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Life, Death and Representation

Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi

Edited by

Jaś Elsner and Janet Huskinson

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Abbreviations

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| <i>AE</i> | <i>L'Année Épigraphique</i> |
| <i>Aquarius</i> | <i>La catalogazione automatica dei sarcofagi reimpiegati. La stampa dei documenti. (user name: F. Martorana)</i> (Pisa, 4.8.1982). |
| <i>ASR</i> | <i>Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs</i> (Berlin 1890 –). |
| <i>ASR I, 2</i> | Andreae, B. <i>Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben. Die römischen Jagdsarkophage</i> (Berlin, 1980). |
| <i>ASR I, 3</i> | Reinsberg, C. <i>Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben. Vita Romana-Sarkophage</i> (Berlin, 2006). |
| <i>ASR I, 4</i> | Amedick, R. <i>Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben. Vita privata</i> (Berlin, 1991). |
| <i>ASR III, 1</i> | Robert, C. <i>Einzelmythen – Actaeon bis Hercules</i> (Berlin, 1897). |
| <i>ASR III, 2</i> | Robert, C. <i>Einzelmythen – Hippolytos bis Meleagros</i> (Berlin, 1904). |
| <i>ASR III, 3</i> | Robert, C. <i>Einzelmythen – Niobiden bis Triptolemos</i> (Berlin, 1919) |
| <i>ASR IV, 1</i> | Matz, F. <i>Die dionysischen Sarkophage. Die Typen der Figuren. Die Denkmäler 1-71 B</i> (Berlin, 1968). |
| <i>ASR IV, 2</i> | Matz, F. <i>Die dionysischen Sarkophage. Die Denkmäler 72-161</i> (Berlin, 1968). |
| <i>ASR IV, 3</i> | Matz, F. <i>Die dionysischen Sarkophage. Die Denkmäler 162-245</i> (Berlin, 1969). |
| <i>ASR IV, 4</i> | Matz, F. <i>Die dionysischen Sarkophage. Die Denkmäler 246-385</i> (Berlin, 1975). |
| <i>ASR V, 1</i> | Rumpf, A. <i>Die Meerwesen auf den antiken Sarkophagreliefs</i> (Berlin, 1939). |
| <i>ASR V, 2, 1</i> | Kranz, P. <i>Die stadtrömischen Erosen-Sarkophage 1: Dionysische Themen: Ausnahme der Weinlese- und Ernteszenen</i> (Berlin, 1999). |
| <i>ASR V, 2, 2</i> | Bielefeld, D. <i>Die stadtrömischen Erosen-Sarkophage – Weinlese- und Ernteszenen</i> (Berlin, 1997). |
| <i>ASR V, 2, 3</i> | Schauenburg, K. <i>Die stadtrömischen Erosen-Sarkophage 3: Zirkusrennen</i> (Berlin, 1995). |
| <i>ASR V, 3</i> | Wegner, M. <i>Die Musensarkophage</i> (Berlin, 1966). |
| <i>ASR V, 4</i> | Kranz, P. <i>Jahreszeiten-Sarkophage. Entwicklung und Ikonographie des Motivs der vier Jahreszeiten auf klassischen Sarkophagen und Sarkophagdeckeln</i> (Berlin, 1984). |
| <i>ASR VI, 1</i> | Stroszeck, J. <i>Die dekorativen römischen Sarkophage. Die Löwen-Sarkophage. Die Sarkophage mit Löwenköpfen, schreitenden Löwen und Löwenkampfgruppen</i> (Berlin, 1998). |

- ASR VI,2,1 Herdejürgen, H. *Die dekorativen römischen Sarkophage. Stadtrömische und italische Girlandensarkophage. Die Sarkophage des ersten und zweiten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1996).
- ASR VII Herbig, R. *Die Jüngeretruskischen Steinsarkophage* (Berlin, 1952)
- ASR VIII,2 Kollwitz, J. and Herdejürgen, H. *Die Sarkophage der westlichen Gebiete des Imperium Romanum. Die ravennatischen Sarkophage* (Berlin, 1975).
- ASR IX,1 Rogge, S. *Die Sarkophage Griechenlands und der Donauprovinzen. Die attischen Sarkophage. Achill und Hippolytos* (Berlin, 1995).
- ASR XII, 1 Grassinger, D. *Die mythologischen Sarkophage. Achill, Adonis, Aeneas, Aktaion, Alkestis, Amazonen* (Berlin, 1999).
- ASR XII,2 Sichtermann, H. *Die mythologischen Sarkophage. Apollon, Ares, Bellerophon, Daidalos, Endymion, Ganymed, Giganten, Grazien* (Berlin, 1992).
- ASR XII,6 Koch, G. *Die mythologischen Sarkophage. Meleager* (Berlin, 1975).
- CIG *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*
- CIL *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
- Digest *The Digest of Justinian*. Edited by A. Watson (Philadelphia, 1998).
- EphEp *Ephemeris Epigraphica. Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum Supplementum*
- ICUR *Inscriptiones christianae urbis Romae*
- ILCV *Inscriptiones latinae christianae veteres*
- LIMC *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (Zurich and Munich, 1981-1999)
- MNR Museo Nazionale Romano
- PLRE Jones, A. H. M., Martindale, J. R. and Morris, J. *Prosopography of the later Roman empire* (Cambridge, 1971-)
- PPM Baldassare, I., Lanzillotta, T. and Salomi, S. *Pompei. Pitture e Mosaici, vols. 1-9* (Rome, 1990-2000).
- Rep. *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage*
- Rep. I Deichmann, F., Bovini, G. and Brandenburg, H. *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage I. Rom und Ostia* (Wiesbaden, 1967).
- Rep. II Dresken-Weiland, J. *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage II. Italien mit einem Nachtrag Rom und Ostia, Dalmatien, Museen der Welt* (Mainz, 1998).
- Rep. III Christern-Briesenick, B. *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage III. Frankreich, Algerien, Tunesien* (Mainz, 2003).
- SEG *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*

All dates are AD unless indicated otherwise.

Introduction

JAS ELSNER

This book was born out of two impulses. First, there is no single volume of essays on Roman sarcophagi in English, despite the great antiquity of their systematic study (for well over a century). Nor is there a good introduction for purely Anglophone students to the rich and thoughtful traditions of continental research on sarcophagi, particularly in German scholarship. Second, current research has focused insistently on a relatively small corpus – the sarcophagi carved with ancient mythological subjects, usually studied within the timeframe and cultural context of their place and moment of production. This body of material is small by comparison with the vast surviving quantity of Roman sarcophagi which certainly number over 10,000 examples and may stretch to as many as 20,000 including fragments (many unpublished). Large areas of great interest in the big picture of what the production and survival of ancient sarcophagi mean, have been relatively little discussed – especially questions of reception and the longevity of sarcophagi through reuse and spoliation into the middle ages, and questions related to their material nature (the kinds of marble used for them and what this means for the industries of their production and distribution in antiquity). Our aim here is not a radical rethink of all the assumptions guiding the long study of sarcophagi, but rather a blend of new approaches with new thinking on traditional questions, coupled with an insistence on the bigger picture of production and reception as well as a refusal to follow the scholarship's strange division between sarcophagi with Christian subjects and those without, which were produced in the same places by the same workshops for very similar patrons and clients.

The study of sarcophagi (*Sarkophagstudien*, to give the subject its most professional terminology,¹ and one that reveals the subject's fundamental German origins) is an odd discipline. It is on the one hand the result of a focus on a very particular kind of object and on the other of the remarkable quantity of such objects that have survived in the archaeological record. By far the greatest number of our surviving sarcophagi is from the Roman Empire rather than from anywhere in the Mediterranean before imperial times. Of these, again the largest number by far are what German scholarship calls 'stadtrömische' – that is made often from imported marble in the City of Rome itself, either for use

1 See e.g. Koch 1998, 2002 and 2007 for the series *Sarkophag-Studien*. For a recent general review of the field see Baratte 2006.

there or for export across the empire, but significant numbers were produced elsewhere in Italy, in Greece, Asia Minor, the eastern provinces and southern France in late antiquity. While the essays in this book are in principle concerned with sarcophagi from all over the empire, it is inevitable – given the bulk of our examples and the resulting stress of the large majority of the literature – that most focus on examples from the city of Rome.

Sarcophagi are typically body-sized boxes (made for one or more bodies, and many of the surviving examples include the bones of more than one individual) with a lid. The decorated instances number thousands, which means they are susceptible to statistical and quantitative analysis in ways most other classes of surviving ancient art are not.² They may be carved only on the front, more typically on the front and on the two ends (with the ends often sculpted in lower relief than the front), relatively rarely on all four sides (but commonly so in sarcophagi from Attica or the east). Hardly any are decorated on the interior, and these are from the provinces.³ The extent of decoration can be very simple or highly complex, from ‘abstract’ (as in the large number of strigillated examples that survive – perhaps more than a thousand, including fragments) via relatively non-complex designs such as garlands to vivid realisations of visual narratives. The lid may emulate the roof of a building, turning the whole sarcophagus into a form of body-sized micro-architecture; or it may show an individual or couple reclining as if in life, in three-dimensional form by contrast with the relief-decoration of the main base; or it may add a further band of imagery to run alongside, perhaps also to comment on, the images of the main base; and it often includes a panel for an inscription (which may have been painted, in which case it is now lost). It is not surprising that the major scholarly emphasis has been on the visually richer examples with figures or subjects taken from Greco-Roman mythology or Christian scripture, since they are among our most impressive surviving monuments of Roman art; but it is worth mentioning that to emphasise such examples (as does this volume, and almost all other discussions) is to stress a small sample within the much larger surviving body of sarcophagi which are decorated with non-narrative subjects, such as garlands, paired images of lions and strigillation.

The richness and diversity of types of decoration within a highly restricted material format goes with two intriguing chronological issues, neither of which has been fully or finally explained. First, sarcophagi came into significant de-

2 For some statistical discussions of iconographical matters in published sarcophagi see Ewald 2004, 234–7, 250–3; Zanker 2005; and for a chronological overview of changes in the spectrum of themes between the second and fourth centuries, see Ewald 2003, 563–5.

