted images required a radically different approach to representing mythological narrative; and just how different will be tested by asking a series of quite basic questions about which myths were represented on strigillated sarcophagi, how, and why. Central issues here are narrative modes, and the use of mythological subjects to stand for core social and moral values.

These values are a major consideration in Chapter 9, which examines various symbolic themes that became important in the third and early fourth centuries, succeeding mythology as a meaningful source of representation. The sheer flexibility and potential ‘neutrality’ of figures such as the seasons, shepherds, and praying women can make them elusive to discuss; but it is clear from the samples considered here that their use across the figured panels of the sarcophagi created imagery that was open to multiple readings. Biblical subjects came to be juxtaposed with them, showing how symbolic figures might work for Christians too.

Christian religious themes are discussed in Chapter 10, including their use in portraying men and women as Christians. Christianity involved eschatology, beliefs, and a communal history that could set its adherents apart from mainstream

Roman society, and its visual imagery drew heavily on scriptural subjects and symbolic compositions. Even so there are strong continuing traditions.

Chapter 11 looks at the use of strigillated sarcophagi by Jewish patrons. Although few examples survive, they appear to have had a particular appeal to this community, because they could include inscriptions.

Part III considers the continuing lives which Roman strigillated sarcophagi enjoyed in later, post-classical societies. These are significant in themselves but can also reflect the values of ancient Rome: some sarcophagi were reused because of their associations with classical antiquity, while others were prized for their links with early Christianity and the authority of the Roman church.

To evaluate (rather than merely list) the many instances of their reuse and appropriation, some overall frameworks are needed, and various possibilities are reviewed in Chapter 12. Subsequent chapters examine the reuse of strigillated sarcophagi themselves (Chapter 13), and then the adoption of their distinctive motif of curved fluting (Chapter 14).<sup>68</sup> Each focuses on specific historical contexts of time and place, but because of constraints of space and subject matter, does not attempt an all-inclusive, ‘grand narrative’ of cases or deep exploration of the sophisticated and complex symbolism that could attend individual instances of reuse.

<sup>68</sup> As on the tomb of Elizabeth Johnston (Figure 1.6): Waterfield and Woodward 1996: 83–4 (noting Soane’s use of strigillation).

## Introducing the Sarcophagi

### INTRODUCING STRIGILLATED SARCOPHAGI: TYPICAL FEATURES

Although Roman strigillated sarcophagi are immensely varied in the details of their individual decoration, their main types and features can be quite simply described in a brief, synchronic introduction.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The sarcophagi*

The sarcophagi are made of marble.<sup>2</sup> Like others used in Rome, their main decoration was on the front of the chest and lid; usually the back was left undecorated (to be placed up against the wall of the tomb building) and motifs on the small sides worked in low relief.

There is no single type of ‘strigillated sarcophagus’, since they come in various shapes, sizes, and proportions. Some, intended for couples, were large; a few were massive, and there were tiny ones for infants.<sup>3</sup> Most are rectangular in form (with or without rounded corners), while others (known as *lenoi*) were shaped like elongated tubs, sometimes with flaring sides.<sup>4</sup> Lids took various forms, but were often flat with a vertical front face which could be high or shallow, and was usually decorated.<sup>5</sup> Others were formed like a pitched roof,

<sup>1</sup> As such it gives limited examples and references.

<sup>2</sup> For a fragment of a porphyry sarcophagus: Amedick 2010. Limestone was also used outside Rome in some areas: e.g. Christern-Briesnick in *RS* III: nos 627–31 and 633–6 (North Africa).

<sup>3</sup> Compare sizes of *lenoi* with corner groups of lions and prey: fragmentary side panels in the Vatican are 1.50 m high (*ASR* VI, 1: no. 371), while a child’s is only 0.60 m high (including the lid) and 1.11 m long (*ASR* VI, 1: no. 409). Borg 2013: 203 for the large number for double burials in sarcophagi (not necessarily of married couples).

