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Classical Remains and Christian Remembrance: Reviewing Late Roman Sarcophagi

Volume I of II

by

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"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand."

From the 1834 hymn 'My Hope is Built on Nothing Less', Edward Mote (1797-1874).
Inspired by Matthew 7.24-27/Luke 6.46-49 and 1 Corinthians 10.4.

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Declaration

The author states that this thesis is their own work. Section 4.1 draws on research conducted for an essay for their taught MA at the University of Warwick (2013a), entirely reworked into a new argument with further research. The author also confirms that this thesis, or any part of it, has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

Early Christian art is of key importance in the mutual transformation of Roman culture and Christianity, the transformation of an anti-imperial offshoot of aniconic Judaism, into the official religion of an iconophilic empire. Despite this, early Christian sarcophagi have often fallen into the gaps between classics, medieval studies, art history, and patristics and biblical studies. Christian funerary commemoration has been characterised as a break, with Christian sarcophagi treated separately to non-Christian, and considered to represent the foregrounding of a very different kind of identity: communal and religious, rather than individual and cultural.

This thesis offers a re-viewing of early Christian sarcophagi in their late Roman context. It explores the formation of a newly Christian Roman identity from the late third into the fourth century, and will find that Christian sarcophagus patrons were building on the frameworks of traditional commemoration, and still engaged in elite Graeco-Roman culture. The aesthetics considered here were distinctive in several interrelated ways that also reflect wider trends in late antique visual (and even literary) culture: inherited formal frameworks, an interest in the statuesque, and a self-conscious sense of materiality. The increased interpretative opportunities challenge the characterisation of Christian sarcophagi as less complex and culturally engaged than their predecessors. Roman heritage was made the foundation for the new Christian identity of the fourth century.

List of Abbreviations

ASR I, 2 = Andreae, B. (1980) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd. 1, Die Sarkophage mit Dartellungen aus dem Menschenleben. T. 2, Die römischen Jagdsarkophage* (Berlin).

ASR I, 3 = Reinsberg, C. (1991) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd.1, Die Sarkophage mit Darstellungen aus dem Menschenleben. T. 3, Vita Romana* (Berlin).

ASR II = Robert, C. (1890) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd. 2, Mythologische Cyklen* (Berlin).

ASR III, 1 = Robert, C. (1897) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd.3, Einzelmythen. T. 1, Actaeon bis Hercules* (Berlin).

ASR III, 3 = Robert, C. (1919) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd.3, Einzelmythen. T. 3, Niobiden bis Triptolemos* (Berlin).

ASR IV, 1 = Matz, R. (1968) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd. 4, Die Dionysischen Sarkophage. T. 1, Die Denkmäler 1-71B* (Berlin).

ASR IV, 4 = Matz, F. (1975) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd. 4, Die Dionysischen Sarkophage. T. 4, Die Denkmäler 246-385* (Berlin).

ASR V, 3 = Wegner, M. (1966) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd.5, Die Musensarkophage. T. 3* (Berlin).

ASR V, 4 = Kranz, P. (1984) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd. 5, Jahreszeiten-Sarkophage. T. 4* (Berlin).

ASR VI, 2, 1 = Herdejürgen, H. (1996) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd. 6, Stadtrömische und Italische Girlandensarkophage. T. 2, Die Sarkophage des ersten und zweiten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin).

ASR IX, 1 = Rogge, S. (1995) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd. 9, Die Attischen Sarkophage. T. 1, Achill und Hippolytos* (Berlin).

ASR XII, 2 = Sichtermann, H. (1992) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd. 12, Die mythologischen Sarkophage. T. 2, Apollon, Ares, Bellerophon, Daidalos, Endymion, Ganymed, Giganten, Grazien* (Berlin).

ASR XII, 6 = Koch, G. (1975) *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs. Bd. 12, Die mythologischen Sarkophage. T. 6, Meleager* (Berlin).

CIL = (1853-) *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Berlin).

CLE = Engström, E. (1912) *Carmina Latina Epigraphica post editam collectionem Buechelerianam in lucem prolata* (Gothenburg/Leipzig).

ICUR = De Rossi, G. B. ed. (1857-88) *Inscriptiones Cristianae Urbis Romae* (Rome).

LXX = Septuagint.

NRSV = New Revised Standard Version.

RS I = Deichmann, F. W., Bovini, G. and Brandenburg, H. eds. (1967) *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage. 1. Bd., Rom und Ostia* (Wiesbaden).

RS II = Dresken-Weiland, J., Ulbert, T., Bovini, G. and Brandenburg, H. eds. (1998)
Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage. 2. Bd., Italien mit einem Nachtrag Rom und Ostia, Dalmatien, Museen der Welt (Mainz).

RS III = Christern-Briesenick, B., Ulbert, T., Bovini, G. and Brandenburg, H. eds. (2003)
Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage. 3. Bd., Frankenreich, Algerien, Tunesien (Mainz).

Introduction

Early Christian art is of key importance in the mutual transformation of Roman culture and Christianity – the transformation of an anti-imperial offshoot of aniconic Judaism, into the official religion of an iconophilic empire. Despite this, early Christian sarcophagi have often fallen into the gaps between classics, medieval studies, art history, and patristics and biblical studies. Christian funerary commemoration has been characterised as a break, with Christian sarcophagi treated separately to non-Christian, and considered to represent the foregrounding of a very different kind of identity: communal and religious, rather than individual and cultural.

This thesis offers a re-viewing of early Christian sarcophagi in their late Roman context. It explores the formation of a newly Christian Roman identity from the late third into the fourth century, and will find that Christian sarcophagus patrons were building on the frameworks of traditional commemoration, and still engaged in elite Graeco-Roman culture. The aesthetics considered here were distinctive in several interrelated ways that also reflect wider trends in late antique visual (and even literary) culture: inherited formal frameworks, an interest in the statuesque, and a self-conscious sense of materiality. The increased interpretative opportunities challenge the characterisation of Christian sarcophagi as less complex and culturally engaged than their predecessors. Roman heritage was made the foundation for the new Christian identity of the fourth century.

The thesis aims to fill this gap in scholarship by applying some of the gains made elsewhere in the areas of earlier Roman art, late antique domestic art, and late antique literature, to the funerary context of Christian sarcophagi. Its concerns share points in common with scholarly developments in recent decades in the study of ancient visual culture and the humanities more generally, such as a focus on identity and viewers, and concepts of collective memory.[1]

This aspect of the transformation of Roman culture is significant in the study of cultural interaction and adaptation, the relationship between Christianity and culture, and cultural legitimacy and reconstructions of the past. The aesthetics forged in this period have a long later history, from the use of columnar frames in Christian art and architecture well into the Victorian period, to how the classical order is still the style most associated with authority around the world.

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[1] Elsner (1995) on viewing; Halbwachs (1950), (1952) on collective memory.

0.1. Christianity and Rome

A famous passage from Eusebius illustrates the reconstructed past for Christian Rome in the fourth century. Here he sets out his interpretation of the divinely-unified destinies of Christianity and Rome following the Peace of the Church:

> "But (now), two great Powers sprung fully up, as (it were) out of one stream; and they gave peace to all, and brought all together to a state of friendship: (namely) the Roman Empire, which, from that time, appeared (as) one kingdom; and, the Power of the Saviour of all, whose aid was at once extended to, and established with, every one. For, the divine superiority of our Saviour swept away the authority of the many Demons, and many Gods; so that the one kingdom of God was preached to all men Greeks and Barbarians, and to those who (resided) in the extremities of the earth. The Roman Empire too,-- since those had been previously uprooted who had been the cause of the rule of many--soon subjugated all (others), and quickly brought together into one state of accordance and agreement, the whole race of (man). And, behold! it henceforth brought together such a multitude of nations, as soon to take possession (of all), even to the extremities of the earth; the teaching of our Saviour having, by the divine power, already prepared all parties, and established (all) in a state of equanimity. And this is indeed a great miracle to those, who set their minds on the love of truth, and are unwilling to be envious against that which is good. For at once, was the error of evil Demons put out of sight; and, at the same time, did the enmity and contention of the nations, which had always existed, lose its power… [etc.]

> "It was (now) practicable too, that any desiring to send, for the purposes of merchandise, and to proceed, whithersoever he pleased, to do this with the greatest facility. Those of the West could come without danger to the East: and again, those who were here (in the East) could proceed thither as to the house of their own fathers, according to the words of ancient prophecy, and of many other burdens of the Prophets, which we have not now leisure to mention, excepting these respecting our Saviour, the WORD OF GOD, which proclaimed thus: "*He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the rivers to the extremities of the earth*:" and again, "*In his days shall righteousness spring forth, and abundance of peace* :" and again. "*They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into reaping*

hooks, and nation shall not lift up the sword against nation; nor shall they learn war."[2]

Eusebius sees it as divinely ordained that Christianity and the Roman Empire should have emerged almost simultaneously. He paints an idealised picture where both empire and Christianity have brought together one kingdom, with all peoples brought into agreement, with an end to all hostility both spiritual and political. The aims of empire and Christianity are adapted to each other, so that unity is the main emphasis of both, glossing over the violent conquest and oppression inherent to the maintenance of empire, and the challenge to the imperial authorities posed by the earliest Jesus movement in protesting this very kind of injustice and envisioning an alternative society. Rome's subjugation of neighbouring nations is quietly aligned with Jesus' "way of peace", and Jewish prophecies are seen as equally applicable to imperial history as to the New Testament.[3] Eusebius's framework therefore excises the central conflict between empire and Christianity, and thus echoes the sanitisation and neutralisation of the threat posed by anti-imperial movements by empire through the ages.[4] The means of empire end up being sanctioned by one of its unintended results, the efficient spreading of Christian teachings through its established economic network.[5]

Over the course of this thesis, this process of mutual adaptation, and argument for Christianity as fulfilment, will be observed in sarcophagus reliefs. As Averil Cameron has pointed out, in the forging of a new Christian Roman identity out of disparate roots, visual art was an important part of the story.[6] Such a topic is especially relevant today, when rival

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[2] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Theophania* 3.2, trans. Lee (1843). The three verses quoted as prophecies are Psalm 72.8 and 72.7, and Isaiah 2.4.

[3] Luke 1.79.

[4] Recent critiques of the reception of Christian activist Martin Luther King (who consciously placed himself in the tradition of biblical prophets rejected in their lifetime that culminated in Jesus, by invoking Moses in his final 'Mountaintop' speech) drew attention to this process of selective memory on the fiftieth anniversary of his assassination:

Gary Younge, *The Guardian*, 4th April 2018, based on his 2013 book:
> "This week, the US will indulge in an orgy of self-congratulation, selectively misrepresenting King's life and work, as if rebelling against the American establishment was, in fact, what the establishment has always encouraged… In death, the struggle is to ensure that King's legacy isn't eviscerated of all militancy so that it can be repurposed as one more illustration of the American establishment's *God-given* ability to produce the antidote to [its] own poison." (My emphasis).

Peter Tatchell, *The Independent*, 4th April 2018:
> "In the decades since his assassination on 4 April 1968, Martin Luther King Jr has been sanitised and *sanctified*; co[-]opted and embraced by the American establishment as a bland, unthreatening *saint* of racial equality." (My emphasis).

Again, the use of Christian vocabulary is revealing, 'sanctified' and 'saint' having become bywords for establishment acceptance.

[5] Cf. Corke-Webster (2019) 249-79 on Eusebius's treatment of the church and Rome, and Averil Cameron (1991).

[6] Averil Cameron (1999) 16. On Christian Roman identity in art, see Elsner (2003), and in text, Trout (2003) and (2014b). On other areas of cultural interaction, Bowersock (1990), Gruen (2002) and Gregg (2015).

reconstructions of the past continue to give shape to contemporary politics and society around the world.[7]

0.2. Late antiquity and early Christianity

The culture of the later Roman Empire was in the past disparaged as an era of decadence and decline.[8] However in the last few decades, late antiquity has come to be recognised as a dynamic period that is worthy of study in its own right, thanks to the work of scholars such as Peter Brown and Averil Cameron.[9] The term 'Late Antiquity' was coined to repackage this period at the end of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Middle Ages, roughly from the third to seventh or eighth century AD, though still up for debate.[10] This period overlaps with early Christianity, described in a British Museum guide from 1940 as "a kind of no-man's-land, rarely entered by the classical archaeologist and even more seriously neglected by the medievalist".[11] More recently, Elsner has described the "wall of non-communication" between the Roman art historian and the medievalist, respectively viewing the period as one of decline on the one hand and beginnings on the other.[12] Today classicists tend to write of 'late antiquity' in the lower case, or 'late/later Roman', in order to try to reduce the effect of an artificial division caused by modern terminology. Elsner's *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph* is an example of reframing late antiquity as part of Roman imperial history, with a chronological span of the second to fourth centuries, rather than the usual Republic to the third century at the latest.[13]

Despite the past divide, the strong continuity in elite education or *paideia* into late antiquity has long been recognised by scholars.[14] The idea of *paideia* has largely been exploited up till now as a model for understanding literary culture in late antiquity, but as scholars such as Ruth Leader-Newby and Sarah Bassett have demonstrated, it can and should also be applied to the visual.[15] From another angle, Werner Jaeger has explored the unified and unifying culture of *paideia* as providing the basis for Christian communication with the surrounding Graeco-Roman culture, and ultimately the development of the idea of a Christian civilisation

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[7] For example, cf. Gaston and Hilhorst (2018).
[8] Gibbon (1776-89).
[9] E.g. Brown (1971), Averil Cameron (1991).
[10] See Lizzi Testa (2017); Elsner (2006).
[11] British Museum (1940).
[12] Elsner (1998) 23; also (2006) 275-6 on the two perspectives.
[13] Elsner (1998).
[14] Marrou (1948), Barrow (1976), Kaster (1988), Averil Cameron (1997), Morgan (1998), Onians (1999), Cribiore (2001), Alan Cameron (2004), Chin (2008), Watts (2012), Ramelli (2015), Stefaniw (2019).
[15] Leader-Newby (2004); Bassett (2008).

with its own culture; this framework of *paideia* should also now be extended to see how this worked in the visual sphere of early Christian society.[16] Nasrallah has suggested that divisions by scholars along the lines of pagan, Jewish, and Christian may have obscured alliances across these lines over the value of Greek *paideia*, which operated across a different plain spanning religious divisions.[17]

While comparison of late antique with classical has rightly lost such overtly negative conclusions, 'change or continuity' has continued to prove the paradigm for assessing the period's developments. Concepts like 'transformation' or 'anchoring innovation' can be useful in moving beyond too rigid a modern dichotomy.[18] Continuity tends to be stressed more over rupture, recognising that cultural change might not necessarily be perceived as keenly by Romans living through changes over decades or centuries.

Michael Roberts's foundational work *The Jewelled Style* presented a new approach to late antique poetry on its own terms and sought to bring out an aesthetic common to art as well as literature.[19] Aaron Pelttari's own investigation into a late antique literary aesthetic concludes that its distinctive feature is the new and original space provided by late antique authors for the reader.[20] He also emphasises the reception of classical Latin poetry in late antique works.[21] In recent years distinctively late antique genres of literature such as the cento and the image-poems of Optatian, previously little valued as novelties, have received new critical attention.[22]

Philip Hardie however has recently questioned the scholarly focus on fragmentation. Picking up on the mosaic metaphor of Roberts, he has emphasised that the success of a mosaic depended not only on the viewer's awareness of the individual elements, but moreover on fooling the eye into seeing unity.[23] He has pointed out that the metaphor of the mosaic has often been made in reference to the poetry of other periods before they came to be more widely appreciated, from archaic Greece to Statius, and even in a more positive sense to Virgil's works. One is bound to notice the seams when one pays attention to them. His thoughts seem to be reflected in a scholarly trend emerging that leans towards emphasising

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[16] Jaeger (1961). Also Young (2006) and Schwartz (2013) on Christian *paideia*. Huskinson (1999) on intellectual scenes in Christian art.
[17] Nasrallah (2010) 50.
[18] Elsner (1995) on transformation; Sluiter (2016) on anchoring innovation.
[19] Roberts (1989).
[20] Pelttari (2014).
[21] Cf. Formisano's review (2015).
[22] McGill (2005) on the cento, Squire and Wienand (2017) on Optatian.
[23] Hardie (2017).

unity over fragmentation, and that focuses on the creativity and originality involved in the integration of earlier works.[24]

The critical discourse of decline in this period has been encouraged by a formalist focus on the development of classicism; one might think of Ernst Kitzinger, who begins his 1977 work by describing the "collapse of the classical Greek canon of forms" during this period; the "demise of classical art"; "the contrast in style... is violent".[25] The bibliography on art in this period tends to be still split between Roman republican and imperial art that is uncomfortable with including Christian material, and early Christian and Byzantine art that neglects the Graeco-Roman context.[26]

In the second half of the twentieth century, art scholars more generally began to be interested in the social and cultural contexts of art, going beyond the previous concern for typology and style, in something of a 'cultural turn'. For late antique art too, changes that were previously seen as negative and due to a lack of skill or economic problems, should now be emphasised as more active, positive choices, not just as responding to societal changes but helping to shape contemporary culture, an argument shared by Elsner, and in the field of Latin literature with Habinek.[27] Out of this, since the 1990s, comes an interest in the role of the viewer in creating meaning in their own social context, rather than attempting to define the intrinsic meaning of images. Elsner's *Art and the Roman Viewer* exemplified this approach.[28]

Visual culture has been instrumental in refuting earlier assumptions about the antagonism between Christianity and classical culture that the church fathers such as Jerome or Augustine emphasised.[29] Recent works on late antique art have stressed the importance of *paideia* and a shared classical culture in the Christian period.[30] Antiquarianism is a feature of late antique domestic art such as silverware, while many Christian motifs have long been recognised as deriving from Roman visual art. The careful preservation of classical monuments and artworks during the Christian period has been brought to light.[31] Sarah Bassett, for example, has published extensively on statuary-relocation programmes in Constantinople, highlighting how classical art was instrumental in creating and asserting a particular kind of Roman identity by Constantine and his successors.[32] Lea Stirling has also

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[24] E.g. Kaufmann (forthcoming) on unity in late Latin poetry.
[25] Kitzinger (1977) 7.
[26] Elsner (1998) 279.
[27] Habinek (1998).
[28] Elsner (1995).
[29] Nasrallah (2010) on Christian writers' attitudes to classical art and architecture before Constantine.
[30] Leader-Newby (2004).
[31] Curran (1994), Jacobs (2013).
[32] Bassett (1991), (1996), (2000), (2004), (2007), (2011), (2015a), (2015b).

challenged the assumption that Christianity meant an end to the collecting of classical works in domestic contexts in the West.[33] Whereas once the disparate statuary found grouped in late antique Ostia was assumed to have been gathered for destruction in the lime kilns, it has been shown that the actual purpose was new arrangements for domestic display.[34]

These contributions have countered the argument that after Christianity, Romans either stopped caring about their artistic heritage or actively sought to destroy it; such work is all the more important when the popular perception of the period continues to prefer the old cliché of 'the dark ages', newly invigorated by modern experiences of religious extremism.[35] Based in part on the opinions of the church fathers, the Western half of the empire is said to have had a more ambivalent attitude to classical culture than the East. This thesis focuses on sarcophagi from the West, in order to see if this aspect of visual culture continues to challenge assumptions about general attitudes based on patristic texts.

0.3. Early Christian sarcophagi and late Roman art

Until the mid-twentieth century, scholarship on sarcophagi was largely occupied by the enormous (and still incomplete) task of cataloguing, assigning dates and making identifications of iconography.[36] Classicists judged the reliefs of little artistic value in themselves, except as potential records of echoes of lost Greek sculpture.[37] Even today, sarcophagi can often be found on the edges of discussions on Roman art, as something of a lesser art form than other less 'functional' types of sculpture. While there have been some multi-author volumes and individual chapters dedicated to sarcophagi in English in the last decade, Janet Huskinson's book on strigillated sarcophagi, Stine Birk's work on sarcophagi with portraits, and the translation of Zanker and Ewald are the only monographs on Roman sarcophagi published in English since the start of the new millennium.[38]

It was religious historians who began to be interested in the potential funerary symbolism of the imagery, of whom Franz Cumont is the chief example. His 1942 work sought to uncover

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[33] Stirling (2005).
[34] Murer (2016).
[35] Cf. Catherine Nixey's *The Darkening Age* (2018), and the film *Agora* (2009). Modern biblical epics *Noah* (2014) and *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014) are also influenced by the theme of religious extremism; Cyrino (2017).
[36] Zanker and Ewald (2012) 18-20 summarise the historiography.
[37] Zanker and Ewald (2012) 18 cite Jakob Burckhardt (1855).
[38] Huskinson (2015); Birk (2013); Zanker and Ewald (2012), trans. of (2004); Couzin (2015) on the *traditio legis* motif also focuses chiefly on sarcophagi. Multi-author volumes on sarcophagi: Elsner and Huskinson (2011) and Elsner and Wu (2012). Chapters on sarcophagi in monographs: Borg (2013) chapters 6 and 7, 161-240, and Newby (2016) chapter 6, 273-319. Chapters on sarcophagi in multi-author volumes on late antique art: Meinecke (2012); Birk (2012a); Birk (2014). For recent non-English works, see Studer-Karlen (2012); Meinecke (2014).

reflections of philosophical and mystical teachings, an approach that was criticised by Nock in his 1946 review, who proposed instead a case for purely allegorical meanings.[39] Cumont's approach has been criticised for reading too much into images, in particular for the apparent prioritisation of text over image, making the meaning of the myth the starting point of interpretation rather than its rendering in the relief.[40] At the opposite end, Nock's secularist formula of "classicism and culture" seems to limit the interpretative possibilities of the decoration.[41]

In recent decades, scholars have investigated the cultural and social significance of sarcophagus reliefs, reflecting wider trends in classics. Studies on sarcophagi are now geared around issues of self-representation and the viewing audience.[42] Zanker and Ewald situate their study of myths on sarcophagi in relation to the original context of the tomb and associated rituals by the living.[43] Jaś Elsner and Zahra Newby have interpreted sarcophagus reliefs in relation to the idea of rhetoric, focusing on the techniques the imagery employs to communicate their messages of praise and consolation to the viewer.[44] Janet Huskinson has published studies on various aspects of Roman sarcophagi, including children, women, and recently an overdue volume dedicated to the strigillated type of sarcophagus.[45] Portraits are another focus of study, as well as the later reception of sarcophagi.[46] In recent years Elsner has pushed further in thinking about the sarcophagus as a three-dimensional object designed for the specific purpose of containing a body, and the relationship between the decoration and this function.[47] Despite the fundamental link between architecture and human bodies, the theme of architectural structure on sarcophagi, which will be so important in this thesis, has surprisingly only been extensively explored twice in the last 120 years, in a small work by Walter Altmann and chapter by Edmund Thomas.[48]

If sarcophagi have often been at the edge of discussions on Roman art, Christian sarcophagi are often at the edge of those, not helped by the separation in the catalogues.[49] The majority of Greek and Roman sarcophagi were catalogued in *Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs* (*ASR*) within volumes divided into themes such as Dionysiac or seasonal, but sarcophagi with

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[39] Cumont (1942); Nock (1946). Cf. Newby (2016) 273.
[40] Zanker and Ewald (2012) 20.
[41] Nock (1946) 166; Elsner (2011a) 9-11; Koortbojian (1995)
[42] Huskinson (1999) 190 on sarcophagi as a valuable source of information about Roman society; Elsner (2011a) 14: "of quite exceptional importance for understanding Roman culture."
[43] Zanker and Ewald (2012) 20.
[44] Elsner (2014) and Newby (2014).
[45] Huskinson (1996), (1999), (2015).
[46] On portraits, Newby (2011); Birk (2013). On later reception, Elsner (2009); Prado-Vilar (2011); Huskinson (2011) and (2015) part III, 245-296.
[47] Elsner (2012), (2018a), (2018b).
[48] Altmann (1902); E. Thomas (2011).
[49] Cf. Elsner (2011a) 8-9, and Elsner and Wu (2012) esp. 7-12.

apparently Christian scenes in the *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* (*RS*) were divided by location.[50] In the main handbooks, Guntram Koch separates the Christian sarcophagi from the non-Christian Roman examples, covered in his volume with Hellmut Sichtermann.[51] This simple division has discouraged comparison, broken only recently by Jutta Dresken-Weiland's work to contextualise pagan and Christian sarcophagi of the fourth to sixth centuries.[52] Recent multi-author volumes on sarcophagi have incorporated chapters on Christian material, though there is still room for more interaction within individual contributions.[53] The scholarly divide has left one corpus treated as fundamentally religious, but the other as secular. While Elsner rightly challenges this dichotomy by pointing out that non-Christian funerary imagery may also be religious in nature, it is equally important to acknowledge the wider 'secular' cultural influences on Christian sarcophagi, the "collective cultural language" of late Roman antiquity.[54] However in a recent handbook on Early Christianity, a section entitled 'Expressions of Christian Culture' contains nine chapters on literature, but none on art.[55] Early Christian sarcophagi can in fact illustrate that the dichotomy between religious and cultural, sacred and secular, is a false choice.

The labelling of Christian sarcophagi as religious artefacts has undoubtedly held back scholarly developments from being extended to them. The discipline of early Christian archaeology was formed out of the rediscovery of the catacombs in Rome, which happened to take place during the Counter-Reformation.[56] Early Christian art was apologetically useful in the Catholic Church's claims to apostolic authority and the validity of iconophilia.[57] The first catalogue of early Christian material, published in 1634 as *Roma Sotterranea*, was undertaken by Antonio Bosio under the sponsorship of the Vatican.[58] The attempts of the 1864 work of Giovanni Battista De Rossi to represent for the first time a more scientific approach, explaining that he was "an archaeologist, not a theologian", attracted accusations of Protestant conspiracy.[59] The Pontifical Commission for Christian Archaeology's director, Marucchi, was still criticising Protestant archaeologists in the introduction to his 1929 book, while Joseph Wilpert, a scholar and priest who published a two-volume analysis of the iconography of Christian sarcophagi, criticised those "who switch off their piety in their

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[50] *ASR* I-XII (1890-1999), *RS* I-III (1967-2003).
[51] Koch (2000); Koch and Sichtermann (1982).
[52] Dresken-Weiland (2003).
[53] Elsner and Huskinson (2011), Elsner and Wu (2012), and Galinier and Baratte (2013).
[54] Elsner and Wu (2012) 12.
[55] Harvey and Hunter (2008).
[56] See Frend (1996) and Hirschfeld (2008); I discuss the implications of the history of early Christian archaeology on later British attitudes in my MA dissertation (2013b).
[57] Humphries (2008) 89-90.
[58] Bosio (1634).
[59] De Rossi (1864), quoted in Rutgers (2000) 14.

study of religious topics for the sole purpose of wanting to pass themselves off as real scholars".[60]

The Vatican still controls access to the catacombs and the largest collection of early Christian monuments in the Museo Pio Cristiano, which can hamper the ability to publish outside of its supervision. Additionally, early Christian sarcophagi have frequently been reused as altars or fonts in churches around Italy and the south of France, contexts which reframe them as sacred artefacts and liturgical objects, aside from making it rather more labour-intensive to track them down.[61] The history of the discipline has a heavy theological burden, which has probably contributed to classical scholars being deterred from engaging with such contentious material, treated as part of the history of the modern church more than the ancient world.

There are numerous perspectives from various disciplines of classics, medieval studies and patristics, with few taking a fully joined-up approach. Classicists can be quick to label Christian sarcophagi as simple, uncomplicated, and with a fixed meaning tied to biblical texts, in comparison with earlier Graeco-Roman sarcophagi, whose reliefs are perceived as being more open to personalisation by the patron and interpretation by the viewer. Huskinson, for example, writes that they express Christian beliefs "in an uncomplicated way".[62] Where complexity is acknowledged, it can be with implicitly negative descriptions such as "crowded" for the frieze type sarcophagi with multiple figures.[63] Judgements such as 'simpler' can unwittingly continue to carry the negative comparisons of the old view of decline. In this thesis, I hope to emphasise the creativity and erudition of Christian patrons and viewers, and the complexity of their images; I would argue there is no reason to see them as less interesting or worthy of close reading than their predecessors. I will also draw attention to common structures between types, bridging the often rigid boundaries of typology.

Scholars with a background in patristics, however, can help to refute the idea of a monolithic biblical text, comparing the scenes with various textual interpretations by the early church fathers.[64] However, with their background in literary biblical reception, the text seems to be prioritised over the image, and the motifs can be treated as if straightforwardly illustrating scenes from the Bible, not taking into account the funerary rather than ecclesiastical context. There can be a tendency to treat the sarcophagus motifs individually, comparing individual

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[60] Marucchi (1929); Wilpert (1929-1936), quotation from (1930), trans. Rutgers (2000) 38.
[61] Cf. Elsner (2009).
[62] Huskinson (2015) 216.
[63] Zanker and Ewald (2004) 264.
[64] Jensen (2000).

examples of a motif across different sarcophagi, wall paintings, and other decorative arts, without fully taking into account the decorative scheme as a whole, or other aspects of the archaeological context, or the needs and function of each medium.[65] Christian meanings are also inevitably prioritised over any further cultural or material significance for ancient viewers. Though the church fathers can provide evidence for interpretations current at the time, they may not necessarily express the same emphasis as the visual renderings of biblical scenes. My approach will not go so far towards emphasising Graeco-Roman continuity as to neglect the biblical content, but will emphasise how this is mediated through a Roman funerary visual language, and the artistic and functional demands of sarcophagi.

While scholarship on the cultural significance of the earlier material has flourished in recent decades, the same growth regarding the early Christian corpus has not quite kept pace. Chronology and typology of late sarcophagi in the West have been laid down by the likes of Marion Lawrence, and the Wilpert and *RS* catalogues have been joined more recently by Koch's handbook. However Christian funerary art is only recently being subjected to the same interdisciplinary approaches as its classical and medieval counterparts.[66] Edmund Thomas cites the late-twentieth-century analyses of religious microarchitecture by medieval art historians when investigating the same issue for classical sarcophagi, but the monuments of the early Christian period that form the chronological bridge are only touched upon in conclusion.[67] Elsner has surely done the most to integrate early Christian examples, applying the same approaches as to the earlier period, such as a shared rhetoric of presence and absence.[68] He has thus laid out numerous paths across the gap between the early and late empire, presenting the case for the validity of the scholarly approaches to earlier periods in the Christian period and laying the foundation for the present study.

There is a tendency to see a communal religious identity privileged on Christian sarcophagi, marking a departure from the individual identity described in non-Christian funerary reliefs. The division between 'religious' Christian and 'secular' non-Christian contributes to this perception, which is complicated by the more traditional praise of the deceased and consolation for the bereaved expressed in contemporary Christian epitaphs. The assumption that Christian sarcophagi are not interested in displaying identity in the traditional sense, in praise of the deceased and their relationship to culture, may be influenced by the modern separation of spirituality from daily life, but seems anachronistic in this early period.

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[65] Jensen (2000), Dulaey e.g. (2006).
[66] Lawrence (1927), (1932), Soper (1937), Wilpert (1929-36), Koch (2000).
[67] E. Thomas (2011) 387 citing Boldrick and Fehrmann (2000) and *Homes for the soul* (2000).
[68] Elsner (1998) esp. 145-65 on funerary art, (2018a) 379-380, (2018b) 249-250.

Some scholars have begun to move beyond identifying and comparing types to reconstructing a viewing of the whole individual sarcophagus. One that has most attracted attention since its 1597 discovery is the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, an early columnar example of a *praefectus praetorio* that stands out for the treatment of its rich, deeply carved decoration, and combination of biblical and pre-Christian motifs.[69] Malbon presented for the first time a "holistic" analysis of the decorative scheme of this sarcophagus, laying out the connections between the front, sides and lid, and taking into account all the ornamental elements of the architectural frame.[70] Elsner has also suggested how the three-dimensional scheme of this sarcophagus worked, highlighting the framework of passing time that encompasses both Christian typology as well as the seasonal scenes.[71]

Generally though, the reconstruction of meaning on sarcophagi with biblical scenes is focused on the potential theological meanings of the arrangement and the relationship of the scheme to texts, more than to traditional funerary commemoration and late Roman visual culture. The importance of the Graeco-Roman tradition is appreciated elsewhere in late antique culture in both literature and art, but has not been considered enough in the funerary context now that this context was predominantly Christian. The style and content noticeably differ, but the underlying concepts and frameworks will show that sarcophagus design was still building on tradition. Once this traditional cultural backdrop is restored, the distinctive contribution of Christian thought to the development of this tradition can in fact be more clearly distinguished. Christian patrons will be shown to be engaged in traditional Roman visual culture, and using this familiar and prestigious language as the basis for constructing a new identity, one still rooted in the aspirational culture of the elite.

While Christian sarcophagi tend to be artificially divided from non-Christian, they are more often grouped together with other Christian media, in particular catacomb wall painting, but also gold glass, ivories, gems, silverware, and mosaic. Robin Jensen's comprehensive collection of baptism imagery, for example, covers all media with related scenes.[72] This kind of approach has provided useful collections of individual scene treatments, and suggestions for theological interpretations gleaned from commonalities and variations, but is often more concerned with identifying which texts have influenced which depictions, rather than taking into account the different contexts and audiences for each medium. When viewing a Christian sarcophagus in the fourth century, the tradition of Roman sarcophagi would be at the forefront of the mind in a way that would not be true when scrutinising a motif on a gem.

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[69] de Waal (1900), Gerke (1936), Himmelmann (1973), Daltrop (1978-80). See Chapter 3, fig. 3.2.
[70] Malbon (1990) 38.
[71] Elsner (2008) 26-31.
[72] Jensen (2011a).

The main point of viewing for sarcophagi may have been at the funeral or 'lying in state' since many were buried, whereas wall paintings were chiefly visible to visitors to the graves.[73] As Dresken-Weiland has demonstrated, the patrons of sarcophagi were from the middle classes and above, whereas catacomb paintings were generally commissioned by a lower class, and therefore without the same investment in intellectual culture.[74] It is therefore important to treat sarcophagi as their own discrete medium, distinctive in terms of viewers, patrons, and crucially function, as Elsner has emphasised in recent years.[75] He has compared individual sarcophagi with other types of containers, like the Projecta and Brescia caskets, but importantly is more concerned with highlighting the shared function of containing, rather than shared imagery.[76]

This is all the more important given the playful intermediality that has emerged as a key feature of late antique visual aesthetics in recent years. Bente Kiilerich has highlighted the importance of the medium in *opus sectile*; she identifies an interest in simulating different materials and creating unexpected material effects, from the deliberate choice to render supple flesh and water in the challenging medium of cut stones, to imitating cheap brick in expensive marble, to multiple levels of representation created by mosaic representing cameos representing bronze, marble or paint.[77] Like Kiilerich, Thelma Thomas has also demonstrated the importance of the qualities of the medium when it comes to late antique textiles, creating effects to delight the viewer (which is to be explored further in a sub-chapter of this thesis).[78] Michael Squire meanwhile has recently turned to considering materialist aesthetics in the image-poems of Optatian.[79]

The material turn in the humanities in the twenty-first century has spurred these kinds of analyses, but no one has considered the implications of a wider material aesthetic in this period for the medium of stone sarcophagi, though Elsner's work on the functions of objects as important in their interpretation, and recessions of representation as a self-conscious feature of art that contains a body, comes the closest. Examining sarcophagi as a discrete medium, while still in comparison with other media in separate subsidiary chapters, will help to reveal a similar media-conscious aesthetic as found elsewhere in late antique art. Given that elsewhere this has been explained in relation to the importance of display and a shared

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[73] Meinecke (2013).
[74] Dresken-Weiland (2003).
[75] Elsner (2012), (2018a), (2018b).
[76] Elsner (2008).
[77] Kiilerich (2016); the examples listed refer to the Hylas mosaic in the Basilica of Junius Bassus, an exedra of a building at Porta Marina, and a floor mosaic border from Pedrosa de la Vega.
[78] T. Thomas (2002), (2016). See Chapter 4.2.
[79] Squire (2017).

intellectual, cultural language, this has implications for sarcophagi as a part of Roman artistic culture, and about the kind of identity in which Christians were claiming a share.

Materiality is a particularly important topic when it comes to the history of Christianity, which was distinguished by its belief in the Incarnation, when God entered the material world. For Peers, Christians' relationship to objects as part of the material world is fundamental in theorising the late antique viewer.[80] Certainly by the early Middle Ages, this issue was at the heart of constructing Christian identity in opposition to Judaism (and vice versa) in fierce debates about images and icons.[81] Christianity could be a contributing factor behind an interest in materiality in this period, but in any case, recognising engagement with aesthetics of materiality on late Roman sarcophagi certainly has the potential to throw up new Christian meanings. Materiality has received recent attention in a funerary context, where issues of matter are particularly poignant, while spoliation as an issue of material reuse in late antiquity continues to be debated. [82]

This thesis must not only be concerned with excavating a way of viewing directly from the fourth century, but also from established ways of viewing these monuments that have calcified around them ever since their rediscovery. A fundamental challenge with writing art history is the dilemma of the translator, trying to capture an ancient way of viewing, but having to write from modern assumptions about viewing, emphasising similarities or differences in relation to the modern in order to translate from one viewing audience to another. Factors may end up being overstated or underplayed that were more or less important in the minds of ancient viewers, in tempering or magnifying from their level of importance for us today; a pair of glasses would appear to distort the world to one seeing correctly, but helps to put things into focus for those with difficulty seeing. This thesis will make particular use of the visual-cultural lens of Roman funerary commemoration and late antique intellectual culture, in order to help bring back into focus the distorted picture of Christian sarcophagi in the fourth century: one that has skewed disproportionately towards applying the meanings of literary texts, and isolated 'religious' as distinct from 'cultural' identity.

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[80] Peers (2012).
[81] Barber (1997).
[82] On materiality and the funerary: Newby and Toulson (2018); Crowley (2018). On *spolia*: Elsner (2000); M. Hansen (2003); Brilliant and Kinney (2011); Brandenburg (2011); Liverani (2011); Sande (2012).

0.4. Outline of the thesis

Three chapters on sarcophagi serve as the main content and structure of the thesis. These will proceed broadly chronologically. The themes that run through each revolve around inherited frameworks, an interest in the statuesque, and materiality; it is impossible to treat the material thematically, as the themes are all intertwined and mutually constructive. We will observe different nuances at different stages in the relationship between Christianity and Rome, so it makes sense to situate the monuments historically. The third chapter is followed by smaller subsidiary chapters, each on a different medium from funerary and domestic visual culture, which help to clarify the medium-specific qualities of the sarcophagi and demonstrate a wider late antique aesthetic. Throughout reference will be made to literary texts – classical, late antique, early Christian, and biblical - and end with a chapter on material that is both visual and textual.

The Christian sarcophagi that are the main subject of the thesis date from the late third and fourth centuries, centred around Rome and Arles as the locations of the majority of the surviving Western material. The thesis is not intended to be an exhaustive account, but takes the approach of case studies to tell a story of broader cultural themes. I have attempted to view as many as possible of the Christian sarcophagi featured in person, as it is the best way to get a sense of the physicality of the objects in their three dimensions, which is so important to the approach of this thesis.

The first chapter begins with the background of Greek and Roman sarcophagi in the second and third centuries, setting up the theme of recessions of representation important on this class of monument. One understudied feature of this will be drawn out, the caryatid motif, which will be particularly important as a self-referential, architectonic device. It then moves to strigillated sarcophagi as a common framework for the statuesque from pagan to Christian, focusing ultimately on the case of the 'Good Shepherd' type as an example of a pre-Christian 'neutral' statuesque image that could have had significance to Christians and non-Christians. The significance of statues in late antiquity will be explored.

The second chapter will move into the first half of the fourth century and the introduction of biblical imagery to the picture outlined in the previous chapter, highlighting the continuing resonances of a traditional framework with which Christian patrons could play, on frieze and strigillated types. The popular pairing of the raising of Lazarus and Peter striking the rock will be the main case study, and a distinctive approach to the materiality of the tomb will be demonstrated, fundamentally related to the new Christian belief in a bodily resurrection.

The third chapter will proceed to the second half of the fourth century and focus on architectural types of sarcophagi, chiefly columnar. Architectural frameworks, statuesque

connotations of figures, and materiality will all be considered, in a period when Christianity was becoming ever more dominant and established as the religion of empire. The broad divisions of dating into the first and second halves of the fourth century in the second and third chapters are led by the dating of the sarcophagi in the scholarship, rather than by specific historical dates.

The fourth chapter will look beyond sarcophagi, and is composed of two halves. Each pursues themes from the previous chapters, focused on one aspect of early Christian text and late antique art, and each starting to look past the end of the fourth century, in order to help flesh out a three-dimensional view of Christian sarcophagi in their late antique context. The first half will examine the reception of Virgil in Christian verse epitaphs from the late fourth century and into the fifth. This chapter will follow up on a key theme from the third chapter, the creation of a new past for Christian Rome out of classical fragments, with a triumphal sense of fulfilling poetic prophecies.