3 For instance, the Simeon sarcophagus with Holwerda, 1933 and Bastet, 1979, no. 32, or the Kerch sarcophagus with Rostovtzeff, 2004, vol. 1, 474–92.

mand rather suddenly towards the beginning of the second century in Italy,⁴ and somewhat later in Greece.⁵ This has been tied to a fundamental social move from cremation to inhumation in the disposal of the dead, with ash chests and urns seen as the precursors of sarcophagi.⁶ But we need to use some circumspection here – it is clearly the case that sarcophagi come to outnumber ash chests in the course of the second and third century, but they never wholly replace them. Moreover, it is by no means certain that all sarcophagi were always used for inhumation – we have some examples where (despite their body-shaped form and size) sarcophagi appear to have been used for ashes.⁷ Second, and no less problematic, is the sudden end of large-scale and high-quality decorated sarcophagus production at the inception of the fifth century – at least in Rome, although production continued at a much reduced scale in local centres such as the South of France, where the material used shifted from imported marble to local stone, and at an elite level in imperial centres such as Ravenna and Constantinople.⁸ The general phenomenon has been tied to wider changes in aesthetics, material production and burial practices in late antiquity,⁹ but it has never been adequately explained. Yet – even if clear explanations and causes for the beginning and end of the vast numbers of Roman sarcophagi produced between the early second and the early fifth centuries cannot be certainly grasped – the remarkable growth and development of a spectacular artistic phenomenon in a very specific medium and type of object is itself worthy of study as a process; it remains astonishing that there has never been an attempt at a full, single synoptic account.

The ‘scientific’ field of sarcophagus studies reaches back to the seminal enterprise of Friedrich Matz the elder and Carl Robert from the 1870s in establishing what became the *Antiken Sarkophagreliefs* series (*ASR*) and before that (as Bjoern Ewald reminds us in this volume) to Winckelmann and the inception of Classical archaeology as an academic discipline in the eighteenth century. But we may fairly say that the regular (re-)discovery and reuse of

4 See especially Brandenburg 1978; Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 35–61; Müller 1994, 139–70. In Italy at any rate there was a significant traditions of Etruscan forerunners in stone from c. 350 BC: See *ASR* VII and van der Meer, 2004. Nor was the occasional use of sarcophagi unknown in the first centuries BC and AD.

5 See Ewald 2004, 231. Herdejürgen 1981 is correct to note some first century examples (as there were some in Italy) but the key issue is the production of large quantities.

6 Toynbee 1971, 39–40; Brandenburg 1978, 324–6; Davies in this volume.

7 On sarcophagi as ash urns: Cumont 1931, 352; Nock 1932, 333 and n.61; Toynbee 1971, 40 and n.107.

8 On the end of sarcophagus production, see Brandenburg 2002, and Brandenburg 2004. On Ravenna see *ASR* VIII.2, *Rep* II. 118–26 and Koch 2000, 379–98; on Constantinople, see *Rep*. II, 126–30; Koch 2000, 399–443; Deckers 2004; on Gaul, Benoit 1954, 5–7.

9 See Elsner 2004, 277–86.

sarcophagi has been a fundamental constant in the European artistic tradition since late antiquity itself.¹⁰ From within antiquity sarcophagi were reused for reburials. By the early middle ages, more sacred and decorative re-employments were added to this fundamental and continuing function – notably with sarcophagi serving as caskets for saints’ relics (that is, as the ancient tombs of the very special dead)¹¹ and their carved fronts as the display spolia in the façades of churches (the cathedrals of Genoa in Italy and Tarragona in Spain spring to mind).¹² The above-ground display throughout the middle ages of carved sarcophagi now in the Camposanto at Pisa,¹³ as a veritable art gallery of ancient relief sculpture, clearly led to significant imitation and inspiration for the likes of Nicola Pisano and others in the development of early Renaissance sculptural styles in their work on the pulpits of the cathedral and baptistery in the same complex.¹⁴

This very long history of excavation, display and re-use is itself a signal of the great problem in finding examples that have any significant archaeological context. Indeed, it is only in very recent years than an attempt has been made, in the path-breaking book of Jutta Dresken-Weiland on the Western empire, to create any kind of systematic catalogue of sarcophagi that can be contextualised.¹⁵ The difficulties, however, are great. We must rely on old records of finds to attempt even a general sense of archaeological context (rarely anything as specific as a find-spot). We must believe the epigraphic data (more than I do) to trust that a sarcophagus apparently made for a woman, for instance, (like that of

10 In the history of the reuse of antiquities sarcophagi hold a privileged place. For a general conspectus, see Settis 1986, with further and more nuanced thoughts in Settis 2004 and 2008.

11 For instance, the small sarcophagus said to have housed the relics of St Caesarius of Arles from as early as 883: See Benoit 1935 and 1946, *Rep.* III, no. 79; or the sarcophagus said to be of St Martha which appears to have had a reliquary function since 1187, see *Rep.* III no. 511; or the sarcophagi found in 1279 at La Ste. Baume and interpreted as the reliquary containers of a series of saints including Mary Magdalene: see Saxer 1955, *Rep.* III nos 497–500, Fixot 2001. For the charged issue of what happens when the bones a coffin holds are discovered to be holy, see the modern debate on the first century ossuary of James, the brother of Jesus in e.g. Byrne and McNary-Zak 2009.

12 The literature is large. See e.g. Andreae and Settis 1984 (where Genoa is discussed by Lucia Faedo; on Tarragona, see Rodà 1998, 154); Greenhalgh 1989, 194–201; Greenhalgh 2009, 207–212.

13 See Arias, Cristiani and Gabba 1977. They lined the outside walls of the Cathedral until they were removed to the Camposanto when Pisa came under Florentine occupation in 1406: just one example of the intricate political complications underlying display choices in the history of the reception of sarcophagi. See Tolaini 2008.

14 E.g. Seidel 1975. For a general overview, Zanker and Ewald 2004, 9–24.

15 Dresken-Weiland 2003. For the special and limited case of Aphrodisias, see Smith 2008. On tombs in context (not specifically sarcophagi) see Feraudi-Gruénais 2001. Of great importance in this area will be Borg forthcoming, and Meinecke forthcoming.

Bassa, discussed in this volume by Dennis Trout) was certainly not intended to include also the bodies of her husband and children, despite the absence of their mention on a given inscription.¹⁶ With osteological evidence of bones inside sarcophagi, we are on equally difficult ground, since it is not certain that any given group of bones actually belonged to the person initially intended for or buried inside a given coffin. All this prompts some doubts as to some of the more optimistic conclusions about gender, influences of customers on image-choices and questions of arrangement and display in Dresken-Weiland's book, despite its outstandingly important catalogue and discussion.¹⁷

However, as the essays by Ben Russell and Frances Van Keuren et al. in this volume demonstrate, the application of modern technologies and methods from the sciences and social sciences can – even in this uncertain archaeological terrain – throw substantial light on some aspects of the making and trading of sarcophagi. Notably, scientific analysis can tell us much about where different kinds of marble came from, and this in turn illuminates the remarkable breadth and extent of the marble trade in the Roman Empire. John Herrmann's note, arising from the scientific evidence that some fourth century sarcophagi were made from Carrara marble – that is, from a quarry largely out of service after the second century – suggests that the practice of using old blocks (whether previously carved or uncarved) for sarcophagus-production in the late antique period was in fact extremely widespread, with sarcophagi playing a full part in the well-attested culture of spoliation and reuse that appears to have become frequent in the course of the third century.¹⁸ The movement of sarcophagi – some decoratively roughed-out and some uncut – to workshops in Rome or Athens from quarries in Asia Minor, Greece and Italy, and the movement of finished artefacts to Southern France, Sicily and Dalmatia as well as all over Italy has the potential to be a very rich source for the dynamics of demand, the economics of the market and the analysis of questions of 'industry' and 'mass production' in the Roman world.¹⁹

From the points of view of both art history and social history, the loss of archaeological context for almost all our surviving sarcophagi (except any dis-

16 On inscriptions see Wischmeyer 1982, 117–57; Dresken-Weiland 2003, 18–80, Dresken-Weiland 2004.

17 It may be added that sarcophagi are by no means unique in having been studied so late in a contextualised model. See now Audley-Miller 2010, for a catalogue of Roman funerary portraits with archaeological context. Some recent discussion of funerary ritual in archaeological context may be found in Heinzlmann, Ortili, Fasold and Witteyer 2001 and in relation to the materials from Ostia in Heinzlmann 2000, 97–101.

18 On third century spolia see e.g. Pensabene 1993, 762–8; Pensabene and Panella 1993–4, 112–25; on spolia in general see e.g. Lachenal 1995 and Hansen 2003.

19 On sarcophagi from Gaul, see Turcan 1999, 269–332 and *Rep.* III; on Sicily, see Tusa 1957; on Dalmatia, see Cambi 1998.

covered very recently) has been little short of catastrophic. A good example of the problem is the outstanding second and third century group of sarcophagi discovered together in 1885 in two underground chambers on the Via Salaria in Rome, of which 7 are now in Baltimore, 2 in Rome and 1 (an undecorated sarcophagus) was destroyed shortly after excavation.²⁰ A third chamber – the first chronologically and probably part of the same tomb (though this has been contested) contained a series of high quality statues, busts and funerary altars.²¹ The sarcophagi offer a collection of examples, some of exceptional quality, that belonged together in antiquity and were placed in a single tomb – which has been identified as belonging to an extremely distinguished Senatorial family, the Licinii and Calpurnii – which appears to have had continuous usage of the site for some 200 years from the first to the early third century.²² The original excavation reports fail to record any kind of context, including the arrangement or placement of the items, their contiguity or otherwise, or any issue that might respond to a bigger visual question than the specific iconography of given examples in isolation.²³ Yet we know enough in general to say that the majority of second and early third century sarcophagi were placed in mausolea,²⁴ that many of these were not only carefully laid out – so that some kind of attention was at least potentially paid to the visual arrangement of sarcophagi in relation to each other – but also that the walls and ceilings of these spaces were painted with frescoes, the mythological subjects of which may have emulated the subjects carved on the sarcophagi.²⁵ Precisely the same considerations apply to sarcophagi placed in decorated underground hypogea and cubicula in catacombs.²⁶ Of course this picture of carefully created integral contexts of display is too simple. Many such tombs, as family complexes, were added to over time as in the Via Salaria burials mentioned above, and every available space may have eventually been stuffed with items which will have confused any original visual co-ordination or conceptual planning. Something like this may have been the case in the so-called Tomb of the Pancratii on the Via Latina in Rome, from which some stucco decoration survives and at least 7 sarcophagi were recovered

20 Lehmann-Hartleben and Olsen 1942, 10 and esp. Kragelund, Moltesen and Østergaard 2003, 55–79.

21 See e.g. Kragelund, Moltesen and Østergaard 2003, 46–54 and 109–111 (altars), 81–100 and 113–115 (portraits).

22 See e.g. Bentz 1997/8; van Keuren 2002; Kragelund, Moltesen and Østergaard 2003.

23 Especially Fiorelli 1885. Full original documentation is in Kragelund, Moltesen and Østergaard 2003, 55–65 and 116–25. Discussion of the dig is *ibid* 13–18.