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Figures 2.4, 5.8, and 8.1 for rectangular. For *lenoi* see Figures 2.2, 3.1, and 5.10. For the relationship between lions’ head *lenoi* and large tubs often displayed in baths (as opposed to vats for wine-making) see Ambrogi 1999: 51–2, with references, including Stroszeck in *ASR* VI, 1.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. here Figures 7.3, 8.2, 9.1, and 9.5. For lids generally: Sichtermann in *KS* 66–72; and Wischmeyer 1982 (on Constantinian Christian sarcophagi).



often with ‘roof tiles’ and *acroteria*, while a few had reclining figures, as on a couch (*kline*).<sup>6</sup>

As well as the sarcophagi, there are also flat panels (often called by the Italian term *lastre*, or ‘pseudo-sarcophagi’), which were used to cover burial places in walls, or coffins of other material fitted into *arcosolia*.<sup>7</sup> Though thinner than the front panels of sarcophagi, they were often decorated to resemble them—even to the extent of having sections distinguished as ‘lids’—with motifs that were sometimes inscribed or worked in low relief.<sup>8</sup>

### *The fluting*

Fluting, arranged in decorative panels, is the defining feature of strigillated sarcophagi and *lastre*, but varies considerably in form and visual impact. Although it is sometimes vertical (and partially infilled), on most examples it follows the distinctive ‘S’ shaped line.<sup>9</sup> These curved ‘strigils’ have two possible forms: in one they are divided from each other by a single crest (as on Doric columns), while in the other each flute is framed by its own narrow raised moulding, so that it appears separated from its neighbours by a narrow groove between them (as on Ionic).<sup>10</sup> There are also variations in the width and depth of the flutes, and in the curvature of its line.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes the spaces between the ends of the flutes were embellished with small tear-shaped or round motifs.<sup>12</sup> Originally too the fluting was probably gilded or coloured (as were other parts of the sarcophagus).<sup>13</sup>

Occasionally strigillated decoration was used on the sides or back of a sarcophagus or even on its lid, but primarily it decorated the front.<sup>14</sup> Yet here too its arrangement varied considerably. In their authoritative account of Roman

<sup>6</sup> Roof-like: here Figures 7.5 and 9.4. *Kline* lids: e.g. *RS I*: no. 392, and Iannacone in Tomei 2006: 292, Cat. II. 401.

<sup>7</sup> e.g. Agnoli 1998, 2001, and in *Ostia XII*, 208–13. See also Figure 4.1 (on left).

<sup>8</sup> e.g. *Ostia XII*: e.g. 253–8, B 100–B 116. Agnoli 1998: 130–2 lists critical differences from sarcophagi.

<sup>9</sup> Vertical: see here Figure 7.7. On a sarcophagus in Calenzano, Corsica, the vertical flutes exceptionally lack infill: *RS III*: no. 202; Koch 2012a: 13 (local copy or import from southern Gaul).

<sup>10</sup> For a clear illustration of the differences and their effects, see *Ostia XII*: tav. 101 where in examples B42 and B43 the strigils are separated by a groove, while on B 44 there is a single crest. Cf. here Figures 3.1 (single crest) and 3.7 (groove).

<sup>11</sup> Examples of relatively broad: *RS I*: no. 665 (here Figure 5.9); relatively narrow *RS II*: no. 101 (here Figure 2.5); scarcely curving: Pulvers 2002: 777, no. 1737.

<sup>12</sup> Examples of ‘tears’: *Ostia XII*: 235, B 45; cf. also *ASR VI*, 1: nos 167 and 317. For round motifs: e.g. *RS I*: nos 233a, 235a, 758.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 3 for the limited evidence.

<sup>14</sup> Sides: e.g. Testini 1973–4: 168, fig. 3; *RS III*: no. 38, pls 13, 4. Back (on a few, high-status fourth-century sarcophagi): e.g. *RS II*: nos 101, 146, 148, 149; Figures 2.5 and 10.9. Lid: e.g. *MNR Cat I*, 8, 2: 345–6, no. VII, 10.