The second half of the fourth chapter will look at columnar frameworks on a different medium, tapestry wall hangings originally from a domestic context. The close relationship between imagery and medium will again be highlighted, showing up the similarities and differences with the treatment of architecture in stone and cloth. Classical poetry will help shed light on the learned references of the textiles and the visual games at play.

Finally, the thesis will conclude with one last case study of a sarcophagus from the end of the fourth century, one that draws together the main themes as well as providing a particularly good look at the process of viewing itself.

Chapter One

Monumentality on Roman Sarcophagi

Monumentalising motifs, whether that be statuesque or architectural, are well known on pre-Christian sarcophagi. Christian sarcophagi however are not discussed in these terms; the evolution in style and content seems to distract the modern viewer from noticing a high degree of continuation on the level of formal structure and frameworks, as well as the statuesque origins of many motifs. This chapter will follow the development of pre-Christian frameworks and motifs into the Christian era, focusing particularly on the outer framing positions of sarcophagi as a key to opening our eyes to the statuesque, and the substitution of 'neutral' motifs drawn from the Graeco-Roman past.

The chapter will start by setting up the background of statuesque imagery in the funerary sphere, including issues of representation that this raises related to the function and medium of the sarcophagus, before focusing on the caryatid motif as one aspect of the statuesque. It will then look at these framing positions in the particular type of the strigillated sarcophagus in the second and third centuries, before continuing with this type into the fourth century with 'neutral' Christian imagery. It will aim to bridge the gap between sarcophagus types and between pagan and Christian, before bridging to biblical imagery in the next chapter. The significance of statues and architecture is important to set up for the second and third main chapters.

This chapter will also start to consider the significance of this statuesque or semi-architectural imagery in the changing context of Christian Rome. The reliance on literary evidence, chiefly the patristic texts, privileges a generally negative view towards classical art and culture.[1] But this was not necessarily a view shared among non-clerical individuals in the middle and upper classes, for whom the classical tradition had always been an important marker of status and education.

1.1. Sarcophagi and monumentality

Statues or busts of the dead were originally displayed in or around the tomb, but there was also a tradition for displaying the dead in a statuesque way on individual funerary monuments; tombstones often depict the deceased person in an aedicula, in the form of a

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[1] Nasrallah (2010) on earlier Christian attitudes to classical art and architecture in the second century.

bust, or on a plinth of some kind, such as a second-century child in Ostia who stands on an inscribed platform or plinth on his memorial (fig. 1.1).[2] The deceased could even be portrayed by famous statue types with portrait features: a statue group from Ostia represents a couple as Mars and Venus (fig. 1.2), composed of the Ares Borghese and Aphrodite of Capua types, which had been created to celebrate the emperor and his wife.[3]

Depictions of statues are also common on sarcophagi. *Kline*-type lids feature the deceased reclining as a three-dimensional statue, in one case holding another sculpture form of the portrait bust to indicate a pre-deceased wife (fig. 1.3).[4] Two-dimensional figures on the reliefs of the base also often stand on plinths, and statue types are a popular source of iconography, with or without plinths. The prevalence of statues on sarcophagi, especially in an architectural context, has been linked to the long history of displaying sculptures of the deceased in or around the tomb.[5] The decline in monumental family tombs may have prompted the rise in popularity of architectonic sarcophagi, and the lack of the tomb for display may have similarly prompted sculpture to be depicted on the sarcophagi along with the architectural structure.[6] Statuesque depiction conveyed the prestigious connotations of a time-honoured mode of commemoration: connotations of societal status, culture and exemplarity.[7]

Depicting the dead as statues would also offer some consolation for the bereaved, not just through the satisfaction of having given honour to their status, accomplishments or virtue in life.[8] In the nineteenth century, Cassandra Austen wrote that she was comforted by the statuesque appearance of her sister on her death bed:

> "There was nothing convulsed or which gave the idea of pain in her look, on the contrary… she gave me the idea of a beautiful statue, and even now in her coffin, there is such a sweet serene air over her countenance as is quite pleasant to contemplate."[9]

Though this witness is remote in time and not directly comparable with ancient views, the beauty of statues and the veneer of beauty that sculpture could lend a city is well attested in

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[2] Mander (2013) no. 143; Kleiner (1987) no. 12. See P. Stewart (2003) 92.
[3] Giuliano (1985) 219-24, no. V,1. Wrede (1981) on commemoration in the form of divinities; D'Ambra (2008) for depictions of girls as Diana.
[4] Felletti Maj (1953) no. 147. See Ackers (2018) on busts.
[5] P. Stewart (2003) 84; Birk (2013) 48; Borg (2013) 277.
[6] Zanker and Ewald (2012) 253; Wallace-Hadrill (2008) on the tomb as a house.
[7] Koortbojian (1995) 120-1. On statues as *exempla*, cf. Newby (2016) 325-6; also E. Thomas (2011) 415-6.
[8] On rhetoric of consolation on sarcophagi, see Newby (2011). Ackers (2018) 136-140 on funerary portraits as consolation as well as status.
[9] Letter of Cassandra Austen to Fanny Knight 20th July 1817, following death of Jane Austen on 18th July; Le Faye (2011) 361.

the ancient world.[10] The consolatory power of the statue was in picturing the deceased in an eternally beautiful and peaceful attitude, as unhurt by any previous bodily suffering or misfortune, and as unaffected by the passage of time as a work of art. The new existence of a person after death is symbolised by a world of representation equally just removed from the land of the living; the statue occupies the space somewhere between presence and absence.

Famous statue types meanwhile could convey the same sense of prestige and timelessness, but also specifically the intellectual culture or *paideia* of the deceased or their family.[11] There was evidently a continued appetite for such statuary in later ancient Rome, one that could end up blurring the line between the domestic and funerary worlds.[12] The Mars and Venus group was actually found in a late antique residence in Ostia, refurbished in the late third century, at which point it is thought the original portrait features of Mars at least were reworked into a more generic head.[13] A nearby early imperial grave altar may have acted as a base for the group, which was apparently on display in a large hall with a nymphaeum and other statuary. Moreover it is not the only funerary sculpture to have been found in late Roman homes in the town. Earlier research had suggested that such material had been brought into the city in medieval times on the way to being recycled in lime kilns, but it has been convincingly argued by Murer that they were actually moved in the late third to early fourth century for the purposes of domestic decoration.[14] A similar Mars and Venus group was found in another late Roman residence on the Quirinal hill in Rome.[15] Imperial-era statues of the deceased in the form of gods were the most popular for reuse, such as those in the guise of Venus, Mars, Diana, and nymphs or Nereids, and not just for private display, but in public places too, including the forum and public baths.[16] In one case, the lid of a Severan sarcophagus with a reclining couple was made into a fountain in a bath house near Viterbo.[17]

Statue types were of course sources of iconography for sarcophagus reliefs, and in the run up to late antiquity there seems to be an increasing tendency to statuesque excerption in frieze sarcophagi. Mythological figures move to the centre and grow in scale compared to the other characters.[18] For example, in the group of Achilles and Penthesileia sarcophagi of the early third century (e.g. fig. 1.4), the central figure of Achilles comes to dominate, while the rest

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[10] Bassett (2015a) 249-50.

[11] Bartmann (1991) 78-9; Vermeule (1977) 35-40 on statues and architectural settings on sarcophagus reliefs.

[12] On statues in late antiquity in various parts of the empire: Hannestad (1994) 105-49; Bassett (1991-2015); Stirling (2005); Bauer and Witschel (2007); Myrup Kristensen and Stirling (2016).

[13] Murer (2016) 182 n23.

[14] Murer (2016) esp. 181-3; e.g. Lenzi (1998) 251-2 on lime kiln theory.

[15] Cf. Kousser (2008) on the popularity of Venus in late antique domestic and public art.

[16] Murer (2016) 192-4.

[17] Murer (2016) 195 n90.

[18] Borg (2013) 167.

of the scene falls into the background on a smaller scale, as the bucolic imagery does on the late antique sarcophagi.[19] The remains of a sculptural group of Achilles and Penthesilea in the round have survived in Aphrodisias; well-known statue types in narrative friezes could evoke the prestige of the famous type at the same time as making the subject more recognisable for the Roman viewer.[20] Endymion too becomes increasingly isolated as a central motif throughout the third century, and is reminiscent of the types of reclining figure seen commonly in statuary, not least the figures of the deceased depicted for centuries as if lying on the *kline* lids of sarcophagi.[21] Many of these dominant central figures also gain portrait features, emphasising their central role.[22] This increasing excerption and isolation, and the dissolution of surrounding narrative detail, means that figures on sarcophagi of all types appear increasingly statuesque.

A sarcophagus in the Vatican (fig. 1.5) illustrates some of the issues of representation that statuesque depictions could raise.[23] In between the pediment of the doorway and the aedicules containing the large portrait figures, there are small half-bodies of women visible, holding wreathes.[24] While their just visible wings mean they could be diminutive hovering victories, they can also easily be interpreted as architectural sculpture; their size, position, frontality, and symmetrical draping all work together to give this impression.[25] The nude youths before them also appear very sculptural: alongside their nudity and scale, they are also symmetrical in their poses and props, and moreover stand on round plinths that fit perfectly between the columns. They are however larger than the victories and stand in a more relaxed pose; on the scale from statue to real person, they seem to be midway between the victories and the larger figures of the couple, at least one of whom is the deceased being commemorated. This game of different layers of representation is underscored by the depiction of winged genii on the doors; holding cups and branches, they mimic the pose of the youths. The door is in a sense a microcosm of the wider sarcophagus, or *mise en abyme* to follow Elsner.[26] The layers of representation thus range from two-dimensional, to

[19] *ASR* II 92; Newby (2011) 315 on Achilles; Bartmann (1991) 80 on Achilles and Penthesilea as a contrasting pair of living body and corpse.
[20] Erim (1968) 67-8.
[21] Koortbojian (1995) 135 on Endymion; Elsner (2018b) on *kline* lid statuary.
[22] Borg (2013) 167.
[23] *ASR* I,3 151.
[24] Haarlov (1977) on half-open door motif.
[25] P. Stewart (2003) on how the differences between people and statues was articulated in art. Also Platt (2011) 34-8.
[26] Elsner (2018a).

architectural, to freestanding ideal statuary, to ostensibly real people (or at least portrait statues).[27]

Indeed, the way the faces of the nude youths are turned to the larger portrait figures, a connection underlined by the crossing of arms in front of the intervening columns, draws attention to the ambiguity. The victories crown the nude youths, who in turn look at the commemorated couple. If the couple were to move, the youths would not be looking at anyone. Yet if the youths are also not fixed, then if they were to move, the victories would not be crowning anyone. The architectural setting adds to the impression that these too might be statues after all. No matter how lifelike, all sarcophagus figures are made of stone. Elsner has discussed the "recession of representations" offered by a relief with some figures on plinths and some without, and questions whether some are to be considered more or less 'real' than others.[28] These kinds of visual games constitute an acknowledgement that all figures on sarcophagi are marble images, and in this sense they are all 'by nature' statuesque.

All three figural pairs on different levels of representation depend on each other; as soon as one level changes status in the eye of the viewer from stone to flesh or vice versa, the others must follow.[29] The sarcophagus front flickers between life and art. Elsner has shown how Roman sarcophagi were concerned on a fundamental level with these very issues, as marble monuments containing human remains, preserving the memory of the now decaying body with stone bodies. The status of these bodies as natural or artificial, lifelike or statuesque, alive or dead, is fundamentally related to the function of the sarcophagus.[30] There is a key relationship between the dead body encased in marble, and the human likenesses rendered in that same stone. This awareness of materiality could extend to the viewer: the gorgon heads commonly carved on sarcophagi could function to remind the viewer that they too will be reduced to stone monuments.[31]

This blurring of the lines between different types of representation seems due to the visual eliding of the sarcophagus and the body, between flesh and stone. In fact, this sarcophagus presents an interesting reversal to the typical order of representation or presence observed by Platt, beginning with the invisible corpse, to a centrally positioned portrait, to more

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[27] Cf. *ASR* I,3 14 for a similar composition; instead of the youth statues crowned by architectural victories, victories on plinths hold semi-human trophies.
[28] Elsner (2012) 188.
[29] Elsner (2012) 188 on "recessions of representations"; also (2018b) 558.
[30] Elsner (2018b); also (2018a).
[31] Mack (2002) and Grethlein (2016) on the gorgon's gaze, cf. Elsner (2018a) 360 on the material implication of gorgon heads on a sarcophagus in terms of the deceased.

statuesque figures on either side.[32] Usually the figures at the edges are somehow less real than those within, furthest away from the most real person inside.

1.1.1. Figural architectural supports

Sarcophagi were fundamentally related to architecture, as shown by the long tradition of architectural elements in their designs, including doorways, columns, aedicules, and acroteria. Early columnar sarcophagi may have been in imitation of temple-tombs, for example. One architectural element that is more popular on sarcophagi and cinerary urns than seems to have been acknowledged, is the supporting human figure in place of a column, known as a caryatid or atlas.[33] Their ubiquity is likely to be down to their unique ability to represent both architecture and the human body, two major concerns of sarcophagus decoration deriving from its function. In the majority of cases, such figures are found at one or both ends of the sarcophagus front, taking the position of columns to support the entablature or lid. They fit with Platt's scheme for less 'real' images at the most external parts of the sarcophagus.

Such figures at the ends of sarcophagi have been described as caryatids previously by scholars, such as on a third-century example from Crete (fig. 1.6), whose framing figures stand on plinths and support an architectural entablature.[34] However there has been no single study of their particular function or significance on sarcophagi. Vitruvius's description of caryatids was applied by Roman architects to the architectonic Erechtheion maidens on the Athenian Acropolis.[35] Pliny describes the pre-Hadrianic Pantheon as being decorated with caryatids (seemingly removed to Hadrian's villa at Tivoli where they have been identified with the Erechtheion maiden copies), and versions of the Erechtheion maidens were also included on an Attic storey above colonnades in the Forum of Augustus.[36] Caryatids were thus well known and well represented in Rome.

There is a great variety in the way the support figure is expressed: the figure may seem to support the entablature or other architectural feature (or hold an object that supports the entablature) with their hands; or the entablature may simply rest on their head (or an object placed on their head). On one ash chest in the Vatican, nude figures hold the entablature up with one hand (fig. 1.7), while on another, herms support a tiled roof with their heads (fig.

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[32] Platt (2012) esp. 224-5 and updated (2017).
[33] Schmidt (1982) for a survey of the caryatid in (full-size) Greek and Roman architecture.
[34] *ASR* II 23; Lloyd-Morgan (1990) 149.
[35] Vitruvius, *De architectura* 1.1.5. Lesk (2007); also King (1998).
[36] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 36.11; Broucke (1999). Lesk (2007) 37 on the Forum of Augustus caryatids.

1.8).[37] The Attic sarcophagus from Crete (fig. 1.6) depicts slightly larger scale figures at either end, which exceed the frame of the other figures so that the lid rests on their heads; they also stand on decorated plinths.

The figures may be delineated on the front of the sarcophagus only, or also on a short side so they fit around the corner. The sarcophagus of Licinia Magna in Arles (fig. 1.9) presents four figures on plinths across the front, the outer two of which (two victories) face diagonally outwards from the corners (fig. 1.9b); there are also two figures on plinths on the remaining edge of the short sides.[38] The garlands on a sarcophagus from Rome are held by cupids, which also lift up their elbows to the entablature (fig. 1.10).[39] Garland sarcophagi often exhibit particular interests in issues of representation. On the left short side of the Licinia Magna example, there is a scene of Leda and the swan (fig. 1.9c), also found in statuary; it is set in a rocky landscape, playing off the plinths on either side, and highlighting the two modes of representation of winged creatures.[40] The cupid on the plinth could be merely a framing device, or part of the narrative of the amorous god. The second garland sarcophagus is replete with masks across the front and heads for acroteria, while the lid has repetitive reclining figures, which Elsner has demonstrated are in a special relationship to the horizontal body within.[41] Other garland sarcophagi place the cupids on plinths, or even as a rare herm in the central position (fig. 1.11), underlining their semi-statuesque status.[42] Even in such a formulaic type, there is a wide range of variations and no two are exactly alike.[43] While garlands are categorised as a separate type of decoration from architectonic motifs by Davies, the garland motif assumes a support at either end from which to hang, on occasion in the form of columns.[44] The cupids which commonly bear the weight of the garlands on funerary monuments are inherently architectonic and statuesque.

In narrative friezes, the figure is often distinguished from the rest of the decoration by devices ranging from increased scale to a more statuesque depiction. A Dionysiac frieze sarcophagus in the Musei Capitolini (fig. 1.12), for example, includes a male figure on the

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[37] Altmann (1905) 55 no. 10; Sinn (1991) 98-9 no. 78. Sinn (1991) 101-2 no. 84. Davies (2011) 28-39 on ash chest decoration.
[38] Gaggadis-Robin (2005) 197-201 no. 65. For garland sarcophagi, *ASR* VI,2,1; Davies (2011) 40-45 on early garland sarcophagi and their relationship to earlier grave altars and ash chests; for similar Proconnesian sarcophagi, cf. McCann (1978) no. 2. Similar caryatid-types without plinths on an Amazonomachy sarcophagus in the Louvre: Redlich (1942) 9-11, no. 69.
[39] *ASR* VI,2,1 61. Nock (1946) 148 describes such cupids carrying garlands as "baby caryatids". Cf. *ASR* III 3 no. 425.
[40] The right short side has two winged griffins drinking from an urn full of water; cf. Elsner (2018a) 378 on vases as self-referential motifs on sarcophagi.
[41] Elsner (2018b).
[42] Koch and Sichtermann (1982) 231, no. 17, Koch and Wight (1988) 30-1, no. 11; the eyeholes were widened later for a fountain fitting.
[43] Koch and Wight (1988) 30.
[44] Davies (2011) 28-29; e.g. ash chest of L. Lepidius Epaphra (Sinn (1987) 132 no. 161).

far right corner with a basket of fruit on his head (fig. 1.12b), supporting the ornate border with a more static pose than his companions.[45] Similarly, on a fragment of a sarcophagus depicting the myth of Proserpina, a static female figure whose head reaches the entablature looks diagonally out from the corner (fig. 1.13).[46] She also carries fruit, this time gathered in the folds of her dress across her abdomen. The use of fruit to allude to pregnancy cleverly resonates not just with Proserpina's separation from her own mother, the goddess of agriculture, but also with the events of the myth that follow the depicted snatching: Proserpina yielding to a fruit that results in her entrapment as a wife and mother herself. In the funerary context it also connotes rebirth. Both gatherings of fruit held by the support figures of these two sarcophagi take part in the self-referential sarcophagus trope of container imagery, fittingly for an element also fundamentally involved in such referentiality.

The support figure can also be fully integrated into a frieze on the same level of naturalism as the other participants. For example, on a sarcophagus from Arles with the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus (fig. 1.14), the character at the right end of the front raises his arm over his head so that his forearm is parallel to and making contact with the entablature.[47] Another such figure can be found at the back of the left short side (fig. 1.14b). Both figures seem to support the entablature in the same manner as caryatids, though the relaxed arrangement of their feet makes them playful interpretations of this principle of support. The figure on the far right, again, of a frieze sarcophagus in the Hermitage appears from the front to be simply a man standing behind the chair of a seated woman, but from a side view (fig. 1.15) his caryatid-style arm on the short side becomes visible.[48] The full integration of such figures into the narrative frieze is a playful twist on tradition, available for the knowing viewer to spot. These figures are not straightforwardly caryatids, but play with the type.[49]

Once one is familiar with this often very subtle device, it is surprising just how often it can be spotted. The third-century child's sarcophagus in the Palazzo Nuovo (fig. 1.16), for example, has been analysed by Elsner in terms of its series of recessions of the human figure, encompassing reclining figures in relief on the lid and base, and the deceased as three-dimensional *kline* statue, statue on the casket, and corpse on the casket, all set within

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[45] *ASR* IV,1 10; La Rocca and Presicce (2010) 128-133, no. 5; cf. *ASR* V,3 130 for a cupid sarcophagus with the cupid in the same position holding a fruit basket.
[46] *ASR* III,3 360; Giuliano (1982) 109-11, no IV 21.
[47] *ASR* IX,1 50. Cf. *ASR* IX,1 47, 57 and 70 for similar figures on the same type.
[48] *ASR* IX,1 28.
[49] Cf. *ASR* IV,1 9, with figures like those on the Hippolytus sarcophagus supporting the entablature with their forearms at either end, and at the far side of both short ends figures like that on the Dionysian sarcophagus supporting a fruit basket.

mythological narratives of the creation of mankind (fig. 1.16b).[50] Given this monument's concern with bodies and artifice, it is perhaps not surprising to notice that the chained figure of Prometheus could be another caryatid-type. From the front, he is visible on the far right, his head protruding, with one hand chained behind the head of Hermes. Moving to the right, we can see that his other hand is chained back against the short side of the sarcophagus (fig. 1.16c), much like the Licinia Magna or garland examples. The rocky backdrop is clearly executed, a setting which makes this figure a particularly fitting choice for this position that is so conspicuously sculptural; meanwhile the fact that Prometheus's arms are not just raised but actually chained in this position adds a particularly strong sense of stability. The implied interplay between stone and sculpture fits the concerns of this sarcophagus well.[51]

The sculptural connotations of the end positions could be used to subtle effect with even looser definitions of a caryatid-type support. A frieze sarcophagus in the Vatican depicts the mythological story of the slaughter of the Niobids (fig. 1.17): Niobe's children are ranged in their death throes across the front of the sarcophagus, being shot by Apollo and Artemis.[52] The figure of Niobe is depicted on the far right with her cloak billowing up over her head. This in itself could provide an ironic counterpoint to the supporting column on the far left; her position could even underscore her role in 'laying the foundation' for the slaughter through her hubris. However, more importantly, in the myth, Niobe is said to be so grief-stricken that she turns to stone; her position here cleverly hints at this future material transfiguration, perhaps one that is already starting to take place.[53] The unusual atlas-style supports underneath the sarcophagus are original, making the metaphor of support more explicit.[54] Moreover two groups of Niobid statues are known from imperial gardens in Rome.[55] The parents standing in for the structural supports, framing the melee of their children's bodies, could be an image of the patron(s) of the sarcophagus providing commemoration for the dead body of their loved one within, just as the couple are depicted again on the right short end, either side of a round tomb (fig. 1.17b).[56] The divisions between frame and content here are minimal: the billowing cloth around Niobe's head helps to frame

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[50] Stuart Jones (1912) plate 34; Koch and Sichtermann (1982) 183-4, no. 215; Elsner (2018b) 556-8.
[51] Another example of a *lenos*-shaped casket with a caryatid-type figure is an Apollo and Marsyas sarcophagus in the Galleria Doria Pamphili, c. 230 AD, where Marsyas hangs with his hands tied above his head on the same right hand corner; Koch and Sichtermann (1982) 40ff, no. 36.
[52] *ASR* III,3 315; Sichtermann and Koch (1975) 50, no. 49; McCann (1978) 59-60. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.146-312. Very similar arrangements can be found on sarcophagi in the National Archaeological Museum, Venice (second half of second century AD, *ASR* III,3 316), and Wilton House (early third century AD, *ASR* III,3 317), though both without the column.
[53] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.303ff.
[54] McCann (1978) 60 n34.
[55] Newby (2012) 363-73.
[56] Examples of this scene on other sarcophagi, e.g. *ASR* XII,6 81.

her as separate, as the shield does for her husband opposite, but the central carnage floods into their space, with children clinging to the lower limbs of both.

The Portonaccio sarcophagus (fig. 1.18) conveys the same idea: larger scale groups of trophies (with and without human faces) that reach the entablature, frame the chaotic battle within.[57] Even without the explicit markers of the statuesque on the Niobids sarcophagus, the positions alone carry sufficient sculptural significance. This subtle interpretation of the scheme engages the knowledgeable Roman viewer by offering further meaning in exchange for thoughtful attention; it is an alternative, mythological take on the themes of death and sculpture evident elsewhere on Graeco-Roman sarcophagi as commemorative objects.

The architectonic figural motif of the caryatid is another key aspect that unites Platt's arguments about framing and Elsner's analysis of self-referential recessions of representation on sarcophagi. The connotations of the framing positions and expectations for a particular structure could be exploited to varying effects, ultimately offering a self-referential commentary on commemoration. They form another dimension of the sophisticated play with different layers of representation, between real person and statue, part of the narrative or part of the architecture.

Midway between statue and column, the figural support embodies both aspects of monumentality that are of particular interest throughout this thesis. As images of bodily strength, caryatid figures are highly self-referential motifs for a sarcophagus, whose function is to contain and preserve the memory of the body despite its decay; the sarcophagus represents an awareness of the body losing form and strength, and using bodies as structural elements fits within these concerns. Out of the examples given here where a caryatid-type is only present at one end, it is always on the right; this may relate to the order of viewing, with the caryatid a culminating surprise, but it may also be significant that this is usually the end where the head of the body lay. Edmund Thomas considers that the affiliation between body and column weakened and was lost in this period, before resurfacing in the fourth century.[58] The use of bodies as structural entities on sarcophagi, more or less continuously in this intervening period, might suggest the idea was still latent, and helps explain its resurgence in the late third and fourth centuries.

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[57] Koch and Sichtermann (1982), 92.
[58] E. Thomas (2011) esp. 417-18.

1.2. Statues on strigillated sarcophagi

Strigillated sarcophagi are a type not mentioned thus far, but they also seem to be particularly suited to the depiction of architectural features.[59] Moreover, the earlier examples abound in depictions of statuary on plinths, in the central niche and also in the outer positions. There are always either narrow figures or columns at the outside edges, while sometimes the central panel can be dispensed with. In prioritising this minimal structure akin to an architectural frame for the viewer's attention, the strigillated type was built upon the widespread supportive framework considered so far. As well as surviving in the greatest numbers, strigillated sarcophagi provide a long, continuous run from pre-Christian to Christian, and therefore provide an excellent type on which to observe the development of the first neutral motifs adapted by Christians.

Doors, columns and portraits in the form of tondos and shells, all features of more monumental architecture, are all commonplace, as well as handles which make conspicuous the monumental materiality of the object.[60] A mid-third-century example from Rome (fig. 1.19) even preserves a tile-effect roof to crown the corner columns and elaborate doorway.[61] In fact the earliest strigillated examples show a particularly strong emphasis on architectural structure, with aediculae, columns, plinths and doorways among the very earliest developments. From the mid-third century, the addition of the portrait clipeus (e.g. fig. 1.20) is another aspect borrowed from architectural sculpture. As public honours, both portrait statues and shield portraits also carried connotations of reward and status.[62]

Huskinson compares the strigillation itself to spiral fluting on columns, and this seems particularly the case when deep mouldings are found on the top and bottom of the patterns (e.g. figs. 1.21 and 1.22).[63] The less common vertical type of fluting makes this even clearer, clearly originating from the identical decoration on columns, which are themselves often depicted on the sarcophagi (as in fig. 1.20). The frequent mix of spiral and vertical fluted columns on sarcophagi, and the alternating of the direction of the flutes, indicate a conscious and purposeful use of these architectural elements.[64]

From the beginning then, the strigillated sarcophagus evolved as a type with a strong architectural foundation, providing a frame which monumentalises the enclosed images. This type does not directly imitate actual buildings with the same degree of *mimesis* as

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[59] Huskinson (2015) 78-9.
[60] Huskinson (2015) 23-5, 81-4.
[61] Borg (2013) 128-30, fig. 78.
[62] Fejfer (2008) 233-5; see Studer-Karlen (2012) on Christian portraiture.
[63] Huskinson (2015) 8-9.
[64] Cf. Elsner (2018a) on the juxtaposition of strigillated columns and panels on sarcophagi.

columnar sarcophagi, since it is difficult to imagine a full-size building with wall-height strigillation. Instead they use these patterns to allude to the monumentality of marble architecture across the body of the sarcophagus, often within a frame of doors, columns and roofs that nevertheless create the impression of the sarcophagus as a miniature building, despite the effect of the strigils blurring the line between real and illusory. Platt and Huskinson have described the contradictory nature of strigillation in reinforcing the materiality of the sarcophagus through reference to architectural carving, yet at the same time creating shimmering patterns that have the effect of dissolving the solidity of the stone.[65]

Statues on plinths are part of this monumental theme from the start, including famous statue types such as the Three Graces and Narcissus (figs. 1.21 and 1.22).[66] The figures at the ends, in this case Narcissus, are frequently symmetrical and appear to function as framing devices, we might even say as caryatid-types in many cases; they even raise their arms over their heads in an allusion to the structural history of their position. They frequently lack a border around them so that they could lean out over the edge, functioning as the frame or book-ends to the decorative front. Huskinson suggests that strigillated panels could make the sarcophagus appear like a wall with windows on the figures, who operate "in their own world".[67] However the lack of outer border means that the figures better resemble architectural elements inserted into the monument, and are therefore part of the same architectural world as the strigillation.

Moreover the doubling of the figures makes it clear that they are not from the realm of real life or mythological narrative, but are statuesque ornamental devices. That the figures can be substituted by columns underlines this architectural function. At times, the viewer's expectations of stability from these supports can be playfully undermined, for example by depicting Bacchic dancers whose wild movements happen to have been frozen in semi-supportive positions (e.g. fig. 1.23); the stability of the support they offer is in question.[68]

The five-panelled strigillated sarcophagi are able to use the outer pair to frame the central panel and qualify how it is to be interpreted.[69] The figures of the Three Graces and Narcissus (fig. 1.21) can all represent the theme of beauty, almost comparing ideals of male and female beauty.[70] The jars at the feet of the Graces and their nudity give the impression that they

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[65] Platt (2012) 220; Huskinson (2015) 94: "fluting could threaten to subvert the sense of solidity with hints of the immaterial."
[66] *ASR* XII 2 no. 159.
[67] Huskinson (2015) 95-6.
[68] *ASR* IV,4 282.
[69] Huskinson (2008) 291 and (2012) 91 discusses strategic use of corner figures.
[70] *ASR* XII,2 159; Huskinson (2015) 9-11, Elsner (2018a) 371.

could be bathing, which links them with Narcissus whose myth takes place by a pool; this location is not indicated in the reliefs however, so it is up to the educated viewer to make the connection using their own mythological knowledge. The repetitive waves of the strigils, which the curves of the bodies mimic so well, add to this watery theme. The background drapery found in all three reliefs also connects the figures within a domestic setting, while compared to the more downward gaze of other representations of Narcissus (fig. 1.22), he and the Graces could be looking at each other, reinforcing the connection between them all.[71] While in Fig. 1.22 Narcissus gazes at his reflection as directed by Cupid, in Fig. 1.21 there is no such mirror or pool. The outer figures inform how the central image is to be interpreted, with the appearance of a sculpture collection adding to the prestige of the deceased.

The form of the strigillation helps the viewer to interpret the decorative scheme in this way. Not only does its columnar appearance emphasise the classical, architectural framework, but the waves of flutes back and forth across the sarcophagus front also serve to draw the eye from one figure to another and back again. Like ripples, they spread outwards from the top of the central panel and return inwards at the bottom, acting like reciprocal arrows to direct the viewer to interpret each panel in relation to the others.

The next example is another case of an arrangement of statue types on plinths, this time framing statuesque depictions of Mars and Venus in a central columned archway with the Dioscuri at the ends, all on plinths (fig. 1.24).[72] While Mars and Venus first focus the attention of the viewer and might stand for divine love, reading outwards the Dioscuri (who helped the Romans to victory in battle) then bring to the fore the part this couple played in the history of Rome: Venus being the mother of Aeneas, and Mars the father of Romulus and Remus. The overall picture of this sarcophagus then is a very Roman theme, celebrating Rome's mythical and divinely-ordained past. The figures reflect the patriotism and pride of the patron or deceased in their mythological origins, as well as their culture and erudition.

As well as the selection and arrangement of existing statue types, license was also taken to produce innovative groups, as had occurred in full-size statuary with the Mars and Venus, such as the pairing of Meleager with Atalanta (figs. 1.25 and 1.27).[73] Around forty examples of full-size Meleagers survive, including one now housed in the Vatican (fig. 1.26).[74] Meleager's pose in the first example of the theme on a sarcophagus (fig. 1.25) is particularly

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[71] *ASR* I, 3 236 no. 150; Huskinson (2015) 23-5, Elsner (2018a) 369-71.
[72] *ASR* XII, 2 nos. 12, 13, and 18.
[73] Three Graces *ASR* XII,2 no. 159; Meleager *ASR* XII,6 nos. 146 and 147. Huskinson (2012) notes the prevalence of figures on plinths on strigillated types, linking this to their architectonic qualities.
[74] Spinola (1996) 137, no. 40; A. Stewart (1990) 185.

close to this version, with a similar pose, dog, and originally a spear; both examples on the sarcophagi include the boar's head. However both sarcophagus reliefs have elaborated on the surviving statue types by including other characters, particularly Atalanta, and the later example (fig. 1.27) also shows Meleager conducting a sacrifice or libation.

A mid-third-century sarcophagus from Ostia frames a central relief of Orpheus with a learned woman and learned man, holding a scroll and standing next to a book roll respectively (fig. 1.28).[75] They qualify Orpheus's significance as belonging to the cultured, intellectual sphere, rather than perhaps a more cultic or religious meaning. The way in which they both look in towards him further stresses the mythical figure, and the culture he represents, as the focus of their study. The woman is likely to be the deceased, as she is the focus of Orpheus's gaze, and most sarcophagi depicted with a man and woman tended to belong to women.[76] They are also linked by small birds at the woman's foot and in the tree next to Orpheus's head. She stands in the traditional pose of the muse Calliope, and is thereby presented as the poet's inspiration and worthy object of his song.[77]

Orpheus's look back to the woman might recall Orpheus looking back at Eurydice as he attempted to lead her back from the dead. Perhaps this sarcophagus can be read as expressing a desire to return the deceased woman to life, maybe to her husband represented on the other end of the sarcophagus.[78] Whether their hoped-for reunion is envisaged as successful, as in older versions of the Orpheus myth, or ultimately unsuccessful, as in Virgil's alternative ending that by this time was the more canonical, is left unclear.[79] The strigillated patterns help to create this ambiguous sense of journeying backwards and forwards across the sarcophagus, dramatising the gazes and movements. The direction of the woman's pose contrasting with that of Orpheus and the man, even as she looks towards them, perhaps hints at the degree of her separation from them, and her inability ultimately to be brought back to life in a physical sense; though at the same time, some consolation is offered that she may be resurrected in some sense through Orpheus's other power, song and poetry. The links between the Orpheus myth and poetry have been noted in Virgil's *Georgics* 4, in particular the parallel with the backward glance of the poet who looks towards the past for inspiration.[80] The scroll held by the woman and collection of scrolls at

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[75] *RS* I 1022. Huskinson (1974) no. 15 discusses issue of Christian identification, and lists other instances of Orpheus in a Christian context.
[76] Dresken-Weiland (2003) 212 notes that sarcophagi with portraits of both men and women are most likely to contain women, based on inscriptions.
[77] Huskinson (1999) 199-200 on female sarcophagus portraits related to Calliope and Polyhymnia. Cf. I. Hansen (2008) for representations as Muses.
[78] Cf. Newby (2016) on reading of Alcestis and Laodicea.
[79] Gale (2003) 333-4 on Virgil's version of Orpheus and his relationship with poetry itself.
[80] Gale (2003).

the feet of the man (he probably held one originally as well in his missing hand) underlines this self-consciously poetic theme, and ultimately reflects on the culture and education of the deceased and her husband, the likely patron.

A large fourth-century example from San Sebastiano (fig. 1.29) demonstrates the longevity of this manner of linking the whole composition.[81] A learned woman and man stand at either end, a small Victoria on a capital writes on a shield in a central *mandorla*, and hunts take place on the lid between masks – all very typically late Roman aristocratic themes of *paideia*, victory, and hunting.[82] The image of victory relates to the hunting scenes, but could also link to the learned portraits with their book rolls, as the particular representation chosen is the one where she is shown writing. The first horseman's spear, the net and the learned man's sash, together with the animals leaping out from the centre, create some dramatic lines in conjunction with the symmetrical strigils, which are themselves echoed in the curves of the couple's drapery. As well as bouncing between the panels on the front of the sarcophagus, the lines of the strigils also point up to the lid and back again. The marble itself is stripy, with coloration running in a thick horizontal band across the centre of the lid, and diagonally across the front so that it variously runs with and against the strigillation. This adds to the tension of conflicting lines in and out, back and forth, making for a dramatic and impressive composition.[83] The form of the strigillated sarcophagus was therefore capable of providing plenty of opportunities for incorporating late Roman interests to impressive effect.

Importantly, the framing panels are still strongly linked to the architectural features of the acroteria above, since the portraits correspond to the genders of the masks directly above each. These kinds of depictions of mortal men and women could also be interpreted as statuesque, not just because they occupy the same spaces as statues within an architectonic frame, but also because full-size late Roman portrait statues exist that look very similar, complete with book rolls at their feet (figs. 1.30 and 1.31).[84]

This sarcophagus also makes it clear that the idea that strigillated sarcophagi were simpler and cheaper options compared to more elaborate frieze or columnar sarcophagi is too simplistic, as even patrons who could afford such monumental examples chose to decorate much of the expanse of stone in this way.[85] Strigillation appears to be the perfect adornment

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[81] La Rocca and Presicce (2010) 40-45, no. 3; Stuart Jones (1912) 23, no. 18.
[82] *ASR* I 2 for hunt sarcophagi.
[83] Platt (2018) and Barry (2011) 7-133 on marble conceived as a naturally occurring art form in antiquity.
[84] Cf. the fifth- to sixth-century statue of Flavius Palmatus for the longevity of this style of portrait; Inan and Alföldi-Rosenbaum (1979) 236-8, no. 208.
[85] Zanker and Ewald (2012) 251 on the idea that strigillated vs other types makes social difference more visible.

to show off the attractive and presumably sought-after blue-veined marble that features in some of the better-executed examples (figs. 1.29 and 1.42).[86] Strigillation equally highlights the figural panels, reducing the figural decoration to the architectonic frame of the sarcophagus.

When it comes to the difference between the two ways of depicting statues, whether on a plinth or in the manner of a famous sculptural type, the significance of either choice has not been fully discussed by scholars. Thomas, for example, mentions the case of a sarcophagus which employs both strategies of representation for mythical figures between columns, but does not elaborate on any differences in meaning or the reasons behind each selection.[87] Without a plinth, a statue type could provide a subtler message aimed at a more educated viewer, providing more of a challenge to recognise the type and prove oneself cultivated in the arts; or a plinthless statue could appear more integrated into the appearance of a living narrative, more dynamic but still reassuringly statuesque, stately, and enduring. Clearly, plinths might be necessary when representing a less recognisable figure as a statue, such as a portrait of the deceased. Statuesque figures ultimately appear with and without bases; perhaps plinths were often redundant when seeing portraits and characters depicted as statues in these positions on sarcophagi were so commonplace, even taken for granted.

The statuesque figures standing in the corners of strigillated sarcophagi could therefore be seen as comparable to the early motif of the caryatid, particularly when the most famous and prominent caryatids in Rome were known to be versions of famous Greek artworks, as many of the statue types on the sarcophagi were. Statues on sarcophagi could attest to the culture of the deceased by referencing their classical heritage, and complicate the game of representation that was such a feature of sarcophagus decoration.

1.3. Christian sarcophagi and the statuesque

Although Huskinson's monograph on strigillated sarcophagi covers the Christian period, her analysis of the images on this type as statues ends with mythological examples, and the idea does not resurface in the subsequent discussion of symbolic or Christian types.[88] This section will use the strigillated type as a bridge from pagan to Christian, picking up its well-known statuesque connotations and showing how they continue in the fourth century. The previous discussion of the statuesque frame on many sarcophagi will also form an important part of

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[86] Further examples with this kind of marble follow in the next chapter.
[87] E. Thomas (2011) 415-16.
[88] Huskinson (2015), final mention of statues 179.

the argument, especially when turning to frieze sarcophagi, aiming ultimately to demonstrate the continued presence of the statuesque on Christian sarcophagi.