24 Dresken-Weiland 2003, 98–107.

25 For an outstanding discussion of one such example in Rome, see Bielfeldt 2003.

26 For an example, see the Crypt of the Twelve Apostles in the Catacomb of Marcellus and Marcellinus, with Saint-Roch 1981, 219–23 and Saint-Roch 1999, 34–6, 97–99, 119–122.

after the original find of 1858, of which 5 still exist.²⁷ The question of when such tombs were available to visitors or to display is also an open one – and it may be no more often than on the anniversary of decease or when a new burial was added; likewise, the issue of to whom such display was made possible (just family? chosen visitors? slaves and freedmen? long-standing clients?) is unresolved and likely never to be soluble.

Yet not only are there hardly any studies of such integrated contexts – either in their original form or as developments over time – but the job is in fact difficult for the archaeological reasons laid out in my lament about the group of sarcophagi now mainly in Baltimore.²⁸ However, in principle the issues are extremely interesting. There is a potential for linking the different narrative directions of different sarcophagi (some ‘reading’ left to right, some right to left and some with highly centralised designs) to placement in different positions in the same site – for instance in left and right hand niches or *arcosolia* that comprised tomb spaces. There is the further issue that sarcophagi place decoration on the exterior of the coffin space, protecting or encasing the dead as it were with imagery designed to be viewed by the living, while the spaces containing sarcophagi – mausolea or cubicula – are decorated on their interiors, with a range of painted imagery that itself encases a viewer, that plays with or against the sarcophagi within them, and that relates as a flat pictorial field to the carved relief surface of the sarcophagi. Questions of the apotropaic function of imagery, of whether sarcophagus decoration was for the edification of the dead in their tomb-houses or for the living who occasionally visited them to mourn and remember, of whether imagery – like the representation of garlands and other offerings – might function as a replacement for (or a perpetual performance of) funerary ritual,²⁹ would all be profoundly advanced if we had more by way of context.

It is worth noting, however, that the contextual turn is historiographic in that it inevitably goes with a reaction to the long history of reception and of the kind of archaeology that demolished contexts as it unearthed trophy objects, and demolished objects (like the uncarved sarcophagus in the tomb of Licinii) which did not make display pieces. It is also profoundly limited – at any rate for sarcophagi – because with the best will in the world it can never be applicable to more than a few hundred sarcophagi at most (and many of these in only the vaguest terms) out of the thousands that survive.

27 Herdejürgen 2000, 220–34; Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, catalogue K48, 108–114 and Dresken-Weiland 2003, catalogue A.55, 313–4.

28 That said, in cases where something might be attempted it usually has not been – witness Saint-Roch 1999, who discusses the room, the paintings and the sarcophagi separately as if they had no potential integral relations.

29 On sarcophagi decorated with implements of cult see Herdejürgen 1984.

As so often with fields that boast a venerable and ancient historiography of continuous study over more than a century, there have been some very eccentric turns taken in the discussion of these objects, which remain influential in circumscribing the field.³⁰ Some issues – such as the question of sarcophagi as micro-architecture, to which Edmund Thomas returns in this volume – had brief outings in the course of the last 150 years and were promptly forgotten.³¹ The great question of stylistic change in Roman art and how it could be traced most intimately and precisely through the vast empirical archive of sarcophagi was arguably the dominant aspect of the field for most of the twentieth century, but appears entirely to have dropped out of fashion in the last 30 years.³² The attempt to write a social history of the Roman upper class through the ways imagery on sarcophagi has emulated so-called state reliefs is an old one which remains in play – it is closely inter-related with the *ASR* category of catalogues of sarcophagi showing images of public and private life (*Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben*).³³

Most notable is the rigorous separation of ‘pagan’ from Christian sarcophagi, not only in the vast majority of discussions but even in the main handbooks and the key fundamental corpora which catalogue and reproduce the surviving examples.³⁴ Indeed, institutionally different disciplines – *Klassische*

30 One historiographic survey is Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 3–19 and 621–3.

31 See Altmann 1902 for the last extensive account of architectural structure.

32 This was how Alois Riegl used sarcophagi in his seminal *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*: Riegl 1901, 71–81. The obsession with stylistic change (*Stilwandel*) became the driving force in the work of the giants of twentieth century Roman art history including Gerhard Rodenwaldt and Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli: see especially Rodenwaldt 1935 as well as Rodenwaldt 1925, 1935–6, 1936, 1939 and 1944 with Effenberger 1986, Thümmel 1986 and Zimmermann 1986; also Bianchi Bandinelli 1970, 313–28 (although this is focused on historical reliefs). For this topic as late as the 1980s, see Jung 1984. For a recent discussion of formal and iconographic changes, and also the move to pre-Constantinian Christian sarcophagi, see Zanker and Ewald 2004, 247–66.

33 See e.g. Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 88–126; Wrede 2001.

34 Handbooks: Pagan – Koch and Sichtermann 1982 (also Koch 1993a); Christian: Koch 2000 (also Koch 1996, 107–24). Corpora: the great ‘pagan’ series is *ASR*, on which see Koch 1998 ix–x for a brief history and 318–20 for a conspectus of the envisaged volumes; the Christian series is *Rep*. Note the way that the edited volumes of the *Sarkophag-Studien* series (e.g. Koch 1998 and 2007; also Koch 1993b), systematically exclude Christian material (although Koch 2007 has a short piece on Jewish ossuaries and Koch 1993b has a piece on a relief from a sarcophagus from Constantinople which is necessarily Christian), yet Koch himself is perhaps the foremost expert on Christian sarcophagi; the same observation may be made of the early Christian side of the field: Koch 2002, and Bisconti and Brandenburg 2004, contain hardly any non-Christian material. One exception to this obsessive divisionalisation is when the scholarly focus is on the extant remains in a given province or region: Noguera Celdrán and Conde Guerri 2001, is an admirable mix of Christian and pre-Christian material in Spain. However, for Southern France, Drocourt-Dubreuil 1989 eccentrically excludes the non-Christian

Archäologie and *Christliche Archäologie* – have been traditionally responsible for the two areas of study. All this despite the fact that from the later third century the same workshops in Rome appear to have been making sarcophagi with ‘pagan’ and Christian and Jewish iconography for patrons of broadly the same social standing.³⁵ This division is an example of the larger institutional split between the study of late antique art, seen as a branch of Classical archaeology, and the study of early Christian art, seen as the inception of Byzantine and medieval art history.³⁶ In respect of logic, materials, historical context and artists – that is, the sociology of production – the division makes absolutely no sense at all, since it is dependent on the separation of Christian *iconography* from other iconographies (in ways we do not adopt or accept when thinking about Dionysiac or Meleager iconographies, let alone erotes or garlands). At the same time, insofar as some Christian patrons may have partaken of a different eschatology, and hence a different view of life and death, from other Romans, one can see that different ways of viewing and patron-relations to the finished object are potentially at play in Christian iconographies. This however is a subtle nuance within what ought to be one field; but the divide of sarcophagus studies into two different fields is fundamental to the history and evolution of disciplines, including the differentiation of secular subjects from theology in the early modern period. It is not so easily overcome.

In interpretative terms – and ones not wholly unconnected with the Christian/Pagan divide – the great shift that took place in the field in the 1940s remains of huge importance to the ways scholarship is still practiced. In 1942, Franz Cumont (1868–1947), the great Belgian scholar of ancient religions and their archaeology, published his *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains*.³⁷ Although by no means only about sarcophagi, this book was – and remains – the most systematic and relentless attempt to find religious, allegorical and symbolic meanings in the non-Christian sarcophagi. It is hard to resist the conclusion that Cumont’s interpretative model is ultimately Christianising in that it is driven by Christian-modulated assumptions about religion, such as the centrality of belief, which are at least contestable and need to be enticed out

material from the site of St Victor at Marseilles, while Gaggadis-Robin 2005 publishes only the pagan sarcophagi in the Arles Museum.

35 The Jewish question is complex: see Elsner 2003. Clearly there are many sarcophagi with Old Testament themes used in a Christian context. There are a few which may be seen as made for Jews (or re-used by them) with specifically Jewish imagery like the menorah: see Konikoff 1986 and Rutgers 1995, 77–81. What is not clear is whether any of the sarcophagi we think of as Christian might have also been used by Jewish patrons or perceived as inoffensive by Jewish viewers.

36 See Elsner 2004, 271–86.

37 Cumont 1942.

of the material evidence.³⁸ Cumont's position, although influential on a small number of scholars and most especially the great French expert on sarcophagi, Robert Turcan,³⁹ remains largely a road no longer travelled. In 1946, Cumont's book received a brilliant, sceptical, thirty-page review from A. D. Nock.⁴⁰ This consisted of a series of demolitional vignettes of some of Cumont's stronger proposals resulting in the following general proposition about the nature of Roman sarcophagi:

We are left with classicism and culture as a prime factor when we look at these representations [on sarcophagi] or at a grave altar with the tale of Pasiphae. They mean no more than do the garland sarcophagi and it matters not whether the garlands hang by themselves or are carried by Erotes. Literary classicism is the predominant factor, but there was also a similar feeling towards many art works of the great past.