1.3.1. Strigillated type

At the end of the third century, a particular type of shepherd carrying a sheep, known as a Good Shepherd in art historical terms, quickly became a very popular motif on sarcophagi. On strigillated sarcophagi, it frequently takes the place of the end framing figures, and seems to have much in common with the kind of caryatid-type figures considered thus far – not least because it appears to derive from the classical *kriophoros* statue type (fig. 1.32), and it is also found as statuettes and furniture supports across the empire in the third and fourth centuries (figs. 1.33-36).[89] Constantine himself is said to have set up a statue of the Good Shepherd on a fountain in the main forum of Constantinople.[90]

Despite its clear affinities with the kinds of statuesque figures considered so far, the Good Shepherd has not been considered extensively in terms of architectural sculpture.[91] Most scholarly attention has focused on its potential religious significance rather than its formal properties – what biblical resonances the motif has, or indeed how far it can be considered a Christian image. Klauser argued against the assumption that the type was automatically Christian, emphasising its long pre-Christian artistic heritage.[92] Following Klauser, the usual position acknowledges the pagan origins of the motif, which soon came to signify Christ as the Good Shepherd of John 10 in the Christian era.[93] Indeed, the pastoral theme in general appears to have been much less popular in early Christian literature than in visual art, suggesting that artistic rather than biblical traditions could play more of a role.[94] In many cases the presence of biblical scenes can help to confirm a Christian owner, but otherwise their religious affiliation cannot be assumed. The shepherd's significance lies in its usefulness as a 'neutral' image that could appeal to both pagan and Christian audiences.[95]

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[89] Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 9.22. Pietrangeli (1973) 65, no. 83; Lazaridou (2011) nos. 117 and 118; Firatli (1990) nos. 42-45. Cf. Spier (2007) no. 21 for a statuette.

[90] Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 3.49; Jensen (2000) 174.

[91] E. Thomas (2011) 424-5 briefly on Good Shepherd as "revitalised" caryatid. Cambi (1994) 42-46 and Provoost (2004) 3-5 on relationship of sarcophagus type to sculpture.

[92] Klauser (1958-67).

[93] John 10.1-19. Post (1983), Engemann (1991), Bisconti (2000) 138-9, Jensen (2000) 37-41, Provoost (2004).

[94] Provoost (2004) 2 n1. Jensen (2000) 38-9 on literary evidence for identifying the Good Shepherd as Christ.

[95] On the origins of Christian art, Grabar (1968) and Finney (1994). On the Good Shepherd as a "readymade" motif, and on its continued use by non-Christians, Kinney (2012) 9-11.

An early use of the Good Shepherd in this role can be found on a fragmentary sarcophagus front from the late third century (fig. 1.37).[96] The centre features an elaborate doorway with columns, pediment enclosing a wreath, and figural spandrels. Standing on a plinth, the shepherd fits in with the architectural theme as a caryatid-type figure. There is no external border to his space, and the carved border of the strigillation that continues over and below the doorway stops before him. It is worth noting the contrived pose, with the shepherd looking down and to the left at the dog, while the dog turns back his head to look up at him. The gazes looping backwards and forwards match the undulating strigillation; the turn of the sheep's head meets the curve of the dog's in a figure of eight, the sheep's hind legs curve around to the relaxed leg of the shepherd's *contrapposto* pose. The tall plinth emphasises the statuesque heritage of the Graeco-Roman *kriophoros*, in the same position as classical statue types seen earlier. The shepherd also conspicuously functions as architectural sculpture; likely one of a matching pair, they would have supported the lost lid as the counterpart of the columns that support the pediment in the central panel, just as the freestanding supports originally supported tables or architectural features. One child's sarcophagus (fig. 1.38) has a surviving lid in the form of a tiled roof, supported by three shepherds including two Good Shepherds.[97]

On other early-fourth-century examples without the plinths (figs. 1.39-41), the shepherds are still decidedly structural elements.[98] They do not fit within the moulded entablature but are set into recesses which cut into it; nor are they included within a border, but stand distinct from the rest of the decoration. They appear like statues set into niches, framing the sarcophagus front. Their appropriateness for spaces arguably reserved for architectural sculpture with a structural function suggests that this motif could be read as statuesque even in examples without plinths. One example now lost (fig. 1.40) featured a pastoral scene under the portrait tondo, and therefore could suit a Christian or non-Christian – though it is possible that the decoration of the lid might have helped to signal a Christian interpretation, like an example with a central orant (fig. 1.41), which is topped by scenes of Jonah and the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace.[99] The sarcophagus in San Prassede (fig. 1.39) can be quite securely identified as Christian through the reclining Jonah shown under the portrait shell.

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[96] *RS* I 68.
[97] *RS* I 725. A seasonal sarcophagus from Tunis (*ASR* V,4 586) frames the Good Shepherd type in the conspicuously statuesque setting of a colonnade, with the Three Graces; late third to early fourth century.
[98] *RS* I 756, 664, 1003. Cf. *RS* I 757 with vertical strigillation.
[99] *RS* I 1003. Cf. other orants: *RS* I 75, 757, 826.

Koortbojian refers particularly to reclining figures, such as this Jonah, when he argues that an absence of setting and a focus on individual figures is an indication of the representational mode of freestanding sculpture 'encroaching' on the relief medium.[100] Framed by statuesque caryatid-types, the setting of Jonah here is particularly statuesque.[101] Meanwhile Elsner has made an argument for a relationship between two-dimensional reclining figures and three-dimensional reclining statues on *kline*-type lids, centred on the ambiguous dimensionality of the hidden, horizontal body.[102] Against this background of expected sculptural interaction, Jonah's resemblance to ideal nude statuary can also participate in this visual discourse.

In Matthew and Luke, Jesus calls Jonah a "*σημεῖον*" or "sign" when he responds to a request for a sign by the scribes and Pharisees: "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."[103] In Matthew he goes on to explain that as Jonah spent three days in the sea monster, so he will be in the earth, while in Luke, he says that he will be a sign to his generation as Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh, to whom Jonah was sent to ask them to repent.[104] The Vetus Latina and Vulgate manuscripts translate "*σημεῖον*" as "*signum*", a word that could also be used for an 'image'. The condensed biblical images on sarcophagi were fittingly sign-like 'signs/*signa*' in both these senses, as images and as signals of the wider stories; furthermore, as signs by which to interpret the wider meaning of their specific arrangement, chiefly the salvation and prestige of the deceased.[105] A Latin-speaking Christian viewer may be expected to have been aware of the layers of meaning involved in looking at an image (*signum*) that was a signal (*signum*) of a biblical sign (*signum*). In particular, a *signum* made of marble, as in Ovid's "*e Pario formatum marmore signum*", could be safely understood as a 'statue'.[106] The fame of Jonah as a Christian 'sign' would surely have been recognisable on sarcophagi too, in his statuesque form representing a textual and visual *signum*.

The Good Shepherd is vastly more popular as one of a framing pair than the several other types of shepherd depicted on sarcophagi, described as "the uncontested *primus inter pares*".[107] For it to suddenly surge in popularity in sculpture, at this point in the second half

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[100] Koortbojian (1995) 141.
[101] Cf. Spier (2007) 191-192 figs. 1-4 for the statuettes of the Jonah cycle in Cleveland.
[102] Elsner (2018b) on *kline* statues relating to depicted reclining figures.
[103] Matthew 12.38-41, 16.4, Luke 11.29-32.
[104] Sherwood (2000) 11-21 sees Jesus as the ultimate strong reader in applying a past text to his own situation, with this image "a kind of interpretative dare" that inspired a huge range of patristic responses.
[105] Grabar (1968) 8 on Christian scenes as "image-signs" that suggest more than they show.
[106] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.419, on Narcissus as he is transfixed by his reflection.
[107] Provoost (2004) 5 calculates 63.71% of pastoral scenes in catacomb painting and on sarcophagi include the Good Shepherd type, but does not have figures for each medium.

of the third century, suggests a strong motivation for resurrecting the type. One reason that would explain its comparative popularity for Christians is that its pose corresponds best with biblical images of 'good shepherds', in particular the parable of the lost sheep: when the shepherd has found his charge, "he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices."[108] Yet in the different medium of catacomb painting in Rome, the Good Shepherd type tends to appear alone and in a more central focal point, such as in the centre of a ceiling fresco.[109] In the sculpted medium of the sarcophagus, in the same way that the doubling of mythological figures like Narcissus implied the repetition of sculpture arrangements, the doubling of the Good Shepherd clarifies that we are in the world of art. It seems most likely that it was its Graeco-Roman statuesque heritage that meant it could also appeal to non-Christians as a reassuringly familiar piece of Roman artistic culture, but one adapted to the times, when mythological statues might have been of more limited appeal in a funerary context. The significance of Good Shepherds around portraits is not just framing the deceased as part of the sphere of the peaceful, reflective life, but also as one still invested in Roman culture. The fundamental structure of these sarcophagi is highly traditional, meaning that the viewer must still engage with the existing artistic discourse laid out in the sarcophagi of earlier centuries amongst which the deceased present themselves.

While the use of plinths might appear to decline into the fourth century, there are still notable examples that show that this mode of representation was still relevant. An impressive example from the San Sebastiano catacombs (fig. 1.42) is set off by its vibrant stripy marble, the colourful veins stretching across and linking one side to the other.[110] The design and the stone block seem to have been especially well matched: the thickest band of colour intersects the shell and the top curve of the strigillation, while the smaller line crosses the smaller pastoral scene and lower curve of the strigillation, more or less on a level with the plinths. The union of medium and ornament must have made for a prestigious monument. A fragmentary example from outside Rome (fig. 1.43) even adorns its plinth(s) with a tiny image of a shepherd milking a sheep, creating at least three layers of representation.[111]

In this period especially, a trend can be noticed regarding the use of plinths on strigillated types: a sarcophagus that depicts its figures on plinths will have the 'boxed-in' type of strigillation, with equally shallow borders around all four sides of the fluted panel (e.g. figs. 1.37, 1.42, 1.43).[112] Those without plinths will have the 'open' type of strigillation with deep

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[108] Luke 15.3-7.
[109] E.g. Spier (2007) 179, no. 8, from the Coemeterium Maius, cubiculum II.
[110] *RS* I 239.
[111] *ASR* I,3 164; Huskinson (2012) fig. 9. See Chapter 1.1 on layers of representation.
[112] Huskinson (2015) 94-6 on the different types.

mouldings at the top and bottom, but little or no border at the sides so that the fluting blends into the figured scenes (e.g. figs. 1.39-41). This suggests that 'open' strigillation, with its greater resemblance to a fluted column, due to the deeper mouldings at the top and bottom, might have been enough of an architectural marker to negate the need for plinths. Therefore while we might observe a slight decline in the use of plinths, a corresponding rise in the use of 'open' strigillation means that the sarcophagi retain their architectural frame for sculptural forms.

In light of the interesting combination of container imagery with support figures in some of the pre-Christian examples considered above (figs. 1.12 and 1.13), it is notable that the Good Shepherds frequently carry milk jugs or other vessels. These are held in line with the curve of strigillation, whether at the top (figs. 1.39, 1.40, 1.44) or bottom (fig. 1.41); in fact vessels seem to be a unique feature of the shepherds on strigillated types in contrast to friezes.[113] The effect of the implied contents of the vessels ripples across the strigillated front. On one small example, two Good Shepherds hold jugs in line with a barrel in the central *mandorla* (fig. 1.44).[114] Vessels are the most common motif for this space, with barrels topping the list of variants.[115] Barrels are not among the usual range of funerary imagery more broadly, so seem a special choice for the unique shape of the *mandorla* sandwiched between the strigils. Huskinson describes the effect as "a container contained", perhaps alluding to the containment of the tomb.[116] While the vessels carried by shepherds on one level constitute a reference to the Eucharist or perhaps baptism, such as when Perpetua dreamed of a heavenly shepherd giving her milk to drink, in a funerary context they also play on the trope of containment.[117]

The orant is a type of praying figure, usually female, with raised hands, whose exact interpretation has been a matter of debate, though generally accepted as coming to represent the deceased or their soul.[118] It was, though, originally a symbol of *pietas* in classical art, and statues may have been well known given its appearance on coins, which commonly depicted statuary in their iconography.[119] Indeed some statues of the empress Livia survive in this form (fig. 1.45).[120] As seen, the orant was one of the central figures that a pair of Good

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[113] Frieze types to be considered below, Chapter 1.3.2.
[114] *RS* I 823.
[115] Baratta (2007) 207.
[116] Huskinson (2015) 191.
[117] *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 4.9. Cf. Spier (2007) no. 22 for a fourth-century gold glass medallion with shepherd and sheep, which situates a small vessel in the centre of the roundel, a similarly self-referential touch given the exhortation to 'drink', and since such medallions were originally the bases of vessels.
[118] Jensen (2000) 35-7.
[119] Klauser (1959) on *pietas* and the orant.
[120] Also Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 5589.

Shepherds might frame (fig. 1.41), and sometimes it took the place of one of the shepherds (fig. 1.47), though unlike the shepherd it was never duplicated for both end positions.[121] Nevertheless, in the painted ceilings of the catacombs, orants often fill in the spaces between scenes in a vaguely architectonic fashion akin to columns, their arms stretching out to the central roundel; one example in the catacombs of Priscilla stands out for having the torsos of orants emerging from foliate ornaments (fig. 1.46).[122]

Framing figures tend to only differ from each other when representing a man and a woman (e.g. fig 1.28), and even then they are always of the same genre, such as a philosopher and muse, or a satyr and maenad. The evolution of the orant and Good Shepherd as frequent framing partners suggests a strong link in meaning, drawing on the depiction of male-female couples.[123] It seems likely that they evolve from the same idyllic-intellectual world as learned couples; the female figure listening to the philosopher could be a parallel for the orant praying to or praising the Good Shepherd.[124] This interpretation might compel us to accept a stronger Christian meaning than initially evident in this pair; with the experience of how male and female pairs were traditionally used, the viewer is invited to find a connection between the two. The orant and Good Shepherd have not merely been cut-and-pasted to fill two empty panels, but chosen for two panels that have developed to be viewed in correspondence with each other. Thus a knowledgeable viewer would see not just a praying woman and a shepherd, but would know that the link between the two could imply that the woman is praying to or giving thanks for the biblical Good Shepherd. The fact that the Good Shepherd and orant are comparable to both these male-female pairs, and to statuesque caryatid figures, further confirms that the learned men and women could also be conceived as statuesque in these end positions.

The large seated portraits of a learned woman and man on a late third-century sarcophagus are instead turned inwards towards a small central *mandorla* of a Good Shepherd (fig. 1.48), which could suggest that this figure is the focus of their devoted study, and which might more strongly imply a directed Christian reading than the more open framing pairs.[125] A later example (fig. 1.49) clarifies its ambiguous meaning further with a full-size central Good Shepherd panel, and Muses standing before the seated couple, as if mediating between them and the shepherd, leading them intellectually towards him.[126] A final example from the late fourth century also has a central Good Shepherd, and frames it with portraits of two learned

[121] *RS* I 825.
[122] Giuliani (2016) 20-21.
[123] As noted by Huskinson (2012) 96. Cf. *RS* I 646.
[124] Jensen (2000) 36
[125] *RS* I 945; Huskinson (2008) 290.
[126] *RS* I 817.

men, who gesture even more explicitly towards him, therefore identified by Elsner as saints (fig. 1.50), indicating a Christian reading of the central motif.[127] If it were not for the portraits of the couple on the lid, however, we might mistake them for learned men, accompanied by their book rolls. The first case of the central Good Shepherd in the *mandorla* perhaps represents a cautious, small-scale first introduction.

A strigillated sarcophagus from Rome with an orant in an ornate central archway demonstrates the potential for correspondences between the framing figures and the adjacent short sides (fig. 1.51).[128] The statuesque fisher and shepherd are both biblical metaphors for God and his representatives seeking the lost, and thus form an appropriate pair of sculptures.[129] On the right, adjacent to the shepherd, the relief is filled with rows of sheep (fig. 1.51c). On the left, a fisher stands on a plinth, holding an object in his left hand and with his right directs his fishing rod into a pool of water. On the short side behind him is a scene of John the Baptist baptising Jesus in the Jordan (fig. 1.51b). The baptiser stands in a very similar pose to the fisher, linking the act of baptism with the biblical metaphor of 'fishing for men'. The link between John the Baptist and the front figures explains why the fisher and, more unusually, the shepherd are both bearded. The marine decoration on the lid helps to spread the watery, baptismal theme across the casket. There may be a correspondence between the figures in the baptism scene and their own frame of two trees – in leaf next to the draped John and bare-branched next to the nude Jesus – that continues the self-referential sarcophagus theme of clothed and unclothed bodies explored by Elsner, not to mention the equally self-referential interest in framing.[130] The body of the deceased is contained securely between symbols of grace and salvation, and is tied to them by the insistent relation of content to frame across different dimensions, including exterior and interior.

A sarcophagus with vertical strigillation from the Pisa Camposanto features a similar effect of relating frame to content (fig. 1.52).[131] On the front stands a central Good Shepherd framed by two other pastoral figures. The uppermost leaves on the branches framing the central shepherd almost blend into the foliate border chosen for the strigillation, in itself a familiar play on the (lack of) divide between art and life. On the right short end (fig. 1.52c), the sleeping shepherd fits with Elsner's proposed interplay between reclining figures on sarcophagi and the viewer's awareness of the horizontal corpse; it lies in contrast to the

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[127] *RS* II 148; Elsner (2014) 334. A further late-fourth fragmentary example is at S. Sebastiano, inv. no. SEB 284.
[128] *RS* I 777.
[129] Matthew 4.19 and 18.12-14 (for example).
[130] Elsner (2018b). Elsner (2012) and Platt (2017) on framing.
[131] *RS* II 90.

upright shepherds in the position of figural supports. The rocky landscape stretches below and above, creating a tomb-like structure through the manipulation of dimensions. The dead person could similarly be thought of as merely asleep, and perhaps their tomb too is just an illusion.

On the opposite end (fig. 1.52b), perhaps the boat would also be understood as a type for the coffin, out of which the deceased will emerge as does the praying man from his vessel. What makes this especially convincing is the form of the hoisted sails above, which clearly mimic the egg-and-dart decoration on the upper border of both short ends. It might even be possible to imagine the boat as a microcosm of the front decoration: two draped figures on either side, and in the centre a potentially christological symbol. The shepherd had the potential to be interpreted in relation to Jesus, while the mast forms a cross: a ship was one of the symbols considered sufficiently Christian by Clement of Alexandria.[132] The images that cover either end at head and feet seem to encapsulate the hidden meaning of the sarcophagus as seen from the front, that on the level of the invisible and intangible, the tomb is not really a tomb: it is a temporary place of refuge or repose. While the sides did not usually allow for the depth of carving of the front, they still evidently added a key dimension to the interpretation.

1.3.2. Frieze type

Strigillated sarcophagi have so far helped to argue for the continuation of the statuesque in the Christian period. Now that we have identified certain statuesque types, these sculptural building blocks can now be extracted more easily on the busier compositions of frieze types. This section will start by identifying the same types of Good Shepherd and orant in the end positions, before considering how they could still be statuesque when ranged more freely across the sarcophagus.

The parallel between the framing role of the Good Shepherd and orant figures on a frieze sarcophagus (fig. 1.53) and on strigillated types is clear.[133] Even in the frieze, they retain their end positions and scale, dwarfing the other figures in between and distinct from the central panel of decoration, in the same way that the figures on the strigillated examples are distinct from the fluted panels. The narrative bucolic imagery has simply been substituted for the strigillation as a filler in between the two statuesque figures. The small building with tiled roof and arches in the centre even seems to fulfil the architectural role of the usual

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[132] Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogos* 3.11.
[133] *RS* I 2.

motif in the centre of a doorway or tondo. Another early-fourth-century example for a child from San Callisto has the same effect (fig. 1.54), with a central orant, framing shepherds, and similar pastoral scenes in between, including another tiled roof building, while a further case continues the support metaphor in a different way with traditional cupids holding the *parapetasma* behind the deceased.[134]

There is an interesting dialogue between the elements on Fig. 1.53. The orant stands in front of a *parapetasma*, clearly defined from the bucolic imagery against a domestic background; she therefore retains the isolation that defines the five-panelled structure. The shepherd, however, is more ambiguous: by his nature he is linked to the pastoral, and the tree that borders him on the left makes for a continuous natural setting. He could be imagined as simply standing further forward in space than the rest of the scene, as the sheep he carries does seem to be a little larger than the others. The imagery therefore plays with the boundaries established between elements, between architectural and narrative. Each figure is closely tied to the imagery above them on the lid: outdoor imagery of the hunt above the shepherd, a portrait of the deceased against another *parapetasma* on the right. The cupids surrounding the deceased carry baskets of fruit, and the outermost one places his down directly above the orant's box – an alignment of containers that could hint at the ultimate container of the sarcophagus. The *parapetasmata* would have been painted blue, and the shepherd and hunters above all wore tunics painted with blue stripes; the use of colour unites each main figure and their side of the lid.[135] This perhaps gives the sense of two supports holding up the lid, as if a table or bed, helping to highlight the structural function of the figural end positions.

A later-third-century sarcophagus now in Berlin (fig. 1.55) has two such structural figures at either end, an orant and a Good Shepherd, with a reclining Jonah amidst sheep and goats, and a further two shepherds in between.[136] The only pointer to an identification as Jonah is the distinctive gourd, without which he could be a more generic reclining nude in the style of Endymion. The trees next to the orant and shepherd serve to define their space as distinct, a reminder of the caryatid connotations of these positions. As with the shepherd in the previous example, there are nevertheless gestures towards further integrating the figures. The additional two shepherds in different poses draw the Good Shepherd into the spatial world of the intervening frieze, while the one furthest to the left exchanges a look with the orant. The two tree trunks framing the nude distract somewhat from the divisions of the end

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[134] *RS* I 363 (also *RS* I 988, and cf. *RS* I 961 with different shepherds); *RS* I 769.
[135] *RS* I 2; Siotto (2017) 131-2.
[136] *RS* II 241.

figures by further breaking up the front, though more superficially, since they are interrupted by animals.

A sarcophagus in Copenhagen (fig. 1.56) continues the symmetrical frame of two Good Shepherds as caryatids, without an external border.[137] They are clearly of a different order to the contained decoration, a frieze with the cycle of Jonah, as they stand detached from the watery location. Again, a small hut can be noticed in the background. The curves of the boat and the rocky outcrop on which Jonah reclines echo each other on each side of the space, which is emphasised by the balancing effect of the shepherds; both Jonahs (as well as the one being released from the *ketos*) are horizontal, sheltered by sails and gourd. Given Elsner's analysis of *mise en abyme* as a feature of Roman sarcophagus decoration, together with reclining figures as a reference to the dead body, we might wonder whether these elements, as containers or supports for reclining nude figures, might constitute references to the casket.[138] The caryatid-style frame fits well with the themes of container, support, and body that this sarcophagus evinces; we could say the same of the previous example, with its prominent reclining nude in the centre on a larger scale, supported by rock, under the cover of the gourd – a leaping goat forms the final 'wall' to his shelter.

Since the three main positions on sarcophagi have helped with identifying statuesque motifs outside the borders of the strigillated type, it is also possible to see these images as statuesque outside of these positions. On a famous *lenos*-shaped sarcophagus found buried beneath Santa Maria Antiqua, from the turn of the fourth century (fig. 1.57), many of the scenes can be compared to predominantly pre-Christian sculpture: Jonah in the guise of Endymion, the orant, the seated philosopher, the Good Shepherd, and the baptism scene which depicts John the Baptist and Jesus as ideal statue-types, in the form of philosopher and athletic young boy.[139] Indeed the gesture of the baptism recalls the crowning of an athlete; the athletic figure of Jesus even lowers his gaze in a gesture of modesty that in other contexts is considered to evoke classicising statuary.[140]

There is a gesture towards the appearance of a narrative setting on this sarcophagus with the background of trees and the water which runs from one end to the other, but each motif remains isolated, the trees ultimately serving to further divide each scene. The trees could in fact serve to strengthen the connotations of a statue collection, since in Rome luxury gardens

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[137] *RS* II 7.

[138] Elsner (2018a) on *mise en abyme* and also (2012) for relation of sarcophagus decoration to its function as container; (2018b) on reclining figures and relation of sarcophagus decoration to the concealed body.

[139] *RS* I 747.

[140] Newby (2005) 261. The seated personification of the river on the left end also carries a trident in the manner of a classical Neptune (fig. 1.57c).

were often the settings for displaying sculpture. Water too has been associated with the display of ideal sculpture in Roman Gaul and Spain, with finds tending to group around baths, *nymphaea*, and other decorative pools.[141] The statuesque connotations of a collection of individual figures arranged in such a setting seem to be unavoidable. Jensen has commented that all the iconography on this sarcophagus is linked by water, apart from the three central figures; this scheme of a statue collection is able to unite all these parts.[142]

The boat need not be excluded from this consciously marble scheme. It is decorated across its length with flowing spirals, mimicking the waves of the water flowing underneath from end to end. Behind the tail of the *ketos*, the water curls in a manner that parallels the curl just above it (fig. 1.57b). As before, the body of the boat can be perceived as a microcosmic motif for the sarcophagus as a whole, linked by the decoration; the curve of the boat's belly is wrapped around the curve at the end of the sarcophagus.[143] The mast and sails over the sailors are again echoed by the gourd sheltering Jonah, whose reclining nude figure clearly references the body of the deceased. Jonah is pictured in paradisiacal repose (a sign of the resurrection) after having been tipped out of the boat, which means the boat can represent the sarcophagus from which the deceased will escape to the afterlife or final resurrection.[144] In Matthew's version of the sign, the belly of the *ketos* is the type for the tomb, though on a sarcophagus, the shape of the boat could be a better approximation of the metaphor, fitting with the tradition identified by Elsner on Roman sarcophagi of *mise en abyme*.[145]

The motion of going into and out of water implied by the Jonah image is matched on the opposite end by the scene of baptism, and also the nets of the fishermen (fig. 1.57d). Water is closely linked to the idea of resurrection, the membrane through which the mortals pass into the immortal. This interacts interestingly with the statuesque theme, since in Roman art, statues can variously indicate both lifelessness and perpetuity. Moreover the issue of the permeability of the sarcophagus as a boundary between life and death has already been implied by motifs such as the half-open door; it is therefore significant that the images illustrating transition from land to water and back again are found at the edges of the casket, and the water linking them flush with the bottom edge.[146]

On another *lenos*-shaped sarcophagus of roughly the same period (fig. 1.58), the same figures of seated philosopher, Good Shepherd and orant appear, with a seated woman and

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[141] Stirling (2007) 315-316.
[142] Jensen (2015) 51.
[143] On a third-century *lenos* with nereids and tritons in the Musei Capitolini, a boat is also positioned on the curved end, as well as a smaller version under the central clipeus portrait (inv. MC2403).
[144] The sign of Jonah: Matthew 12.38-41, 16.1-4, Luke 11.29-32.
[145] Elsner (2018a). Cf. *ASR* 5,4 68 for a trough of grapes being trodden on one end of a *lenos*.
[146] Haarløv (1977).

attendants.[147] This composition leans further towards an appearance of narrative, with the shepherd and orant looking towards each other, while the orant also turns to become one of the pair of attendants flanking each seated figure. It appears to aspire in style to the mythological or narrative frieze type of sarcophagi, but using the same individual symbolic elements.

The framing devices on this sarcophagus are noteworthy, with the trees suggesting the natural world framing the central figure, while at the outer left before the large ram is a column topped by a sundial; the corresponding area on the right is restored, but the symmetry seems to demand a matching man-made feature on the right. The large ram terminals must echo the sheep that frame the shepherd, in a further nod to the interest in different levels of representation.[148] Which are more lifelike: the symmetrical though close-to-life-size rams forming a sort of architectural frame, or the diminutive sheep integrated into the frieze, but who are part of a group with a statuesque sheep-bearer? The figures seem to flicker between flesh and stone, life and death.

A final case study from the end of the fourth century will suffice in this chapter to illustrate the longevity of the tripartite statuesque framework and its relation to self-referential imagery. Three Good Shepherds on plinths are ranged across the front of an impressive late-fourth-century sarcophagus in the Vatican, clearly differentiated from the smaller scale erotes and sprawling vines which fill the space around them (fig. 1.59).[149] They are thus clearly related to the structure of the strigillated sarcophagi, including the expectation for the outer pair to match more closely, while the central shepherd has a different base and is bearded. They are similar to the earlier examples with pastoral fillers, but make their statuesque nature explicit by being placed on plinths. Edmund Thomas has noted their "spirally fluted" leggings as a late incarnation of the ancient parity between human figure and column; on strigillated sarcophagi, columns could take the end places, but the same type of statuesque figure across the front, as here, makes clear an equally architectural function for all three positions.[150]

The trough into which one cupid is pouring grapes and in which another is treading them (fig. 1.59b) is a well-known trope from much earlier Roman monuments (e.g. fig 1.8).[151]

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[147] *RS* I 66.
[148] The heads of the smaller sheep are restored; the restorer has added the horns to match the ends, seeming to have shared the instinct that they could comment on each other.
[149] *RS* I cat. 27.
[150] E. Thomas (2011) 425 n.202 describes the leggings of the shepherds on this sarcophagus as "spirally-fluted", like columns. The columnar framing of later-fourth-century sarcophagi, and the renewed metaphor of person and column in early Christianity, will be explored in the third chapter.
[151] As well as "the best known" Jewish sarcophagus from Rome, late third century: Konikoff (1990) 38-41, no. 14.

With similar lion-head decoration to sarcophagi, it has been identified as a metaphor for the coffin, in which the body is broken down yet transformed into something new and more refined.[152] Grapes are being harvested from the entire area of the casket, enveloping the whole body within the metaphor of transformation. The spreading vines could also camouflage the body, while the viewer's awareness of it (much like the grapes) is diverted to the much smaller trough in the foreground. The trough is framed by two large baskets of grapes, while the two pots that catch the wine echo the vessel that catches the goat's milk on the opposite side. Layers of containers thus litter the scene. This relationship between hidden body and visible decoration, in particular the metaphor of the coffin in miniature, reflects the same concerns as earlier Roman sarcophagi.[153]

In this case, the single cupid could appear to be rising from the trough as the Christian from the tomb, supported by a companion; above stands the figure of Psyche with fragmentary butterfly wings. There is a relationship between the cupid standing in the trough, and the shepherds standing on their plinths, an instance of 'life' mimicking 'art'. The sarcophagus was sometimes treated as a statue base in the past, supporting reclining statues of the deceased; there is thus a three-layered echo, relating the marble box containing a body to the comparable oblong bases of the statues and cupids. The base of the cupid provides life, while the bases of the statues provide stability and longevity: the sarcophagus in the Christian era arguably offers both.[154]

In its concern with issues of representation and artifice, this example is positioned firmly in the tradition of earlier Roman sarcophagi. The cupids, though fictive, represent living bodies engaged in activity. In front of them the shepherds, on a different scale, stand still on plinths, and evidently fulfil a more 'functional' architectural role as framing devices. Parallel to this are the 'live' goats and 'ornamental' sheep. There is then the decoration of the plinths themselves, compositionally even further forward: as the stone trough was decorated with lion-heads borrowed from funerary decoration, the central plinth depicts griffins framing a tripod, like the griffins that are commonly depicted on the short ends of sarcophagi. The outer two plinths (figs. 1.59c and d) depict disembodied heads, which even extend onto the short end of the plinth, taking the decoration into three dimensions just as the sarcophagus itself is highly decorated on its short sides. The foliate borders also play upon the naturalistic vines spreading from top to bottom. The heads on the plinths at the front look up at the

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[152] Elsner (2012) 182-4.
[153] Cf. Elsner (2018b) on the relationship between the hidden body and visible decoration on Roman sarcophagi.
[154] A theme to be explored further in the second chapter.

shepherds, who could be looking at the cupids; the cupids have wings that the shepherds lack, while the shepherds have bodies that the heads lack.

This layering of representations places the most lively and natural imagery further back behind the statues, closer to the interior of the sarcophagus than the architectural frame of shepherd statues. The clothed shepherds also stand in opposition to the nude cupids, which follows Elsner's line of argument for earlier examples, using the clothed to frame the nude, beyond which is framed the hidden body, becoming something less than nude.[155] The semi-architectural frame of the statuesque shepherds contains the wilder narrative scene. A playful interruption to this scheme, however, may be found in the syrinx hanging from a branch to the left of the centre, an instrument that is commonly held by the Good Shepherd and is on their larger scale. Perhaps the 'statues' have more life than initially thought. This sarcophagus, though created at the end of the fourth century, sits firmly within the tradition of Roman funerary decoration, not just in its statuesque framing and bucolic imagery, but also in how it joins in the game of playing with the conventions and tricks of its predecessors. All of the imagery has been selected from their classical artistic heritage, but the choices of shepherds and vines would hold extra significance for a Christian audience, who by this time made up the majority.

These traditional structures are therefore adapted to frame the deceased between statuesque, architectonic figures, using the same framework as pre-Christian examples. Statuesque depiction takes part in the games of representation inherent to sarcophagi, as the only artistic medium to be built around an invisible, now lifeless human body. As Huskinson says, depicting figures as statues complicates their interpretation.[156] This interpretative and representational playfulness takes part in late antique elite culture, as do the references to prestigious physical remains of the classical heritage.

1.4. Classical remains in Christian Rome

It has been seen how common statues and architectural sculpture were on the strigillated types so popular in late antique Rome. Collections of sculpture became much more numerous in late antiquity throughout the empire, particularly in private contexts, with the statuary that was amassed to adorn the new capital of Constantinople being the greatest example on an imperial scale – conspicuous to those in Rome since many of the pieces were

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[155] Elsner (2018b) e.g. 557.
[156] Huskinson (2015) 179.

sourced from there.[157] Displays of statues on sarcophagi could reflect this contemporary taste for collections of statuary while similarly commenting on the *paideia* of the deceased or their family. Crafting Christian messages out of sculptural components excised from the authoritative past, for purposes of legitimisation, has much in common with late antique attitudes to sculpture collections and art in general.

One advantage of constructing a relief out of statues, as on the two *lenos* sarcophagi, is the ease of juxtaposing individual motifs. This could be seen as more appealing than continuous narrative in late antiquity when negotiating identity, particularly out of potentially conflicting ideologies. They conjure up subtle associations and influence ways of viewing without having to be too explicit or direct, whether that be combinations of statues and monuments in Constantinople or the juxtaposition of different biblical scenes. Kousser interprets these types of monuments in both the public and private spheres in the fourth century as "traditional in form and oblique in content", evidence of the elite's negotiation of their changing identities "without the appearance of open conflict."[158] Birk similarly puts the popularity of the trend for abbreviated and compositionally separated scenes on strigillated sarcophagi down to the ability to portray motifs not usually seen together on the same visual field, such as both men and women sacrificing, or real people alongside mythical ones.[159]

The large sarcophagi from San Sebastiano (fig. 1.29) and San Urbano (fig. 1.48) are good examples of the more limited traditional repertoire: they are of an immense size, but their figural decoration at least is limited.[160] They appear "faultlessly correct", remaining open to any interpretation and excluding no one.[161] New roles and ideals could be expressed in an intelligible, traditional manner. These monuments are therefore traditional in the sense of representing a high valuation of the past and an existing repertoire, but at the same time they represent an evolution in which bits of that past are chosen to be remembered through a self-conscious process of selection, and the form in which these pieces of the past are evoked.

The effect of reusing statue types, and depicting figural decoration in a statuesque manner functioning as architectural building blocks on both strigillated and frieze types, is reminiscent of the culture of *spolia*, the aspect of public art for which Constantine's reign is famous. This is clearer in the examples in higher relief, where the end pieces really look like they could be inserted fragments. In the same way that the Arch of Constantine was made up

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[157] Jacobs (2010) 268 on increasing popularity of sculpture collections; cf. Sande (2012) on conspicuousness of despoliation in Rome. On Constantinople, Bassett (2004), etc.; Squire (2011) 186-7.
[158] Kousser (2008) 114.
[159] Birk (2013) 66-68.
[160] *ASR* I 2 cat. 105; Kousser (2008) 133.
[161] Kousser (2008) 134.

of sculptural reliefs excerpted from older monuments, sarcophagi appear to be composed of sculptural fragments excerpted from the canon of Graeco-Roman statuary. The impulse to re-contextualise 'historic' individual elements through juxtaposition is the same.

Spolia could be appealing in a time of competing religious and political claims because they carry an authoritative sense of authenticity as original monuments, brought untouched from the past and able to give 'unbiased' testimony. Late Roman authors show such an interest in using earlier artworks as historical evidence in literature.[162] The late fourth-century *Historia Augusta*, for example, repeatedly calls on the witness of monuments to provide insights into the past.[163] The 'authority of the past' was offered by *spolia* in a concrete as well as symbolic sense. An excerpted statuesque figure (such as a Good Shepherd), inserted into a sarcophagus front, gives an impression that it has been inherited straightforwardly and wholesale from the past, and should therefore be trusted to be interpreted as traditional and authoritative – while in fact the context in which it is being redeployed may be far from traditional.

R.R.R Smith has argued that rather than referencing a particular statue type or artist, models were followed for sculpture simply because it was the surest way to successfully execute a complicated design.[164] In the relief mode of sarcophagi, there are fewer physical constraints or technical issues to consider, but it is possible that statue types were still a convenient source of imagery, especially since sarcophagus workshops were likely to have also created other sculptures.[165] However these issues of practicality from the point of view of the craftsmen are not sufficient to explain the significance for patrons and viewers. No degree of convenience to the workshop would be sufficient to convince their late Roman clientele to make such an investment, if the aesthetic was not also sufficiently attractive.[166] Lindros Wohl's reminder that literary quotations are not treated as purely economical but are also analysed for deeper significance is relevant here too; just as quotations of Virgil by late antique poets could lend the "prestige of tradition", so inserted statuesque types could do the same for sarcophagus patrons.[167] Acknowledging pragmatic factors should not mean that the question of meaning can be considered satisfactorily answered.

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[162] P. Stewart (2007) 28.
[163] E.g. *Historia Augusta*, Severus Alexander 4,4: the emperor had a graceful and manly appearance "which we see even today in painting and statues"; quoted in P. Stewart (2007) 28.
[164] Smith (2015).
[165] Birk (2012b) 31-3
[166] See Russell (2011) and (2013) 293-310 on sarcophagi and customer demand.
[167] Lindros Wohl (2001) 102. See Chapter 4.1 on Virgil.

Stewart has suggested that the origins of the rigid frontal aesthetic of late antique portraits might indeed lie in attempts to render the subject in a more statuesque manner.[168] This would imply the increasing value of statuary as a link to the past in late antiquity, even while the creation of actual full-size statues was diminishing. The prioritising of 'abstract' over 'naturalistic' in sculpture indicates that the value of a statue was increasingly in itself and the tradition it symbolised, not in how well it represented someone. There was perhaps more interest in depicting statues as statues rather than 'real' people. Indeed abstract effects are more pronounced in monumental sculpture than in other areas of the visual arts; on silver plate, for example, mythological subjects tend to be depicted more classically.[169]

Despite this move away from naturalism in sculpture, it has been noted that contemporary literary authors continued to praise naturalism as the aim of good art, and insisted upon the need for a good likeness in portraiture when in reality individuality was decreasing.[170] The importance placed on artistic mimesis by authors such as Basil shows that there was still an interest in the phenomenon of traditional statuary with all the inherited ideas around it, but the art of the period shows that this interest had been diverted from the reality of mimesis to the theory.[171] Onians has shown for example how the focus of the ekphraseis of the two Philostrati and Callistratus, spanning the early-third to the late-fourth centuries, turns increasingly from the action of a scene in the elder Philostratus, to the appearance of the participants in the younger, and finally to the experience of the viewer in Callistratus.[172] Moreover while Callistratus does seem to have the most vivid experience of the artworks, at the same time his descriptions are filled with praise for the artist, a constant reminder of their unreality simultaneous with his insistence on how real they appear. Callistratus's attention is always on the effect of the materiality of the statues, punctuating his works with "it persuaded you", "it deceived one", "we stood speechless at the sight", while displaying a heightened consciousness of the boundaries between art and nature: "not an image, but a modelled presentment of truth".[173] He continually turns his descriptions back to the skill of the artist in accomplishing such illusions, rather than inviting us to join in the illusion by allowing us to forget for a time that we are not looking at the real Narcissus or Medea.