And again:

In spite of local variations there is massive unity in this sepulchral art; but is it not a unity of cultural inheritance and to some extent of feeling rather than a unity of belief?⁴¹

I think it little exaggeration to say that where Nock led, just about the entire field has followed for well over half a century. Whether in the direction of mythological narratives and classicising interpretations,⁴² or into the world of social meanings and mourning,⁴³ let alone more directly archaeological issues of formal influence, typology and iconography,⁴⁴ Nock's twin formula of 'classicism and culture' reigns supreme. Nock's intervention allowed Classicists to heave a collective sigh of relief and leave issues of belief and symbolic meaning to their early Christian brethren. But it is worth asking if the secularist agenda which has been ascendant since Nock is not itself limiting and potentially

38 However, Cumont's model of ancient religion should not be lead to the assumption that he was himself a Christian apologist. He was prevented from occupying the Chair of Roman History at Ghent in 1910 specifically because he was seen as not Catholic enough. His thinking may be better placed in the context of Belgian symbolism and pre-World War I mysticism, which included a strong tradition of Freemasonry in Belgium.

39 See for instance Turcan 1966, 1999 and 2003 and especially his riposte to the rejection of Cumont in Turcan 1978; also Engemann 1973.

40 Nock 1946. For an interesting account of Cumont and Nock in relation to epiphanic sarcophagi, see Platt, forthcoming, chapter 8.

41 Nock 1946, 166 and 169.

42 For example, books: Müller 1994; Koortbojian 1995 (explicitly at p. 3, n. 3); Bielfeldt 2005; significant shorter pieces (out of vast numbers) Blome 1978; Brilliant 1984, 124–65; Giuliani 1989; Blome 1992; Zanker 1999; Zanker 2000, and Zanker 2005.

43 Magisterially Zanker and Ewald 2004; on the image of the intellectual see Zanker 1995, 267–97; esp. Ewald 1999; Borg 2004b, 167–71.

44 For instance, Himmelman 1979.

restrictive,⁴⁵ as if some questions of belief and the search for meaning after death were not in play for at least some viewers and users of sarcophagi in antiquity.⁴⁶ The opening of Nock's final sentence in his famous review is worth citing here: 'Our decisions are personal; at all times students of ancient religion are almost necessarily maximizers or minimizers....'⁴⁷ Insofar as sarcophagi touch on questions of the aftermath of death, Nock is quite right to see the burden of explanation as an interpretative and personal one for the modern interpreter just as much as for the ancient viewer. It may be that the 'minimizers' may have dominated the field for too long.

The result of Classical archaeology's abandonment of the Cumontian arena of belief has meant that little work has been done on the potential parallelisms of Christian visual promises of salvation and afterlife by comparison with those in pagan sarcophagi (even when – as in the case of Dionysus' epiphany to Ariadne or Selene's appearance to Endymion – there may be some implication of a better future in a better place). Similarly the appropriation of 'paradisaal' themes from pagan to Christian iconographies – one thinks of bucolic or seasonal imagery, or the sleeping Ariadne and Endymion reconfigured as the type of the resting Jonah – while frequently noted, have never been the subject of sustained and systematic analysis that explores the transformation of culture through iconography in the carefully limited context of a single type of monument with a funerary function. At the same time, Christian sarcophagi have rarely been subjected to the kinds of social, functional and economic analysis that Nock's 'culture and classicism' opened for the non-Christian corpus. They have for too long remained in a scripturally-determined ghetto of iconographic and typological description. Yet, in testing for instance the kinds of rhetorical emphasis of praise or polemic offered by Christian sarcophagi (as Jaś Elsner begins to do here), and alternatively by pagan sarcophagi, as well as comparing the two approaches – something may be learned on both sides of a largely false divide.

45 See Horden and Purcell 2000, 447 for problems with the 'extreme secularising tendency' governing studies of ancient religion in general in the second half of the twentieth century.

46 It is interesting that Nock's model for reading sarcophagi anticipates by a generation that primarily adopted for understanding the so-called 'Second Sophistic', especially in seminal work of Ewen Bowie 1970, and those who have followed him in a cultural interpretation, such as Anderson 1993; Swain 1996; Whitmarsh 2001; Borg 2004. It is only relatively recently that religion has been integrated into this cultural mix in e.g. Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2000; Galli 2004 and 2005; the essays in the third part of Cardovana and Galli 2007. It is time, in the study of sarcophagi (arguably the supreme artistic phenomenon of the period of the Second Sophistic), that the 'classicism and culture' brigade remembered that religion (including belief) is part of their enterprise.

47 Nock 1946, 170.

It is worth noting how ‘spotty’ our ability for detailed focus remains, despite the long history and sporadic intensity of scholarly study. Many iconographic categories of Roman mythological sarcophagi – by far the most popular for scholarly discussion – remain without a fundamental catalogue: only three volumes of the projected six in the new edition of the mythological sarcophagi (*ASR* XII. 1, 2 and 6) have been published.⁴⁸ In the case of sarcophagi from the Greek-speaking East, only one volume of the projected eleven on Greece itself has seen the light (*ASR* IX 1.1) – which means that detailed studies of the material have been reduced to the mythological corpora made available there (the themes of Achilles and Hippolytus), as Bjoern Ewald remarks in the acknowledgment note to his paper here.⁴⁹ Likewise no *ASR* volume of the projected eight for the Asia Minor sarcophagi has yet been published;⁵⁰ nor any of the three for Syria, Palestine, Arabia and Egypt.⁵¹ As a result the literatures on these topics remain weak in general and by contrast with sarcophagi from Rome – despite the outstanding nature of the material – with the exception of Bjoern Ewald’s important article of 2004 and in this volume (which make a huge advance in the field of Attic sarcophagi)⁵² and the work of Fahri Işık and Bert Smith on Aphrodisias,⁵³ which puts the material from that particular city on an entirely different basis of contextual and archaeological knowledge from anything else in the East.

The current volume, born from a conference at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, represents a series of new essays in English. It makes no claims and has no pretensions to do more than sketch some dimensions in which the gaps might be filled and the field might develop. We see the totality of Roman sarcophagus production and receptions from Asia to Spain as part of a wide and complex phenomenon – differently motivated and enacted in different contexts, to be sure. The book opens with a chapter by Glenys Davies that assesses the inception of sarcophagi and their relation to funerary urns and ash chests. This is followed by four chapters that stress different aspects of the big picture within which Roman sarcophagi must be placed. Janet Huskinson looks at the long

48 The full projected agenda was advertised in Koch 1998, 318–20. It has been radically reduced in the last 10 years – see now http://www.dainst.org/index_89d21121bb1f14a137510017f0000011_de.html for the current project.

49 In the new model the eleven Greek volumes have been reduced to three projected volumes (all on mythological subjects) for Attica and one in the *Sarkophag-Studien* series on Thessalonike.

50 Although I take it that what Koch 1998, 319 advertised as *ASR* X.2.1 on garland sarcophagi at Aphrodisias has now emerged elsewhere as Işık 2007. Korkut 2006, discusses garland ossuaries in limestone from Pamphylia and Cilicia. On some aspects of Phrygian sarcophagi, see Strocka 1984.

51 On Palmyrene sarcophagi, for instance, see Parlasca 1984 and 1998.

52 Ewald 2004 and in this volume.

53 Işık 2007 and Smith 2008.

story of sarcophagi from their documentable reuse in antiquity to some aspects of their 'lives' in the Middle Ages and the Counter Reformation. Francisco Prado-Vilar, beginning with a specific instance of medieval appropriations of a striking iconography on a particular sarcophagus, traces aspects of that long story in the history of art itself – thinking especially about the tradition of Aby Warburg. Frances van Keuren and her collaborators offer new scientific analyses and resulting reflections on where the marble comes from – issues that stress wide movement of marbles from different provenances and raise questions about the extent of the use of spolia (reused blocks of stone recycled from some earlier function) in the making of sarcophagi in late antiquity. Ben Russell takes a fresh synoptic look at the economics of production, trade and the sarcophagus market.

The volume then turns to three groups of studies that home in more directly on the iconographic and detailed art-historical study of objects. The first group deals with questions of portraiture, gender and identity. In the spirit of giving a fresh outing to some old and perennial themes, Zahra Newby undertakes a new exploration of the significance of portrait heads within sarcophagi with mythological subjects.⁵⁴ Stine Birk examines one of the great emergent themes in archaeology and Classical studies since the 1980s, namely, the place of gender in the visual and material culture. Björn Ewald turns to questions of identity and sexuality in both modern and ancient reception in the spectacular corpus of Attic sarcophagi. The second group pairs two essays that give deep readings of individual objects. Katharina Lorenz confronts the problem of how to read the mythological material and how its visual representations may respond to the actualities of mourning in which the sarcophagus itself was a centre piece by focusing on the great Borghese sarcophagus with the theme of Meleager that is now in Paris. Dennis Trout examines the remarkable Christian sarcophagus of Bassa from the Praetextatus catacomb in Rome with its long poetic inscription, to explore the ways mourning and identity were constructed in the Christian fourth century. Our final group pairs two chapters that explore frameworks and categories across multiple examples of sarcophagi. Jaś Elsner looks at the subject of the Arrest and Trial of Jesus in a series of fourth-century sarcophagi to examine questions of polemic and apologetics. Edmund Thomas reflects on the complex relationship between Asian and Italian columnar sarcophagi as brilliant examples of ancient 'micro-architecture'.

As a whole, the book actively seeks to deny the disciplinary divide between 'pagan' and Christian sarcophagi (or more correctly between those with iconographies identified as Christian and all the rest), and so includes three papers

54 See for instance Wrede 1981, 139–57; Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 607–14; Fittschen 1984; Andrae 1984b; Huskinson 1998; Koch 2000, 107–118; Dresken-Weiland 2003, 85–95; Zanker and Ewald 2004, 45–50.

– by Dennis Trout, Janet Huskinson and Jaś Elsner – that deal with material from Christian contexts. Likewise, we contest the usually too firm line that has been drawn between studies of antiquity and studies of its reception – since in the case of our objects, their ‘lives’ as artefacts in the experiential record of European culture encompass both.⁵⁵ Hence the papers of Francisco Prado-Vilar and Janet Huskinson actively take on questions of reception, interpretation and influence in periods after the ancient world itself came to an end.

Sarcophagi are our richest single source of Roman iconography – translating the realms of Greek and Roman myth, the subjects of Roman public art, some themes of spiritual or directly religious content into images that were designed to resonate in the most personal and intense of private contexts, when a family mourned for its deceased. We cannot know how often the tombs, in which sarcophagi were kept, were opened and for whom – but their showing was clearly ritualised, exceptional, candle- or lamp-lit and special in every way (like the later *ostentiones* of relics or icons in Christian culture). The patterning and arrangement of visual narratives, the replication but also differentiation of similar imagery, the wide distribution of marble types and of finished examples from workshops based in urban centres – all this goes to the heart of a series of key issues in Roman artistic production. Moreover, although some sarcophagi were clearly purchased by the very highest echelons of the Roman aristocracy (witness the items in the Licinian tomb or the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, who was city prefect when he died in 359), many surviving examples take us somewhat deeper down the social pyramid into the world of wealthy freedmen and the more aspiring middle classes. Their visual negotiation of the ideals, realities and fantasies of Roman people, both the deceased and their mourners, at the interface of the public and the personal where death is marked and the rites of burial performed, makes them of quite exceptional importance for understanding Roman culture.⁵⁶

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55 Note the rigorous separation of the ‘reception’ papers from those on sarcophagi in antiquity when the Pisa conference on 1982 came to be published: Reception was Andrae and Settis 1984 (*Marburger Winckelmann Programm* 1983) and sarcophagi in Roman antiquity was Andrae 1984 (*Marburger Winckelmann Programm* 1984).

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1.

Before Sarcophagi

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Elaborately decorated sarcophagi came into use in the city of Rome and its environs from c. 120 onwards.¹ Only a handful of sarcophagi can be dated to the first century or first two decades of the second century, the best known of which is perhaps the very early and anomalous Caffarelli sarcophagus in Berlin (c. 40).² Of the three early sarcophagi illustrated here two belong to the Trajanic period (i.e. between c. 100 and 120) (Figures 1.8 and 1.9), and the third (Figure 1.10) is Hadrianic.³ Inhuming the unburnt body in a sarcophagus was at this time an exceptional form of burial, presumably undertaken for personal or family reasons, and it would not be seen as the usual Roman funerary custom at the time.⁴ Instead the dead were usually cremated, and the funerary monuments of choice for those who could afford them were the marble ash chest (designed to hold the cremated remains taken from the pyre), the grave altar (which did not have a cavity inside to hold the ashes and therefore had a more purely commemorative function) or the ash altar (which was larger in size than an ash

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- 1 The date at which production of the main series of imperial sarcophagi began will be discussed in more detail below.
 - 2 Caffarelli sarcophagus, now in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin (inv. SK 843a): *ASR* VI, 2, 1, 77, no. 1. Although this sarcophagus is decorated with garlands its style is quite different from that of the Trajanic and Hadrianic series of garland sarcophagi which belong to the beginning of the vogue for using sarcophagi in the second century.
 - 3 Sarcophagus of C. Bellicus Natalis Tebanianus (Figure 1.8), Camposanto, Pisa: *ASR* VI, 2, 1, 79–81, no. 6 (dated c. 100); child's sarcophagus with biographical scenes (Figure 1.9), Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 65199: *ASR* I, 4, no. 190, pl. 45, 1–5 (c. 100); Huskinson 1996, 10 and 22, no. 1.29 (c. 120); child's sarcophagus with griffins in Ostia with inscription to Ostorius Ostorianus (Figure 1.10) (Ostia Museum inv. 1156): Huskinson 1996, 63, no. 9.14; Eberle 1990, 53, fig. 2; Herdejürgen 1990, 97–8, fig. 2 (130–40).
 - 4 Herdejürgen suggests that only 15 garland sarcophagi can be assigned to the period from Augustus to c. 120, and that literary sources provide three possible reasons for the choice of such an anomalous form of burial: being a member of a Pythagorean sect, family tradition, and sensitivity to the burning process (*ASR* VI, 2, 1, 17). Petronius (*Satyricon* 111.2) describes inhumation as a Greek custom, and Tacitus (*Annals* 16.6), commenting on the exceptional practice of embalming used for Poppaea, says that cremation was the Roman custom.

chest, and combined the functions of both ash chest and grave altar).⁵ The change from ash chests and grave altars to sarcophagi, and from cremation to inhumation, took the best part of a century to achieve, but by the early 3rd century the practice in Rome had completely reversed: the usual form of funerary monument for those who could afford it was the sarcophagus, and ash chests and grave altars had practically disappeared.⁶ Whereas in the early empire tombs were built to accommodate cremated remains only, in the 3rd century they were designed to contain inhumed bodies, whether these were placed in sarcophagi or more basic forms of coffin or trench grave.⁷ This chapter examines issues concerning this change in practice by focussing on the decoration of the monuments themselves. It concentrates on the types of funerary containers and monuments that were used before sarcophagi arrived and those sarcophagi which can be dated to the earliest decades of the second century: it considers the salient differences between them, and asks whether we can ever confidently answer the question of why the changes took place.

The nature of the question

When this phenomenon was considered in the early and mid twentieth century it was assumed that the reason for such a change in burial practice should be sought in the area of religious belief, and that the explanation must involve changes in beliefs about and attitudes to the fate of the body and soul after death. Even A.D. Nock's article on inhumation and cremation published in 1932, which argued that the change was one primarily of 'fashion', examined the question from the point of view of the attitude of different religious groups

5 For these monuments see Altmann 1905, Sinn 1987, and Boschung 1987.

6 As Jaś Elsner has pointed out to me, it is an assumption (if a plausible one) that sarcophagi represent inhumation as a burial rite: the size and shape of sarcophagi leads to the supposition that they were designed to, and always did, contain unburnt and fully articulated bodies, but the form of the human remains inside is not known for most sarcophagi. It is conceivable that on occasion they might have contained ashes or a secondary deposit of bones. Some cases of ashes placed in sarcophagi have been recorded, but these are generally at sites outside the city of Rome or at periods later than that considered here (Toynbee 1971 and 1982, 40 and n.107; Nock 1932, 333 and n.61). From the available evidence it does seem that there was a general correlation between sarcophagi and inhumation, but this is a particularly pertinent issue when considering 'children's sarcophagi' which are often defined as such by size (see below, n. 76).

7 This change can be seen particularly clearly in the excavated cemeteries under the Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican and in the Isola Sacra near Ostia, where tombs of the later 2nd century provided for both cremation and inhumation, and contained both ash containers and sarcophagi. For a brief discussion of the evidence see Morris 1992, 56–62; for details of the tombs, Toynbee 1971 and 1982, 132–143.

to death and the afterlife. Franz Cumont's monumental study of Roman funerary symbolism (1942) interpreted the decoration of Roman funerary monuments as expressions of complex and deeply held afterlife beliefs and hopes. Nock, in his review of Cumont, and in line with his previous article, queried the idea that the majority of those buying sarcophagi held or were trying to express such complex religious/philosophical beliefs.⁸ Some scholars, however, were persuaded by Cumont's approach and adopted it enthusiastically in their analysis of specific monuments,⁹ while others instead developed a more general approach to funerary symbolism which toned down some of Cumont's more extravagant arguments but nevertheless assumed that the motifs used should be explained primarily in relation to afterlife belief.¹⁰ Nock's scepticism nevertheless struck a cord with many, and scholars studying these monuments in the later part of the 20th century have on the whole tended to react against Cumont's interpretations, seeing them as too often resting on obscure texts and arcane philosophies unlikely to be known by the public at large.

Even so, many would agree with Toynbee when she states that: 'The view that mere fashion or a purely ostentatious taste for elaborate and expensively decorated coffins could have brought about a change in burial rite so widespread and lasting is not convincing'.¹¹ Instead she suggests that 'it is in the development of this "other-worldly" thought that we have to seek the reason for the striking and enduring change in the method of disposing of the dead'.¹² Toynbee's idea that the use of inhumation is 'somehow a gentler and more respectful way of laying to rest the mortal frame'¹³ is echoed by McCann who considers, but rejects, the idea that the production of sarcophagi was inspired by the emperor Hadrian's taste for Classical forms, which resulted in an influx of

8 Cumont 1942; Nock 1946. On the whole Cumont deals with later Roman monuments, but he does discuss the ash chest of T. Flavius Abascantus in some detail in an Appendix, and the ash chest of Ti. Claudius Vitalis in the text (Cumont 1942, 162–8).

9 See, for example, the interpretation of the decoration of the ash chest of Ianuaria (now in the Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. 9858/9) in Farnoux 1960, and of the ash chest of Volusia Arbuscula (in the Musée Condé, Chantilly) in Berard 1974, 15. Cumont's views continue to be more highly regarded by French-speaking and Italian scholars, while English and German speakers tend to be more sceptical or dismissive of his approach.

10 See especially the work of Toynbee. For example, Toynbee writes that: 'A charioteer winning a race on a tombstone, or a hunting- or battle-scene on a sarcophagus, speak of the soul's triumph over death and evil; a man or woman reclining at a banquet expresses the soul's endowment with heavenly bliss' (Toynbee 1956, 210). I discuss the issue of different approaches to the symbolism of the decoration of ash chests and grave altars more fully in Davies 2003.

11 Toynbee 1971 and 1982, 40. But Toynbee adds 'despite the fact that ashes have occasionally been discovered in sarcophagi'.

12 Toynbee 1971 and 1982, 33.

13 Toynbee 1971 and 1982, 41.

artists from Asia Minor to Rome: 'Artistic considerations may in part explain this change, but concern with inhumation of the body and the wish to honour it with a more sumptuous and lasting home must reflect more than a change in fashion and taste'.¹⁴ 'Fashion', however, is increasingly seen by many modern social historians as something that should not be considered too trivial for academic study – as the phrase 'mere fashion' implies – but rather as a phenomenon worthy of study in its own right, revealing many insights into the thought and concerns of the culture that created it. Thus recent studies have tended to focus on the ways the monuments express identity and status rather than afterlife belief: the focus has switched to social rather than religious reasons for commissioning and buying expensive and elaborately decorated funerary containers and monuments. The switch in interest can be seen clearly, for example, in the contrast between Cumont's interpretation of the scene on the grave altar of Flavius Abascantus showing him (presumably) reclining holding a cup as a 'festin céleste', a banquet taking place in a celestial afterlife, with Roller's recent assessment of the scene of C. Calpurnius Beryllus (see Figure 1.6) reclining on a couch with a table in front and a serving boy at either end as an expression of his social aspirations.¹⁵

At the same time important work was being done on the typology and chronology of the monuments, and on catalogues which considerably enhanced the known corpus of material for study, refined their chronology, and began to identify workshop groupings.¹⁶ Such studies have tended to be rather cautious in their consideration of the significance and in particular the symbolic content of the decoration of the monuments; moreover, the various types of monuments have generally been considered in isolation, rather than in relation to one another. It is this relationship that this chapter aims to explore.