In three descriptions Callistratus uses the language of 'home' and of some sort of legal boundaries being transgressed, a common vocabulary which is disguised by the Loeb

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[168] P. Stewart (2003) 110.
[169] Elsner (1995). Leader-Newby (2004) on late antique silver plate.
[170] P. Stewart (2007) 28, 30.
[171] Basil of Caesarea, *De spiritu sancto* 45.
[172] Onians (1999) 262-7; also Bussels (2012) 83-106 finds that the consciousness of the fiction of mimesis remains uppermost.
[173] Callistratus, *Ekphraseis* 1.3, 3.2, 6.3, 10.2.

translation, and another departure from the earlier Philostrati for whom the word has no such metaphorical sense. The stone "did not abide within its proper limits (ἐν τοῖς οἰκείοις)"; the bronze is "departing from its own proper province (τῆς οἰκείας)"; the stone, "while retaining its own nature (τῇ οἰκείᾳ τάξει), yet seemed to depart from the law (νόμον) which governs stone"; and there is the image of a leaping Bacchante which "has not been deprived of its native (οἴκοθεν) power of movement".[174] The competitive relationship between art and nature is, as you might expect, at its most self-conscious in the ekphrasis on the statue of Narcissus looking into the stream.[175] In a particularly complex section, Callistratus describes how the spring and the statue are trying to copy each other: "whereas the marble was in every part trying to change the real boy so as to match the one in the water, the spring was struggling to match the skilful efforts of art in the marble".[176] This reciprocal relationship is parallelled by that between the statue and Callistratus's text, which is made clear in the concluding lines:

> "In admiration of this Narcissus, O youths, I have fashioned (ἀποτυπωσάμενος) an image of him and brought it before you also in the halls of the Muses. And the description is such as to agree with the statue
> (ἔχει δὲ ὁ λόγος, ὡς καὶ ἡ εἰκὼν εἶχεν)."[177]

As Onians puts it, "as art becomes less descriptive, the accounts of art become more so."[178]

Zanker and Ewald's conclusion that myth on sarcophagi continued to be valued primarily as a claim to culture and tradition, while the actual content of myths lost much of their attraction and power, fits with this perfectly.[179] In her assessment of the role of statues in lending prestige to the late antique city, Bassett sees the "material aspect" of statues (including the expense and patronage they imply and as a traditional component of urban beauty) as of first and highest importance; their representational potential merely "*further enhanced* these notions".[180] The interest of both late antique writers and artists then was in making a statue's qualities of being a statue visible, rather than trying to use the statue as merely a transparent window or veil through which to reveal the subject matter; the statue became the real subject, no longer just the medium. This idea of 'self-consciously-statuesque statues' has the ability to explain simultaneously the increasing tendency to abstraction in

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[174] Callistratus, *Ekphraseis* 6, 9, 2.
[175] Callistratus, *Ekphraseis* 5.
[176] Bäbler and Nesselrath (2006) highlight the fluid transition between media.
[177] The final chiasmic line is taken by the Loeb editors to be probably a marginal gloss, but it sums up the theme of the passage nonetheless.
[178] Onians (1999) 261.
[179] Zanker and Ewald (2012) 266.
[180] Bassett (2007) 192-3, emphasis added.

sculpture, and the increasing focus in literature on the actual processes and effects of mimesis: in both cases the interest in the theory and practice of imitation becomes the focus more than its simple accomplishment.[181] We might apply Roberts's words on aesthetics in late antique poetry to both: "the seams not only show, they are positively advertised."[182]

Depicting a figure as a statue, whether through the deployment of a base, through architectural placement, or in an abstract statuesque style, might also increase its force as an exemplar; it gives a sense of historic commemoration as an exemplary figure that has been publicly honoured and held up as classic. A twenty-line inscription on the base of a statue in Trajan's forum of Merobaudes (fig. 1.60), an early fifth-century poet and general, describes the now lost bronze image as something with which past generations "used to honour men of rare example":

> *... Ideo illi cessit in præmium*
> *non verbena vilis nec otiosa hedera, honor capitis*
> *Heliconius, sed imago ære formata,* **quo rari exempli**
> **viros***, seu in castris probatos, seu optimos vatum,*
> **antiquitas honorabat***. ...*
>
> Therefore he is granted as a reward not cheap foliage nor idle ivy as a Heliconian honour for his head, but a statue made of bronze, by which times of old used to honour men of rare example, who had been tested in military service, or were the best of poets.[183]

The inscription itself is carved on a reused base with the previous inscription removed, as is evident from the deep and uneven surface, which might add to the emphasis on antiquity. Not only does it emphasise the antiquity of this tradition of commemoration as a way to bestow praise, with a "self-conscious historical awareness" typical of late antiquity, but it also explicitly associates statues with exemplification.[184] Furthermore, Newby has shown how in an earlier period Greek myth could be excerpted to exemplify Roman virtues in the same way that myths were used as *exempla* in quotations, forming snapshots of exemplary values.[185] Referencing a myth in the form of a statue could be seen as the next logical development in this process of increasing excerption and isolation: a statue that lacks any agency within the decorative field is the ultimate isolated and static figure, best able to

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[181] Onians (1999) on abstraction.
[182] Roberts (1989) 3.
[183] *CIL* VI 1724 10-14, translation Gehn, LSA database.
[184] P. Stewart (2007) 35.
[185] Newby (2016) 320-47.

embody an eternal exemplary virtue. Without the clutter of narrative, the imagery is less descriptive and can more easily stand for wider values.

Depicting mythical figures as statues made it clear that it is their artistic heritage that is being recalled, and less the myth in its own right; myth was desirable only as much as it belonged to the past, not the present.[186] The more abstract and statuesque, the less 'real' and living, and the less threatening. Any increasing abstraction in late antique art could therefore be reinterpreted more positively as an interesting artistic choice, not as demonstrating a lack of skill; if skills were lost over time it was a sign that they were not so desirable or necessary, not because late antique artists were less competent than their predecessors. If late antique art is more abstract than the art of earlier periods, this is best seen not as a result of increasing spiritualisation, but rather of secularisation, situating myth safely in the past and confined to the forms of statues. That Christian figures such as the Good Shepherd are also depicted as statues shows that this is part of a wider late antique approach, where the negotiation of identity is situated safely in the more neutral zone of the past. The potentially controversial debate retreats into and relies on the authority of an exemplary classical heritage, where late Roman patrons were on safer ground.

One important factor to consider is the growing status of art in mediating between pagan and Christian attitudes to traditional culture. The self-conscious materiality of these statuesque depictions can be read as a parallel to the move to appreciating mythological or divine sculpture on an aesthetic level, secularised and desacralised. Bassett has traced the growth of this aesthetic appreciation in the fourth and fifth centuries in the attitudes of Prudentius, Lausos, and the Theodosian Code, but in the funerary sphere there is good evidence before the Peace of the Church for continuing Christian appreciation of classical sculpture, at a time when the literary record is dominated by the rejection of the apologists and early fathers.[187] This process of secularisation of classical statues by asserting their status as works of art can be seen taking place under the surface (often literally), to come out more openly and authoritatively after Constantine. In the fourth century it was suddenly not so tempting for Christians to throw out all of Rome's prestigious traditions now that they were effectively their new masters; but the authority with which Prudentius claims classical culture in his poetry as a fourth-century Christian insider, in contrast to the third-century apologists whose faith left them 'outside' elite Roman culture, was foreshadowed among the earliest Christian elite, who were already on the inside, so to speak.[188]

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[186] Borg (2014).
[187] Bassett (2000), (2015a).
[188] Bassett (2015a) 256, for Prudentius's attitude as that of an 'insider'.

Jerome later famously summed up the emperor's general collecting activity by saying that "Constantinople was enriched by the denuding of nearly all the cities which were dedicated before Byzantium".[189] The only contemporary account is that of Eusebius, who tells us that "the city… was filled throughout" with statues of great antiquity and "of skilled artwork", from "various provinces" including Delphi and Helikon.[190] However his claim that the purpose of these displays was to literally expose former cult statues to ridicule, "to rebuke the superstitious errors of the heathen", has been correctly critiqued by Bassett, for example. The sculptures were not all cult statues, and their arrangements showed thematic consistency and propriety in harmony with traditional Roman ideas of statue collections, with careful selections evident from the baths to the imperial palace, and stood in a tradition of beautiful statuary reflecting civic virtue as well as the power of the emperor.[191] The sarcophagi from the turn of the fourth century come from the same period in which Constantine was amassing his collections of sculpture in Constantinople, and it seems possible that the juxtaposition of isolated, sculpturally-inspired figures could be inspired by a broader culture of collecting. They might reveal a similar desire to Constantine's to display cultivated *paideia,* through exhibiting a collection of well-known statues or architectural sculptures inserted into the sarcophagus front.[192]

It should not be forgotten that the impetus to desacralise pagan art was not only a Christian operation. Libanius himself adopts the strategy in pleading for the return of a stolen statue of Asclepius, emphasising its artistic credentials as supposedly a work of Pheidias, as well as its historical interest in being modelled as a likeness of Alcibiades, while quashing any suggestion of cult: "no one was such a scoundrel as to dare say that sacrifice was performed to it."[193] His claim that "in it art matched nature (ἡ τέχνη τὴν φύσιν ἐμιμεῖτο)" is reminiscent of Callistratus's description of a bronze statue of Kairos ("art vied with nature", "τὴν φύσιν ἀμιλλωμένης τῆς τέχνης").[194] The name-dropping of Pheidias shows that Libanius at least believed that Christians could still be relied upon to value famous sculptors. In fact, while Christianity has been traditionally blamed for the destruction of ancient statuary in late antiquity, perhaps with the hindsight of Byzantine iconoclasm, the evidence from sculptures reused as building materials suggests that pagans were as likely as Christians to destroy

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[189] "*ditatur Constantinopolis paene omnium urbium nuditate quae ante Byzantium dicta.*" Jerome, *Chronicon ad annum 324.*
[190] Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 3.54, trans. Cameron and Hall (1999). His is the only contemporary account.
[191] Bassett (2015a). See also Bassett (1991) and (1996) on specific locations of statuary collections in the hippodrome and Baths of Zeuxippos, and (2007) and (2011) for more general discussion.
[192] Bassett (1996) on Constantine's sculptural displays of *paideia.*
[193] Perry (2008) 438-9; Libanius, *Oration* 30.22-23.
[194] Libanius, *Oration* 30.22; Callistratus 6.1.

statues.[195] The joint enterprise of neutralising any threat contained in the subject matter of classical sculptures by transforming them into works of art was in the interest of Christian and non-Christian alike, the success of which has meant the perpetuation of the classical tradition and survival of so much Graeco-Roman material culture.

1.5. Conclusion

This chapter has traced the thread of statuesque imagery from early Roman funerary monuments to early Christian sarcophagi. With the help of the important outer framing positions, it has been seen how the architectonic metaphor of support evolved from caryatids to Good Shepherds, with a new wealth of Christian meanings breathed into old images. These statuesque and architectural motifs should be seen as especially significant in the context of the self-referentiality of the sarcophagus, in the repertoire of other imagery like reclining figures and tomb-like troughs that continued in the figure of Jonah and motifs like gourds and boats. The metaphor of support if anything becomes stronger into the Christian period, as the statuesque Good Shepherd and orant can represent exemplary virtues in a way to which the playful depiction of Niobe and Prometheus did not aspire.

The continuing appeal to the language of statues by elite Roman converts to Christianity, and their choices of ambivalent images from existing types like the Good Shepherd, serve to make the argument for a Christian heritage that could be traced back into the prestigious past of pre-Christian Rome. The existence of what would become claimed as Christian motifs in the back catalogue of Roman art not only normalises the new religion, but weaves it backwards into the very fabric of Roman culture, showing Christianity to be predestined and preordained for Rome.

These strategies of representation using classical imagery and frameworks by elite Roman Christians could also contain a polemical message aimed at their fellow Christians. An argument might be being made for the preservation of prestigious elite (though originally pagan) forms by showing their compatibility with a Christian message, and, ultimately, for the preservation and continuity of elite privilege and position, which would suffer if the common exclusivising language on which they depended were to break down. A step further would be to interpret this use of existing types as actually fundamentally subversive – hijacking the way people viewed and interpreted existing pre-Christian iconography all over the city, thereby repopulating Rome with potential and potent Christian images. It is not

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[195] Coates-Stephens (2007) 179.

necessary to view this as a deliberate strategy, but could be a more unconscious consequence of this reuse of classical forms.

The chapter has established the longevity of ways of reading sarcophagi across different types and subject matter, and we have also started to see comparable aesthetics across funerary art and the wider visual culture of late antiquity. Importantly, it has been argued that Christian funerary art could be just as engaged with elite culture and aesthetics as earlier funerary art and also non-funerary late antique art and literature. The last example of the Three Good Shepherds sarcophagus looked ahead to the end of the fourth century, and provided an indication of the endurance of this sophisticated engagement.

With the groundwork having been laid in the third century through looking at the more 'neutral' imagery used by Christians, the following two chapters will fill in this rough sketch of the fourth century with the newer and more distinctively Christian motifs based on the Bible. In the late third century, the reuse of the caryatid motif and other statuesque forms seems to be geared towards assimilation and the beginnings of the realignment of the classical heritage. In the next chapter we will see this taken further, drawing on statuesque forms and frameworks in a way that reveals evolving attitudes to death and its monuments, and ultimately the place of Christianity in Roman history.

Chapter Two

'The Stone was Rolled Away': Biblical Imagery on Sarcophagi, 300-350 AD

This chapter will examine how the statuesque imagery and reflexive frameworks explored in the previous chapter continued to guide the interpretation of biblical imagery in the first half of the fourth century. It will also consider how these guidelines were creatively developed by Christians within the context of a playful late antique intramediality to create a specifically Christian response to memorialisation, in light of the challenges posed by paying tribute to their traditional Roman culture while acknowledging their new Christian hope.

In the previous chapter, the discussion of strigillated sarcophagi finally turned to frieze examples such as that from Santa Maria Antiqua (fig. 1.57). There we saw figures like the Good Shepherd and orant, established as potentially statuesque from their positions on strigillated types, alongside biblical scenes such as Jonah and the baptism of Jesus. The frieze type in the first half of the fourth century similarly continued to juxtapose several independent scenes, but now more explicitly Christian by depicting stories from the Bible.

This chapter will begin therefore with a close initial reading of one biblical frieze, establishing the visual construction not just as inevitably fragmentary by the assemblage of abbreviated scenes, but also stressing the overall unity created through compositional and thematic links. This will demonstrate that an encouragement to close reading was built into these monuments, important to start to break down any set ideas that they were in any way simpler and less complicated than before.

The first part of the chapter will then continue the work begun with the Christian sarcophagi of Chapter 1, where it was considered how early biblical figures like Jonah, known to derive from pagan models, could be knowingly statuesque. Here, we will continue with motifs introduced in the first half of the fourth century, such as the miracles of Jesus, and consider how they could also be constructed as statuesque, self-consciously materialistic, or self-referential. The second part will focus on one especially self-referential funerary motif, the tomb of Lazarus.

The idea of the framework established in Chapter 1 will occasionally be significant, as there, in helping to establish a particular motif as statuesque. It is in the third part of the chapter however that the idea of the sculptural framework of the sarcophagus will be especially important. It will consider one popular framing pair, the raising of Lazarus and the rock

miracle of Peter, in light of the self-conscious, materialistic emphasis revealed in the first half of this chapter, and the sculptural framework of Chapter 1.

2.1. Viewing biblical sarcophagi

The large sarcophagus of Lucius Marcus Claudianus (fig. 2.1), a 43 year old man of senatorial rank who was buried around 330 AD in the city of Rome, is just one example of the biblical frieze type.[1] It can provide an initial illustration of how the sometimes densely packed sarcophagi could continue to encourage close reading.[2] Found in the garden of a church in Rome, the front of the body of the sarcophagus is made up of a mass of robed figures: a central female orant, and either side from left to right: Peter striking the rock; a man holding a scroll; the arrest of Peter; Jesus turning the water into wine; Jesus multiplying the bread; Jesus healing the blind man; Jesus predicting Peter's betrayal (with the cock that crowed at his feet); and Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.[3] The lid includes more biblical scenes on the left; a central inscription telling us the name of the occupant, his age, rank and the day of burial; and on the right a portrait of the deceased in between seasonal scenes of harvest.[4]

The parade of togate figures is reminiscent of earlier types of frieze sarcophagi, such as one with a procession in honour of a consul entering office (fig. 2.2).[5] Both have different layers of figures to create a dense effect, with some merely heads carved in shallower relief in the background. They also owe much to public reliefs such as the earlier processions on the Ara Pacis and the Arch of Constantine.[6] The biblical characters take on the appearance of thoroughly Roman citizens – in many cases with the tomb of Lazarus at one end (fig. 2.1b), they might appear to be engaging in some sort of religious procession towards a temple-like structure.[7] These biblical processions are distinctive however for being made up of snapshots

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[1] *RS* I 771; Giuliano (1985) 137-45 no. III, 7; Koch (2000) no. 36; Gasparri and Paris (2013) 360-1, no. 262. Cf. *RS* I 6 for a similar arrangement on the main body.

[2] Cf. Deckers (2007) 103-4 for a brief interpretation of the themes based more on individual scenes rather than the decorative scheme as a whole, as attempted here.

[3] The fact that a female orant is depicted on a sarcophagus for a man probably suggests that the orant represents a personification of the soul, rather than that it was intended for a woman or that the sarcophagus and lid do not match, given that the two were excavated together, and the compelling links between them, as we shall see.

[4] *ICUR* I 2005; *CIL* VI 41428. Gasparri and Paris (2013) 360 interpret the name as Lucius Valerius Claudius Maximus Claudianus.

[5] *ASR* I,3 88; Gasparri and Paris (2013) 342-4, no. 250; Borg (2013) 186-191.

[6] Deckers (2007) 104 compares the "stylised drapery" to the Arch of Constantine reliefs, judging the same workshops for the Arch to have been favoured for sarcophagi.

[7] Cf. Birk (2013) 71.

of different narratives cut-and-pasted together into the appearance of a continuous frieze, as was evident with the sarcophagus from Santa Maria Antiqua.

The scenes with Jesus from left to right follow the chronological order related in the gospel of John, and include the wine and Lazarus miracles that are found only in John.[8] The exception to the chronology is the raising of Lazarus, which is moved to the end after the scene where Jesus speaks to Peter about his death; it therefore forms the culmination of Jesus' story where in the literary version we would expect Jesus' own resurrection.[9] In the visual tradition, the resurrection of Lazarus can stand for that of Jesus and all Christians, as emphasised by the positioning of the deceased Claudianus's portrait above, looking towards the right in the direction of the narrative of salvation below. Most of the other bodies are also directed towards the right, while even the number of scrolls seems to increase climactically: there is one on each side of the lid, one to the left of the orant, but three to the right. The final scroll held by the penultimate Jesus predicting his death is the largest and has an incised omega that probably would have been emphasised with paint (fig. 2.1d), positioned under the scroll held by the deceased man. All this emphatically directs the viewer to 'read' from left to right, and reach the dead man and the imminently resurrected man at the end of the 'narrative'.

One can read broadly similar themes outwards from the central orant, to the left and the right: firstly scenes of miraculous provision (water into wine; multiplication of loaves and healing), then suffering and death foretold (Peter's arrest; Jesus predicting his death), and finally miraculous renewal (Peter baptising; Jesus raising Lazarus). Another reason for one of the Jesus scenes appearing on the left side could be so that the orant stands just after Jesus' first miracle as told by John. She turns slightly towards him, so that her prayer is potentially an expression of faith at the first opportunity to respond to Jesus, both visually and in the gospel. She interrupts the narrative to represent the equivalent of the response in John: "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."[10] On the other side, the scenes of Peter are given their own unity through the men arresting him reappearing as the baptised figures, with the same distinctive hats of Roman soldiers.

Additionally the seemingly random grouping of figures on the left of the lid can be disentangled (fig. 2.1e). Each of the New and Old Testament halves work chronologically, from Jesus' infancy to ministry, and from Abraham to Moses, though the New is positioned

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[8] John 2.1-11 (water into wine), 6.1-14 (multiplication of loaves), 9 (healing the blind man), 18.13-27 (predicting Peter's denial). Dulaey (2006) and Jensen (2014) on the popularity of John's Gospel in art.
[9] John 11.1-44.
[10] John 2.11.

before the Old. The order makes more sense thematically, in light of the theme on the main field below. Following the flow from death to life out from the centre on the main body, the Old Testament scenes above Peter's arrest give way to the New Testament scenes above the water miracle; from the giving of the law (which brings death, according to Paul) and potential brutality of the sacrifice of Isaac, to the healing of a woman and the new birth of the infant Jesus.[11] Abraham usually looks towards the hand of God to prompt him to abandon the sacrifice; as it is absent here, he instead looks towards Jesus in the adjacent scene, highlighted by the mirroring of their hands placed on the heads of the figures kneeling before them, with different intent. It is as if Abraham looks to Jesus for example. The juxtaposition of Moses receiving the tablets of the law, next to the inscribed *tabula*, also seems an intentional one.

Moreover the main body relates to the lid in a convincing way. In addition to the symmetrical staffs of each Jesus framing the central orant pointing to each cluster of pots or baskets, not only are the diagonal lines of the staffs raised by Peter and Jesus at each end emphatically symmetrical, but they are also echoed in the props held by the figures immediately above them: the staff leant on by the shepherd and the ladder the grape-harvester is about to ascend. The living tree and vine frame the lid in the same way that the life-giving rock and stone tomb frame the casket. The shepherd contemplating the infant Jesus can take on the role of all disciples contemplating the life of Christ, the chief of whom, Peter, is depicted below. Koch cited this sarcophagus lid as an example of the sculptors filling in the space with inoffensive imagery, when the client's choices did not fill the entire field.[12] However the convincing links between either side of the lid and with the main body suggest that if this was the case, it was done not arbitrarily but with a good deal of thought and complexity by the stone carvers.

This use of narrative is comparable to other areas of fourth-century Christian art. A fourth- or fifth-century silver-gilt ewer from the Traprain Law hoard, for example, similarly arranges four scenes from the Old and New Testaments around its main body (fig. 2.3).[13] The Fall (fig. 2.3d) is on the opposite side of the jug to its antithesis, the Nativity (fig. 2.3b), representing the Incarnation and restoration of 'God with us' that was lost; Eve helping Adam to take the forbidden fruit is situated opposite Mary helping Jesus to accept the Magi's gifts.[14] The raised arm of Eve gesturing to the tree is repeated in the gesture of Moses

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[11] Romans 7.10.
[12] Koch (2000) 84 note 3.
[13] Spier (2007) 253ff, no. 75; Kaufmann-Heinimann (2013).
[14] Augustine, *Confessiones* 1.27-30: "Because man fell through pride, He applied humility as a cure. We were trapped by the wisdom of the serpent; we are freed by the foolishness of God. …The same principle of contraries is illustrated in the fact that the example of His virtues cures our vices. But the

raising his staff to produce water from the rock (fig. 2.3c), symbolic of baptism; one indicates death produced from something living, the other life from something lifeless. Opposite the rock scene is possibly another miracle granted to Moses in the desert, the miracle of the quails (fig. 2.3a), where the birds are miraculously sent down to Moses and the Israelites for food.[15] An alternative identification as the Betrayal of Jesus would enable a chronological progression from Old Testament to New. As a perverse inversion of a most intimate sign of friendship, the kiss of Judas would contrast with the Magi's worship of Jesus to the right, and complement Adam and Eve's perversion of the fruitful unity of marriage to the left. Either way, the themes of refreshment and gift-giving would be appropriate for a dining or Eucharistic context.

As on the sarcophagus, there are notable links between the different zones of decoration. The pair of butting rams are positioned above Adam and Eve (fig. 2.3d), mirroring the conflict and rebellion initiated against God in this act. The rams' point of contact falls slightly off centre between Adam and the tree, with Eve, tree, and snake under one ram, and Adam under the other. This seems to pit Adam against the joint efforts of Eve and the snake who reaches out towards her, and also suggests that he will lose the battle, with his ram pushed back by the second. The chair on which Mary and the infant Jesus sit to receive the Magi is positioned directly under the shepherd's hut, with the door facing in the same direction (fig. 2.3b). Placing Jesus under the doorway recalls the door and gate imagery used to describe him.[16] The Magi simultaneously approach the building as they approach mother and child, and could be counterparts of Christian worshippers processing to a church, the house of God. They also process in the same direction as the potential chronology of the scenes around the ewer, so that the viewer's eyes follow their same path of pilgrimage and arrive with them at the throne of the Madonna and Child. Like the complex relationships between sarcophagus lids and bodies, the smaller pastoral panel acts like a microcosm of the main narrative below; and further below, the vine snaking around the bottom of the ewer even has exactly one bunch of grapes for each figure in the biblical frieze.

These initial viewings have begun to make the case for deliberate visual strategies on Christian sarcophagi in the same manner as other elite art, and why it is worth paying as close attention to them as earlier, non-Christian examples. The following sections will delve deeper into the significance of particular motifs, including many seen on the Claudianus sarcophagus, such as the woman with issue of blood, water into wine and multiplication of

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following things are like similar bandages applied to our wounds and members: that, born of a woman, He freed those deceived by a woman; that as a man He freed men."
[15] Exodus 16.
[16] John 10.7-10; cf. Matthew 7.7, 13-14, Luke 11.9.

loaves, and finally the framing motifs of the raising of Lazarus and the rock miracle. While the complex visual connections might be similar across art forms, it will be seen that the choice and articulation of the motifs is frequently dependent on the specific medium and function of the sarcophagus.

2.2. Self-referential imagery

2.2.1. The statuesque

We have seen in the previous chapter how Christian sarcophagi were still concerned with the traditions of sarcophagus decoration. Semi-architectural structures with support figures continue throughout the third and fourth centuries; statuesque biblical figures could fit in alongside them; and other self-referential, coffin-like motifs continue to appear.

The reading of Christian stories into ancient statue types is illustrated nicely by Eusebius in the early fourth century, who recalls seeing a bronze statue group of Jesus healing the bleeding woman in the same town in which it took place, Caesarea Philippi, set up by the very same woman:

> "Since I have mentioned this city I do not think it proper to omit an account which is worthy of record for posterity. For they say that the woman with an issue of blood, who, as we learn from the sacred Gospel, received from our Saviour deliverance from her affliction, came from this place, and that her house is shown in the city, and that remarkable memorials of the kindness of the Saviour to her remain there.
>
> For there stands upon an elevated stone, by the gates of her house, a brazen image of a woman kneeling, with her hands stretched out, as if she were praying. Opposite this is another upright image of a man, made of the same material, clothed decently in a double cloak, and extending his hand toward the woman. At his feet, beside the statue itself, is a certain strange plant, which climbs up to the hem of the brazen cloak, and is a remedy for all kinds of diseases.
>
> They say that this statue is an image of Jesus. It has remained to our day, so that we ourselves also saw it when we were staying in the city.
>
> Nor is it strange that those of the Gentiles who, of old, were benefited by our Saviour, should have done such things, since we have learned also that the likenesses of his apostles Paul and Peter, and of Christ himself, are preserved in paintings, the ancients being accustomed, as it is likely, according to a habit of the

Gentiles, to pay this kind of honour indiscriminately to those regarded by them as deliverers.[17]

However the statue he describes, of a woman kneeling with outstretched arms at the feet of a standing male, was probably a statue of the emperor and a personification of the province of Judea.[18] The way that Eusebius describes the statue rather neutrally, before noting that others have identified this as Jesus and providing an explanation for why this should not be considered "strange", suggests that he is quite aware of the non-Christian origins of the statue type.[19] He is nevertheless very receptive to the idea that a pre-Christian artwork could contain Christian truth, only to be fully understood by the enlightened Christian. The implication of Eusebius's account is that "the Gentiles" incorporated Christian figures into their art "indiscriminately" without appreciating their full significance, but Eusebius and other Christians now have the knowledge to interpret correctly.

Similarly to how nuggets of Christian truth could be read in the Old Testament prophecies, Eusebius appears keen to see foreshadowings of Christianity in classical culture too, giving material, high-status evidence that the history of Rome had long been destined to culminate in a Christian empire. Eusebius's argument could conveniently be applied to any aspect of classical culture that appeared to overlap with Christian ideas; a Christian could point to a shepherd sculpture, for example, and claim that it is really a representation of the Good Shepherd, though the artist may not have known it.

The reading of Christian meanings into earlier Greek and Roman statuary, thereby hooking onto its cultural prestige and claiming Christianity as the heir to that tradition, could similarly lie behind the re-use of sculptural types and statuesque figures on Christian sarcophagi. Images of Jesus healing the bleeding woman are common on sarcophagi in the fourth century (fig. 2.1e, for example), and the iconography of the raising of Lazarus frequently depicts his sister in a similar way (fig. 2.1).[20] The visual association with imperial statue types, and the precedent set by Eusebius for a Christian interpretation, could mean that this iconography was intended to recall such freestanding statuary.[21]

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[17] Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist*. 8.18, trans. McGiffert (1890); he also describes the statue when he reaches the story in his Commentary on Luke, 8.43. The statue and its destruction are also described in Sozomen *EH* 5.21; Rufinus 7.14; Philostorgius *EH* 7.3; and Asterius of Amasea, *Conc. Nic II, Labbe*, 7.210.
[18] Wilson (2004) 91. Another interpretation which seems less likely has been Asclepios and Panacea: von Harnack (1924) 146; Eisler (1930) 27; Keel (1994) 155-65.
[19] Wilson (2004) 90 reads in the passage "a hint of scepticism".
[20] For the healing of the bleeding woman on sarcophagi, Wilpert (1929-36) 300, Koch (2000) 165-6.
[21] Bottari (1737) argued that just one particular example, on the side of Fig. 3.16 (*RS* I 677), represented this statue group due to its unusual depiction and deviation from the biblical account: Jesus is bearded, faces the woman, and she does not touch him. However their poses are not uncommon on sarcophagi, suggesting other examples could be viewed in terms of this kind of statue. Wilson (2004) 94-95.

One overlooked detail that contributes to the picture of the figures on sarcophagi as statues is the inclusion of small struts on the hands, especially between parted thumbs and index fingers. This can be for an emphatic effect, such as on the Claudianus sarcophagus, where a carefully fluted strut has been carved on the raised hand of Jesus predicting Peter's denial towards the climax of the narrative sequence (fig. 2.1c). This is surely not a necessary structural support: the index finger is already attached to Peter's beard, and the thumb has a further strut hidden behind it. The attention paid to it with the fluting also serves to make it more visible. This is reminiscent of imperial Roman 'copies' of full-size Greek statuary, which frequently employed struts (often more than strictly necessary, it has been argued) to highlight the fact that they were skilled marble versions of bronze originals.[22] The purpose of the strut on the sarcophagus might be to portray the figure less as a depiction of a 'real' person, and instead more consciously statuesque.

Claudianus's sarcophagus also illustrates the popularity of the miracles or 'Signs' (*signa*) of John's Gospel, such as the water into wine.[23] Scholars have explained this with reference to the drama or expressiveness of John's account, or the sacramental nature of the Signs as relevant in a funerary context.[24] The multiple meanings of *signa* as images as well as signs could provide further explanation, as with the *signum* of Jonah, highlighted by making these images self-consciously image-like and statuesque.[25]

While there are a number of biblical groups that could be considered in relation to statues, this section will focus on those with particular funerary significance.[26] In the previous chapter we saw how Jonah is recognised as a development from the funerary Endymion, and in the tradition of the kinds of reclining figures intended to recall *kline* sculptures.[27] Although standing, Daniel in the lion's den is another image that appears to have sculptural connotations, almost always depicted nude in an orant pose between two lions (fig. 2.4b).[28] Both Jonah and Daniel are (almost) always heroically nude, unlike the original Jewish

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[22] Anguissola (2018).

[23] John 4.46-54, 5.1-15, 6.5-14, 6.16-24, 9.1-7, 11.1-45; Dodd (1953) 368-379 and Smalley (1993) 373.

[24] Dulaey (2006); Jensen (2014).

[25] See Chapter 1.3.1.

[26] See Chapter 1.3.2 with the baptism of Jesus group. The sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22, Fig. 2.1 lid) could be compared to statues of the emperor subduing a captive; see Chapter 2.6 and conclusion. The entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21.1-11, Fig. 2.34) with equestrian statuary – though originally enacted as a subversive mimicry of the pre-Passover imperial *adventus* undertaken by Pilate on the opposite side of the city, it becomes increasingly imperial (MacCormack 1989 65; Deckers 2007 105 and Harley-McGowan 2013 18 on the parallel with the imperial *adventus* in art and text). When some Pharisees call on Jesus to silence the crowds loudly praising God at his arrival, he responds that "if these were silent, the stones would shout out (οἱ λίθοι κράξουσιν)" (Luke 19.40); on sarcophagi the stone ironically must "shout out" to replace the voice of the deceased.

[27] Elsner (2018b).

[28] *RS* I 43. For Daniel on sarcophagi, Wilpert (1929-36) 251-8, Koch (2000) 151-2.

characters.[29] This has been explained as belonging to a salvific afterlife, or baptismal types that represent the new birth of the Christian.[30] Yet this can still seem jarring when every other figure in a composition is clothed (e.g. fig. 2.33), and other baptismal types, such as Peter's crouching jailers, are never depicted naked.[31] Jensen references the tradition of portraying heroes as nude, but cannot explain the differentiation between Jonah and Daniel on the one hand, and other heroic biblical figures such as Samson or Joshua on the other, who are always fully-clothed and far less frequently represented.[32]

Acknowledging Jonah and Daniel's ability to imitate classical statue types in the iconographic tradition, however, would account both for this difference in depiction and for their comparably huge popularity.[33] Eusebius testifies to the existence of a statue of Daniel and the lions made of gold and brass, standing alongside the Good Shepherd, installed by Constantine in the main forum of Constantinople.[34] The popularity of the Good Shepherd was evidently based on its origins as a classical sculpture, and the appropriateness of Daniel's presence alongside it could indicate a similar derivation.

We can note that the Old Testament characters of Jonah, Daniel, Noah, and Abraham, some of the most popular from the Jewish scriptures on sarcophagi, were all examples given by Jesus himself in the New Testament, either as exemplary figures (e.g. Daniel as a prophet of God) or as metaphors (e.g. Noah's flood for the day of judgement).[35] Depicting these figures as statuesque could be to use the visual language of prestigious and exemplary heritage, corresponding to the terms in which Jesus talks about them. Christian typology presented the Old Testament as a past heritage to look upon with enlightened eyes and see its true meaning, comparable to the classical reuse involved in the story of the 'bleeding woman' statue and the Good Shepherd.

It is difficult to read the symmetrical, diminutive lions that flank Daniel as intending to represent living, dangerous animals, even given the constraints of space.[36] It seems more natural to see them as sculptural decorations, forming a statue group with the heroic nude in the centre. They are reminiscent of the statues of lions that guarded tombs in the Greek East

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[29] For Jonah on sarcophagi, Wilpert (1929-36) 201-22, Koch (2000) 154-6.
[30] Elsner (2014) 340 for example, on nudity and salvific afterlife; Jensen (2000) 177 on childlike Daniel and baptism.
[31] *RS* I 45.
[32] Jensen (2000) 174.
[33] Balch (2008) 275 cites the appreciation of aesthetic beauty as one factor in the Endymion type for early Christians, in addition to its eschatological associations.
[34] "τόν τε Δανιὴλ σὺν αὐτοῖς λέουσιν ἐν χαλκῷ πεπλασμένον χρυσοῦ τε πετάλοις ἐκλάμποντα", Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 49; Jensen (2000) 174.
[35] Noah: Matthew 24.38, Luke 17.26, cf. 2 Peter 2.5 and 1 Peter 3.20. Daniel: Matthew 24.15. Abraham: John 8.39-59, cf. James 2.21.
[36] *RS* I 43.

(fig. 2.5), some of which are known to have eventually made their way to the heart of Rome (fig. 2.6).[37] Some examples of images of Daniel in catacomb paintings depict the lions as less passive (fig. 2.7, raising their paws) and less symmetrical (fig. 2.8), and therefore as less statuesque than in marble. The visual metaphor works brilliantly: the den into which Daniel was thrown and from which he emerged unscathed is already a symbolic tomb, foreshadowing the death and resurrection of Jesus and all his followers after him. Transforming the lions into traditional funerary sculptures makes this idea explicit on a visual level, depicting Daniel as if emerging triumphantly from within a literal tomb, passing miraculously between its stone guardians from the world of the dead back to the living. The statuesque depiction of the lions captures both the physical threat of the wild animals and the symbolic threat of death and the grave.

As an orant, the raised arms of Daniel mean that he also fits in the framing end position. An epitaph in the Vatican collection (fig. 2.9) assigns images of the Good Shepherd, Adam and Eve, and Daniel to the three main positions seen on sarcophagi.[38] Daniel seems set up as a complementary statuesque framing figure to the Good Shepherd, both with pairs of animals at their feet and with arms aloft. The framing of the central Adam and Eve with these figures is thought-provoking: while the human figures of the shepherd and Daniel are each framed by two tamed animals, in the centre it is one malicious animal tempting the two framing humans. The intervening scenes of farming cattle also relate to domesticating nature; the theme could be characterised as putting right humankind's relationship with the natural world and with God. While on a stone slab the outer pair might lose their literal significance as architectural support figures, they fulfil a supportive function in a looser sense, holding together the composition and setting the interpretative frame. In the pattern of Christian caryatids representing more solidly exemplary supports, the outer sculptural frame of the shepherd and Daniel seems intended to offset and contain the sinful central group.[39] The inscription calls on the deceased to live forever, "*in aeterno*", a prayer presumably upheld by the supporting outer pair, sealing the acknowledgement of sin between pillars of salvation.[40]

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[37] Cirucci (2015); one found on the Esquiline, another possibly in Trastevere.
[38] *ICUR* I 1723; Marucchi (1888-89) 74 on Wilpert's assessment of the meaning of the intervening images of working livestock and spinning, as referring to work as the penalty of sin; Dulaey (2005) 17 on how the bucolic images recall the pastoral scenes of sarcophagi, concluding that it shows the will to imitate the decoration of sarcophagi in a more affordable format for the "poor".
[39] See Chapter 1.5.
[40] Cf. *ICUR* V 14385; Cipriano (2013) for another reconstruction of an inscribed plaque divided by three main images – the fiery furnace, an orant with doves, and a Good Shepherd. See Bisconti and Braconi (2013) on late antique figured inscriptions generally.

A child's sarcophagus from the catacombs makes the link between Daniel and the deceased very clear (fig. 2.10).[41] The nude, statuesque figure of Daniel emerging between his funerary-style lions stands at one end of the front, opposite Lazarus who is about to emerge from his own monumental tomb. Daniel is clearly parallelled with the central orant: both in the same pose, with prominent and surely unnecessary struts bridging their thumbs and fingers on both hands.[42] Their attendants perform parallel roles: each one on the left has a gesture of speaking, while the figure to the right of Daniel brings him an offering of food, and the figure of Jesus further to the right of the orant performs the miracle of turning water into wine.

In his examination of self-reflexive decoration on sarcophagi, that is adornment that self-referentially comments on the coffin's function, Elsner has considered the potential for sarcophagus-like features in biblical scenes to play the same role.[43] He draws attention to the small sarcophagi, sometimes strigillated, from which Jesus sometimes raises dead figures, namely the daughter of Jairus or the son of the widow at Nain, as well as the scene of Noah emerging from a box-like ark, which Elsner compares to a sarcophagus with its short end facing out. In the previous example, Noah emerging from the ark is above Daniel emerging from the tomb, emphasising the latter as a self-referential motif.[44]

On another example (fig. 2.11) Daniel and the lions are positioned next to the tomb of Lazarus.[45] With the direction of travel to the right established by the prior entry scene, Jesus, standing in between them and just in front of a lion, could be seen as chronologically passing from accomplishing the actual 'resurrection' of Daniel to his next patient centuries later. Or we could imagine him walking through a cemetery, passing a funerary statuary group on his way to the temple-tomb of Lazarus, the older monument acting as a past *exemplum* of resurrection. The fact that all the figures are stone means that the lines are blurred, and whether in this scenario Daniel is to be considered a living person or a funerary statue is almost irrelevant – he is both simultaneously. His depiction is always going to be a commemorative sculpture on one level; the images of both Daniel and Lazarus function as *exempla* for the deceased Christian. In all three cases of the most popular resurrection types

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[41] *RS* I 364.
[42] The link between the poses of Daniel and the orant more generally has not been emphasised enough; the orant is widely recognised as representing the soul of the deceased, but Daniel's similar iconography could cause us to view him similarly.
[43] For Noah on sarcophagi, Wilpert (1929-36) 223-5.
[44] Elsner (2012) 185. Augustine, *De civitate dei* 15.26 in a nice parallel argument later claims that the dimensions of the ark corresponded to the dimensions of the human body.
[45] *RS* I 26.

on sarcophagi, of Daniel, Lazarus and Jesus, stone plays an important part in the story in sealing the pit or tombs.[46]

The early biblical sarcophagus from Velletri (fig. 2.12) clearly mimics the tripartite division of the strigillated sarcophagus, with three large figures including the Good Shepherd and orant types in the statuesque positions.[47] In between the choices of scenes are dominated by the kinds of nude statuesque types we have seen: Daniel in between the lions, Jonah reclining, and Adam and Eve in a *dextrarum iunctio* pose, somewhere between funerary couple groups, and the nude Mars and Venus. The image of Noah emerging from his coffin-like box is again positioned as complementary to the Daniel group, both in the orant pose at the top of the field, like the orant representing the deceased person in the sarcophagus. Both therefore seem to be set up as complementary types of the tomb.[48]

Statuesque imagery could express new stories in a prestigious cultural language, one that had a particular depth of meaning on sarcophagi with the tradition of self-referential issues around death, art, and life. Biblical friezes packed with individual motifs could be read through juxtaposition in the manner of a sculpture collection. The statuesque could also convey Christian ideas of creation and re-creation through baptism, and the immortality of the post-resurrection body – compared in one recurring patristic metaphor to a reassembled statue.[49]

2.2.2. Tomb types

As has been seen with Noah's ark, more specific references to the sarcophagus itself can be found. Elsner argues that on a sarcophagus now in Syracuse, the resurrection of a body from a strigillated sarcophagus deliberately plays off the scene above of the infant Jesus in a similar-shaped woven manger (fig. 2.13).[50] More generally, scenes of Jesus in the manger must have borne a resemblance to the deceased person, wrapped in their grave clothes as Jesus is wrapped in swaddling bands. If the main opportunity for viewing the sarcophagus was before the burial, in the presence of the visible body wrapped in several layers of cloth and laid out for the 'lying-in-state', this comparison would have been more explicit.[51] The

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[46] Discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.4.
[47] *RS* II 242.
[48] Elsner (2012) 180-8, esp. 184-5.
[49] See Bynum (1995) 94.
[50] *RS* II 20; Elsner (2012) 184.
[51] Borg (2013) 236-40, Meinecke (2013).

theological underpinning for this parallel must relate to the new birth of the deceased in Christ and their expected resurrection; it rejects the fact that the person is really dead.

The healing of the paralysed man (e.g. fig. 2.14) is another important motif in a funerary context, based on the story where Jesus forgives the sins of the man and then tells him to pick up his bed and go home.[52] The form of the bed can be compared to the lids of *kline* type sarcophagi, where a life-size sculpture of the deceased reclines in eternal repose. The paralytic turns this image upside down, walking off with the bed (that he formerly lay upon) on his back; the miraculous liberation from paralysis fits surprisingly well with the visual idea of an immobile statue come to life, which corresponds to the earlier sarcophagus interests demonstrated by Elsner in art and nature, stone and flesh, death and life. On another level, the manner in which the man usually carries the bed over his back means that he can also correspond to the real body beneath the *kline* lid of a sarcophagus; the implication is that even though sealed beneath the lid of the coffin, the contained corpse is in some sense not really dead.

In the context of the self-referentiality of the casket, this can arguably be read as another type of resurrection. Suggestive of the scene as a pseudo-resurrection and the bed as a pseudo-tomb is one case where the paralysed man is positioned opposite the raising of Lazarus as if its counterpoint (fig. 2.14), and another where Jesus turns to the central orant, probably representative of the deceased, while gesturing to the bed (fig. 2.15).[53] In fact, the paralysed man is interpreted as a type for resurrection in early Christian texts.[54] In the 350s, Hilarius saw in the story the universal stages of salvation: first forgiveness, then resurrection and journey to the 'home' of paradise.[55] Others later saw the bed as representing the grave or the flesh. The sarcophagus motif manages to convey the fullness of the story and its symbolic meaning through the manipulation of traditional funerary art.

The interplay between *kline* statues reclining life-like atop a sarcophagus, in relation to the horizontal human body decaying inside, was always bound up in fundamental issues of art and nature, death and life, and this development of the theme shows it was still a relevant set of references for Christian patrons.[56] Though it corresponds to some patristic exegesis, this interpretation can be built to a great extent from visual analysis alone: the sight of a figure rising from or carrying a *kline*-type bed on a sarcophagus, in the context of much other self-

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[52] Matthew 9.1-8, Mark 2.1-12, Luke 5.18-26. *RS* I 8.
[53] *RS* I 8, *RS* I 25. The later Bethesda type sarcophagi, from the second half of the fourth century, elaborate on the bed theme through a double register scene of the man carrying his bed above, and lying upon it below; Koch (2000) 171-2.
[54] Dulaey (2006) 300f, 321. Cf. Dresken-Weiland (2010) 259-60.
[55] Hilarius on Matthew 8.7.
[56] Elsner (2018b); see Chapter 1.3.1 on Jonah and *kline* statues, in passing.

referential imagery, does most of the communicative work. It does not take its lead from the patristic texts but from the visual world of funerary art, closer to the viewpoint of the late Roman viewers of sarcophagi.

On an impressive double-register sarcophagus from Arles (fig. 2.16), the other type of this scene is depicted, where the man sits up on the bed, as if the *kline* statue had risen from the lid (fig. 2.16b).[57] In this case, it seems chosen so that the hand of Jesus on the man's head can follow the position of his hand in the adjacent scene, the creation of Eve and Adam. The parallel poses highlight the theme of birth and rebirth, with creation from clay next to a kind of funerary statue restored to living flesh. The juxtaposition of naked Adam and Eve and clothed paralytic could also tie into the traditional patterning of nude and dressed bodies identified by Elsner on earlier sarcophagi.[58] The arrangement of the couple in the portrait is also preserved in that of Eve and Adam, first woman then man, including the deceased in the commentary on creation and rebirth.[59]

This example illustrates a decorative feature of many of these bed scenes: headrests shaped like fish, which have a parallel in the child's sarcophagus on the Capitoline (fig. 2.17).[60] The fish has obvious Christian significance, and could represent in a broad sense the faith upon which the deceased has rested, which is the basis of healing and resurrection. According to Dulaey, in the early Christian literary discussion of this healing, the forgiveness of sins prior to the miracle is the key to the symbolic meaning of the freedom from paralysis, and moreover the occasion for forgiveness being baptism is almost always mentioned.[61] The frequent occurrence of the fish decoration could therefore be read convincingly as a baptismal reference. In the Arles case, the fish headrest sits atop a fluted leg, next to the large fluted portrait shell containing the dead couple. The juxtaposition of marine elements could strengthen the connection between two different types of representation of the deceased. Both *kline* statues and shells had always portrayed the dead as monumentalised and immortalised in a peaceful afterlife, but here the intervention of Jesus and the combination of marine details means there is the additional prospect of an eschatological hope for the couple through baptism.

The fact that these depictions are tied to the medium of the sarcophagus is strengthened by the disparate depictions in other media. On sarcophagi the paralysed man is either entirely underneath the bed like the corpse in the tomb, or sitting on top like a statue waking up.

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[57] *RS* III 38. Cf. *RS* III 32, where the man reclines on the bed and takes Jesus' hand.
[58] Elsner (2018b).
[59] The skeleton of the man buried with his wife in the sarcophagus showed signs of old battle wounds, so scenes of healing might be especially pertinent.
[60] See Chapter 1.1.1, fig. 1.16.
[61] Dulaey (2006) 289-91, Dresken-Weiland (2010) 259-60.

However on a gold glass medallion from Rome (fig. 2.18), the figure carries the bed over his shoulder so that his head protrudes above the bed frame; this corresponds less well to the stone lid of a sarcophagus, with a corpse entirely below or a statue entirely above.[62] In catacomb paintings, the bed is usually angled to reveal the horizontal surface of the bed rather than the side (fig. 2.19), which means that it is not in a clear above-or-below relationship with the man's body, as on the gold glass; the wicker frame is also clearly articulated.[63]

By referencing statues on the lids of sarcophagi, the healing of the paralytic suggests the statuesque theme of the previous subsection, and the particular container form of the sarcophagus itself.

2.2.3. Containers

The issue of self-referential container imagery has already arisen in discussion of Noah's ark in this chapter and Jonah's boat in the previous chapter, both somewhat monumental vessels that mimic the shape of the sarcophagus to different degrees. On pre-Christian sarcophagi, smaller vessels like urns have also been taken to be self-referential; the most obvious, yet overlooked, parallels are with the jars and baskets of two of the most frequent scenes, the miracle of water into wine at Cana, and the multiplication of loaves and fish (both fig. 2.1).

The first miracle in John's Gospel is at the wedding at Cana, where Jesus' mother calls upon him to help when the celebration runs out of wine.[64] He instructs the servants to fill six stone jars, used for ceremonial washing, with water. When the steward tastes it, it has become wine, of better quality than had previously been served. The significance of the story lies in the abundant provision, generous beyond expectation, and particularly the transformation of the tools of ritual cleansing into celebratory refreshment. The primary importance of the miracle in John's Gospel, concluded in the final line, is that it was "the first of his signs (τῶν σημείων)", through which he "revealed his glory" and caused his disciples to believe in him.[65]

The original cleansing purpose of the jars proclaims the fundamental sinfulness and dirtiness of the body; their conversion into containers for wine illustrates the Christian transformation of the body that renders such rituals redundant. Similarly, the fundamental purpose of the sarcophagus is a reminder of the decay of the body that needs to be contained and concealed;

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[62] Walker (2017) cat. 3, 131.
[63] Spier (2007) no. 3c; cf. 9b.
[64] John 2.1-11. For water into wine on sarcophagi, Wilpert (1929-36) 309-10, Koch (2000) 170.
[65] John 2.11. Dodd (1953) 297-389.

the Christian transformation of the body through baptism, death and resurrection had undermined and transformed this purpose. Mourning is translated into joyfulness, just as the solemnity of the water jars is transfigured into the festivity of wine. The same connotations from this juxtaposition could be inherited from the classical tradition: Tibullus describes the process of treading wine from grapes as "sober water was mingled with carefree wine", and laments: "Often I've tried to dispel troubles with wine: but grief turned all the wine to tears."[66] By contrast, the biblical miracle reverses this process of grief.

On sarcophagi, what is significant in the context of this chapter is that the jars in which the transformation takes place are made of stone. They are yet another form of transformative stone container, carved in the marble of a transforming sarcophagus. This scene is therefore another very appropriate metaphor for Christian sarcophagi, again reflecting on their medium and the very nature of funerary commemoration. Jesus touches his staff to the stone jars, made of the same stone as the larger container of the sarcophagus (there is no indication in the gospel that Jesus physically accomplishes the miracle through touch or even in person; he merely instructs the servants). The moment of destabilising transformation is memorialised: waves are often visibly carved inside the jars (fig. 2.20), but what liquid are we to imagine is depicted? Is it still water, or wine?[67]

The jars even look like stone urns, taking the same form as those which are sometimes placed to catch the wine produced in the sarcophagus-shaped troughs trodden by cupids (fig. 1.59b). The biblical jars were said to each hold twenty or thirty gallons and would have been much larger vessels. To a viewer unfamiliar with the story, it could appear to be another resurrection scene parallel to those where Jesus points his staff at a figure lying on the ground, just this time directed at a group of urns. A traditional part of Roman funerary practice when cremation was the custom had been to mix wine with the ashes. In the step-by-step description of the funerary rites of Misenus, book 6 of the *Aeneid* includes: "they washed with wine the thirsty ash (*vino et bibulam lavere favillam*)" before gathering it into an urn.[68] In the fourth century one of Ausonius's epigrams begins with the same image, even though cremation was by now not the norm:

> **sparge mero cineres** *bene olentis et unguine nardi,*
> *hospes, et adde rosis balsama puniceis.*
> *perpetuum mihi ver agit illacrimabilis urna*
> *et commutavi saecula, non obii.*

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[66] Tibullus, *Elegies* 2.1 and 1.5, trans. Kline (2001).
[67] If these details were originally painted, this might remove some of the ambiguity.
[68] Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.227, trans. West (1990).

> *nulla mihi veteris perierunt gaudia vitae,*
>
> *seu meminisse putes omnia sive nihil.*

> Sprinkle my ashes with wine and with unguent of sweet-smelling nard,
>
> stranger, and add balsam leaves with red roses.
>
> My urn, which you should not weep over, brings me perpetual spring,
>
> and I have changed my existence, not died.
>
> None of the joys of my old life have perished,
>
> whether you think I remember all or none.[69]

The fourth-century epigram introduces the idea of a transformation rather than death, taking a more hopeful tone than earlier funerary literature that is shared by Christian epitaphs. It even implies a contrast between wine and water entering the urn, instructing the passer-by to sprinkle wine, but not tears. The depiction of the wine miracle using an urn-like form on a stone sarcophagus would surely recall this practice, still alive in the literary tradition. Virgil's language of washing the ashes with wine in particular provides an interesting resonance for the iconography, where the urn-like jars for washing are filled with wine. In Virgil, the addition of wine is simply to honour the remains of the deceased correctly, but in the biblical miracle on sarcophagi, it could signify their resurrection.[70]

Of course, the important aspect of the water into wine scene acknowledged by scholars is as a type for the Eucharist, signifying the bread and wine in conjunction with the multiplication of loaves.[71] Dresken-Weiland notes that at the same time that banqueting scenes disappear from sarcophagi, the multiplication of loaves appears; the implication is that the Eucharist is an alternative communal meal, or that on a visual level the baskets of bread stand in as offerings for the deceased.[72] Wine and grain were traditional funerary gifts. The Eucharist itself stands for the body and blood of Jesus: at the Last Supper, Jesus says of the broken bread "take; this is my body", and of the cup of wine, "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many".[73] By partaking of the bread and wine, his followers receive a share in his sacrificial death: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?"[74] Through the Eucharist, Christians also experience renewed communion as a church

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[69] Ausonius, *Epigrams* 8, trans. adapted from Kay (2001).

[70] See Chapter 4.1 on the influence of Virgil on fourth-century Christians.

[71] For the multiplication of loaves on sarcophagi, Wilpert (1929-36) 308-9, Koch (2000) 168-9. For the loaves and wine scenes as Eucharistic symbols, Wilpert (1929-36) 307-10.

[72] Dresken-Weiland (2013) 254.

[73] Mark 14.22-24. Cf. Matthew 26.26-28, Luke 22.19-20, 1 Corinthians 11.23-25.

[74] 1 Corinthians 10.16.

community and with God, again echoing ancient sacrificial meals: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar?"[75] The bread and wine, body and blood, are thus fundamentally connected to the (dead) body of Jesus, and evoking this on sarcophagi inevitably has a special funerary significance. On some examples, the bread is carved with crosses, as in the Eucharist (fig. 2.21).[76] In the context of the Eucharist, the urn-like water jars can be imagined as holding Jesus' blood, and the bread baskets his body. Both are therefore comparable with another bodily container, the sarcophagus itself.

On the small child's sarcophagus from San Callisto (fig. 2.10), with its focus on types for the tomb detailed above, the remaining scene on the front alongside the orant is the wine miracle; this would seem to confirm its suitability for comparison with other tomb and container-types.[77] The two figures of Jesus stand back to back, their staffs almost forming one line, and together represent the first and last of John's *signa*. On one example of the loaves scene from San Sebastiano (fig. 2.22), the bread baskets seem to consciously echo the corpse that Jesus is preparing to raise to life: Jesus stands in identical poses in both scenes, pointing his staff down to the right.[78] The reproduction of the bread equals the rejuvenation of the body, just as bread equalled body in the Eucharist. A child's sarcophagus in the Vatican frames a central orant with Jesus multiplying the loaves and fish on the left, and raising a dead child to life on the right (fig. 2.23).[79] The arrangement of figures and poses with staffs clearly makes a parallel between the objects of the miracles. The scene of the resurrection of the widow's son is especially poignant on the coffin of a child. The smaller, simpler caskets can state most plainly what the more visually elaborate embellish, with the aim of posing a challenge to the viewer to interpret.

The other iconographical type for this miracle positions Jesus as the centre of a group of three, almost orant-like, with his hands placed over two baskets held by disciples; even then, the insistent clusters of baskets at their feet, typically up to six, keep depictions of containers conspicuous. Returning to one of the earlier examples on the Velletri sarcophagus (fig. 2.12), the multiplication of loaves is the only biblical scene that does not so clearly evoke nude statuary (like Daniel and the lions, Adam and Eve, and Jonah), or reference the

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[75] 1 Corinthians 10.17-18.
[76] Cormack (2008) 908, on another scene of bread with "clear symbolic references" to the Eucharist, the Hospitality of Abraham in the fifth-century mosaics of San Vitale, Ravenna. The sacrificial implications are "intensified" by juxtaposition with the Sacrifice of Isaac.
[77] *RS* I 364.
[78] *RS* I 176. For later examples, cf. *RS* I 60, *RS* I 54 for the body and the wine jars, and *RS* III 57 and 69 for all three.
[79] *RS* I 9.

sarcophagus as container (Noah); this does suggest that it is the foregrounding of containers that makes it relevant to the overall theme. Elsner points out the interplay between the woven wicker manger and the miniature strigillated sarcophagus on the coffin from Syracuse, but the patterning also continues in the woven baskets in the multiplication scene adjacent to the resurrection and below the manger (fig. 2.13). The Eucharist is a ritual that enacts accepting a part in Jesus' death through which to be reborn, and is itself a body-transforming miracle.

On some sarcophagi, large baskets are depicted on the short ends (fig. 2.24b and 2.25), part of the funerary vocabulary of gifts for the dead, but also potentially nods to the containing function of the tomb.[80] They can even take up the entire field, so that the containers of basket and coffin are somehow made equivalent. On one such example in the Vatican with baskets at both ends (fig. 2.25), the woven construction interacts with the carved strigillation on the front, similar in the patterned layers yet contrasting in flexible woodwork against solid architecture, as on the Syracuse sarcophagus.[81] On the sarcophagus of Marcia Romania Celsa (fig. 2.24b), ears of wheat emerge from the centre of the brim, providing a link to the baskets of loaves on a smaller scale on the front (fig. 2.24).[82] This miracle of Jesus is thereby further linked to his ultimate miracle, the miraculous transformation of the body that takes place in the resurrection of believers. This connection reaches in both directions, back to the bodily foundations of Roman sarcophagus decoration, and forward to the new Christian doctrine of bodily rebirth.

Returning to the Claudianus sarcophagus (fig. 2.1), it can be seen that the miracles of wine and bread framing the orant on the main relief have a striking parallel in the harvests of wheat and grapes depicted either side of Claudianus's portrait on the lid. The wheat is directly above the bread baskets, forming a sort of axis for the two complete sets of motifs. The basket holding the grapes is even the same as those holding the bread. This ties together both fields of decoration, and makes clear the link between the deceased and the representation of the soul. It also links the traditional funerary imagery of the seasons with the newer currency of biblical images.

The wine and loaves miracles are bound up in funerary self-referentiality, and their full interpretation requires knowledge of both Christian texts and Roman visual culture. The Cana miracle in particular has the material of stone in common with the statuesque imagery

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[80] *RS* III 37, *RS* I 69. Cf. *RS* I 837, *RS* I 1004, *ASR* 5,4 191. Cf. side of Sinn (1991) 101-2 no. 84 (fig. 1.8, side not shown). See Chapter 1.1.1.
[81] *RS* I 69.
[82] *RS* III 37.

discussed so far, and this combination of self-referentiality and materiality will continue to be important in the following sections.

2.3. The tomb of Lazarus

The raising of Lazarus is the most common depiction of resurrection on Christian sarcophagi, with a tomb featuring prominently (fig. 2.1 and 2.1b).[83] We have so far seen how it can be balanced with other quasi-sculptural, funerary imagery such as Daniel. In light of the sculptural and self-referential significance of the Christian imagery considered so far, this image should clearly provide rich material for analysis. The full significance of depicting such a fully formed tomb on a coffin has not yet been fully explored.

The story of Lazarus is unique to the Gospel of John, where it forms the final miracle before Jesus enters Jerusalem.[84] Jesus is sent a message by Mary and Martha, saying that their brother Lazarus is ill. When Jesus returns to Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for four days. Jesus weeps, but goes to the tomb, instructs them to take away the stone, and calls Lazarus to come out. Lazarus emerges still wrapped in cloth. On sarcophagi, the scene focuses on Jesus in front of an ornate tomb, with Lazarus's wrapped body visible between the columns. The miracle is usually accomplished by the pointing of a staff or wand, and the developed iconography shows one of the dead man's sisters kneeling at Jesus' feet.[85]

The biblical tomb is a cave, yet sarcophagi always feature a more recognisable type of temple-tomb for a Roman audience. Although the tomb does not mimic the box-like shape of a sarcophagus like the small sarcophagi of other resurrections or Noah's ark, it has been seen in the first chapter that there was a long tradition of presenting sarcophagi as miniature tomb buildings complete with columns, gables, pediments, and tiled roofs.[86] It is particularly close to the doorways of the 'Door of Hades' sarcophagi (fig. 2.26; cf. 1.19, 1.22, 1.37), which can come complete with columns, acroteria, and a wreath with trailing ribbons in a triangular pediment.[87] Lazarus's tomb potentially represents the sarcophagus by synecdoche, excerpting the central portal. Such door motifs are known to have echoed the doors of actual

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[83] On the scene of the raising of Lazarus, see Partyka (1993); Koch (2000) 167-8; Dresken-Weiland (2010) 213-232.
[84] John 11; on patristic exegesis, see Partyka (1993) 78-94.
[85] For the raising of Lazarus on sarcophagi, Wilpert (1929-36) 302-303, Koch (2000) 167-8.
[86] Huskinson (2015) 84 on sarcophagi sharing features of temple-tombs.
[87] *ASR* I,3 138; Haarløv (1977) 134 no. 6. Cf. Platt (2012) and (2017). The 'doors of Hades' on sarcophagi are only ever half-open at most, sometimes with Hercules emerging from the Underworld imagined behind the sarcophagus front, but never the deceased. Lazarus's tomb by contrast is always door-less and with open space between the columns on two sides.

tombs, and seem close to many cinerary urns which share the same features (fig. 1.7).[88] In catacomb painting meanwhile the tomb is usually still a building (figs. 2.27 and 2.28), but the iconography is not nearly as uniform and does not have all the details of the sarcophagus type; the close affinity between tomb and sarcophagus is based on the particular medium of marble monument, and not the funerary sphere as a whole.[89] Since Paul described the body as "a temple of the Holy Spirit", the temple-tomb somewhat elides the boundaries between tomb and body, in a way that is not out of place with the visual games of previous centuries.[90] The iconographical choice of the temple-tomb thus strengthens the link between depicted and actual tomb.

The column of the tomb is most often in three dimensions, standing out from the sarcophagus front. On the outer edge, it takes the place of one of the columns that had frequently framed the front, which helps to anchor the tomb as overlapping with and linked to the sarcophagus itself. On the sarcophagus of Sabinus (fig. 2.29), the visibility of the three-dimensional column from the side means that it can also take part in the scene on the short side (figs. 2.29c and d), much as the former caryatid-types could have a dual role.[91] The monumental furnace appears as a sarcophagus type, taking up the whole field so that the two are visually equated. The column of Lazarus's tomb appears to play a part in the architecture, eliding the tomb and the furnace, in addition to the furnace and sarcophagus. The action of Jesus in saving Lazarus extends around the corner and across dimensions to saving the three Hebrews, and by extension to the deceased whom the two architectural scenes contain.[92] The church fathers retrospectively interpreted the mysterious fourth figure visible in the biblical furnace as Christ.[93] Visually too, the memory of the past is transformed in light of the revelation of Christian truth.

It is important that Jesus usually points directly to the wreath in the centre of the pediment, a carved decoration lacking in the catacomb paintings and third- and fifth-century sarcophagi.[94] The wreath is a widespread detail on earlier funerary monuments, including in pediments of *stelai* and sarcophagus doorways alike. Here it inherits its associations with victory, but in a new and improved, incredibly direct way, since Jesus is accomplishing a

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[88] Borg (2013) 198-9. Soper (1937) 164 observed that the typical rendering of Lazarus's tomb could be compared to the small temples that sometimes formed part of the schema of Meleager sarcophagi, which perhaps draw on this same bank of familiar imagery connecting tombs to sarcophagi. Also Vita Romana sarcophagi, e.g. *ASR* I,3 12, 29, 33, and 61.
[89] Deckers, Seelinger, and Mietke (1987) plate 59a.
[90] 1 Corinthians 6.9.
[91] *RS* I 6.
[92] The lid of this sarcophagus in fact reuses an architectural cornice, though it is not clear if this would have been apparent to the viewer.
[93] Dulaey (1997b).
[94] See Figs. 2.38 and 2.47, to be discussed.

victory over death itself through this very gesture. The action recalls the verses: "Where, O death, is your victory? …But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."[95] While the meaning is biblical, the means by which this truth is conveyed is decidedly classical. There is a certain irony to this that must have been satisfying to Christian Romans at this time: the 'true' meaning of a traditional, classical image was finally revealed by their own faith. Eusebius would surely have approved. It also helps to emphasise the importance of the decoration of the real tomb, suggesting the value in an active reading of the rest of the sarcophagus, hinting that a search for meaning there would be equally fruitful.

One particularly significant decorative feature is detailed acroteria in the form of heads or masks. These stand in ironic relation to the rest of the stone heads in line with it, but which again are on a different level of representation. Masks on sarcophagi had long been a popular motif, in relation to decorative interests in recessions of real and fictive bodies, as well as indicating culture through a general reference to classical drama. The lids of Christian sarcophagi were often framed by mask acroteria, contributing to the parallel between real and depicted tomb. On such a small space as Lazarus's tomb, they stand out as being a significant choice. On one double-register sarcophagus in the Vatican, Jesus' staff points to one of these masks rather than the wreath (fig. 2.30).[96] While pointing to the wreath indicates that the resurrection unlocks its victorious meaning, pointing to the mask could focus on the transformation unfolding from the 'empty mask' of the lifeless body to living, breathing person. Issues of representation are particularly complex around resurrection, as framed by Paul in one of the foundational passages in 1 Corinthians:

> "So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable… It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body… Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam [Christ] became a life-giving spirit… The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image (εἰκόνα) of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

> …For this perishable body must put on (ἐνδύσασθαι) imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability,

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[95] 1 Corinthians 15.55 (quoting Hosea 13.14) and 57.

[96] *RS* I 42; the left hand mask and lower portion of the staff are restorations, but the tip of the staff survives showing that it would have pointed to a mask matching the one on the right.

and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'"[97]

The resurrection follows the examples of two archetypal men, patterned on the transformation from one image to another. The representational self-awareness that the masks embody is inherent in the very idea of resurrection. The word for "put on" primarily means to put on clothes, which lends further significance to the masks which are also to be worn.[98] The masks sculpted out of durable stone cover frail corpses, as immortality is something to be worn over mortal bodies. The layering of representation is even more complex than first appears, if the immortality in which the dead bodies restored to life are clothed is compared to the kind of immortality offered by a permanent tomb monument in stone. Simultaneously as we have seen, the masks could represent the physicality of the body that is shed to exchange for the spiritual, in a sense more familiar to a Graeco-Roman audience. The picture of the exact nature of the resurrected body is mixed across the New Testament, so multivalence in the iconography is not inconsistent.[99]

There are even examples with small-scale sculpted reliefs on the base of the tomb, something which Soper assigns to a secondary phase of development.[100] The sarcophagus of Marcia Romania Celsa in Arles (fig. 2.24), for example, depicts a minutely carved shepherd leaning on his staff, with a cloak around his shoulders and a tiny dog at his feet (fig. 2.31) – one of the typical shepherd types seen repeatedly on sarcophagi.[101] They further indicate an increasing interest in the tomb itself with its architectural and sculptural details.

The decorations are carved on the edge of the tomb's base, on panels with clear, raised edges, evoking the figures that frame strigillated sarcophagi. The steps of the tomb could almost be the central strigillation, with the balancing figural panel to be imagined on the opposite side; in one case there is a decorated panel on either side.[102] As much as they form the corner panel of the tomb's base, they are simultaneously the corners of the real-life casket; though on a diminutive scale, Celsa's shepherd occupies the same position on the sarcophagus as a corner shepherd on a strigillated type. This is comparable to how the outer

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[97] 1 Corinthians 15.42-55.
[98] The sense is preserved in the Vulgate (*induere*).
[99] Bynum (1995) 19-108 on the range of patristic responses to this ambiguity in the first four centuries. Cf. Barton and Muddiman (2001) on 1 Corinthians 15.42-50, on the ambiguity in Paul's description of whether the old body is reused in some way in the resurrected body, as Jesus' seems to have been.
[100] Soper (1937) 164; Recio Veganzones (1990).
[101] *RS* III 37, Koch (2000) no. 137. On a sarcophagus from Cahors, another shepherd leaning on a staff beneath a tree; Soper (1937) fig. 35.
[102] *RS* II 58; Jastrzębowska (1997) 11.

column of the tomb is found where a larger-scale column would be on the outer edge. The stone of the tomb opened by Jesus is concretely tethered to that of the deceased's own. The inclusion of such detailed marble decoration on a tomb, that is itself merely detailed marble decoration on a tomb, expresses a typical elite sense of dramatic irony.

While Lazarus's tomb is linked to the sarcophagus, it is never in the centre as the doors would be. The small base reliefs anchor the corner of the tomb to the corner of the sarcophagus, but the perspective is tilted: the tomb is frequently set at an angle on the sarcophagus front, so that it is turned sideways towards the figures on the sarcophagus as well as out towards us. This rotates the domain of the dead away from being straightforwardly behind the front of the coffin with the remains of the deceased. The empty air between the tomb's outer column and the back of the sarcophagus front alters our perspective on the established lines between living and dead. If the tomb frontage is originally the central portal of a sarcophagus, this virtual sarcophagus extends out to either side at a wonky angle, projecting either further out to the side, or even diagonally behind and in front of the actual sarcophagus. The real sarcophagus has slipped its moorings and escaped the boundaries prescribed by the position of the central panel, and finds itself located partially outside itself. The traditional location of the dead has been literally side-lined, and our perspective has been radically altered. The deceased is now memorialised *outside* the tomb, in the space outside the virtual boundaries of the traditional casket.

It is notable that the motifs chosen to decorate the tomb of Lazarus are all pre-Christian in origin: the vines (fig. 2.32) and trees (2.33) that Recio Veganzones described as the patrimony from pagan art, along with the rustic 'farmer-hunter' figures (2.36); and the Old Testament characters Ezekiel (2.34) and Daniel (2.35), both Jewish prophets who looked forward to the coming Messiah.[103] The depiction of the raising of Lazarus thus shows itself to be chronologically aware, by not decorating his tomb with any stories that post-date the one taking place. It would not make sense for Lazarus to be buried in a tomb decorated with one of Jesus' miracles, at a time when the Crucifixion and Resurrection were still to reveal their ultimate meaning. A coherent series of decorative recessions is therefore created by the layering of chronologies; the fourth-century tomb is decorated with a New Testament tomb decorated with pre-Christian scenes. In reality, a first-century Jewish tomb was unlikely to have been decorated with images, so the heritage Lazarus's tomb refers to is really the dual heritage of the Roman Christian: pre-Christian Roman art, and the Jewish scriptures.

The sarcophagus fronts on which all these small-scale tomb motifs are located are otherwise full of scenes from the New Testament period. Meanwhile traditional rural or seasonal

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[103] Recio Veganzones (1990) 231.

scenes, and imagery from the Old Testament period, were common choices for the lids and sides of such sarcophagi.[104] The figurative panel on Lazarus's tomb seems to be conceived as affiliated with these secondary fields of decoration, bordered off at the margins of the main panel. The previous chapter saw how the short sides could act as microcosms of the front, and lids with smaller Old Testament figures also seem to offer a typological commentary on the main figures below, as seen on the Claudianus sarcophagus. Similarly, the isolated panel of Lazarus's tomb forms a microcosm or commentary, as will now be discussed: both in relation to the tomb itself, and to the wider tomb of the sarcophagus.

One example shows a man using his staff to harvest fruit from a tree (fig. 2.36).[105] On several occasions Jesus compares people to crops to be harvested.[106] In Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples to "ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest", meaning to send more people to gather followers.[107] The harvest is therefore a fitting type of resurrection. The man's gesture also matches Jesus', both pointing their staffs to the top of tomb and tree. Harvesting fruit is paralleled with the act of retrieving the body from the tomb; the idea is found elsewhere on the Claudianus sarcophagus (fig. 2.1), where the vine bearing fruit about to be plucked, is placed above and in parallel to the tomb, with the body waiting to be brought down. On Fig. 2.36, the scene on the lid above is Jonah under the gourd; as a statuesque evocation of the body in a vegetal type of the tomb, he stands as something of a bridge between the fruit in the tree, and Lazarus in the tomb.[108] The lid and figurative panel both work as levels of commentary on the main action.

Motifs that seem to echo the actions of Jesus in resurrecting Lazarus lend a prophetic flavour. Jesus' actions are to some extent prefigured in the ornament of the tomb he approaches. Given the layering of representation we have seen in depicting a tomb on a tomb, the prophetic nature of the tertiary layer of Lazarus's decoration, fulfilled in the secondary layer of the depiction of Jesus, logically implies that this secondary layer, in its totality, will be fulfilled in the primary tier, the real world of the deceased and the viewer beyond the frame of the sarcophagus. Just as Christ is shown approaching the tomb, healing

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[104] Fig. 2.24: the Fiery Furnace and cupids on the lid, baskets on the sides; 2.34: Moses, Abraham, and Adam and Eve on the lid; 2.32: Jonah cycle. Further examples (without figurative panel on Lazarus's tomb) cf. fig. 2.29: hunting imagery on the lid, Adam and Eve and the Fiery Furnace on the sides; fig. 2.2: Abraham, Moses and seasonal scenes on the lid; *RS* I 621: Jonah cycle; *RS* II 30: Fiery Furnace and Adam and Eve on sides.
[105] *RS* I 770.
[106] Matthew 13.1-43, Mark 4.1-20, Luke 8.4-15. See also Jesus as the "first-fruits" of the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15.23. In the epitaph written for his sister Irene, Damasus says that her piety "had produced splendid fruits (*fructus*) in her happy years"; *ICUR* IV 12417, trans. Trout (2015a) 103-5, no.11.
[107] Matthew 9.38.
[108] See Chapter 1.3.1 on Jonah as statuesque.

the sick, and transforming matter, he will fulfil these signs through the salvation of the dead believer.

Moreover these panels can interact with other motifs across the sarcophagus, so that the commentary has a wider scope. On a sarcophagus in the Vatican (fig. 2.32) there is a vine bearing bunches of grapes (fig. 2.32b). The believer is a branch of the True Vine, Christ, but the vine also carries over its pre-Christian connotations, in particular the traditional funerary metaphor of treading grapes to represent the transformation of the body after death.[109] Both Christian and funerary traditions thus equate the vine or its fruit with the body of the deceased. The twin significance of the vine is picked up further along this sarcophagus in the water-into-wine miracle, which, as has been seen, could also convey connotations of bodily transformation through allusion to the blood of the Eucharist and funerary container imagery.[110] Further still, the baptism performed by Peter at the far right means that the casket is framed by meandering vine and wavy water, either side of the Cana scene transfiguring one to the other.

Ezekiel acts as a prophetic footnote on Lazarus's tomb (fig. 2.34), providing a reference both for his resurrection in this scene and for the coming of Jesus as Messiah in the centre of this sarcophagus. Firstly, Ezekiel appears elsewhere on sarcophagi in the scene of the raising of the dry bones, a vision of a very bodily resurrection.[111] Secondly, later in Ezekiel's prophecy, God tells him that the eastern gate of the temple sanctuary is to remain shut to everyone but God himself; this was believed to be fulfilled when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday through the eastern gate, depicted in the centre of this sarcophagus.[112] Not only this, but this later prophecy was also interpreted symbolically by the church fathers as a reference to the incarnation: Ambrose claimed that the gate represented Mary, through whom Christ came into the world.[113] The tomb of Lazarus being conceived as a kind of portal, related to the doors on sarcophagi, means that the tomb itself is a sort of gate; it certainly resembles a temple in the Graeco-Roman sense.[114] Only Jesus can enter the realm of the dead through this gateway tomb and bring Lazarus back, recalling the Harrowing of

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[109] John 15.1-17. Elsner (2012) 182-4.
[110] *RS* II 108 positions Lazarus's tomb with another vine panel beneath the Cana miracle.
[111] Ezekiel 37.1-14. V5-6: "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."
[112] Ezekiel 44.1-3. Earlier in Ezekiel, the presence of God leaves the temple via the east gate to the Mount of Olives (11.23) before returning (43.1-4); in the gospels, Jesus travels from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem via an east gate (Matthew 21.1-11, Mark 11.1-11, Luke 19.28-44).
[113] Ambrose, *De Institutione Virginis* 8.52. Cf. John 10.7-10 where Jesus is the gate.
[114] The temple location of Daniel killing the dragon in the temple of Bel (fig. 2.35) could also resonate with the temple-tomb origins of Lazarus's tomb.

Hell tradition that after the Crucifixion Jesus descended to Hell to save souls.[115] This combination of motifs across the sarcophagus represents a complicated series of referents, available for the knowing viewer to untangle. No one meaning is fixed, but remains flexible enough to accommodate others. As with the vine, the figurative panel has a 'local' significance in relation to Lazarus's tomb, and the wider sarcophagus.[116]

The tiny decorative panels on the tombs of Lazarus can thus be interpreted as microcosmic motifs, reducing an action or theme in the wider scene or indeed whole sarcophagus front to a single 'keyword'. The encapsulation of themes in the wider work on a single enclosed object is reminiscent of ekphrases of objects like the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*, or more poignantly given the architectural, temple-tomb form, the doors of Dido's temple in the *Aeneid*.[117] The self-referential relationship between art and nature that can be seen in representations of the tomb is after all a key feature of ekphrasis. Ekphrasis has been identified as receiving renewed interest in late antiquity, even as characteristic of the period's poetics, and one symptom of the interest in tiny details as part of a greater whole that would be characteristic of the "jewelled style" of late antique aesthetics.[118] Roberts proposed that, as well as art influencing poets, ekphrasis would have influenced artists through the tastes of patrons.[119] We can see elements of these fascinations in the decorative concerns of sarcophagi at this early stage in the fourth century. The nod to techniques taught in the rhetorical schools as part of a traditional education helps to confirm that early Christian sarcophagi were still engaged in traditional culture, displaying the patron's highly prized *paideia*.

The double-register strigillated Ludovisi sarcophagus (fig. 2.37) takes the image further.[120] It combines biblical scenes with traditional images like the *dextrarum iunctio*, personification of Harmonia, and Cupid and Psyche. The couple appears to be standing on a plinth, which is notably carved with another traditional scene of cock-fighting, watched by one defeated and one victorious cupid, within a carved border. In the top right side panel, the base of the tomb of Lazarus – the 'plinth' for the now missing body – is also represented with a recessed panel with protruding border. However the panel in this case is blank. This results in the sister crouching in front of the base appearing to fulfil this role, almost becoming part of the

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[115] Taught by early fathers based on e.g. Ephesians 4.7-10 and 1 Peter 3.19-20.
[116] Cf. the 'Two Brothers' sarcophagus (fig. 2.33) for another example: the tree on the figurative panel links with the central scene below the portrait, of Peter in between trees. On Peter as a self-referential and materialistic motif, below at Chapter 2.4.
[117] *Iliad* 18.478-608; *Aeneid* 1.453-493.
[118] Roberts (1989) on the jewelled style and 38-63 on ekphrasis, esp. 55-56. Elsner (2004) 293-304, 305-307, 309 on tiny details; 293 on ekphrasis as an example of this tendency to miniaturisation; also (2013). See Chapter 1.4 for ekphraseis of Callistratus.
[119] Roberts (1989) 66.
[120] *RS* I 86.

tomb's decoration. Again, this starts to playfully elide the recession of decorative images, making the viewer question the stability of the separate layers of representation. The tradition of depicting mourning relatives on grave monuments helps the elision.[121] Here the sister could either be mourning or praising.

The impact of this representation of Lazarus's tomb as fundamentally linked to the actual tomb of the deceased was evidently long-lasting. A fifth-century sarcophagus from Constantinople (fig. 2.38) includes a depiction of the scene within one of its niches, with a tomb stripped of solid pediment so that it is a clear-cut copy of the triangular niche; the opposing niche on the right contains the statuesque group of Jesus with a kneeling woman.[122] Similarly, on sarcophagi from Ravenna with rounded lids, the tomb of Lazarus on the short ends has a rounded roof; on the opposite ends are statuesque groups with Daniel and the lions.[123] An early-fifth-century gilded silver reliquary from Lombardy (fig. 2.39), meanwhile, depicts the raising of Lazarus on its lid, just twelve centimetres long.[124] As on sarcophagi, Jesus directs his staff at the architecture of the tomb, which perhaps relates to its similar function as a container for bodily remains. The roof of the tomb is domed, echoing the oval shape of the box, and the spiral-fluted columns recall the braided rope decoration around the edge. One of the scenes around the body is the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace, another type for the coffin as seen earlier, and on either end are depicted the gates of Jerusalem and Bethlehem – heavenly counterpoints to the idea of Lazarus's tomb as the gates of Hades.