No surviving ancient text discusses, let alone explains, the change in burial rite and type of funerary monument that occurred in Rome in the 2nd century (which might in itself suggest that contemporary Romans did not see the change in burial rite as of particular significance or interest). In the absence of any such

14 McCann 1978, 20. The idea that Hadrian's Hellenism was an important factor in the introduction of inhumation to Rome is reconsidered positively in Morris 1992, 53–61.

15 Cumont 1942, 457–462. He interprets the wreath often held by the reclining figure as a 'couronne d'immortalité', and the little winged boy flying above Abascantus' legs holding a torch as Phosphorus, who 'shows the heroised dead the pathway in the sky' (Cumont 1942, 458). For the discussion of the altar of Calpurnius Beryllus see Roller 2006, 31–37; for him the 'banquet' scene evokes 'high-style elite conviviality', while 'certain details assert a freedman's achieved status and belonging' – 'The message for the viewer, correspondingly, is one of both social differentiation and social integration' (Roller 2006, 36).

16 Sinn 1987 for ash chests; Boschung 1987 (which provided an update on Altmann 1905); *ASR* VI, 2, 1 for garland sarcophagi.

literary evidence the main source of information is the monuments themselves. The first question I shall be considering therefore is the extent to which the decoration of ash chests and grave altars differs from that of the earliest sarcophagi: was there a complete break in pictorial tradition, or was there continuity? Can we discern changes in the motifs and designs used which might suggest significant changes in concerns and attitudes? Another set of questions, which are more difficult to answer given the available information, concerns the people who were buying or commissioning the monuments. What kinds of people elected to use the new monuments, and, once sarcophagi had become well-established, who were the most likely to hold onto the old monuments and methods of burial? Equally important to consider are the suppliers of the monuments – the sculptors who made them: to what extent were they responsible for creating or fostering the demand for a different type of monument? Were sarcophagi made in the same workshops as grave altars and ash chests? Or were sarcophagi promoted by new workshops (possibly indeed by sculptors newly arrived in Rome from the eastern provinces), or by workshops which had hitherto specialised in non-funerary art (such as the sculpted decoration of temples and other public buildings)? And finally, what was the motivation that inspired an individual's decision to be inhumed (or to inhume a relative) in a sarcophagus rather than be cremated and commemorated by a grave altar and/or an ash chest? Which was the more important factor in making the decision: the burial rite or the type of monument?

Dating and chronology

Only a very small proportion of the monuments can be dated at all precisely. As the majority of ash chests and grave altars have inscriptions which provide some information about the person or people commemorated it might be expected that these would give some fixed dates on which a chronology could be based. But the date of death is only very rarely mentioned: Boschung lists only six altars which give the names of the consuls at the time of death.¹⁷ Very few of the people concerned were famous enough for us to know the date of their death from other sources, and any other information provided can usually only suggest an approximate date of death: the best we can hope for from the inscriptions is a 20-year period in which the person commemorated is likely to have died. Occasionally we know the date of events in the deceased's life (e.g.

¹⁷ Boschung 1987, 57–8, Appendix I, nos. I.1–I.6. The grave altar of Volusia Prima and Volusia Olympias in the Villa Albani (Boschung 1987, 57, no. I.1), for example, has inscriptions on the sides naming the consuls of 89 and 97 (CIL VI 9326). This altar is richly decorated and belongs to the period of particular interest to this chapter.

the date of a consulship), but not how long after that date the person concerned died: this is true of two of the monuments illustrated here, the sarcophagus of C. Bellicus Natalis Tebanianus, who was consul in 87 (Figure 1.8), and the grave altar of Licinia Magna, who was the daughter of a consul of 27 and wife of a consul of 57 (Figure 1.2).¹⁸ Many ash chests, too, are dedicated to imperial freedmen whose names indicate the regime or even the emperor who granted their freedom – but again this provides only a *terminus post quem*, with a long potential survival period after that (although this may be limited to some extent by the stated age at death, and likely lifespan).¹⁹ The presence of portraits with fashionable hairstyles is also evidence that can be fairly closely dated, but again only quite a small proportion of the corpus has this feature.²⁰ The early sarcophagi are even less helpful in that very few of them have inscriptions or portraits. Occasionally the context in which the monument was found provides some clue about the date of the monument, such as the brick stamps in the structure of the tomb with three sarcophagi in it found at the Porta Viminalis: these date the construction of the tomb to c. 134, but this provides only indirect evidence for the dates of the sarcophagi (which might have been made some

- 18 Tebanianus, consul in 87, may have died soon afterwards, but may well have survived into the reign of Trajan, or even have died early in the reign of Hadrian: Herdejürgen's date for his sarcophagus of c. 100 seems rather too early to many, including the present author (*ASR* VI, 2, 1, 22–23). Eberle 1990, 50 for example suggests that Tebanianus died c. 120–125. See also the section on dating with the help of prosopography in Boschung's appendix I (1987, 58–63): coincidentally, two other inscriptions name consuls of 87 – one is the grave altar which commemorated C. Calpurnius Crassus Frugi Licinianus who probably died in the reign of Hadrian (Boschung 1987, no. 856 and appendix I.10; *CIL* VI 31724); the other names a L. Volusius who was the husband of Licinia Cornelia Volusia Torquata and who seems also to have been consul in 87 (Boschung 1987, no. 13 and appendix I. 15; *CIL* VI 31726). The circumstances which date the altar of Licinia Magna are also discussed in Boschung 1987, 58–9, no. I.17: he suggests the altar dates to c. 80 (Boschung 1987, 97, no. 657).
- 19 So, for example, someone who has the *nomen* Flavius and who is described as an *Augusti libertus* cannot have died before 69, but equally he could have outlived the Flavian dynasty by several decades and could easily have survived into (even beyond) the reign of Hadrian. Some limitation to the likely date of death may be provided if the inscription gives the age at death. Similar calculations can sometimes be made for slaves and freedmen of other families whose members held consulships: the best studied of these is the large group of funerary monuments for the household of the Volusii Saturnini, a family which provided several consuls over the course of the first century (Boschung 1987, 62–3, App. I.49–I.61; Buonocore 1984).
- 20 The grave altars with portraits have been collected and studied in Kleiner 1987. Many such altars however make such a feature of the portrait itself that there is little other decoration, which means that they do not provide as much information about the stylistic development of other features as one might wish. The female hairstyles on the sarcophagus illustrated here in Figure 1.9 are important evidence for its date in the Trajanic period.

time after, or indeed before, the tomb was built), but does at least give a broad indication of the period concerned.²¹

Frustratingly imprecise though all this information is, it does provide a rough chronological framework on which various scholars have built complex and detailed chronologies for the groups of monuments concerned. To fill in the gaps in the chronology and to assign specific pieces to their place within the framework scholars have relied primarily on the assessment of their style and of the direction and speed of stylistic development within the corpus.²² In the absence of more objective criteria this system has worked reasonably well and has resulted in what appear to be convincing and remarkably coherent dates for the series of ash chests, grave altars, and garland sarcophagi,²³ but it should be recognised that there is a fair amount of subjectivity involved in coming to these conclusions, with consequent room for disagreement. Herdejürgen's method, for example, relies heavily on the assumption that there were recognisable and rapidly evolving period styles, and that sculptors working at the same time, even in different workshops, would share the same definable stylistic characteristics – but at the same time she acknowledges that individual workshops had their own quirks.²⁴ It is not always as easy as some would maintain to decide which characteristics belong to a workshop and which to a period, and different scholars interpret the stylistic evidence in different ways. Thus the absolute dates that are assigned to an individual piece by two different scholars may be quite different, and it has to be recognised that the dates cited in most cases are relative rather than absolute, and they should be regarded as useful guidelines rather than definitive in any sense. Nevertheless, in seeking to understand why some Romans chose to be buried in sarcophagi rather than be cremated and

21 Three sarcophagi were found in this tomb: the garland sarcophagus placed opposite the door of the tomb was probably the earliest burial, but can the sarcophagus also be securely dated to the years around 134? (*ASR* VI, 2, 1, no. 78 dates it 130–140; *ASR* V, 2, 3, 91, no. 124 dates it (or, rather, its lid) to c. 120). And how much later should we date the other two sarcophagi (both mythological frieze sarcophagi, one decorated with the death of the Niobids and the other with the Orestes story)? Indeed, even within the same book (Zanker and Ewald 2004) the Niobid sarcophagus is dated 'after the middle of the second century' (captions to figures 28 and 29) and 'c. 130–140' (359), and the Orestes sarcophagus to c. 150 (caption to fig. 62) and 130–140 (364).

22 Early and pioneering work was done, for example, on the stylistic development of garlands: Toynbee 1934 established that the main series of garland sarcophagi belonged to the Hadrianic period and were not Augustan as had previously been thought, and Honroth 1971 continued the study by comparing the garlands on undated funerary monuments with more closely dated reliefs in both state and funerary art.

23 Sinn 1987; Boschung 1987; *ASR* VI, 2, 1.

24 See for example Herdejürgen 1990, where she identifies a number of workshops making garland sarcophagi at Ostia, but maintains that, although their decorative repertoires and styles were distinct from those of metropolitan Roman workshops, they did not have enough in common with each other to constitute a distinctive Ostian style.

commemorated by an ash chest or grave altar, and why this change in burial practice might have caught on more generally, we have to have some idea of what was being produced when.