The panels of an early-fifth-century ivory casket in the British Museum, famously depicting an early Crucifixion, on another side show the tomb of Jesus attended by mourning women and sleeping guards (fig. 2.40).[125] The corner of a strigillated sarcophagus can just be glimpsed through half-open doors. On the top half of the door is a simplified version of Jesus raising Lazarus, here a prophetic image that hints at the resurrection of Jesus himself. On the bottom half are reliefs of two mourning women seated on rocks, apparently mimicking on a smaller scale the women sitting by the tomb. The complex layering of women framing a tomb, whose doors frame women that frame the empty coffin inside, is self-referential in that they adorn a container, possibly one that contained relics from a body. This interaction of different levels of representation brings us back to the sarcophagus in

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[121] Lorenz (2011) and (2016) 210-223; Newby (2016) 300-301.
[122] Firatli (1990) 56-7, no. 98.
[123] *RS* II 378 and 379.
[124] Kent and Painter (1977) 93-94, no. 157.
[125] Weitzmann (1978) no. 452.

Chapter 1 with architectural sculpture, ideal statues and ostensibly real people in close relationship.[126]

2.4. Cornerstones: the raising of Lazarus and the rock miracle of Peter

The miracle of Peter striking the rock to produce water is frequently paired with the raising of Lazarus on very many sarcophagi seen so far (e.g. figs 2.1, 2.24, 2.29-2.37). Together they form a good example of playfully self-referential, intramedial motifs, based on both their subject matter and depiction, as seen with the biblical 'statues', and to a large degree reliant on their locations within the traditional framework of the sarcophagus, inherited from the kinds of monuments seen in the first chapter.

Peter's rock miracle is not biblical, but is a later apocryphal story found in the *Passio of Processus and Martinianus*.[127] It takes place when Peter and Paul are imprisoned underground in the Mamertine prison in Rome before their execution, and with the sign of the cross, Peter is supposed to have caused a spring to miraculously burst forth in which to baptise the guards and other prisoners. Though the story is only preserved in fifth- and sixth-century texts, it is the only convincing match for the iconography, so the assumption has to be that the later texts preserve an older legend.[128]

On sarcophagi, the motif is based on the rock miracle of Moses found in catacomb painting, where Moses brings forth water in the desert for the thirsty Israelites (fig. 2.41 and 2.42).[129] The borrowing of the Moses motif for a baptism is underpinned by the baptismal metaphor of 'drinking the source' in ecclesiastical language.[130] In fact, the sarcophagus motif was assumed to represent the same scene by early commentators like Bottari, but Wilpert makes clear that the scene on sarcophagi is instead meant to represent Peter due to the typical hats of Roman soldiers, the *pileus pannonicus*, worn by the small baptised men, evidently the guards.[131] Often it is clear from other scenes across the sarcophagus front featuring Peter, such as the prediction of his denial, that the same character is depicted, typically bearded and balding. Finally, there are also examples of glass with 'Petrus' inscribed next to the 'Moses' motif.[132] Wilpert identified the scene as Peter's baptism of Cornelius in Acts, the first gentile

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[126] See Chapter 1.1.
[127] *Passio ss. Processi et Martinianii*. On the motif: Koch (2000) 186-7; Jensen (2011a) 76-8; Dresken-Weiland (2013) 249.
[128] *Pace* Dulaey (2008).
[129] Exodus 17.1-7, Numbers 20.1-13. For the rock miracle on sarcophagi, Wilpert (1929-36) I 108-114 (misidentified as the baptism of Cornelius), Koch (2000) 186-7.
[130] E.g. Cyprian, *Epistles* 63, 8; Wilpert (1929-36) 108.
[131] Bottari (1737-54) III 27; Wilpert (1929-36) 109.
[132] Wilpert (1929-36) 109.

to be baptised, but this does not explain the military dress and rocky landscape as satisfactorily. The sarcophagus motif can be most securely identified as Peter baptising his guards.

Scholarly explanations for the frequency of the pairing of Peter and Lazarus have been based on the link between baptism and salvation.[133] Around a central orant, they specify that the piety of the orant is a Christian piety based on the stories of past miracles accomplished by God, and express the content of her prayer that she be resurrected as others had been before, on the basis of baptism represented in the other half of the frame. On the basis of past miracles, the family of the deceased may have hope in the reality of their loved one's miraculous resurrection. Lazarus was also identified with baptism by the early Christian fathers, such as Cyril of Jerusalem, or Irenaeus who saw the forgiveness of sins symbolised by the loosening of the wrappings.[134]

Baptism is described as a symbolic death of one's previous life in Paul's letter to the Romans, where he contrasts the death of baptism with the eternal life one receives through it: "we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so we too might walk in newness of life".[135] This contrast between the lethal side of baptism and new life is preserved in the first lines of an inscription from St Peter's that was probably associated with a font: "*sumite perpetuam sancto de gurgite vitam*", "take up eternal life from the holy whirlpool", the word for water being '*gurges*', the term for the chaotic whirlpool in the Virgilian land of the dead.[136] "Eternal life" and "holy whirlpool" form a chiasmic line that juxtaposes "life" with "whirlpool [of death]", heightening the striking contrast. This close association between death and the rite of baptism means that both Peter and Lazarus scenes represent either a symbolic or literal death and resurrection. Together they were an appropriate funerary theme.

The ornate tomb and mass of rock that are the scenes of the miracles make for satisfying boundaries, and some of their popularity may derive from the structural role they were able to play in establishing a clear and balanced framework; this is certainly the opinion of Speyart van Woerden, who explains the use as purely "compositorial necessity".[137] Placing them anywhere else on the front would interrupt the sequence of figures and break up the superficial narrative appearance.

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[133] E.g. Huskinson (2015) 216, Milburn (1988) 66: "two parts of one process".
[134] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat. lec*. 2.5, 5.9, 18.16; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 5.13.1; Cf. Jensen (2000) 170-1.
[135] Romans 6.4.
[136] *ICUR* II 4112.1, my translation; Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.296.
[137] Speyart van Woerden (1961) 237.

However as we have seen, these framing positions had a particular history and significance on sarcophagi, and their very monumentality lends them to what had traditionally been key structural positions. On strigillated sarcophagi (figs. 2.44 and 2.45) they are set into recesses that break into the entablature, like the caryatid-types seen earlier, and similarly, they are always symmetrical in the direction they and their staffs point, whether towards or away from the centre; indeed out of the many miracles accomplished with staffs, theirs are the only ones to point up rather than down, which helps them stand out further as a corresponding pair.[138] The upward emphasis of the poses is another echo of the caryatid trope. On the Claudianus sarcophagus (fig. 2.1), with the weight of the men on either end of the lid pushing down on their respective supports, and the staffs below lifted up to the corners, there is a sense of joining body and lid together, strengthening the seal. The pair can be seen as structural building blocks akin to the earlier caryatids or end panels on strigillated types; as earlier, occasionally the compositional edges are blurred to enhance the appearance of narrative – for example by overlapping figures, such as Peter on the left end of Fig. 2.43 turning to engage with Christ behind him.[139]

Fittingly for these supportive positions, the focus in both miracles is emphatically on the shared material of stone. Just as Peter raises his staff to touch the rock at the top of the field, so Jesus lifts his up to touch the pediment of the tomb, which further helps to establish the comparison between them and their rocky centrepieces. In John, Jesus raises Lazarus without any kind of touch, as there is for other resurrections like that of Jairus's daughter where he takes her by the hand; for Lazarus, he simply calls to him to come out of the tomb. Yet on sarcophagi, in the most common representation, a physical connection is established between Jesus and the stone of the tomb via the staff. The earliest depiction of Lazarus in marble relief, on a late-third-century loculus plaque (fig. 2.46), has Jesus pointing his staff down at Lazarus's feet, without the rock miracle to bring out the focus on the stone.[140] The additional significance laid upon the tomb seems to be a later but quickly dominant development, connecting one stone miracle to another. Examples of the Lazarus scene in catacomb paintings, in contrast, show Jesus pointing his staff directly at the head of Lazarus (figs 2.41 and 2.42). This is not just due to the earlier date, as a late-fourth-century gold glass medallion makes clear, with the staff clearly pointing down to the head of Lazarus lying on the steps rather than up to the tomb (fig. 2.47).[141] The shift in emphasis seems to be

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[138] *RS* I 67 and 665. See Chapter 1.3.1.
[139] *RS* I 674; Zander (2014) 304.
[140] *RS* I 811.
[141] Spier (2007) 224-5, no. 50; Partyka (1993) fig. 6; von Matt (1969) fig. 43.

a feature of the medium, where the focus on the marble funerary monument is the specific interest of a marble funerary monument.

Jesus and Lazarus are both buried in similar tombs with a stone (λίθος) sealing the entrance.[142] In all the gospels, it is the rolling back of the stone that signals the resurrection, and the stone is similarly highlighted in the story of Lazarus: Jesus commands the mourners of Lazarus to "Lift up the stone (Ἄρατε τὸν λίθον)" – "so they lifted up the stone".[143] John also frames Lazarus's resurrection with the growing hostility of the Jewish authorities towards Jesus, including beforehand the surprise of the disciples that Jesus wants to return to an area where "the Jews were just now trying to stone you (λιθάσαι)".[144] For John, Lazarus's resurrection is the event that triggers Jesus' arrest, and thus his own death and resurrection.[145] Jesus' instruction to 'lift up the stone' is surely a deadly echo of this image of shadowy persecutors lifting their own stones, ready to strike; by lifting the stone, he himself initiates the event that will bring down the metaphorical stones on his own head, and will put himself in a stone tomb.[146] Lazarus's tomb is therefore the perfect choice for a play on the materiality of stone on sarcophagi, and for recalling Jesus' own tomb – not just because of the theological links that prefigure Jesus' Passion and show him acting to save a friend at the cost of his own life, but through the material links emphasised to such effect through the focus of the sarcophagi.[147]

The wordplay in Peter's name ('rock') is important to this reading. Visual puns relating to the name of the deceased have their own tradition on tomb monuments, such as the early-imperial funerary altar of Tiberius Octavius Diadumenus, which features a representation of the famous Diadumenos statue by Polyclitus on a plinth.[148] Dresken-Weiland puts Peter's popularity on sarcophagi compared to catacomb paintings down to the upper classes wanting a particular connection to Rome's founder, but another factor must also be the playful pun on his name in this medium, which can explain why Peter is so much more common than

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[142] John 11.38-41, 20.1; cf. Mark 15.46, Matthew 27.59-60, Luke 23.53. Jensen (2000) 170 draws attention to other similarities between the resurrections of Jesus and Lazarus, like the weeping women, the wrappings, as well as the stone.

[143] Mark 16.3-4, Matthew 28.2, Luke 24.2. John 11.39, 41; my translation of the verb (NRSV: 'take away').

[144] John 11.8.

[145] Barton and Muddiman (2001) 981-2.

[146] Cf. Fig. 2.22 with a scene of stoning to the right of the multiplication of loaves.

[147] Cf. John 15.13: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

[148] Musei Vaticani, Cortile del Belvedere, inv. 1142; P. Stewart (2003) 98 fig. 15. Also the cinerary urn of T. Statilius Aper with a depiction of a boar (*aper*) at the feet of his portrait: La Rocca and Presicce (2010) 290-3, no. 5; and the fifth-century epitaph of 3-year-old Porcella from the S. Hippolyto cemetery, with an image of a pig (*ICUR* VII 20145).

Paul.[149] It is in response to Simon's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah that Jesus renames him Peter:

> "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter (*Πέτρος*), and on this rock (*πέτρα*) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."[150]

This must have been a very well-known passage among Roman Christians, as the justification for the authority of the Roman church, and central to it is the idea of Peter's name, created as a pun by Jesus himself. Peter is ordained as the rock on which the church will be built, so depicting Peter on stone tombs evokes ideas of stability and construction, a foundational presence in more than one sense: he is the "foundation stone" metaphorically of the church and physically of many sarcophagi. Once Constantine had built the basilica of St Peter's above his purported burial site, the meaning of "on this rock I will build my church" had another level of meaning and must have been forefront in the minds of those burying there; scenes of Peter have been observed as being most popular from sarcophagi found in this area.[151] Pilgrim graffiti in the catacombs repeatedly invoke Peter by name to pray for them, and depicting scenes of Peter on rock tombs could similarly invoke Peter's name and presence in an especially physical way, carving his likeness into the stone that protects the body inside.[152] Placing Peter in the structural 'caryatid' position, and choosing the scene that he engages with actual rock, can only strengthen this impression.

It is significant that Jesus refers to Hades in his response to Peter: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."[153] This can also help to illuminate the pairing of the rock miracle with the tomb of Lazarus. If Lazarus's tomb takes the form of the gates of Hades (in the words of the text, and conveniently in art from the 'door of Hades' sarcophagi), then the self-consciously rocky scene of Peter represents the rock of the church from which he gets his name, against which those gates will not prevail. Whatever Peter sets loose on earth is exemplified by the release of water, and placed opposite the tomb which receives the same gesture from Jesus, it is

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[149] Dresken-Weiland (2013) 249-252.
[150] Matthew 16.17-19.
[151] Dresken-Weiland (2013) 251.
[152] Jäggi (1999); Cooley (2012) 240-1.
[153] Matthew 16.18.

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[149] Dresken-Weiland (2013) 249-252.
[150] Matthew 16.17-19.
[151] Dresken-Weiland (2013) 251.
[152] Jäggi (1999); Cooley (2012) 240-1.
[153] Matthew 16.18.

clear that the deceased is included among those things set free in heaven. Peter releases the deceased just as the stone (πέτρος) of the tomb releases Lazarus.

Paul's exegesis of the original Moses miracle, on which the Peter iconography is based, is also key here. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he describes the Exodus and wanderings in the desert of the Israelites in terms of Christian baptism and communion:

> "I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ."[154]

The image of Christ as living water derives from the New Testament, and Paul seeks to interpret the Old Testament story in light of it, re-viewing the rock and water as a kind of baptism from Christ. In the sarcophagus pairing, this means that Jesus is ironically present in both motifs: he is raising Lazarus, but is also symbolised by the rock, while both scenes on a material level are of course made of rock. The Christ-symbolism of the rock reflects back on the Jesus in the Lazarus scene, so that both Peter and Jesus are conspicuously 'rocky', while working their miracles on both rock and stone. Their individual rockiness bleeds into each other, so that Christ-as-rock and Peter-as-rock are evoked in both scenes.

Following Paul's example, the focus of the early fathers in interpreting the Moses rock miracle is also on the rock itself as a type for Christ. In particular, the water that flows from it is compared to the water that flows from Jesus' side after being pierced on the cross. After surveying the patristic literature, van Moorsel concluded that scholars had tended not to focus enough on the rock in Peter's version of the miracle.[155] The exegetic interest in the rock to which the fathers testify helps to confirm that the material focus of the iconography would immediately strike the viewer.

As a counterpoint to the rock of Peter as a structural support, Jesus is described as a cornerstone several times in the Bible.[156] He first applies the quotation from Psalm 118 to himself in Matthew, that he is the stone that the builders rejected, that has become the cornerstone. Importantly, this is later repeated by Peter in Acts, and in 1 Peter by an author identifying himself as Peter. Paul uses the image twice in his letters to the Romans and Ephesians. The metaphor has a good pedigree for a particularly Roman Christianity,

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[154] 1 Corinthians 10.1-4.
[155] van Moorsel (1964).
[156] Psalm 118.22 and Isaiah 28.16 (retrospectively), Matthew 21.42, Acts 4.11, Romans 9.33, Ephesians 2.20-22, 1 Peter 2.4-8.

endorsed by Jesus himself and the two adopted Roman saints. The caryatid positions of Jesus and Peter raising their staffs gives them a statuesque gloss, which could mean to a Roman viewer that they take on associations of exemplary references to a prestigious heritage.

Other instances of baptism could have been chosen – Jesus' baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist, for example (fig. 1.51b and 1.57) – and there are other resurrection scenes like that of the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow at Nain, or Ezekiel's dry bones. The choice of these two scenes as a pair, over and over again, must owe much to the commentary they could make together on the subject of the marble monuments that frame and are framed by them.[157]

As with the tomb of Lazarus, the strategic placing of the rock miracle is underlined by appropriate adjacent motifs, such as watery scenes like the Jonah cycle. On the lid of the sarcophagus of Crescens (fig. 2.32), above the rock producing water, are two Jonah scenes: the prophet being expelled from the boat into the mouth of the *ketos* and then reclining under the gourd, emphasising the watery theme and another well-known baptismal type.[158] As discussed previously, both boat and furnace on the lid can be read as types for the coffin, so their juxtaposition with the Peter and Lazarus scenes is a further indication of how much the latter framing pair are invested in self-referential aesthetics.[159] There might be a further playful reference to the common pairing of the rock miracle and Jonah on the Claudianus sarcophagus (fig. 2.1).[160] Jonah's boat and gourd very commonly frame sarcophagus lids (e.g. fig. 2.48), and on Claudianus's lid, the manger on the left side could echo the form of the boat, while the overarching vine on the right recalls the spreading gourd.[161] The recumbent posture of the baby Jesus could also nod towards the reclining figure of Jonah, with both being types for the deceased in peaceful repose.

With this emphasis on the shared material of stone as the object of transformation, it might be unclear why the opportunity was not taken to depict a larger mass of rock in Peter's scene to balance the large tomb. Certainly in scenes of Moses or Peter striking the rock in catacomb paintings, the rock is a larger, more monumental mass (figs. 2.41 and 2.42). On a

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[157] Elsner (2012) and Platt (2012) and (2017) for sarcophagi and ideas of framing.
[158] Jensen (2011a) 7.
[159] As the column on the sarcophagus of Sabinus was seen to play a part in the furnace scene on the short side (Chapter 2.3), so Peter's water is visible at the edge of the scene of Adam and Eve in Eden. Just as the salvation achieved by Christ was retrospectively applied to the three Hebrews, so the baptism performed by Peter is at least made present at the time of the Fall, juxtaposing the fall of humankind with its redemption.
[160] See Chapter 2.1, on how the casket framed by Peter and Lazarus was topped by a lid framed by a tree and vine, making explicit the life-giving meaning.
[161] *RS* I 144; I am grateful to Dr John Mandsager for this suggestion. Cf. *RS* I 682, *RS* I 993, *RS* II 123; cf. *RS* I 11 for the manger on one side of the lid opposite both Jonah scenes on the other.

gold glass medallion (fig. 2.18), structured by the repeating gestures of Christ's staff, Lazarus lies against a rock that is identical to Peter's, clearly linking the two.[162] Yet on sarcophagi, Peter strikes a small, circular rock confined to the top corner; there is no obvious reason why this small rock is better suited to represent the prison location of Peter's scene.

The reason for this depiction is surely to present the rock as akin to a capital, with the flow of water forming the column below – just as is found opposite on a smaller scale on the tomb of Lazarus. The column's spiralling fluting is echoed in the flowing waves of the water opposite. These twin pillars at either end of the sarcophagus take the exact positions of framing columns on earlier sarcophagi, each visible from their respective short ends, as just seen on the sarcophagus of Sabinus (fig. 2.29b and c). Not only are the material emphases of the Peter and Lazarus scenes appropriate for these framing positions, but they contain within them the essence of what such support figures embodied, the original architectural support of the column.

Just as the small reliefs on the tomb could appear to foretell events on a larger scale beyond, the small fluted column prefigures the later column of water in the matching position. As the traditional wreath was given new significance, so fluted columns can now be interpreted as covert baptismal symbols; perhaps they always had been, and only with the dawning of Christianity can their full meaning be seen clearly.

The two fluted columns of Lazarus's tomb can now be understood contributing to the tomb as a microcosm of the sarcophagus, which itself is framed by two 'columns'. Lazarus stands in the centre of his tomb, head in line with the capitals and feet with the bases, as the orant is found in the centre of the sarcophagus, herself with sculptural connotations. It has been seen how the small panel on Lazarus's tomb could look like one of the framing panels on sarcophagi, and how Lazarus's tomb was tied to the tomb as a whole partly through the anchoring of these panels in the same end corners. This connection between tomb and sarcophagus is multiplied further by the fact that Lazarus's tomb itself acts as one half of a supportive frame. Most simply, the emphasis on stone draws attention to the material that unites tomb and sarcophagus; both are carved from exactly the same piece of marble, which makes them hard to disentangle conceptually.

Caryatids in a more literal sense might appear to dwindle in the Christian period, but the recurring frame of Lazarus and Peter indicates that the visual idea was still latent, and could be exploited to new effect through the connotations of the end positions and certain cues

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[162] Walker (2017) 131f, no. 3. Cf. Spier (2007) 237-8, no. 60 for a fifth-century ivory panel depicting the rock miracle opposite a doorway: both doorway and rock are of the same height and both appear like rounded arches; British Museum, inv. MME 1856.06-23.9.

such as the upward gestures and material theme. A sarcophagus in Zaragoza, thought to be a copy of Roman works or even made in Rome, in fact still employs the caryatid motif in a more traditional manner (fig. 2.49).[163] A frieze of draped biblical figures, such as Jesus healing the bleeding woman and turning water into wine, is framed by largely nude figures, facing diagonally from the corners, and raising their arms to support the entablature on their palms.[164] The central position also stands out through the raised arm of the female figure. Though a rare survival, this example helps to illustrate the survival of the support figure motif in the visual repertoire of sarcophagus construction, and in the mind of the Christian viewer of sarcophagi.[165]

2.4.1. Mobile materiality

These rocky scenes play on the material of the sarcophagus itself, but are particularly ironic in these corner panels. They play the role of historically structural supports that in fact threaten the structural integrity of the monument, by depicting scenes of impenetrable rock breaking down. Both edifices of tomb and jail should imprison their occupants, but with the strategic application of the staffs of Jesus and Peter, against nature they produce life and either physically or spiritually liberate the trapped men. The potential permeability of the stone of the sarcophagus is a theme well-established on early sarcophagi.[166]

On frieze types, the stream of water runs down the outer edge of the sarcophagus (e.g. fig. 2.32) which can make the edge of the coffin seem dramatically wavy and fluid. Water is possibly the least supportive structural element that could be imagined as a framing device, undermining the solidity and stability of the monument. As seen previously, unstable choices for figural supports have earlier precedents.[167]

The stone that Jesus commands to release life is the same stone as the real-life coffin; the rock that Peter strikes to release baptismal water is the same rock as the sarcophagus. The individual miracle of turning rock into water has a wider effect spreading out into the frame of the stone casket, appearing to turn the hard marble into something soft, slippery and highly mobile. The stone comes to life and becomes an active participant in the

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[163] Sotomayor (1962) 29; Koch (2000) 522 n15; Dresken-Weiland (1997) 20f believes it is Roman.
[164] The right side is damaged, but shows a similar body to the left hand figure; it is currently displayed with modern restoration of a caryatid on the right.
[165] See also Chapter 1.3.1 and Fig. 1.46 on architectonic orants in catacomb painting.
[166] Platt (2012), Elsner (2012) esp. 185-6.
[167] See Chapter 1.1.1.

transformation, with the potential to release life just as do Lazarus's tomb and the prison rock.[168]

When the tomb of Lazarus is depicted in the upper register of a sarcophagus with the rock miracle underneath, like the Two Brothers sarcophagus (fig. 2.33), the sequence implies the dissolving of the tomb from a highly contrived marble structure back into something rough and natural.[169] On the Ludovisi sarcophagus (fig. 2.37), the way in which the sister Martha crouches under the tomb, in the same way that the two soldiers crouch under the water to be baptised, extends the metaphor of transformation to the relatives of the deceased like herself: as the stone of the tomb is dissolved and the dead man is brought to life, the sister is transformed from mourning to rejoicing. This is especially notable on this sarcophagus, with the emphatic theme of doubling: the central couple, Psyche and Cupid, two cupids and cockerels on the plinth, and the overall form with two registers of decoration extending even to the strigillation, with coloured veins running through the marble at the centre point of each register. Three of the outer panels each feature two figures as objects of divine salvation: Lazarus and Martha, the two soldiers, and the two figures of Ezekiel's vision. This doubling theme was well-suited for a tomb containing a married couple.

Peter's role in binding ($\delta\acute{\epsilon}\omega$) and loosing ($\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\omega$), important earlier in the interpretation of Peter opposite Lazarus, could be particularly evoked by the rock miracle. In the text it refers primarily to Peter's teaching authority on decisions over whether something was to be forbidden or allowed (such as Peter's decision to relax Jewish dietary laws in Acts 10), but Peter's 'releasing' of water from the rock, 'setting free' the souls of the baptised, and 'dissolving' of the stone, all nuances of the verb $\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\omega$, could all evoke Jesus' image of Peter as the rock with the power to grant freedom. Tertullian applies this passage to the binding and loosing of souls when he says that Ananias, the selfish Christian of Acts who held on to some of his money instead of sharing all with the community and fell down dead, was "bound with the bond of death" by Peter.[170] Tertullian also says that Peter unbarred "the entrance to the heavenly kingdom" with baptism.[171] There seems to be little issue then with applying this passage to the rite of baptism and the fate of souls, as on sarcophagi. Depicting Peter in the act of loosening the constrictions of the tomb, metaphorically through baptism and materially, could give the sense of a guarantee for the deceased, continually invoking Peter's presence and assistance. The subversive stability of the rock miracle scene on

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[168] Cf. Kiilerich (1999) 137 on how the foreshortening of the angels on the Sariguzel sarcophagus (375-400) makes it appear they are freeing themselves from the stone.
[169] *RS* I 45.
[170] *De pudicitia* 21.11, trans. Thelwall; Acts 4.32-5.11.
[171] Scenes of Peter with the keys of this passage appear on later-fourth-century sarcophagi; Wilpert (1929-36) 172-3, Koch (2000) 171.

sarcophagi can be matched by Peter's role as the foundation of the church that can either bind or set loose.

When the water miracle is integrated into strigillated fluting on the sarcophagus (fig. 2.44), Peter often faces the other way so that the water runs down next to the adjacent strigillated panel. This must help to reflect back on the stone of the whole coffin. A strigillated sarcophagus in the Vatican pairs the miracle of Peter with Jesus' miracle at Cana (fig. 2.50).[172] Here the rock is less prominent, so that Peter's staff is pointed at the moulding while the water flows from the same point as the strigillation (fig. 2.50b). The lack of outer border to the strigillation encourages the blurring between flowing water and architectural ornament, which spreads across the boundary into the figural panel. The division between figure and ornament is eroded. Simultaneously, Jesus points to the jars at the base of the field, accomplishing his own watery transformation (fig. 2.50c). The rock emits water against nature, while the stone jars are designed to dispense water, but will be turned to another use. The water of Peter's scene is borne along the sarcophagus in the ripples of strigillation, flowing down to the water jars that sit in line with the lower moulding. The whole casket becomes fluid and life-giving, framed by transformative miracles that reverberate into solid stone.

When the tomb of Lazarus is placed opposite the rock miracle on strigillated types, the strigillation that runs into the fluted water simultaneously runs into the fluted column on the other side. This explicitly recalls what was discussed previously regarding the dual associations of strigillation as being dynamic, illusory and echoing natural forms on the one hand, and on the other carrying strong architectural associations of solidity and artifice.[173] It extends the juxtaposition of strigillated columns and strigillated panels to its logical conclusion: from a monumental column, to the partly architectural, partly shimmering effect of strigillated panels, to the purported naturalism of flowing water. The stone carved into shimmering waves that start to blur our understanding of the solid object is the perfect counterpart to a pair of miracles that blur our understanding of rock as solid, and stone tombs as sealed, lasting monuments.

While on one level of representation we have seen good reason to view the water in Peter's miracle as structurally destabilising, on the other hand it is much more constructive. The transformation of rock into water is of course underpinned by the inherent irony that the apparent water is in fact still made of marble, as is 'the rock' of Peter himself. The juxtaposition of the column of water opposite the column of a tomb deliberately plays with

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[172] *RS* I 73.
[173] See Chapter 1.2.

the fact that water spouting from a carved rock is itself carved in stone; the folds that are carved to evoke movement ironically end up recalling the ridges of a very solid marble column. The rock miracle holds this tension between mobilising transformation, and petrifying memorialisation; narratively the rock is struck open and pours out rushing water, while visually the water is solidified into static tomb decoration. The carving flips back and forth between liquid and solid in our minds, as the strigillation flips between illusory blurring and solid stone. The ambivalence of the image between strength and weakness is, as it happens, very fitting in a Christian context. In a Christian worldview, the dynamics of power and strength are to be inverted.[174] Paul reports how his physical disability makes him all the more suitable a dwelling place for the spirit of God and receptacle of undeserved grace:

> "'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me… for whenever I am weak, then I am strong."[175]

The idea that a strong structural support could be created out of what appeared weak at first glance would be completely appropriate for a faith in which death led to life and suffering to salvation.

Since the water was seen to form a column, Peter's miraculous act itself can be interpreted as analogous to another kind of transformation of rock, the art of carving. In the motif, rough rock is transformed with a tool into living water, or rather, a stone representation of something living. This is a transfiguration which is equal to the art of depicting the scene on the sarcophagus in the first place, where rough rock is transformed by the application of a tool into a life-like carving. The fact that this carving also echoes the architectural forms of columns and strigillation only serves to underline the inherent artificiality of the depiction.

The depicted miracle thus seems to play a part in the carving of the sarcophagus itself; it is ensuring the continuation or preservation of the memory of the deceased, at the same time that the baptismal meaning of the miracle ensures the preservation of their very soul – as well as their remembrance as a good Christian, of course. Two kinds of preservation are at stake, eternal salvation and earthly memory, a dichotomy that is also strongly reflected in later fourth-century epitaphs, proclaiming that their soul has gone to heaven, while their good name will remain here.[176]

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[174] Cf. Matthew 5.1-12, 20.16, 20.25-28, 23.12, Luke 1.52-53, etc.
[175] 2 Corinthians 12.9-10.
[176] On epitaphs, see Chapter 4.1.

The back face of a four-sided sarcophagus in Campovalano (fig. 2.51, now missing the right-hand panels) situates the rock miracle above the creation of Eve, rendered as a seated God gesturing with a 'modelling rod' to a statue-like figure on a rocky base.[177] The female figure relates nicely to the female orant in the uppermost central panel. The figure of Christ below her, meanwhile, reappears in a supporting role in both scenes on the left, at the right of the field. The doubling of Christ in these two scenes implies similar parallels to be made between the other figures, which means that rocky Peter is the counterpoint of the statuesque Eve below. Again, the waves of the stream are echoed in the strigillation, portraying the baptism as an equally contrived art of stone-working. The idea of Peter's rock miracle as a symbolic carving scene is matched by the depiction of Creation almost as if carving out of rock, both supervised by Christ. The creation of Eve corresponds to earlier pagan depictions of the creation of man on sarcophagi as an act of sculpting (fig. 1.16). Since baptism into the body of Christ meant a new creation for Paul, it is fitting that it too finds expression as an act of creative carving.[178]

What makes these choices particularly exciting in this case is that the inscription tells us that this sarcophagus belonged to a marble dealer, Aurelius Andronicus, originally from Nicomedia in Asia Minor and buried with his wife.[179] Huskinson cites this sarcophagus, with its Greek-style four-sided decoration, as an example of a personal request to honour the background of the client, and the *RS* entry is in no doubt that it was made to order.[180] The choice of rock-carving scenes would be especially fitting as personal selections for a couple whose business was stone; it would not be unexpected that a dealer in marble would take particular interest in the marble monument for his final resting place. The concept of the rock-striking as a rock-carving, positioned above the carving of a statue, therefore has further corroboration.

Since it takes place in the city of Rome, Peter's miracle can symbolise the Empire's conversion to Christianity, but also portrays the foundations of Rome itself as producing the miraculous living water. Although the story is set while Peter is imprisoned by the Roman authorities, focusing on this moment in the context of the intense materialistic focus on the rock serves the idea of Rome as the source of civilisation. Scenes like this one from the apocryphal cycle of Peter are far more popular in Rome than anywhere else, due to Peter's association with the city.[181] On the Campovalano casket, the rock of Rome from which the

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[177] *RS* II 101; Ferrua (1980-2) 383-6.
[178] 2 Corinthians 5.17: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"
[179] See Ferrua (1980-2) 385 on the inscription.
[180] Huskinson (2015) 27; *RS* II 101.
[181] Dresken-Weiland (2013) 251-2.

waters flow is positioned above the throne of God, conveying the idea of Rome as the source of civilisation and seat of divine authority. It has been suggested that this strigillated side, a particular feature of the metropolitan sarcophagi, is a Roman introduction to the otherwise Asiatic four-sided design.[182] The idea of Peter's miracle in the top left as an important moment in the heritage of Rome is implied in the way the orant turns in prayer towards it, in a parallel relationship to how Jesus in the lower level gestures towards the Old Testament scene to the left for his own statuesque origin narrative. The rock-miracle forms a literal pillar of Roman Christianity, completing the work started by Jesus in the rock of Rome itself.

The idea of the rock-miracle as a column, combined with the Roman emphasis of the scene, is a reminder of how classical sculpture had also long been a sign of Roman civilisation. Imperial statuary and columnar architecture had long signalled the spread of Rome across the empire. By portraying baptism as akin to column-carving, the divine creative force represented in baptism ends up being subtly aligned with the civilising power of empire. Both the gospel and imperial project could be framed as the taming of gentiles according to divine will, symbolised by the creation of classical sculpture out of untamed nature. Imperial power seems to be somewhat unsettlingly sanctioned by divine will and destiny – an old Roman message, reformulated for a new Rome.

This kind of sarcophagus memorialises transformation, a radical new execution of an established theme of the sarcophagus as a container for the transformation of the body. It goes further by commemorating its own transformation, its own stone freezing actors in positions of subverting and transforming that stone. It captures the same idea as a second-century gravestone of a sculptor, depicted ironically in the act of sculpting his own tomb (fig. 2.52). The two founders of Roman Christianity are sculpted as eternally working their miracles on the sarcophagus and on the deceased person within. The balance of transformation preserved forever seems to apply the metaphor of perpetual baptism imagined by Tertullian: "nor have we safety in any other way than by *permanently abiding in water*".[183] The way strigillation is used to send waves of baptismal waters across the sarcophagus, while also being firmly solid and architectural, encapsulates this idea.

Jesus the Cornerstone and Peter the rock of the church form the twin foundations of Roman Christian identity on these sarcophagi. At the same time, they undermine the foundation of the tomb itself by focusing on moments when rock is being opened and stone is being rolled away. Building Peter and Jesus into the main supports for the deceased conveys the idea

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[182] Sansoni (1969) 88 on the strigillated side as characteristically Roman.
[183] Tertullian, *De baptismo* I, trans. Thelwall, emphasis added.

visually that because of them, death and the tomb are crumbling away. They build up the foundation of heavenly salvation while breaking down the earthly tomb. The old idea of the tomb is deconstructed, and rebuilt with a new kind of transformational pillar as its foundation.

On a theological level, the choice of scenes and the medium of marble in a Christian funerary context is completely appropriate. The rite of baptism that accompanies acceptance of Christ has accomplished the believer's salvation. The ritual dying and rising of baptism enacts the anticipated second death and resurrection of the body. Both baptism and resurrection therefore have broken down the tomb; it is very appropriate that the motifs chosen to depict these acts should attempt to enact that in a self-consciously material way. The material effect of Jesus' death and the consequences for believers are made plain in Matthew:

> "The earth shook, and the rocks (πέτραι) were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many."[184]

Funerary monuments with Peter splitting open the rock, opposite a tomb, could easily recall this episode, and make clear that the sleeping occupants will also emerge at the final resurrection. While this miraculous, self-referentially materialistic reading seems grounded in a specifically Christian relationship with the body and the material world, it also shares much with late antique concerns for specific media and materiality that we have seen, not to mention the reuse of classical remains.

2.4.2. Memory and salvation

The interest in the physical process of memorialisation as a way of describing salvation can be seen elsewhere, as in the final two case studies in this section; one featuring Lazarus and Peter, and another with a unique theme that also juxtaposes water and the statuesque. Firstly, a double register frieze sarcophagus front in the Vatican with the Lazarus and Peter pair (fig. 2.53) has an unfinished portion of stone, roughly sketched out as three seasonal genii (fig. 2.53b).[185] This could be dismissed as rushed work by the sculptor, which was assumed in the past for the large number of unfinished portrait heads on Roman sarcophagi, until more

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[184] Matthew 27.52-3.
[185] *RS* I 39.

recent scholarly work has interpreted them as deliberate choices.[186] This long-standing tradition of unfinished areas on sarcophagi might cause us to reassess the unfinished genii on this coffin front.

Only the genii have been left in this very lightly worked state; they stand out from the surrounding biblical scenes, and the adjoining deeply carved portrait tondo. Unlike other cases of unfinished areas (e.g. fig. 3.1), the genii are clearly recognisable, just carved in very shallow relief. The rough rock Moses stands on is directly above this roughly worked area. Even if this area was only carved shallowly due to a problem with the stone, it is an interesting choice to carve seasonal figures on this spot, rather than further biblical figures as would be usual. At some point, it must have been a compositional choice.

Elsner has recently incorporated unfinished portraits into an analysis of the Roman sarcophagus as a medium preoccupied with nature and artifice, as bound up in issues of life, death, and memory.[187] The fact that it is the seasons that are left unfinished could make a statement about time standing still amidst a Christian programme of salvation, playing on the viewer's memory of unfinished heads as representing absence and loss; here it is passing time that is absent, blurred out.

The theme of the rest of the decorative programme is one of transformative materiality, hinging on the miracles of Lazarus and Peter on the right edge, leading a flurry of other figures accomplishing miracles of bodies and matter. As we have seen, these depictions of miracles on stone monuments are entwined with issues of stone-carving and memory-making. While 'carving' out their transformations of stone, the biblical heroes could be seen as neglecting the seasonal figures, who remain not fully carved. Peter and the many Jesuses release life from rock, stone tomb, stone jars; but the narrative of salvation leaves time itself trapped in stone. The deceased couple adjoining in their well-defined tondo are thus pictured in a realm outside of change and decay, where the seasons do not move and time stands still, "for the old order of things has passed away".[188]

We could read further, and incorporate the figures either side of the seasonal section into the intramedial narrative. Peter is being led by his guards towards the seasons and gestures in their direction; following the flow from left to right, he could be about to enter or cross the rough section. Daniel, emerging between the lions, looks in the same direction away from the seasons. Perhaps Peter being led to his martyrdom represents the confrontation of humankind with the prospect of death, while Daniel testifies to resurrection, newly emerged

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[186] Newby (2011).
[187] Elsner (2018b).
[188] Revelation 21.4.

on different levels from the lion's den, the tomb, and the unfinished stone. Daniel is the only figure with the same haircut as the male portrait, while the other figure in the same pose, the orant, corresponds to the female portrait.

Secondly, a watery scene on a sarcophagus front from San Callisto also seems to play with this elision between material memorial and Christian salvation, with a unique scene of Jesus walking on the water (fig. 2.54).[189] In the likely original centre of the casket is the boat, already examined as a type for the sarcophagus, out of which Peter has stepped to try to join Jesus on the left. Jesus has taken Peter's hand to pull him from the waves, and in the relief he is helping him to emerge from the blurring background of water. Jesus saves Peter from oblivion on two levels, narratively by preventing him drowning, and visually by pulling his likeness back into view and preserving him in stone – him whose name meant 'rock'. The walking on water equates Jesus with the God of the Old Testament, whose spirit "swept over the face of the waters" of chaos prior to Creation, and according to Job, the God "who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the Sea".[190] Walking on water thus signals the creative power of God, a significance also brought out in the story by rescuing Peter from death, and visually on the sarcophagus by rescuing Peter's image.

Moreover, Jesus stands on the far left in the position of a support. Ironically, although we know he is standing on water and should be in the most precarious position, he is the most stable, alongside sinking Peter and the storm-tossed boat. Jesus as sculptural support for the casket is a literal support for Peter and also for the disciples when he calms the storm. As sculptural support, it is appropriate that he pulls Peter back into sculptable view. Peter calls on Jesus and is supported and saved; the deceased invokes Jesus by having him physically support them in death, with the same expectation of salvation. This salvation is spiritual, but it is conveyed through reliance on traditional ideas of the preservation of memory. Ironically in a funerary setting, in Matthew and Mark, the disciples fear that Jesus is "a ghost" when they first see him (φάντασμά/fantasma); this adds a familiar ambiguous twist to the nature of the support.

This unique scene does feature at the start of the epitaph composed for himself by Damasus, the pope who sponsored the monumentalisation of the martyr cult in Rome in the fourth century:

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[189] *RS* I 365. Matthew 14.22-34 (cf. Mark 6.45-53, John 6.15-21).
[190] Genesis 1.2, Job 9.8. In this passage Job laments that there is no mediator between him and an almighty God, that God is not able to suffer as a mortal as he does; this passage is therefore christologically significant, with Jesus later being seen as the mediator and how God suffered as a human. In all three gospel versions of the walking on water, Jesus calls out to the disciples with "I am (ἐγώ εἰμι)", echoing how God identifies himself to Moses in Exodus 3.14 from the burning bush: "I am who I am" (LXX: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν).

qui gradiens pelagi fluctus conpressit amaros,

vivere qui prestat morientia semina terrae,

solvere qui potuit letalia vincula mortis

post tenebras, fratrem post tertia lumina solis

ad superos iterum martae donare sorori,

post cineres damasum faciet quia surgere credo.