In this chapter I shall be looking specifically at those ash chests and grave altars which have been dated to the end of the first and beginning of the second century, and the earliest of the main series of the sarcophagi made and used at Rome (and its environs, especially Ostia). If one looks at the catalogues of sarcophagi in the *Antiken Sarkophagreliefs* (ASR) series it becomes clear that very few sarcophagi are assigned dates before 150, but that a much larger number fall into the bracket of c. 150–160, or are described as early-mid Antonine (some authors prefer to use absolute dates, albeit covering quite wide periods of time, while others are more comfortable with periods expressed in terms of the ruling emperor or dynasty). Clearly the general consensus is that until c. 150 the use of sarcophagi could be considered experimental and unusual, but that around or shortly after 150 a much larger number of people were opting to use them, and workshops were established which were sufficiently familiar with sarcophagi that they had begun to make standard designs. (I leave open for now the question of whether these were the same workshops that had up until then made ash chests and grave altars or were new workshops that were created to provide for a new form of demand).

Schemes and themes of decoration: ash chests and grave altars

The decorative repertoire for ash chests and grave altars (and the hybrid ash altars) evolved over the course of the first century: a general trend was simply for the addition of more motifs, but some items went in and out of fashion.²⁵ Although there were always some very plain monuments, and also some idiosyncratic pieces that were presumably specially commissioned and had special meaning for the commissioner, for the majority there was a large repertoire of commonly-used motifs which could be combined in a large number of different ways, to the extent that it is difficult to find any two monuments decorated in exactly the same way. The possible decorative schemes can be divided into two broad categories: those based on the hanging garland and those which rely on more architectonic motifs, particularly columns or pilasters at the corners. Examples of the garland variety illustrated here are the

25 This can be seen, for example, in the changing preferences for garland supports: *bucrania* were used early on but became less popular in the later first century, only to experience a revival in the Hadrianic period. Their place had been taken successively by rams' heads, the head of Jupiter-Ammon and cupids (*erotes*) – each of these had its period of greatest popularity.

grave altars of Licinia Magna (Figure 1.2),²⁶ of L. Aufidius Aprilis (a *corintharius* or bronze-smith who worked in the area of the Theatre of Balbus) (Figure 1.3),²⁷ and of T. Apusulenus Caerellianus (Figure 1.5),²⁸ all three of which have been dated to the late Flavian period; the architectonic variety is represented by the ash chest of L. Lepidius Epaphra (Figure 1.1),²⁹ the ash altar of Ti. Claudius Callistus (Figure 1.4),³⁰ and the grave altar of C. Calpurnius Beryllus (Figure 1.6).³¹ Both types of decorative scheme involve combining a variety of individual motifs in a design which is symmetrical and emphasises the front of the monument – indeed in most cases the attention of the viewer is drawn to the inscription in a panel placed in the centre of the upper part of the front.

Standard motifs on the garland variety include the garland itself (made up of fruit and flowers, laurel or oak leaves, or occasionally other plants) slung from bulls' skulls (*bucrania*), rams' heads or the head of Zeus/Jupiter Ammon, or from other supports such as cupids (*erotes*), torches or candelabra at the upper corners of the front: there might be other items under the front corner supports, such as eagles, swans, sphinxes or griffins (the dancing figures on the grave altar of L. Aufidius Aprilis, seen in Figure 1.3, are unusual), and small garden birds, insects and lizards are often shown around the garland. The small semi-circular space above the garland, which was just under the inscription panel and near the centre of the front, was often the location for a less standard, perhaps more personally chosen and meaningful, motif such as a small mythological or animal scene or a portrait, but a popular motif was the head of Medusa, sometimes flanked by swans (as on the grave altar of Licinia Magna, see Figure 1.2). The sides of such monuments would often be decorated in a similar way, but usually without the more complex scenes and commonly (especially on the grave altars)

26 Grave altar of Licinia Magna, Vatican Museums, Gabinetto delle Maschere 811: Altmann 1905, 36, no. 3; Boschung 1987, 97 no. 657, pl. 18; *CIL* VI 1445/31655.

27 Grave altar of L. Aufidius Aprilis, discovered in 1965 on the Via Flaminia, now on display in the Crypta Balbi museum: Caronna 1975, 205–214; Panciera 1975, 222–229 (inscription); Boschung 1987, 99, no. 693, pl. 34.

28 Grave altar of Apusulenus Caerellianus, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 23892: Boschung 1987, 102, no. 754, pl. 30; *CIL* VI 38027.

29 Ash chest of Lepidius Epaphra, British Museum 2368: Sinn 1987, 132, no. 161; *CIL* VI 21188. Sinn dates this late Claudian-Neronian.

30 Large ash chest or ash altar of Ti. Claudius Callistus, an imperial freedman: this monument was found on the Via Flaminia placed back to back to and on the same base as the altar of Aufidius Aprilis. The inscription on the base shows that it was only Aprilis's altar that was originally intended for this site. It too is now on display in the Crypta Balbi museum. Caronna 1975, 214–222; Panciera 1975, 231–2 (inscription); Boschung 1987, 104, no. 782, pl. 35.

31 Grave altar of C. Calpurnius Beryllus, Capitoline Museum inv. 1967: Altmann 1905, no. 182; Boschung 1987, 107, no. 830, pl. 42; *CIL* VI 14150.



Figure 1.1: Ash chest of L. Lepidius Epaphra in the British Museum (2368) (late Claudian-Neronian). Photograph: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

with a jug and an offering bowl (*patera*) above the garlands: these are objects associated with making offerings to the gods and to the dead.³²

32 Several authors have pointed to the importance within the repertoire used on grave altars, ash chests and some early sarcophagi of motifs associated with sacrifice and religious ritual in general: in addition to the jug and *patera* the garlands themselves could come into this category, especially when combined with *bucrania*. Such motifs could refer to



Figure 1.2: Grave altar of Licinia Magna. Vatican Museums, Gabinetto delle Maschere 811 (AD 70–80). Photograph of the cast in Civiltà Romana Museum, EUR, by the author.

Standard motifs to be found in the ‘architectonic’ format include those designed to make the monuments look like a building, such as columns and pilasters (usually placed at the corners and so flanking the inscription panel on the front), imitation ashlar masonry, doors and niches (*aediculae*) (see the closed

the cult of the *Dii Manes* or to the piety of the deceased (or, of course, both). Boschung 1993, 38; *ASR* VI, 2, 1, 24; Morris 1992, 44.



Figure 1.3: Grave altar of L. Aufidius Aprilis in Crypta Balbi (found on Via Flaminia) (late 1st century AD). Photograph: author.



Figure 1.4: Large ash chest of Ti. Claudius Callistus in Crypta Balbi (found on Via Flaminia) (late first century AD). Photograph: author.



Figure 1.5: Grave altar of T. Apusulenus Caerellianus in Museo Nazionale Romano (23892) (late first century AD). Photograph: author.

door flanked by swans on the ash chest of Lepidius Epaphra, Figure 1.1). Here too there might be garlands hanging down beside the columns, looped in a frieze across the top of the front or hanging across the field as in the garland type. The space below the inscription panel may also provide a rectangular field for the representation of a small scene – as before this may be mythological, but is just as likely to involve animals or the deceased him/herself in some way (heraldically arranged pairs of griffins and sphinxes, for example, are quite popular; see also the scene of two dogs attacking a stag in Figure 1.4 or the ‘funerary banquet’ of Calpurnius Beryllus in Figure 1.6). The space above the inscription panel might also provide a narrower field for decoration, often with plant or animal motifs, or again the head of Medusa – in the case of Calpurnius Beryllus’s altar this is flanked by rams’ heads. The sides of these monuments might be decorated with motifs such as a tree with birds, a seated griffin (see Figure 1.6) or sphinx, or the ubiquitous jug and offering bowl.

An important principle in the case of both the garland and architectonic schemes is that the design relies on a mix-and-match approach: the motifs chosen from a large and flexible repertoire are not combined into a single visibly coherent picture, and do not necessarily have any thematic connection with each other. It is debatable whether they were individually or collectively conceived of as having a ‘meaning’, although they did perhaps evoke associations which were seen as appropriate to the context in which they were used.³³ Figured scenes play a limited part: only a small number of monuments are decorated with such scenes as the only form of decoration, and they are clearly one-off commissions where the decoration had particular meaning for the person who commissioned them (and they also tend to be late in date).³⁴ More commonly the figured scene is only part of and is subordinated to the decorative scheme.

33 In my view they did not form a coherent symbolic ‘picture language’ as advocated by Jocelyn Toynbee (Toynbee 1956): see Davies 2003.

34 For example, the scene of a woman with cupid and a little girl with birds and a dog on the ash chest of T. Apusulenius Alexander (Sinn 1987, no. 172); scenes involving cupids and boys on the ash chest of Publius Severianus and Blolo (Sinn 1987, no. 173), both dated Claudian-Neronian; cupids wrestling in the *palaestra* on the ash chest of C. Minicius Gelasinus in Liverpool (Sinn 1987, no. 607 and Davies 2007, 85–90, no. 41), mid second century; battle scenes on a round urn without inscription (Sinn 1987, nos. 631); Meleager, Medea and Hippolytos/Phaedra scenes (Sinn 1987, nos. 633 and 634, 635 and 636): Sinn dates all of these urns/chests to the mid Antonine period, by which time frieze sarcophagi with similar scenes had become established. On grave altars such scenes tend to represent the deceased’s work or family: L. Calpurnius Daphnus is shown at work in the Macellum Magnum on the front of his altar in the Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne (Boschung 1987, no. 953, dated between 41–110), L. Cornelius Atimetus’s tool-making business and shop are shown on the sides of his altar in the Galleria Lapidaria, Vatican Museums (Boschung 1987, no. 968, dated ‘soon after AD