He who walking along trod down the sea's briny waves,

who ensures that earth's dying seeds live on,

who could loose the fatal chains of death

after the final darkness, after three days restore a brother

to the living for Martha, his sister,

he, I believe, will ensure that Damasus rises after he is ashes.[191]

The verb "*conpressit*" means to close or to shut in, which corresponds to the original meaning of the walking on water in Jewish thought; the sea represented chaos or evil, and Jesus walking atop it was to triumph over it.[192] The role of Jesus shutting in the waters of chaos thus quite neatly corresponds to his visual role on the sarcophagus as a support that contains the chaotic waters in the centre of the sarcophagus. The image of treading down or confining is contrasted with the following expressions of loosening chains and raising up. Damasus combines this watery image with the resurrection of Lazarus, similarly to the pairing of Lazarus and the watery miracle of Peter on other sarcophagi.[193] The hope that as Lazarus was raised, so will he be, expresses the meaning of the scene on sarcophagi.

The expression of salvation in terms of a traditional kind of commemoration draws a link between preservation in heaven and on earth, one that seems to parallel Peter's creation of a tomb structure out of a saving rite. In Pollman's analysis of a Byzantine cento, she argues that the borrowing of existing frameworks for a Christian purpose parallels how God accomplishes salvation; God uses "human structures" and redeems them.[194] This seems to

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[191] *ICUR* IV 12418, trans. Trout (2015a) 105-6, no. 12. See Chapter 4.1.2 on Damasus's elogia.
[192] Cf. Barton and Muddiman (2001) 863. Further significance includes the parallel with Joshua crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land in Joshua 3.1-4.24 (Jesus' name in Hebrew, Jeshua, is a derivative of Joshua, and the Jordan flowed through the sea of Galilee that Jesus is walking on) - itself explicitly recalling Moses crossing the Red Sea in Exodus 14; cubiculum C in the Priscilla catacomb has niches with paintings of crossing the Red Sea and Joshua leading the Israelites into the Promised Land (Tronzo (1986) figs 2 and 4). On the crossing of the Red Sea on late-fourth-century sarcophagi, see Chapter 3.3.
[193] Ferrua in *ICUR* IV 12418 proposed that lines 3-4 could refer to Christ's resurrection, 4-5 to Lazarus's.
[194] Pollman (2007) 140-57, also (1997).

match what the sarcophagi are doing: by turning existing frameworks to a new message, they redeem traditional visual culture at the same time as transforming the tomb. A relationship between materiality and spirituality is inherent in a religion founded on the basis of the Incarnation, in which God became human to save humankind, and material rituals involving bread, wine, and water have spiritual implications.[195] However when the material is aligned with Rome as in the rock miracle, salvation working through the material world becomes salvation working through Rome. Though there are just hints of this conflation here, this will be more significant in the next chapter.

2.5. Biblical sarcophagi and late antique aesthetics

We might wonder if viewers of Christian sarcophagi would not experience some form of cognitive dissonance when faced with scene after scene proclaiming new birth, healing and resurrection, but depicted on a very big, solid, and expensive marble tomb that seems to testify to the opposite. It raises questions about how patrons could reconcile their belief in resurrection with traditional commemoration that could show off their status, wealth and education, and whether this new repertoire of imagery had the potential to undermine the traditional nature of the memorial. The interpretation of just two of these scenes in context has indicated that attitudes to the tomb were indeed altered, uniting with a late antique interest in materiality to enable the substance of the tomb to take part in its subversive message, in a way that could still take part in elite display.

It is significant that sarcophagi depicting miracles of saving transformation, like rock into water, water into wine, and multiplying loaves, are at the same time so concerned with their own materiality. Transformations were also commonplace in Greek and Roman myth, but we do not find them depicted to such a dazzling extent on pre-Christian sarcophagi. Miracles by definition concern the subversion of the material world, and unlike for earlier mythology, were for Christians grounded in and centred around one historical, material life, not to mention the collections of relics that would increase over the century.[196] The late antique taste for materiality that emerges with a similar ironic playfulness across other media takes on a special significance in a funerary context around Christian ideas of the body. Cramming the stone with self-consciously material transformations could be seen as analogous to the effect of strigillation, in blurring the stone at the same time as highlighting its architectural nature. It has an almost magical effect, carving transformation into every square inch of

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[195] Cf. Squire (2011) 167-86; Crowley (2018).
[196] Cf. Elsner (2000) for the relationship between relics and late antique aesthetics.

space, so that the casket almost disappears under the collective weight of destabilising miracles eating into its surface.

A sense of playful materiality has been recognised in other late antique media; it is an aesthetic embedded in a traditional elite Roman culture, one that delighted in visual puns and coded references.[197] Sarcophagus reliefs too play visual games to capture the interest of the educated viewer, and ultimately reflect back on the erudition of the deceased and their family as engaged inheritors of Roman culture. The healing of the blind man could be the emblematic miracle of Christian sarcophagi: a miracle of viewing accomplished through materiality.

The example of the Traprain Law ewer discussed at the start of this chapter (fig. 2.3) can illustrate this self-referential materiality at play in another expensive medium, conditioning the depictions.[198] In the scene of the rock miracle, rather than drinking directly from the miraculous fountain or using their hands as in wall painting or on sarcophagi, the Israelites are unusually catching the water in cups. This is evidently a self-referential touch, for a vessel to be used to fill up similar cups. Assuming the base of the handle was detached from the most damaged part to the right of the Fall, the wine would have poured from the part of the lip above the rock, with Moses's staff pointing in the same direction; the pourer of the wine from silver into a cup becomes the mirror of Moses pouring water from the rock into cups.

The rock also takes an unusual form: whereas usually on sarcophagi it is a rocky mound the height of a person, here it appears to be in the shape of a shell at the top of the field. This is significant since there are many examples of shell-shaped dining utensils in silver from previous centuries, perhaps for washing hands. Shells are particularly associated with the iconography of grooming and bathing in general, as on the Projecta Casket, which is important as this miracle scene was understood as a type for Christian baptism, with all its associations with cleansing and purifying. Even today some churches use a shell-shaped scoop to pour water onto the head of the person being baptised. This depiction of the scene on the ewer playfully includes details evoking the spheres of both dining and washing, situating the rite of baptism within both Christian and secular frames of reference.

If the damaged scene on the ewer is indeed the Betrayal of Jesus, it would foreground further metallic references. In Matthew, the same gospel that includes the story of the Magi shown here, the Betrayal is framed by the bribery of Judas with silver – first when he accepts the

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[197] Kiilerich (2016). See Chapter 4.2 on expensive wall hangings whose iconography reflects back on themes of weaving, fabric and flexibility, as a part of a distinctive late antique aesthetic.
[198] See Chapter 2.1.

thirty pieces of silver from the high priests, and then afterwards when full of remorse he throws the silver back into the temple.[199] The silver is particularly important in Matthew's account as it is the key element linking the episode back to the Old Testament prophetic actions which foreshadow it.[200] A scene of the betrayal on the silver ewer therefore, coming after Matthew's nativity scene, might recall for an attentive viewer the silver with which Jesus' life was bought, such an important feature of Matthew's Passion narrative. On a serving vessel, it also resonates with the Last Supper, which is sandwiched with the betrayal in between the silver passages; the wine held in the ewer suddenly recalls the wine drunk by Jesus and his disciples, while the silver vessel recalls the silver that paid for the blood that the Last Supper wine represents.[201] The price of Jesus' life was silver, and the price to redeem ours was his blood, represented by the wine.

In the same way that the imagery on sarcophagus reliefs is particularly preoccupied with stone and statues, and textiles are particularly concerned with depictions of clothing and themes of covering and uncovering, silverware seems to have a special interest in metal, and especially metal vessels on tableware.[202] Sarcophagi equally took part in the aesthetic of self-conscious materiality of late Roman art. As Kiilerich has intimated, drawing attention to materiality was not just part and parcel of complex, reflexive readings, but also ultimately drawing attention to what was an expensive material, whether silver, textile, or marble.[203]

Analysis of these scenes has provided a way of thinking about the decorative choices of sarcophagus reliefs as being preoccupied with their own material. Their significance clearly lies not just in pointing to biblical texts and independent theological interpretation of those texts, but is irretrievably wrapped up in and shaped by the artistic medium in which they are presented. The view taken that the images are executed with just enough details to render them recognisable and convey the essentials of the biblical story, only captures half the picture. Huskinson's summary of the scholarly opinion that the ideological links are clear to see and present their meaning "in an uncomplicated way" – with special reference to the pairing of Lazarus and Peter striking the rock as equalling the simple message of baptism to

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[199] Matthew 26.14-16, 47-50, 27.3-10.

[200] Zechariah (11.12-13) throws thirty pieces of silver into the temple as Judas does in Matthew, and Jeremiah (32) buys a field with silver as the high priests do in Matthew. Amos (2.6) also says that the transgressions of Israel include that "they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals" – the Vulgate translation ("*pro eo quod vendiderit argento iustum et pauperem pro calciamentis*") creates a metallic chiasmus of "*argento*" and "*calciamentis*", which recalls 'lead'.

[201] Matthew 26.17-30.

[202] Fourth-century dishes from the Mildenhall Treasure depict small vessels, as does the different kind of container of the Projecta Casket. Achilles on Skyros was a popular theme for silver plate, featuring a choice between metal weapons and jewellery; cf. Avisseau-Brouster and Colonna (2017) 193-7, no.54 with a pile of weapons in the foreground.

[203] Kiilerich (2016) 44, 47, 54.

new life – must equally be to underestimate the complexity of the material.[204] Scholars from a textual background sometimes appreciate this complexity better, like Jensen who notes that each scene has a different significance in different arrangements.[205] The images are not important only insofar as they point to texts, but tell their own story that must be interpreted as any other piece of artistic and material culture, on their own terms.

In context we can see how different combinations of biblical images could interact in different ways with each other, and with other decorative elements like traditional imagery and portraits. It is evidently not the case that these are images with "no place for… ambiguities" and a "definite… message": we have seen playful irony at different levels of accessibility, which still requires a very active viewer, with room for multiple connections and interpretations.[206] A scene might be unquestionably identified as the multiplication of loaves, but the range of nuances depends on the context, such as the interaction with the seasonal imagery on the lid of Claudianus's sarcophagus. The significance of the biblical imagery is therefore not as stable as sometimes assumed. Zanker and Ewald acknowledge the ambiguity in meanings, while claiming that Christian sarcophagi no longer evoke the merits of the dead.[207] Seen as part of a culture of paideia however, such ambiguity is fundamentally linked to praise of the deceased.[208]

From early on, biblical stories were introduced and presented as part of a framework of intellectual culture, which fits with the idea that they were used to show off a certain kind of *paideia*. One of the earliest prominent biblical scenes on a sarcophagus, the first surviving sculptural representation of the raising of Lazarus, occurs in a philosophical context.[209] On the late-third-century loculus plaque for the grave of a child (fig. 2.46), Jesus is shown dressed as a philosopher and holding a scroll while resurrecting Lazarus; the counterpoint scene on the other side of the central portrait depicts a similarly-represented philosopher but this time seated: perhaps Jesus again, but in this early period the figure could be equally interpreted traditionally.[210] Even Jesus raising Lazarus could appear to the uninitiated to be a generic philosopher-type character using his staff to magically awaken an entombed corpse.[211] On the two ends are represented a learned man and woman.

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[204] Huskinson (2015) 216.
[205] Jensen (2000) 67.
[206] Huskinson (2015) 209.
[207] Zanker and Ewald (2012) 265.
[208] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.9: "Since, then, we may draw several meanings, as we do from what is expressed in veiled form, such being the case, the ignorant and unlearned man fails."
[209] Weitzmann (1979) 413 for dating.
[210] *RS* I 811.
[211] Cf. Albertson (1995) on possible influence of Isiac scene of Hermes Psychopompos.

The biblical stories lend themselves to narrative, but in elite art were in fact usually abbreviated and crammed together with others. Brilliant has characterised the change in viewing through the history of sarcophagi reliefs in general, from one of reading *through* a narrative to reading *out* from more symbolic elements, relying on the skills of the observer.[212] As is typical of the culture of *paideia*, a single detail or snapshot challenges the viewer to recall the rest of the story from their bank of cultural and literary knowledge, and find the links with the surrounding scenes.

It is clear that this kind of art is not a 'visual text' for the illiterate, as some church fathers argued for in churches; in more affluent funerary and domestic contexts, this was clearly an art influenced by *paideia*. It provided an opportunity for showing off one's knowledge by deciphering several layers of meaning and references, including the concept of typological model and fulfilment. This way of viewing still relied on the analytic methods of the schools; to interpret them, you must arguably be acquainted with not just the biblical texts but also the educated system of reading and linking images. Although typological exegesis could be expounded to the lower classes in sermons, comprehending that typology in visual art may have needed skills acquired through traditional education and a wider engagement with classical culture.[213] Elsner has shown that Christian imagery remains indebted to past ways of reading sarcophagus motifs, in terms of viewing from left to right and from the centre out; but the reliance of Christian monuments on pre-existing frameworks seems to go even further.[214] Interpreting these sculptural collections relied on ways of viewing inherited from Graeco-Roman culture, not just Christian exegesis of texts.

Educated viewers familiar with using anthologies and gnomologies would be used to seeing fragments of texts grouped together under various themes. The paratactic arrangements of these sarcophagi could play on expectations for a theme to explain a particular selection of fragments, and challenge viewers to name the unifying theme for themselves. Some sarcophagi could display a coherent programme of typological meaning through carefully selected and ordered biblical stories, while others could copy the overall impression and style without attempting a more complex unifying theme. In the wide range of stories from the Old and New Testaments grouped together on Christian sarcophagi, there is a similar sense of wanting to display something of the full range of the literary tradition evident elsewhere in sculpture collections, for example. The trend towards increasing literary complexity and desire for exhaustivity in late antique literature also finds a parallel in the

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[212] Brilliant (1984) 164. Also Grabar (1968) 8 on catacomb paintings as image-signs appealing to the intellect; Spence (1988) 101 on ambiguities built in to texts for educated Christians; Onians (1999) 266 on training to imagine more than was seen in late antiquity.
[213] Cf. the art lessons given by Philostratus in the *Imagines*.
[214] Elsner (2012) 192.

increasing number of figures on sarcophagi, up to the late third century, and could similarly be linked to the increasingly competitive culture of *paideia* going into late antiquity.[215] According to Origen, the highest point of Christian *paideia* was the study and interpretation of the Bible.[216] Biblical imagery in elite art could also be used to demonstrate the patron's *paideia*.

2.6. Conclusion

Re-viewing the Marcus Claudianus sarcophagus with which this chapter started, the continuity in framework from Chapter 1 is clear. The central orant is not the only structural point in common with sarcophagi, but also the use of two framing motifs at either end that are not as strictly statuesque, but similarly preoccupied with their own material. Though the figures might be mistaken for one homogeneous mass of bodies, the parallels with the tripartite structure of the Velletri sarcophagus (fig. 2.12) are evident. The latter represents an early, locally produced foray into a more extensive integration of biblical imagery, and expresses more simply the underlying framework of many of the Roman sarcophagi: three stone supports with other (often also self-referential) scenes filling in. Peter and Lazarus function as discrete building blocks; the frieze is an illusion. This is important because the treatment of narrative has been seen as the greatest difference between pagan and Christian frieze sarcophagi.[217]

This chapter has focused on one main pairing, but they show the potential for the metaphor of support to be taken further. The pairing of Moses receiving the Law and Abraham sacrificing Isaac, particularly either side of a portrait *clipeus* or shell (figs. 2.53, 2.33, 2.34), was similarly explained as "purely practical" by van Woerden.[218] Alternatively, they form Christianised versions of traditional supporting cupids, which continue to support the tablets for inscriptions or *parapetasmata* on lids (figs. 2.10, 2.13, 2.24, 2.29, 2.32, 2.45). The hand of God in each scene could be seen as supporting each side of the portrait, while the settings of each scene are appropriately rocky and mountainous. Huskinson has also noted that the image under the *clipeus* often referenced funerary rituals and monuments, such as altars, plinths and columns; many Christian sarcophagi suggestively place figures here such as Daniel (fig. 2.4), seen in this chapter in terms of monumentality.[219]

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[215] Zanker and Ewald (2012) 248 on increasing number of figures.
[216] As described by his pupil Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Oratio Panegyrica* 7-15; Laistner (1951) 60-1.
[217] E.g. Huskinson (1996) 68.
[218] Speyart van Woerden (1961) 236-7. Cf. fig. 2.1 with Moses receiving the Law next to the inscription; fig. 2.16 with one next to each roundel on lid; fig. 2.48 with Abraham next to the shell.
[219] Huskinson (2015) 90-91.

The cumulative picture of figures on sarcophagi as knowingly statuesque comes down to three main factors: structure, types, and a specifically late antique materiality. Figures and scenes continued to fit into the structural framework that as we saw in the previous chapter privileged statuesque types especially at the ends, and often the middle. Despite the change in subject matter to biblical narratives, these continue to be isolated, individual scenes, clearly conceived as building blocks despite blending of the edges to create overlaps. These figures frequently either appear reminiscent of existing statue types, or at least seem designed to evoke classical sculpture in a more general way without being tied to a specific type, like heroic nudes. Finally there is the playfulness shown around ideas of stone based on biblical references and puns, iconography that is suggestive of carving, and leading juxtapositions. These aspects are interwoven, so that the material play enacted by pairs of Peter and Lazarus, for example, is particularly effective because of their structural end position.

When we bring these three lenses into focus together, it brings a new colour to our understanding of how Christians in fourth-century Rome would have viewed their monuments. While their sarcophagi have too often been treated as fundamentally different from their predecessors, on a foundational (and iconographical) level, they inherit much of their manner of interpretation, while continuing to develop the sophisticated sense of 'intramediality' in late Roman material culture. This analysis has hopefully indicated the special importance of the medium in funerary as in other late Roman art. The self-referentiality of sarcophagus reliefs means that it cannot always be helpful or appropriate to consider a particular biblical scene across all media without distinction.

This is an aesthetic that depended on an inherited conception of the sarcophagus as a monument and its structural conventions, as well as on the collective memory of classical sculptural types among Christians and non-Christians alike. It is also evident that worldly concerns like the traditional praise of the deceased and the status of their family continued to guide decorative choices. Christians in the first half of the fourth century were able to create impressively cultured monuments that situated themselves and their faith within an evolving understanding of Roman history and destiny. Within the cultural conception of sarcophagus conventions – from the structural framework, to connotations of certain positions, to the permeability of the sarcophagus as container, to self-referential statue and container motifs – Christians were able to construct meaningful monuments that spoke clearly in a familiar, playful, intramedial visual language, of a new belief that "the stone [was] rolled away".[220]

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[220] Luke 24.2; cf. Matthew 28.2, Mark 16.4, John 20.1.

Chapter Three

Pillars of the Faith: Architectural Sarcophagi, 350-400 AD

Having established the complex visual strategies and self-conscious materiality of Christian sarcophagi in the early fourth century, it remains to be seen how these ideas developed in the latter half of the century, when sarcophagi tended towards more complex architectural forms. This chapter will continue to explore the aspects of monumentality discussed so far – columns, statues, and other stone-specific materiality – and how the way this developed reveals a more confident and explicit exposition of Christianity as the fulfilment of Roman destiny.

The columnar type is the most well-known type of architectural sarcophagus, but this period saw plenty of other examples that used architecture in conspicuous new ways. As subcategories of the columnar type, Koch lists the city gate and tree types – the latter since it is an early Christian innovation to use trees in a structural way to divide the figures like columns.[1] Edmund Thomas argues that, contrary to how they have been treated in the past, columnar sarcophagi are not a separate category, since their subjects draw on all themes and motifs.[2] This chapter follows this thought by trying to situate columnar sarcophagi alongside other traditionally distinct types in the late-fourth-century, and against the background of earlier types. Other late-fourth-century types could be included as 'columnar', namely the Bethesda and Red Sea types; these are classified as frieze types by Koch, but also use architecture in further prominent ways to frame the sarcophagus. The Bethesda type uses columns and arches to frame the front as well as in the centre, to divide its scenes of the healing at the Bethesda pool on one and two registers. The Red Sea type similarly frames its narrative frieze of the Exodus crossing with architecture at either end.

This chapter will focus first on columnar sarcophagi. As with the previous chapter, it will start by looking at how connections could be construed across the reintroduction of the columnar framework, restating the argument for complexity and the necessity of close reading. While the exceptional sarcophagus of Junius Bassus has received much close scholarly attention, the analysis here will focus more on other examples that are perhaps more representative of the type in general.

It will then highlight the theme of heritage as a particular concern of these sarcophagi. It will return to the key motifs of the previous chapter, the raising of Lazarus and the rock miracle

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[1] Koch (2000) 32; 124 on innovative use of trees.
[2] E. Thomas (2011) 388-9.

of Peter, to examine how their connotations of ambivalent support and Roman civilisation play out in a much more controlled architectural setting with such Roman associations. This section will conclude with a case study on one characteristic motif of this period's columnar sarcophagi, the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, and what his depiction in this context reveals about attitudes to Roman power among the Roman Christian community.

The final section will look at the Red Sea type, one that initially appears to reflect an apparently contrasting aesthetic of a return to a single narrative across the whole of the sarcophagus front. Yet this type too has an important columnar element, and shares in the concerns with a dual Roman-Christian heritage traced up to this point.

A mid-fourth-century double-register frieze sarcophagus in the catacomb of San Sebastiano (fig. 3.1) provides a good entry point from the biblical frieze sarcophagi of the previous chapter and half-century.[3] It is full of juxtaposed biblical stories, but also breaks up the lower part of the front with four pillars. In addition to these, the scheme is full of other supportive framing elements seen previously: the tomb of Lazarus on the upper left and the brick edifice on the right; Moses and Abraham framing the portrait shell; and the cupids holding the *tabula* directly above on the lid. The four pillars beneath the Moses-Abraham and Lazarus-God pairs underscore these figures as supportive elements analogous to the columns. Below the shell, there is the traditional trough of grapes being trampled into wine jars as a further nod to self-referentiality.[4]

Depicted in the bottom left corner is the flight of Lot's family from the city of Sodom, destroyed for its sinful mistreatment of guests. The depiction of Lot is quite rare on sarcophagi, which Dulaey puts down to the story's lack of christological emphasis, which means its depiction here is likely to be evidence of a special choice.[5] The first pillar forms the city gate, and with their similar columns, the city is a type of the tomb above: while many die, the family escapes with divine assistance.[6] The way that the pillars are angled, the realm of the dead for both tomb and Sodom is behind the sarcophagus front, while the world of the living is the front relief, into which Lazarus is beckoned and Lot escapes.[7] This fits

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[3] *RS* I 188.

[4] The lower right part of the stone is very roughly carved; compared to fig. 2.53, the figures appear more unfinished than just shallowly carved and it is difficult to make out what they represent, though this does not necessarily preclude some similar sort of materialistic significance.

[5] Dulaey (1997a) 22. Cf. *RS* I 244 for one other fragmentary example.

[6] When Jesus says that the town of Capernaum will be sent to Hades (Matthew 11.23-4), he says that "on the day of judgement it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom"; potentially this link between Sodom and Hades plays a part in depicting Sodom beneath the tomb, which references the form of the gates of Hades.

[7] Also to the right of Lot, Adam and Eve are exiled from the Garden of Eden, about to exit through another archway with three-dimensional pillar. Again, Eden is to be imagined to the front, while Adam turns his back to us to leave.

well with the traditional framework of the sarcophagus traced by Toynbee, where if the Underworld is depicted on earlier sarcophagi, it is usually on the short sides rather than the front.[8]

In the context of the conspicuous materiality bound up in the depiction of Lazarus above and the supportive construction, this choice of scene is highly significant. Lot and his daughters are managing to escape, but his wife has disobeyed the command not to look back, turning into a pillar (LXX: στήλη) of salt.[9] It is a clever juxtaposition to place her next to an architectural column. In fact like the depiction of Niobe and other mythological transformations in art, Lot's wife permits a certain playfulness with visuality; is she still a living person, or has the transformation into a pillar taken place, since all the figures on the sarcophagus are in fact frozen sculptures?[10] Lot's wife (an orant) and the Jesuses all have struts on their hands, blurring the lines between who is to be considered a statue: the Vulgate translates 'pillar' as 'statue' ("statuam"), and this overlap between columns and statues was inherent to the caryatid motif.[11] This transformation is brought about by the act of looking; should we as viewers be cautious taking too lingering a look?

The example and the previous two chapters have indicated the close link between statues and columns. Edmund Thomas analyses the development of the previously close association between human body and column on sarcophagi, and concludes that there is a decline of the concept in the Roman period compared to the original Asiatic columnar sarcophagi.[12] However cases such as this treatment of Lot's wife, not to mention everything argued so far regarding figural supports, suggest otherwise.

3.1. Viewing columnar sarcophagi

The history of the columnar type of sarcophagus stretches back to Asiatic types, where their architectural form provided the framework for collections of figures such as the Labours of Heracles.[13] Their popularity rose sharply again in Rome and Arles from the mid-fourth century, with the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (fig. 3.2) being an early exceptional example, dated by its inscription to 359.[14] The overarching columnar arrangement, framing

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[8] Toynbee (1977); Platt (2017) 218-23.
[9] Genesis 19.15-26.
[10] See Chapter 1.1.1.
[11] See Chapter 1.1.1.
[12] E. Thomas (2011) 417-18.
[13] On pre-Christian columnar sarcophagi: Koch and Sichtermann (1982) 76-80, Koch (1993) 29-32, E. Thomas (2011).
[14] *RS* I 680. On early Christian columnar sarcophagi: Lawrence (1932), Koch (2000) 44-45, E. Thomas (2011) 424-426.

all scenes individually but joined together, implies a theme or unity between all niches, as with the Labours of Hercules, which are individual events within one narrative.[15]

The columnar type combines earlier ideas of an architectural frame and the excerption of narrative. It clearly shares some strategies with earlier biblical frieze types, in the arrangement of figures and scenes to create complex interpretative schemes. However the arrangements of figures between columns also have much in common with the restricted panels of figural decoration on strigillated sarcophagi; the common spiral flutes also work in a similar way to strigillation, helping to direct the eye of the viewer across the different niches to encourage comparison of juxtaposed scenes.

The columnar sarcophagus now in the church of Saint-Trophime in Arles provides plenty of opportunities for clever connections to be made across the face of the casket (fig. 3.3).[16] It is the only double-register sarcophagus to be found other than Junius Bassus's, with no pre-Christian parallels.[17] In Koch's opinion, this one is likely to be a local work due to its lower quality carving.[18] The sides are also decorated in two registers in shallower relief. Like the lower register of the Bassus example, its arcades are made up of alternating round arches and pointed gables.

While most scenes are confined to their intercolumniation, others take place across niches: for example, the central Jesus in the upper register talks to Peter in the next scene to the right. Below, the central orant turns slightly to the left, to the figure reading from a codex, as if praying in response. This slippage across the very defined framework on both levels and in both directions teases the expectations of viewers, encouraging them to read across the front and look for any further hidden links.

The terminal positions have some of the most interesting links, which makes sense given the historical importance of these positions. On the far left is Jesus multiplying the loaves and fishes, and below Peter striking the rock. On the far right, Daniel feeds poisoned cakes to the dragon in the Temple of Bel, and below Jesus turns water into wine.[19] The provision of food and drink appears to be a theme that links all four. On the left, food and water are miraculously provided on the left side of the niches. On the upper left and right, Jesus' unusual stone table mirrors the altar in Daniel's scene, both presenting food, both with sacrificial overtones from the Eucharist and temple altar; however one nourishes, the other poisons; one references the life-giving Eucharist, the other kills. On the right, Daniel and

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[15] Koortbojian (1995) 132 on columnar sarcophagi as suited to display of analogies.
[16] *RS* III 118; Benoit (1954) 45.
[17] Koch (2000) 124.
[18] Koch (2000) 284.
[19] Daniel 14 (apocrypha).

Jesus both stand with one hand raised and the other holding a scroll, offering another Eucharistic parallel for the Daniel scene. On the lower left and right, the miracle of water into wine and water from the rock are both obviously water miracles of miraculous provision; both Peter and Jesus gesture to the left, rather than up and down respectively to the rock and water jars as usual. This square of connections is topped off by the motif in the spandrels above: while most contain wreaths with ribbons, the four columns at the far ends of the two registers are capped by birds eating from baskets of fruit (fig. 3.3b). They potentially link back to the basket of bread that Jesus holds a hand over in the top left niche (fig. 3.3c).

They could also relate to the scenes on the sides of the casket. On the left side is the only extant rendering of Jesus cursing the fig tree for its lack of fruit on the way to Jerusalem (fig. 3.3d), in Mark a literary frame for the intervening episode of Jesus driving the moneychangers out of the temple, interpreted as a symbolic destruction.[20] The fruitless fig tree can thus be read as a metaphor for the fruitless temple system. To the left of this scene on the sarcophagus are the offerings of Cain and Abel, and below are the three Hebrews before Nebuchadnezzar, refusing to worship his image. In the juxtaposition of these scenes from Jewish history, with Jesus cursing the fig tree and with it the temple, the impetus of the iconography seems to be towards a rejection of Jewish sacrifice (embodied by Cain and Abel, and condemned with the fig tree) in the same breath as idolatry (the three Hebrews below). The implied fruitlessness of the Jewish tradition is contrasted with the full baskets of fruit in the spandrels on the front, crowning a Christian programme of miraculous provision by a merciful God, summed up in the terminal scenes of food and drink.

The shapes of the arches or gables can sometimes contribute to this linking. This is evident on the sarcophagus of the couple Agape and Crescentianus in the Vatican (fig. 3.4).[21] All the pointed gables contain scenes of saving diminutive figures. In addition, the two pointed niches framed by vertical-fluted columns involve miracles preventing bleeding: the killing of Isaac with the knife is halted, and the woman's issue of blood is stopped. The other two pointed niches have spiral-fluted columns, and both involve saving with water: Peter baptising, and the healing of the blind man, which according to two gospels was accomplished by Jesus rubbing spit into the man's eyes.[22] In John's version, the man is also instructed to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam to complete the miracle. John's description

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[20] Mark 11.12-25. Cf. Barton and Muddiman (2006) 909-10. On the right short end, Jesus is shown entering Jerusalem on the donkey, processing away from a similar looking tree at the edge closest to the front of the sarcophagus.
[21] *RS* I 52.
[22] Mark 8.22-26, John 9.1-12. Tacitus, *Histories* 4.81 records a story about Vespasian being asked to heal a blind man by wetting his eyes with his spit.

of Jesus making mud with his saliva to apply to the man's eyes is deliberately reminiscent of God's creation of man out of dust, so both the healing and baptism scenes could be understood biblically as scenes of new creation.[23] The metaphorical curing of spiritual blindness corresponds well to baptism as a spiritual rebirth. As for the remaining intercolumniations, the feeding of the multitude is a type for Moses, who fed his people in the desert, corresponding to the matching niche with Moses receiving the law. Moses here also looks rather like Peter in the final niche, playing with the overlap in their representations; Moses stands on a prominent rocky outcrop to represent Mount Sinai, while Peter reaches up to the rock in his scene.

The Bassus sarcophagus (fig. 3.2) is the most famous and elaborate example of the type, and shows that connections could be made into the architecture itself.[24] Malbon expands on de Waal and Gerke's analysis of the spandrels as concentric pairs: the central two framing Jesus are scenes from his life, the second and fifth can both be interpreted as either Moses or Peter, and the terminal positions both refer to resurrection.[25] It was seen previously how on earlier sarcophagi the raising of Lazarus was often juxtaposed with the fiery furnace, both monumental constructions functioning as tomb types –the brick- and marble-built constructions were important in linking the two in the context of the monumental materiality of the sarcophagus. Malbon explains in greater detail how this pattern of nesting pairs is also a feature of the upper and lower registers: Jesus in the centre, framed by pairs of scenes from the same testament, framed by Old Testament types and New Testament fulfilments. As earlier, the architecture functions as a microcosm of larger scenes in the niches and the scheme of the wider sarcophagus.[26]

There are correspondences between neighbouring spandrels over individual niches. The elements of fire and water in the furnace and rock miracles, for example, form a contrasting frame for the first niche with Job, perhaps relating to the climactic speeches of God in the book of Job describing creation.[27] The water of the rock miracle and bread of the multiplication scene meanwhile complement the wheat and lamb in the Adam and Eve scene they frame: wheat for bread, and water for the lamb, since both water from the rock and the lamb refer typologically to the blood of Jesus. The uniformity of the lambs in the spandrels acting out different biblical stories gives the impression that Jesus could be the ultimate architect of all the miracles depicted, even those in the Old Testament, again reflecting back

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[23] John 9.1-12; Genesis 2.7.
[24] *RS* I 680.
[25] Malbon (1990) ch 4; de Waal (1900) 76; Gerke (1936) 20.
[26] See Chapter 2.3.
[27] Job 38-42.

into the theme of eternity.[28] The final niche with Paul is topped with the giving of the Law to Moses and the raising of Lazarus by Jesus; an illustration perhaps of the Old-New, death-life dichotomy in Paul's rejection of "the ministry of death, chiselled in letters on stone tablets" in favour of the ministry of the Spirit, written "not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts…"[29]

3.2. Roman and Christian heritage

Since columnar sarcophagi resemble colonnades where statuary was typically displayed, they provide an even more explicit setting for groups of sculptural figures.[30] The use of relief sculptures in multi-storey arcades to represent statues in the round may have a full-size parallel in the colonnades of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, many of whose sculptures echo freestanding statue types like the Dioscuri and the Three Graces on plinth-like blocks (fig. 3.5). This can be explicit earlier, such as the columnar sarcophagus from the Palazzo Mattei (fig. 3.6), which encloses a set of figures associated with the origin of Rome, including Venus, Mars, Rhea Silvia, Cupid and Faustulus, in the forms of famous statue types with two on bases.[31]

A late-fourth-century columnar sarcophagus from Rome frames two couple scenes with the Dioscuri (fig. 3.7), an appropriately Roman choice given the Temple of Castor and Pollux in the Forum Romanum, a reminder of their role in fighting alongside the Romans and securing victory.[32] The Dioscuri with their horses are known in statue form, as in a pair of third-century statuettes. In fact statues referring to the Trojan cycle, including the Dioscuri, were by this time prominent in the Hippodrome at Constantinople, selected to celebrate a distinctly Roman history and present Constantine's city as the new Rome.[33] The selection of the Dioscuri in this context shows their resonance as patriotic figures, evoking the glorious history of Rome to citizens across the empire. The depiction on this sarcophagus of the Dioscuri juxtaposed with scenes from an altogether different sphere within a colonnade seems, consciously or unconsciously, to enact the same reuse of these spoliated heroes as had occurred in Constantinople. Furthermore the sides of this sarcophagus depict Christian

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[28] Elsner (2008) 26-31.
[29] 2 Corinthians 3.3.
[30] Elsner (2012) 186 on how difficult it can be to tell if figures framed in a columnar sarcophagus are meant to represent real people or statues; Koortbojian (1995) 132 on stories appearing as symbols on columnar sarcophagi.
[31] *ASR* III 2 cat. 192; E. Thomas (2011) 423.
[32] *RS* III 51; Benoit (1954) no. 1; Elsner (2012) 193-5 for discussion in relation to framing and the sarcophagus form. See Chapter 1.2 for the Dioscuri in a context of patriotism and a collection of statues.
[33] Bassett (1991) and (2015b) 149-150.

scenes of Jesus multiplying the loaves and fish, and the chair of Peter, suggesting that the Roman saint and the sacrament of the Eucharist could contribute to imperial glory as much as the Dioscuri.[34]

The same idea might lie behind examples with biblical scenes between columns: not just showing off knowledge of myths or stories, but demonstrating a sense of pride in the origins of their culture or faith. Framing a line-up of Christian heroes within such a Roman framework helps to transform them in the eyes of the viewer into Roman heroes, forming part of the argument for Christianity as the culmination of Roman history and culture.[35]

Many later columnar sarcophagi from fourth-century Rome feature wreaths in their design (e.g. fig. 3.8), such as athletes or emperors would be awarded after a triumph; this adds to the connotations of spoils and victory of this type, and implies the kind of arrangement of spoliated statues that a Roman viewer would expect.[36] Wreathes or crowns also had a special significance in this context, with early Christian martyrs said to be presented with crowns for their athletic struggle and victory over death; the protomartyr Stephen may have been so named for this reason. The Saint-Trophime (fig. 3.3) and Aix-en-Provence sarcophagi (fig. 3.11) both have wreaths in the spandrels above the arches, while another late sarcophagus from Gaul also has wreaths above a long series of arches (fig. 3.9), which enclose single, statuesque figures of Christ and the disciples.[37] This gives an even stronger sense of a parade of Roman heroes, in a setting traditionally reserved for a sculpture collection.

The renewed popularity of columnar sarcophagi must be partially inspired by Constantine's extensive use of the style for his churches. The early imperial churches in Rome, such as the Lateran basilica consecrated in 318, and St Peter's begun between 319 and 324, were constructed with a great number of spoliated columns, something that was clearly visible due to the great variety in types of marble, bases, capitals, and entablature.[38] This suggests the question of whether the great number of columns depicted on early Christian sarcophagi might have been viewed in the same way, and indeed some examples do combine different types of column or entablature on one sarcophagus front. Agape and Crescentianus's (fig. 3.4) has a mix of archways, as well as alternating columns of two vertical-fluted followed by two spiral-fluted. The Bassus sarcophagus (fig. 3.2) has eight fluted columns to the left and right with fluting in different directions, and four central columns carved with vines and erotes. It also has a mix of entablatures on the bottom tier. An example from Arles combines

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[34] On the Dioscuri in a Christian context, van den Hoek (2013).
[35] E. Thomas (2011) 423 on 'Romanness' of the arcade.
[36] *RS* I 49.
[37] *RS* III 61; Benoit (1954) no. 9.
[38] Lindros Wohl (2001) 87-98.

all three different types of column (fig. 3.14): spirally fluted at the far edges, then vertical flutes one column in, then more intricately carved columns in the centre.[39] This style seems likely to have been influenced by the arrangements of spoliated columns in Rome's churches, and by replicating them the patrons of sarcophagi could evoke the new holy, imperial architecture.

Moreover Onians has detailed the hierarchical sequences that could be expressed through the arrangements of capitals in churches; for example in St Peter's, Ionic capitals were reused in the atrium, mostly Corinthian in the nave, leading up to Composite in the transept.[40] The placement of different types of column on these sarcophagi also seems hierarchical, with the most highly decorated columns framing the central recesses. Meanwhile the most common type of capital depicted is Composite, the order of imperial monuments such as the Arches of Titus and Septimius Severus before becoming widely used in mausolea and sarcophagi.[41] On sarcophagi, equally as in churches, the column was used with a "new dramatic expressiveness".[42]

Late antique culture can be characterised by a super-reflective relationship with and high regard for the past, a past increasingly relied on for reassurance, prestige, and a sense of enduring stability in the face of the empire's contemporary challenges. Pieces of that past in the form of *spolia* could therefore begin to carry stronger associations of exemplarity than ever; the spoliated imperial reliefs on the Arch of Constantine have been thought to act as *exempla*, and in literature, the *Panegyrici Latini* positions a speech by Pliny in praise of Trajan as an *exemplum* before speeches dedicated to late antique emperors.[43] A mythical figure in the trappings of a spoliated sculpture or literary quotation could acquire an even greater aura of authority and set a more idealised example than in previous periods, when depicted as belonging to a past that was placed on such a pedestal. When it comes to Roman Christians who shared equally in this valuation of the past, it would be natural for them too to visually recall ancient biblical heroes by placing them within a colonnade or on plinths, traditional locations for *spolia*-like antique excerptions that could be relied upon as 'classic'.

The New Testament epistles urge Christians to follow the examples of biblical heroes like Abraham and Moses; for example in Hebrews 11, the author relates at length the deeds done by Old Testament patriarchs, introducing and peppering each of his examples with the word "Πίστει", "by faith", eighteen times in thirty verses:

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[39] *RS* III 53.
[40] Onians (1990) 60ff.
[41] Onians (1990) 59.
[42] Onians (1990) 69.
[43] Rees (2012) 13-14.

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval *[lit. testimony, i.e. in Scripture]*. **By faith** we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks. **By faith** Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and 'he was not found, because God had taken him.' For it was attested before he was taken away that 'he had pleased God.' And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. **By faith** Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.