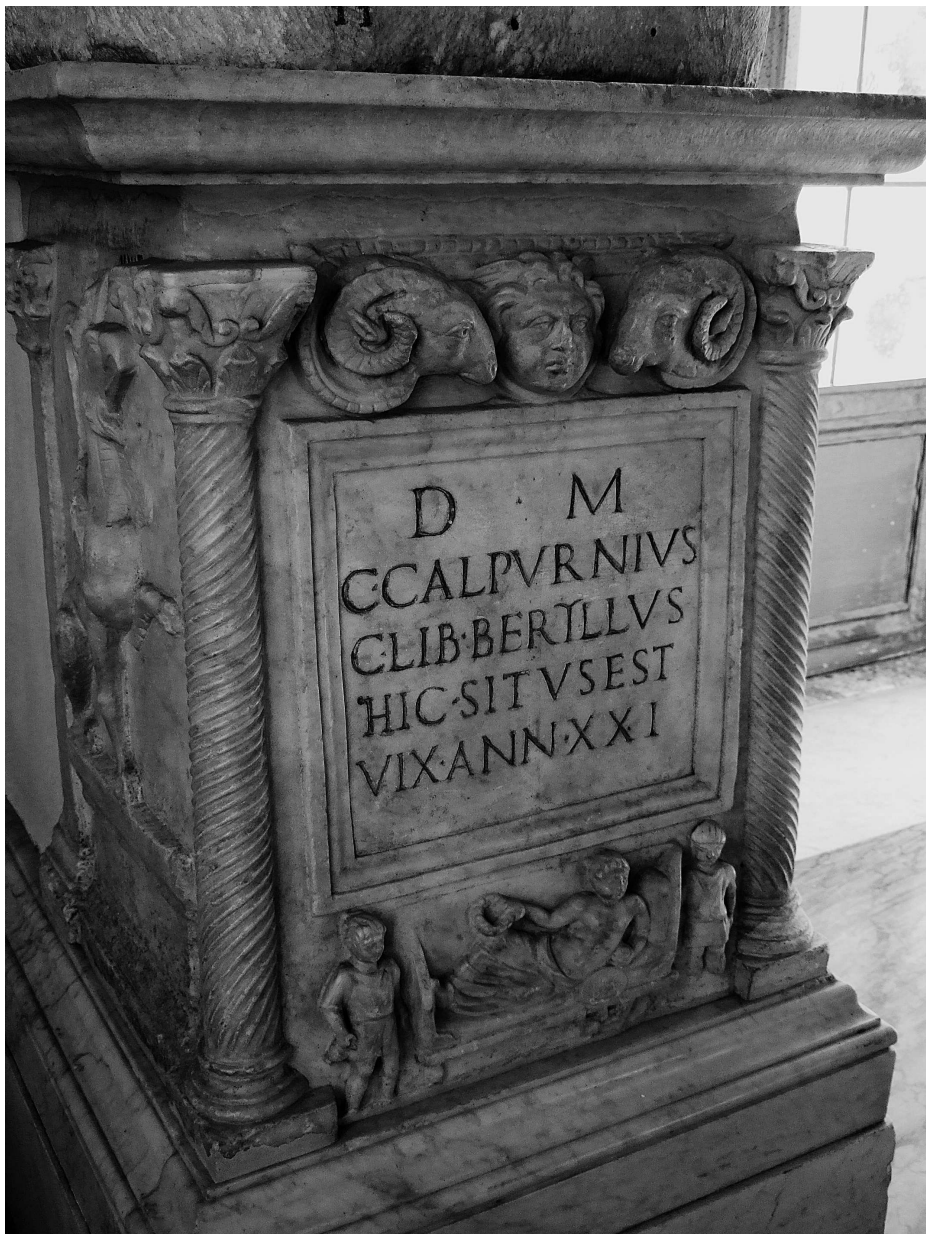


Figure 1.6: Grave altar of C. Calpurnius Beryllus in Capitoline Museums (1967) (early 2nd century AD). Photograph: author.

80'). Passienia Gemella is also shown with each of her two sons on the sides of her altar in Liverpool (Boschung 1987, no 329; Davies 2007, 140–145, no. 104, Hadrianic).

Broadly speaking such scenes depict either the deceased him/herself, a mythological incident, or a scene from nature. The most common of the scenes involving the deceased are the so-called funerary banquet scene, as on the grave altar of C. Calpurnius Beryllus (Figure 1.6) (the deceased is seen lying on a couch with a drinking vessel, with or without paraphernalia such as a small table standing in front of the couch with further cups on it, servants, and a spouse seated at the end of the bed), a couple linking right hands (the '*dextrarum iunctio*' gesture), or, more rarely, other scenes from their working or domestic lives.

Specific mythological scenes are not very common and represent a wide range of rather disparate stories: the only mythological episodes represented on several monuments are the Rape of Persephone (Persephone/Proserpina being carried off in a chariot by Hades/Pluto) (see Figure 1.7)³⁵ and Romulus and Remus being suckled by the she-wolf:³⁶ otherwise scenes appear only once or twice in the surviving corpus (though Venus bathing does appear three times,³⁷ and the doe suckling the infant Telephos was also quite popular as a pendant, or perhaps alternative, to the wolf and twins).³⁸ The scenes which can be identified as specific mythological episodes are otherwise very disparate, and appear to be one-off special commissions: these include: Daedalus making the cow for Pasiphae, Oedipus and the sphinx, Leto fleeing with her children, the death of Archemoros, and Mercury with the infant Dionysus.³⁹ These scenes are typically

35 Ash chest without inscription in the Museo Nazionale Romano (inv. 65197): Sinn 1987, 237, no. 603, pl. 87c (mid second century); Boschung 1987, 107, no. 830, pl. 42 (beginning of second century). I know of eight other ash chests/grave altars decorated with this motif: all would appear to date to the late first/early second century.

36 It is perhaps debatable whether this should really be classed as a 'scene', as it only ever consists of the wolf and two babies, without any other figures. It is found, for example, above the garland on the front of the grave altar of Volusia Prima and Volusia Olympias, dated by consular dates to c. 90 (see note 17 above) (Buonocore 1984, 135–7, no. 106, fig. 5), and below the garland on the front of the altar of L. Volusius Urbanus (Buonocore 1984, 65–7, no. 7, fig. 1; Sinn 1990, 79–80, no. 46, pl. 133–4).

37 On the grave altar of A. Albius Graptus (Capitoline Museums 2101: Montemartini): Boschung 1987, 103, no. 763, pl. 31 (Domitianic); ash altar of M. Coelius Superstes in the British Museum 2360 (Altmann 1905, 161, no. 203, fig. 131), and on a grave altar in Nazzano.

38 The doe suckling Telephos appears on several monuments: it appears, for example, below the garland on the ash altar of L. Volusius Phaedrus (Buonocore 1984, 97–98, no. 51, fig. 4; Sinn 1990, 80–81, no. 47, pl. 135–6). Also used on a smaller number of monuments was the similar scene of a goat suckling a child (presumably Amaltheia and Zeus): all three 'suckling' scenes (she-wolf, doe and goat) appear together on one altar, that of P. Annius Eros and Ofillia Romana in New York, Zanker, 1988.

39 Daedalus: ash chest of C. Volcarius Artemidorus, Museo Nazionale Romano inv. 125407 (Sinn 1987, 200, no. 456, pl. 70 f, late first century); Oedipus: grave altar of Ti. Claudius Geminus, lost (Altmann 1905, 105, no. 90); Leto: grave altar of

small and involve only a few figures, and there is no obvious pattern or explanation for why they were chosen. In addition there are scenes which allude more vaguely to mythology or deities (such as Mercury watching a goat eating the leaves of a tree).⁴⁰ Also quite numerous are scenes which involve the followers of Dionysus (such as the scene above the garland on the grave altar of L. Aufidius Aprilis which shows a sleeping satyr reminiscent of the Barberini Faun watched by two goats, see Figure 1.3): although these scenes sometimes include Dionysus himself, they more often show Silenus riding a donkey in the company of satyrs, maenads and/or Pan, dancing maenads, or other vignettes involving the Dionysiac *thiasos*.⁴¹ Other scenes involve playful cupids⁴² and Nereids, Tritons and other sea creatures swimming through the ocean.⁴³

Animal scenes frequently involve combat: a lion or dogs attacking some other animal such as a deer (see Figure 1.4) and cock fights:⁴⁴ usually these scenes are just presented as scenes, but in some examples, as that of the scene of two dogs attacking a deer on the ash chest of Ti. Claudius Callistus (Figure 1.4)

Luccia Telesina, Museo Chiaramonti, Vatican (Altmann 1905, 83, no. 46, pl. 47; Boschung 1987, 101, no. 732, pl. 28); Archemoros: grave altar of P. Egnatius Nicephorus, Detroit Institute of Arts 38.167 (Altmann 1905, 102, no. 84; Boschung 1987, 103, no. 765, pl. 32, Domitianic). An almost identical altar dedicated to Herbasia Clymene has been lost for so long that one wonders whether it ever actually existed: it is known only from drawings (Altmann 1905, 103, no. 85; Boschung 1987, 103, no. 766); Mercury and the infant Dionysus appear on a grave altar in Amelia and on the altar of Passiena Prima on display in the Vatican car park excavation site (where seated Mercury dangles a large bunch of grapes in front of the child, in the presence of female figures, presumably the Nymphs about to take over the task of caring for the baby).

40 Ash chest of Ianuaria from the Volusii tomb, in the Museo Gregoriano Profano: Buonocore 1984, 110–111, no. 70, fig. 42; Sinn 1987, 202–3, no. 463, pl. 72e, c. 90–120; Sinn 1990, 98–9, no. 78, pl. 196–7. See also Farnoux 1960 for an elaborate and ingenious Cumont-style interpretation of the scene as an allegory of Orphic/neo-Pythagorean beliefs.

41 For example, the ash chest of Callityche in Bologna (Sinn 1987, 161, no. 280, pl. 50b, Flavian?) with Silenus riding a donkey with satyrs, maenads and other figures.

42 Naked little boys, sometimes with, sometimes without, wings appear in a variety of different scenes. Particularly charming are those on an ash altar in the Museo Gregoriano Profano (inv. 9819): those placed under the garland on the front have just finished a cock fight – the winner approaches the prize table and the loser leaves the scene in dejection; on the right side two little boys are represented in drunken revelry, and on the left they appear with a panther (Buonocore 1984, 184–5, no. 186, figs. 37–9; Sinn 1987, 121–2, no. 119, l. 30 a and b; Sinn 1990, 106–7, no. 93, pl. 227–32).

43 For example the grave altar of Agria Agathe in the British Museum (2350) has underneath the inscription panel a scene of a sea-centaur with a Nereid seated on its back and two cupids on its tail; on the ash chest of Flavia Sabina in the Louvre (MA 2148) a child-like sea centaur with a lyre-playing cupid on his back gallops through the waves side by side with a sea-horse (Sinn 1987, 233–4, no. 584, pl. 86b).

44 See also the scene of a lion attacking a donkey above the garland on the altar of T. Statilius Hermes in Cambridge. For the cock fight motif see Bruneau 1965.