By faith Abraham…[etc.]"[44]

The 'by faith' formula linking each biblical patriarch can be compared to the repetitive niche format of the columnar type, framing each episode repeatedly with the same architectural surround. The formula is also similar to the *Commendatio Animae* type of prayer said for a dying person, previously linked to sarcophagus reliefs, which also calls upon biblical *exempla* for salvation.[45] The author of Hebrews makes clear the link between exemplarity and remembrance, stating that it is because of their exemplary faith that they are witnessed to in Scripture and their memory thereby preserved. The exemplary connotations of the columnar type as triumphal display are effective for displaying exemplary biblical heroes.[46]

The column as a metaphor for the human figure had had a long history in Greek art, and seems to be revived in Roman Christianity.[47] Groups of twelve columns or pedestals to represent the disciples were constructed in Constantine's tomb, St Peter's, and the mausoleum of Constantia among others, as well as, notably, on the Bassus sarcophagus (fig. 3.2).[48] Eusebius described the coffins set up for the remains of the twelve disciples in

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[44] Hebrews 11.1-8, emphasis added.
[45] E.g. "Deliver, O Lord, the soul of Thy servant, as Thou didst deliver Noah in the flood", etc; see Finney (1994) 159-60, and 282-6 for chronological problems; Grabar (1968) 10.
[46] Cf. Barton and Muddiman (2008) on Hebrews 11.25, identifying an echo of Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.1.21-34 on the sufferings of Herakles; the existing influence of the exemplary behaviour of a classical hero in the biblical text means it is less of a jump to frame in this way in the fourth century.
[47] E. Thomas (2011) on the column-person dialogue on earlier sarcophagi.
[48] Onians (1990) esp. 70-1 on the significance of columns in Christian architecture.

Constantine's tomb as "*stelai*".[49] The concept of the saints as figurative 'pillars of the faith' has a grounding in scripture: Galatians 2.9 mentions "James, Peter, and John, who were reputed to be pillars (στῦλοι)", and 1 Timothy 3.15 describes the church as "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (στῦλος καὶ ἑδραίωμα τῆς ἀληθείας).[50]

The Anastasis sarcophagus in Arles forms a unique take on this column metaphor (fig. 3.10).[51] The repetitive arrangement of twelve apostles is already akin to the columnar type, but the semi-circles of wreaths held by clenched fists emerging from the entablature above their heads (fig. 3.10b) even seem to mimic the shape of the upper mouldings, positioning the heads as the capitals.[52] The repeated wreath motifs are important in linking each level of the sarcophagus together. The wreaths above the saints' heads are identical to the central wreath (originally containing a christogram), with the same circular buckle-like motif (fig. 3.10c). The innermost saints gesturing towards this wreath echo the conventional imagery of the cupids on the lid holding the medallions, which here appear to be more stylised versions of foliate wreaths such as the central example.[53] There is a clear parallellism between the traditional and the Christian imagery. The literal crownings seem to translate the latent meaning of the traditional motif of the medallion held by cupids, both showing individuals honoured by the divine world. The short sides of the sarcophagus help to make the column metaphor more explicit. On either end there is a baptism scene made up of a column of water from a small rock at the top of the scene (figs 3.10d-e) in the manner of Peter's miracle, straight through the middle of the field.[54] They reveal the underlying columnar metaphor behind the front relief, where the saints form an architectural structure.

One passage dense with architectural imagery that seems relevant for this kind of sarcophagus can be found in Ephesians, a letter concerned with the unity of the church:

> ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι, ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολῖται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὔξει ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ εἰς, ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι.

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[49] Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 4.60.
[50] Gal 2.9, my translation; 1 Timothy 3.15. Lindros Wohl (2001) 105-6.
[51] *RS* III 49.
[52] Cf. *RS* I 175.
[53] The saints are gesturing towards rather than actually holding the wreath, as the fingernails of the left saint can be made out, and the creases of the open palm of the right.
[54] See Chapter 2.4.

> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints
> and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles
> and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole
> structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you
> also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.[55]

The language of the apostles and prophets being the foundation of the Christian community maps particularly well onto the Anastasis sarcophagus's intimation that the apostles are foundational columns, as well as other columnar sarcophagi containing images of saints or biblical figures.

Additionally, these verses conclude a passage on the peace of God making Gentiles one with Jews in the church, so is of key importance for Christians in Rome, providing assurance that they are full citizens of God's kingdom and no less legitimate for being Gentiles far from the Holy Land.[56] The union of Jews and Gentiles was to fulfil the original creation of humankind, a theme particularly at stake on sarcophagus reliefs.[57] The idea of being "citizens with the saints" is reflected in the placement of parades of statuesque Roman heroes in the triumphal framework of a Roman colonnade. The biblical imagery of citizenship linked with monumental architecture would have particular currency in Rome, and fits in with the uptake of the Western-style colonnade in civic architecture elsewhere in the Empire being a way of demonstrating pride in belonging to it.[58] At the same time, the conflation of heavenly citizenship in a biblical sense, with the prestigious visual language of Roman citizenship, comes close to the elision of divine and imperial wills first intimated in the previous chapter.[59]

3.2.1. Aix-en-Provence sarcophagus

The case of a columnar sarcophagus now in Aix-en-Provence (fig. 3.11) can be considered in light of these themes of heritage.[60] At either end, two Old Testament scenes of the sacrifice of Isaac and Moses receiving the law, frame two New Testament miracles of Jesus, the raising of Lazarus and the healing of the blind man (with the bleeding woman type added for good measure), which in turn frame the central orant, standing in for the late-fourth-

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[55] Ephesians 2.19-22. See Chapter 1.3 and 2.4 on Jesus as the cornerstone.
[56] Cf. Tertullian, *De Pudicitia* 21.11 on the importance of the first baptism of a pagan, Cornelius (Acts 10).
[57] See Chapter 1.1.1 and 2.4.1.
[58] E. Thomas (2011) 423-4, in reference to Aphrodisian architecture.
[59] See Chapter 2.4.1.
[60] *RS* III 22; Wilpert (192-34) II ccv 5.

century deceased person. This gives a sense of an unfolding of time, of the continuous and certain progression of the Christian story, from God's interventions in the Old Testament, to Jesus' miracles, to the final resurrection of the deceased expressed in the prayer of the orant. She appears as though already resurrected, supported or presented by her attendants. This confidence in the resurrection is based on a chain of *exempla* of the past, underscored by the wreaths of victory in the spandrels.

The chosen scenes from the New Testament are reminiscent of a passage where the imprisoned John the Baptist sends his followers to ask Jesus whether he is the long-awaited saviour of Israel:

> "Go and tell John what you hear and see: **the blind receive their sight**, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, **the dead are raised**, and the poor have good news brought to them.'[61]

Jesus' reply conflates a number of passages from Isaiah, particularly the following, which says that when God comes to save his people:

> Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
> and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
> then the lame shall leap like a deer,
> and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. [62]

In his reply to John's disciples, Jesus more or less repeats this list (exchanging the mute for lepers), but concludes by adding that the dead are being raised and the poor hearing the good news. He claims that the time prophesied by Isaiah is happening now, even better than the prophet had foreseen, so he *is* the one for whom they have been waiting. The healing of the blind and the raising of the dead could therefore be seen as particular markers of the coming of God's kingdom, one beginning both Jesus and Isaiah's lists, and the other the first additional criterion added by Jesus. Not only that, but the chronological progression from symbols prefiguring the future kingdom (prevention of human sacrifice and giving of the Law) through signals of the imminently arriving kingdom (raising the dead and healing the blind), to the orant in the centre, suggests that the deceased is situated in the established and triumphant kingdom of God. Through clever typological juxtaposition, the Roman dead can be subsumed into the biblical narrative of salvation as the final victorious fulfilment of its promises. The deceased Roman Christian displays alongside herself the *spolia* of the Judeo-Christian tradition, topped by wreaths, which have contributed to her glory in an even more

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[61] Matthew 11.2-5, emphasis added; cf. Luke 7.20-23.
[62] Isaiah 35.5-6; cf. Barton and Muddiman (2001) 860.

profound way than the original portico displays of statues captured in war would have added to the glory of the city.

Abraham and Moses feature prominently in the speech of the New Testament's first Christian martyr, Stephen, before his stoning.[63] Stephen argues for Jesus' place in the long line of prophets rejected by Israel, and that Israel's continual disobedience to God has culminated in the murder of his Son, saying "was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute?".[64] He begins with Abraham, as on the left of the sarcophagus, and focuses particularly towards the end on Moses, as on the right. These two figures therefore could symbolise the Old Testament tradition, as summarised by the exemplary biblical protomartyr Stephen.[65] The wreaths topping the sarcophagus could even recall Stephen's name ('crown').

Elsner notes how the Old Testament figures face away from the central orant, while Jesus looks towards her in both scenes, arguing that the scheme privileges the New Testament over the Old.[66] Indeed, the poses seem orchestrated to highlight the contrasts between Old and New. The pose of Abraham matches that of Jesus healing the blind man: both look behind them with outstretched arms, but one prepares to kill, and other to heal. The pose of Jesus raising Lazarus similarly corresponds to Moses: one prepares to resurrect the dead from a stone tomb, while the other receives stone tablets of the Law that 'brings death'.[67] Lazarus's tomb in front of Jesus also corresponds to the burning bush in front of Moses; this tomb is often paired with a tree or vine to highlight the ironic action of producing life out of stone.[68]

Lazarus's tomb is even depicted with the same type of columns and capitals as those ranged across the front of the sarcophagus, framing all the figures including the orant. In between his miniature columns, Lazarus is still in his burial wrappings as Jesus approaches; in the very next scene the orant seems to emerge triumphantly from between the same scaled up columns in Lazarus's place. The orant's resurrection is accomplished by the same Christ that resurrected Lazarus over three centuries previously. Her outstretched hands could be read as acknowledging Jesus on either side as the recipient of her prayer and praise, much like the two women kneeling at his feet; on the right the bleeding woman proves her faith in Jesus, while Lazarus's sister might be kneeling to praise as much as mourn. The ambiguous, liminal role of this relative could be paralleled in the attitude of the relatives of the deceased

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[63] Acts 7.
[64] Cf. Matthew 23.29-35.
[65] See Chapter 2.6, where it was suggested that Abraham and Moses could function as supportive elements for the clipeus on early-fourth-century sarcophagi.
[66] Elsner (2012) 192.
[67] E.g. Romans 7.7-13.
[68] See Fig. 2.1.

woman: caught between mourning her visible death and celebrating her as yet invisible resurrection.[69]

The decoration of the sarcophagus seems to focus on the act of speaking. The inhabitant of the sarcophagus is presented in eternal prayer to her deliverer, but also inviting the viewer with her outstretched arms to read and interpret the content of or basis for her speech depicted to either side, assuring the bereaved they need not grieve.[70] Spence suggests the orant in general is a symbol of interpretation, a signal to the viewer to interpret the accompanying scenes.[71] The fluted struts on the orant's hands serve to draw attention to the expressiveness of her gestures and her implied speech. The other figure with a strut drawing attention to his hand is the angel next to Moses: according to Stephen's speech, going further than in Exodus, it was the angel that spoke to Moses through the burning bush.[72] The angel is depicted in this act of speaking, signalled by the strut. The fact that a New Testament speech is the source for an act of speaking in an Old Testament scene further complicates the decorative scheme. The sarcophagus also emphasises touch: unlike most depictions, Jesus performs the miracles with his own hands; two hands of God descend from the sky to connect with the patriarchs; and the woman touches Jesus' robe. The monument re-endows the dead woman with speech, and emphasises physical touch, as ways of asserting their bodily resurrection.

3.2.2. Tomb and rock

Depictions of the raising of Lazarus are far less frequent on columnar sarcophagi; the Aix-en-Provence sarcophagus is one notable exception. There it was seen how the columns of Lazarus's tomb echoed the columns of the sarcophagus, where again the tomb could function as a microcosm of the sarcophagus.[73] The sarcophagus of Lot from San Sebastiano (fig. 3.1), which combines the frieze type with an early introduction of dividing columns, also compares these columns with the microcosmic columns of Lazarus's tomb. On the lower left corner, where Lot's family is depicted fleeing from the city of Sodom, the outermost pillar forms part of the city gate, with flames curling from the capital. This sarcophagus illustrates the change that occurs between the pseudo-pillars of the frieze types with Lazarus and Peter, and the later full-blown columnar type. In the lower half, the

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[69] See Chapter 2.3.
[70] Cf. Newby (2016) 301-307 comparing epitaph of Nepos (*CLE* 1109) to consolatory strategies on mythological sarcophagi, situating the dead in a paradisiacal afterlife.
[71] Spence (1988) 64-71.
[72] Exodus 3.1-4.17; Acts 7.35.
[73] See Chapter 2.3.

columns mark the boundaries of Sodom and Eden, as Lazarus's columns form his tomb; the pillars are more explicit structural elements, but are still part of the narrative. In the columnar type, the pillars are more simply framing devices, in that they do not signify any location specific to the enclosed stories, but an overarching framework that assembles disparate figures in one monument to Roman triumph.

Columnar sarcophagi clearly take the architectonic frame further by more directly imitating buildings, and in general, it seems there is less need to depict a miniature traditional tomb when the whole sarcophagus is much more explicitly an architectural tomb. The sense that the framework of Lazarus's tomb has extended over the whole sarcophagus is helpfully illustrated by a type such as the sarcophagus of Concordius in Arles (fig. 3.12).[74] At either end of the front there is a small pediment with columns of precisely the type of Lazarus's tomb, while an architrave with fluted columns and tiled roof stretches all the way in between. The male patron bows beneath one pointed pediment, and the female the other, further recalling the tomb.

The small decorations of columnar architecture are one link between the earlier tomb of Lazarus and later sarcophagi, together illustrating the increasing late-Roman interest in highly detailed architecture. The spandrels continue the role of Lazarus's figured panel in offering commentary on the rest of the decoration, here by framing how the enclosed images are interpreted.[75] The sarcophagus of Agape and Crescentianus features erotes harvesting grapes, and sea creatures at either end (fig. 3.4b).[76] Another sarcophagus in the Vatican has miniature bust portraits in shells in the spandrels (fig. 3.13b), which could almost be listening in to what the figures below are saying.[77] The Passion sarcophagus in the Vatican (fig. 3.8) includes three different sets of spandrels: the central pair have representations of the Sun and Moon (fig. 3.8b), reminiscent of the acroteria on the tomb of Bassus; the outermost spandrels contain winged cupids tending grapevines (fig. 3.8c), while the intervening spandrels depict cupids reaching in to the point of the gable.[78] A sarcophagus in Leiden has scenes from the Jonah cycle.[79] As on the tomb of Lazarus, all this imagery is either of Jewish or pagan origin, establishing a layering of chronology where biblical figures stand beneath pagan or secular architecture, and New Testament miracles take place framed by Jewish spandrels.

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[74] *RS* III 65.
[75] See Chapter 2.3.
[76] *RS* I 52.
[77] *RS* I 53; note the struts on two of the main figures' hands.
[78] *RS* I 49. A fragment in S. Sebastiano has personifications of summer and winter in the spandrels, *RS* I 201.
[79] *RS* II 138.

The spandrels of the Bassus sarcophagus (fig. 3.2) appear to break this pattern, as exceptionally they depict New Testament scenes from the life of Jesus acted out by lambs. The whole sarcophagus is very unusual, not just in how far it has developed the columnar type, with a combination of level architrave and alternating arches and gables, all richly ornamented. Some of the scenes selected would be quite unusual at any point of the fourth century, namely Job and the martyrdom of Paul, while a beardless Christ seated above a sky god is unparalleled. Because of the unique arrangement, Koch concludes the choices were at the special request of the clients.[80] Meanwhile the scenes in the spandrels, albeit with lambs, are more typical of the first half of the fourth century, as seen in the previous chapter: the baptism of Jesus is less common, but the remaining scenes are all popular: the fiery furnace, the raising of Lazarus, the multiplication of loaves, Moses receiving the law, and the rock miracle.[81] Therefore this could still give the impression of an older heritage represented in architecture, under which the characters arrange themselves; the heritage this monument refers to is older Christian monuments.[82] In this case, the coded biblical stories in the spandrels give a sense of the eternal truth of Christianity, embedded in a Roman framework.

It was argued in the previous chapter that Peter's rock miracle appeared to create a column from the foundations of Rome. This suggestion seems to be confirmed by its more explicit expression in the context of columnar sarcophagi; on the sarcophagus in Saint-Trophime (fig. 3.3e), and that of Agape and Crescentianus in the Vatican (fig. 3.4b), the scene is still depicted on the outside edge, but the rock is carved in line with the capital, while the water flows down in waves next to a fluted column. In the first half of the century, the column of water was frequently at the outer edge of the casket, offering an ambiguous form of support in the representational fluctuation between the layers of carved marble, flowing water, and fluted column. On columnar sarcophagi however, the rock miracle is framed within an overarching columnar framework; while the juxtaposition highlights the visual metaphor, the instability of the image is limited and contained, no longer permitted to threaten the solidity of the monument.

The idea of the classical, columnar monument embodied by Lazarus's tomb has enveloped the whole sarcophagus, while its former pair of the rock miracle is subsumed within a single niche. The potential instability of the Lazarus scene previously depended on the interaction of Jesus 'breaking down' the tomb, and the comparison with the rock miracle to bring issues of transforming rock into life to the fore. In the later period, the balancing pair is dropped,

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[80] Koch (2000) 284.
[81] See Chapter 2.3.
[82] Elsner (2008) 30 characterises the theme of the whole monument as one conscious of time or timelessness.

and the columns stand independent of interference by the enclosed figures. The sense of mobile transformation and re-creation of the tomb is gone; the architectural frame that was being undermined and re-created in the first half of the century is now much more set in stone.

This renewed security in the tomb structure develops in tandem with the language of public architecture and Roman triumph, and must relate to the position of Christianity in the Roman world, leading up to official imperial status in 380. If the creation of a column out of a biblical miracle earlier carried implications of civilising new creation and yoking faith to empire, the subsequent development of a columnar structure across the entire sarcophagus seems to signal a new confidence in Christianity within the frame of empire.

One case of the rock miracle continuing to suggest the idea of columns as part of the orderly new creation of baptism can be found on the sarcophagus of Agape and Crescentianus (fig. 3.4). The scenes are in roughly chronological order, progressing from the Old Testament patriarchs, to the life of Jesus, to the subsequent miracle of Peter in Rome. Following this left to right reading, the thrust of the gaze of the Jewish patriarchs towards the hands of God at the right of their niches flows across into the final niche, where Peter looks to the rock in the same place. As the culmination of the viewing and in the same spot as God's hand, it reflects the idea of the rock as Christ, as well as positioning Rome and its patron saint as the culmination of the Christian story, following on unquestioningly from the patriarchs and Jesus himself as the mediator of God's blessing.

Furthermore in the first two niches, the hand of God emerges from the capitals of the columns, as the rock (a type for Christ) sits behind the capital on the right edge. Given the parallel between Abraham's raised sword, and Peter's raised staff which strikes the area of the capital, the first niche almost implies that Abraham is being prevented from striking his capital. In a visual sense, classical architecture is spared from the 'primitive', ritualistic iconoclasm of a Jewish patriarch on one end, while on the other a Christian founder upholds the classical framework, virtually taking part in its construction. Divine mercy and provision continue to be expressed in terms of, and ultimately aligned with, the concerns of Roman civilisation.

Columnar architecture was particularly linked to Roman Christian identity.[83] The dominant contemporary style when Constantine came to power was for huge vaulted concrete buildings like Maxentius's basilica in the Forum Romanum.[84] For Constantine, choosing columnar architecture for his monuments had the advantage of distancing himself from the

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[83] E. Thomas (2011) 422-424.
[84] Lindros Wohl (2001) 104-5.

pagan Maxentius and signalling a new direction in his own reign, one that harkened back to the architecture of Augustan Rome with all its connotations of a new foundation of the city, restoration of morality and establishment of peace, not to mention the prestige of the past. In the early fifth century, Paulinus of Nola uses columns and piers as contrasting metaphors for either access or blockages to the soul respectively, ascribing positive Christian connotations to Constantine's favoured style.[85]

By the later fourth century, Rome had been transformed by the building of churches and Christian cemeteries, which meant that "Christianity had acquired a physical presence on the Roman landscape that would have been inconceivable a half-century earlier."[86] Trout links Damasus's programme of monumentalising early martyrs' graves with this trend; architectural embellishment was added in the form of pilasters and columns, together with architraves, arches, altars, and the famous beautifully cut, classicising inscriptions.[87] The catacomb galleries were redesigned to facilitate public access, such as by the addition of light shafts and entrance ways. The trend to monumentalisation can also be observed on columnar sarcophagi.

What does remain of the ambivalent monumentality of the previous half-century is that while the columnar types imply architectural stability, they also often imply the existence of empty space behind the pillars that the figures might walk about in.[88] This could be compared to the way in which strigillated types suggested architectural solidity but also a shimmering illusory effect; both strigillated and columnar imply monumentality while at the same time dissolving the solidity of the tomb. Open colonnades seem to deny the fact that there is a body; that the tomb, like Christ's, is empty. Jesus' tomb was visited by angels and female and male followers, witnesses to the Resurrection, and similarly the columnar sarcophagus spaces are filled with biblical characters witnessing to salvation. The exchange of dead body for the bodies of biblical heroes suggests the exchange of an earthly body for a heavenly one, just as these figures have done. We can compare 2 Corinthians 5:

> For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. … If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new![89]

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[85] Paulinus of Nola, *Carmen* 28.307-13.
[86] Trout (2015) 44.
[87] Trout (2015) 42-47, esp. 45. See Chapter 4.1.
[88] Others are carved to be a series of closed niches, e.g. fig. 3.9, while the late-fourth-century city gate type also has a more solid architectural backdrop.
[89] 2 Corinthians 5.1-2, 17.

3.2.3. Reviewing Roman power: the case of Pontius Pilate

The scene of Jesus' trial provides a good case study on the relationship between Christian imagery and traditional Roman culture. The trial is a popular theme on later sarcophagi that Elsner has argued affirms Christian triumph at the expense of undermining Roman power.[90] In the context of the highly traditional façade of the sarcophagi, and in light of the argument so far about Christianity being asserted as the fulfilment of Rome's destiny not its subversion, the idea of challenging the authority of Rome might seem unexpected. A closer examination of the figure of Pilate in some examples might suggest a more sympathetic treatment.

The episode of Jesus' trial by Roman governor Pontius Pilate enters the repertoire in the mid-fourth century, with potentially early examples including the Junius Bassus (fig. 3.2) and 'Two Brothers' sarcophagi (fig. 2.33).[91] Pilate always sits at the far right of the front, in a thoughtful pose, usually with Jesus standing in front of him to the left. In addition to any guards holding Jesus, Pilate usually has at least one or two figures around him, in particular a servant standing in between with vessels for the governor to wash his hands.

Elsner describes Jesus on the Arles sarcophagus (fig. 3.14) as standing out in the trial scene (fig. 3.14b) by having nothing to do with the bowl of water in which Pilate will wash his hands, in contrast to his active relationship with water in the other scenes, such as standing atop the four rivers of Paradise in the centre, and washing Peter's feet on the far left.[92] The important role of water is emphasised by the shells and tritons adorning the spandrels. However on a visual level, Jesus stands over the water in the trial scene, much closer than Pilate, in the usual position of the servant holding the jug (cf. fig. 3.15), who is here relegated to the background.[93] Jesus stands in front of Pilate in a parallel pose to how he stands in front of Peter to bathe his feet, and like Peter, Pilate seems to acknowledge Jesus by raising his hand. Could Jesus' position be interpreted as still taking ownership of the water in some way, still in control and sanctioning the decision Pilate is about to take? This would agree with the gospel descriptions of the Passion, all four of which stress that Jesus went willingly to his death, and that Pilate was reluctant to sentence him, only acquiescing under pressure from the Jewish authorities and the crowd; in Matthew's account he asks the

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[90] Elsner (2011b).

[91] *RS* I 62. The close correspondence with later executions of the scene probably point to a date within the latter half of the range. Positioning Isaac, a type for Jesus, in front of Pilate instead of Jesus himself also seems more potent as a later play on any earlier motif.

[92] *RS* III 53; Benoit (1954) no. 5; Elsner (2011b) 373-78; Genesis 2.10-14 for four rivers of paradise.

[93] *RS* I 58.

crowd three times what he should do with Jesus, and asks them a further time the reason for his punishment.[94]

The hand-washing explicitly and emphatically symbolises Pilate's innocence in Matthew: "he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.'"[95] In a sense, it could be interpreted as a statement of faith, of his belief that Jesus was innocent and his wish to be absolved of any guilt for the 'sin' of sending him to his death. Therefore with Jesus standing over the water on the relief, the scene is easily transformed into a type of baptism, in the same sense that the parallel scene of Jesus washing Peter's feet was a type; in fact Tertullian lists Pilate's hand-washing as one of his biblical types of baptism.[96] Other early literature presents Pilate to varying degrees as a Christian convert.[97] Pilate holds out his hand as if for Jesus to 'baptise', and absolve of guilt. This theme of baptism is compounded by the two scenes on the short sides of the sarcophagus: on the left side next to Peter's foot-washing, the miracle of striking the rock, best interpreted here as Peter baptising the two figures; and on the right-hand side adjoined to the Pilate scene, Jesus' own baptism. Pilate about to wash his hands is paired elsewhere with Jesus washing Peter's feet (e.g. fig. 3.16), and so this scene is likely to have had baptismal connotations even before Jesus is brought in to perform the rite on the example from Arles.[98] Therefore, rather than Jesus' representation in this trial scene being intended to contrast with his active roles across the rest of the relief, his positioning seems very carefully contrived to emphasise his agency.

As Elsner notes, on the sarcophagus front the trial scene before Pilate is always on the right hand side, as the culmination of the decorative scheme in a left to right reading.[99] On examples where its pendant on the far left is the washing of Peter's feet, the force of the symbolism seems to hint that just as Jesus' disciples were brought into the new Kingdom, so the Romans would also be part of this divine plan. This sarcophagus type selects evidence from the very text of the Bible to form this polemical assertion of a Roman claim to Christian history and culture. Pilate's hand-washing occurs frequently on sarcophagi in the later fourth century, and its popularity in Roman art may be explained by this interpretation.[100] In the same period when wreaths become a popular accompaniment to Christian imagery, and the columnar type becomes particularly favoured as a frame, with all

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[94] Matthew 27.17-23.
[95] Matthew 27.24.
[96] Tertullian, *Bapt.* 9.4; Jensen (2011b) 79.
[97] Jensen (2011b) 79 gives as examples *Acta Pilati*; Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 21; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.2; Augustine, *Sermones* 201.2.
[98] *RS* I 58.
[99] Elsner (2011b) 363.
[100] Jensen (2011b) 79.

its triumphal connotations, Pilate can also be used for the theme of Christian victory as a fulfilment of Roman culture. Pilate is rehabilitated through a symbol for baptism, and a historical pagan ruler is baptised into a new Christian-Roman version of history, a history that led up to and could make sense of the conversion of the first Christian emperor.

On the ornate columnar sarcophagus in the Vatican Necropolis (fig. 3.16), the counterpoint to Pilate washing his hands on the right end, is the sacrifice of Isaac on the left.[101] As with the foot-washing scene, some correspondences between these framing scenes are evident. Pilate is seated on an unusually high podium, which attracts attention due to its lack of ornament between such richly decorated columns. The surprising height seems to be in an effort to have Pilate sit on a square shaped plinth, in order to match the square altar on which Isaac kneels. Both plinths have the same carving at top and bottom and a plain face. In addition, the outer knee of Pilate juts up sharply, mirroring the opposite knee of Isaac. The lamb in front of Isaac could be the Lamb, Jesus, in front of Pilate; the implication is that Jesus stands ready to take the place of Pilate in his sacrificial death, as the lamb is for Isaac. Pilate is again cast in the role of sinful Man whose guilt is assuaged by Jesus' death. By washing his hands, considered a baptismal type by some church fathers, on a level undercutting the original text, Pilate can be recognised as accepting Christ and the sacrifice he is about to make. He is the prototype Christian. On the earlier 'Two Brothers' sarcophagus, the sacrifice of Isaac is depicted taking place immediately before Pilate, with no Jesus (fig. 3.17). Isaac actually takes the place of Jesus as the object of Pilate's contemplation, making the link between the two unquestionably explicit; the table for Pilate to wash his hands has a dual function as the altar for Abraham's sacrifice.

The fluted vessels depicted on the columns that frame Isaac, Christ enthroned, and Pilate, point further to this baptismal reading, producing extensive vegetation in the same way that the water of baptism produces life – vegetation that extends up to the acanthus leaves of the composite capitals, again creating a subtle visual link between baptism on the one hand and Roman architecture and civilisation on the other, spelling out the meaning of the hand-washing-baptism trope. On the short ends of the first Arles sarcophagus considered here, are depicted two baptism scenes, now incomplete (fig. 3.14c and d). The rock and water flowing straight down in the original centres of the ends appear like new capitals and columns being formed, particularly since the columns of the front are still visible from the sides. Christian scenes again are depicted as taking part in the construction of the Roman frame.

It is hard to see Roman power being criticised here; on the contrary, we might say it is being sanitised. Pilate is depicted sitting in thought, emphasised as being struck by Jesus and

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[101] *RS* I 677.

reluctant to pass sentence; in the latter example, Pilate is clearly tormented by the decision, turning right round in his seat.[102] Jesus frequently raises his hand in a gesture of blessing or even teaching, given the connotations of the scroll he often carries, as on the Bassus sarcophagus (fig. 3.2). The visual depictions of Jesus in the trial scene seem engineered to emphasise his agency, and paint him in favourable relationship to Pilate.

This interpretation of Jesus' agency would still provide a counter to pagan writers who criticised Jesus' silence during his trial, a key aim which Elsner sees behind the frequent depiction of the trial scene, and has the added bonus of deflecting any blame from the Roman governor to the Jews – Elsner again sees a distancing from the Jewish tradition as part of the rhetoric of Christian sarcophagi.[103] If Christians wanted to take a negative view of Pilate, it would have been easy to associate him with the imperial cult and idol worship, as they do with the Jewish leader Herod by frequently depicting him next to his idol – the Jewish not the Roman tradition is the focus for denigration. This reinterpretation reveals a more favourable opinion of Roman authority at the end of the fourth century.

3.3. Red Sea sarcophagi

The Red Sea type appears something of an anomaly amongst the late-fourth-century sarcophagi, and amongst the fourth-century corpus as a whole, in filling the entire sarcophagus front with what is apparently one narrative scene, the crossing of the Red Sea as described in Exodus (figs. 3.18-22).[104] Although classified as a frieze type, Koch says elements of the city gate group were reused on this type.[105] Details from across the narrative are slightly elided, so we can see the Egyptians leaving the city, being destroyed in the water right outside, and the Israelites processing away led by Miriam, already playing her tambourine which in the text occurs after the drama at the sea has concluded. However this is broadly in line with the progression of narrative on pre-Christian sarcophagi, while in contrast to the collections of abbreviated snapshots from across the Bible on earlier and contemporary Christian sarcophagi. This type will be considered in the context of the contemporary columnar sarcophagi, to investigate complementary concerns and aesthetics.

This type, though not with the same concentration of architecture as others, is nevertheless framed by the city gate of the Egyptians on the left, and on the right a column, that favoured

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[102] Spier (2007) 219 no.46 (fig. 3.8), on the hand at his chin as a sign of grief.
[103] E.g. Elsner (2011b) 381.
[104] Exodus 13.17-15.21; *RS* III 119, *RS* III 43, *RS* III 44, *RS* III 21, *RS* I 64. For the crossing of the Red Sea on sarcophagi, Wilpert (1929-34) 244-250; Elsner (2011c). Cf. *RS* III 44 fragmentary from Arles.
[105] Koch (2000) 307.

element of the late-fourth-century. In Exodus the flight from Egypt is led by pillars (στῦλος/*columna*) of cloud and fire which represent the presence of God, leading the Israelites to freedom.[106] On the sarcophagi, this is rendered as a literal column, with flames rising from the capital. In the text there were two pillars, one of cloud to lead by day, and one of fire by night.[107] While the fiery version might be easier to depict, it is significant in a funerary context that the scene be imagined at night; it matches the gloomy setting if displayed in catacombs or mausolea, and takes on connotations of leading the way through the darkness of death.

On the Gaulish examples in particular (figs. 3.18-21), the pillar is on the far-right edge of the front, corresponding to its scriptural position leading the way, but also in the usual position for columns on sarcophagi. It is balanced on the left end by the Egyptian city gate. The two supports can be interpreted similarly to the ironic supporting functions of the Peter and Lazarus pair. Like the pillar of Lazarus's tomb, the gate of the city appears a solidly built structure, but what happens to its inhabitants undermines its guarantee of civilisation and security. Like the watery column emerging from the rock, on the other hand, the fluid flames of the pillar appear to support the lid and preserve the integrity of the monument despite being an insubstantial, natural element. The contrast again could be between man-made efforts and divine creation (though rendered as a man-made column), and querying the material foundations of the tomb, establishing a new foundation on God. There also appears to be a contrast between the practical fortified archway on the left, and the refined beauty of the fluted column with ornate capital on the right, which resonates with Constantine's renewed preference for columns and colonnades, and the golden age of Rome they evoked, over the concrete vaults of previous decades. The progression across the front of the Red Sea sarcophagi could be taken as a representation of the story of Rome, journeying towards its idealised Christian destiny.

The presence of classical architecture on the side of salvation is more explicit than the implied column of Peter's water, to the extent that a fully formed column signifies the presence of God; the column is lacking in earlier, smaller renderings.[108] On the right short end of the Red Sea sarcophagus in Aix-en-Provence (fig. 3.21c), the striking of the rock by Moses is in fact depicted alongside a duplicate of the fiery pillar on the front. The fluted waves and carvings are clearly meant to evoke each other, and as the pillar from the front relief is still visible at the left edge, they could almost function as a trio: one at either edge

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[106] Exodus 13.21-22.
[107] Exodus 13.21-22, Numbers 14.14, Deuteronomy 1.33, Nehemiah 9.12, 9.19.
[108] Cf. *RS* III 41.

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and one in the centre. This arrangement elides the differences between column, water, and fire.

On the example from Rome (fig. 3.22), the pillar is situated among a more extensive architectural backdrop, symbolic of the Promised Land or perhaps simply the heavenly kingdom. To the left of the pillar there is an archway with baskets atop the capitals, as seen elsewhere on sarcophagus architecture.[109] The baskets gain added significance here, building on the growing attention paid to the decoration of Lazarus's tomb and the spandrels of colonnades. One of the most famous episodes from the Israelites' subsequent wanderings in the desert is the provision of manna and quail from heaven, as depicted on the side of the Aix-en-Provence example.[110] Any contents are now very worn, but perhaps the dual containers might recall the dual provision, framed together with the heavenly pillar (and with the same composite capitals) between two fortified archways. In this way, the architectural backdrop seems again to be fitting for the story enacted before it, again giving the impression that events have been foretold and have been prepared as part of the divine plan, 'set in stone' before they occurred.

In Exodus, Moses reports God's instructions that some of the manna be kept with the stone tablets "for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I [God] gave you to eat in the wilderness": a kind of archive for future generations.[111] The manna thus already comes from a context where it is something to be preserved and remembered at a different time; on the sarcophagus, it is just recalled ahead of time. Alternatively, preceding the Red Sea episode, to celebrate Pharaoh initially agreeing to let the Israelites go, Moses instructs them to commemorate the day with a festival of unleavened bread, when only unleavened bread will be eaten: "You shall tell your child on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.'"[112] The baskets on either side of the arch could be a reminder of the significance of bread on both sides of the Red Sea narrative, and ultimately to what bread comes to symbolise under Christianity, the Eucharistic sacrament.

Scholars have observed that the Red Sea narrative can function as a type for baptism.[113] The resurrection of the deceased will follow as surely as the Israelites emerge from the water. On a visual level, the progression from left to right, from warlike to peaceful people via a body of water, certainly fits. The lethal force of the watery interlude fits with the conception of baptism as a kind of death. In the text, the Israelites walk a dry path through the water

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[109] *RS* I 678 (St Peter's) with birds eating from upright baskets, also on the outer columns of *RS* III 61 (fig. 3.9) and *RS* III 119 (fig. 3.3). *RS* II 152 for tipped over baskets, and Koch (2000) 148 and 149.
[110] Exodus 16.
[111] Exodus 16.32.
[112] Exodus 13.3-10.
[113] E.g. by Elsner (2011c) 14.

unharmed, while the Egyptian army is drowned as the water falls back onto them. However in the imagery, the change in scale and chaotic jumble of figures in between two orderly rows visually enacts the sense of breaking down one human form into another, as if the army has been transformed into the peaceful Hebrews. The chaos of the central scene sometimes has the water encroaching on the bottom edge of the sarcophagus (figs. 3.18-19, 3.21), giving the effect of blurring and reforming the stone. The carved waves of the water with the incomprehensible mix of half-figures and single wheels thereby create the same impression as strigillation, melting the solidity of the marble. The old style of militaristic sarcophagus is melted down in the transformative waves into a disordered mass of bodies and weapons, and reformed as a relief populated with peaceful figures in classical robes.

The architecture on the right side of the Rome sarcophagus (fig. 3.22b) could even be envisaged as a highly ornate rendering of the "wall" of water (τεῖχος/*murus*) that stands on each side of the fleeing Israelites, continuing to hold firm beside them while having collapsed back into water over the Egyptians. According to their knowledge of the story, the viewer will be aware that this chaotic sea was formerly a wall too. This affects how we view the very stone of the sarcophagus, as changeable and unstable, held together by God's will alone and with the potential to dissolve. God's people stand upright and secure beside their colonnade, while the pagan army is upturned, their fate and memory as unstable as the disorderly patch of dissolved stone that holds them.

The Red Sea type can at first appear an anomaly amongst the abbreviated compositions of the fourth century, as one of the only narratives to occupy the entire sarcophagus front. The artist often seems to have been tempted to focus on the military side of the decoration, and one advantage of this subject might have been the potential to include a traditional military display, customarily understood as signalling the heroic virtue of the deceased. Yet if it was viewed rather as three reasonably distinct zones, linked by this popular theme of the transformation of baptism visually coupled to the transformation of the stone, it could go some way to explaining its apparent attractiveness to purchasers in at least two major cities.

There are further ironic interplays between the material of the sarcophagi and the story depicted. Miriam is depicted beating her tambourine, from the scene where she leads the women in dancing and singing.[114] Miriam's song is reported in just two lines, which are the first lines of the preceding eighteen-verse song of Moses; we are no doubt meant to imagine that Miriam and the women repeat the same song.[115] With Miriam looking back over the rest of the sarcophagus, with the tambourine struck and its sound echoing in our imaginations,

[114] Exodus 15.20-21.
[115] Exodus 15.1-18.

the song is brought to mind and set in stone. This song contains some pertinent images: it celebrates how the Egyptians "went down into the depths like a stone", and how God had previously made the sea become strangely solid: "the waters piled up, the floods stood up in a heap (LXX: ὡσεὶ τεῖχος, as though a wall); the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea."[116] The sarcophagus memorialises the moment where the waters, which had just been frozen and standing up like a wall, suddenly dissolve, and it is the turn of the soldiers to sink like stones into what had previously had the appearance of something solid and monumental.[117] The central scene is therefore inherently unstable, turning walls into water and flesh into stone. One of the Arles sarcophagi has the waves of the sea blurring into the carved edge of the coffin front, seemingly capturing the solid wall of the sarcophagus dissolving back into the chaotic waters; this is to imagine that it is the stone that is the temporary state, while the flowing water is the original form. Much of this is clear from the images alone, but the scriptural underpinning, particularly important in a relief terminated by an explicit reference to a biblical song, cements it. This relates directly to the function of the sarcophagus.

The Exodus song contrasts solidness with movement, as events pivot between one state and another. The moving sea becomes wall-like, allowing the movement of enslaved people; it is made to move once again, which causes the Egyptians in turn to become stone-like as they sink. Then while the Israelites are imagined passing into their promised land, the neighbouring peoples in Philistia, Edom, Moab and Canaan "became as still as a stone (LXX: ἀπολιθωθήτωσαν)" in fear – in addition in the Vulgate, the Canaanites become stiff ("*obriguerunt*"). Throughout, the frozen state of stone is contrasted with miraculous movement. The sarcophagus front as a whole is one of movement ironically rendered in stone; the scene with the most frantic movement of people in the centre is in fact the one in which according to the scriptural source, the people become like stone. This added layer of flux introduced by depicting this chain of fluctuating liberation and petrification in marble serves to further complicate the picture; it plays with Roman ideas of memorialisation and longevity, as well as Christian interests in the transformative function of the sarcophagus and the *post mortem* transformation of the body. The stone vacillates between different connotations; its solidity is traditionally a guarantee of remembrance and preservation, but

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[116] The Septuagint and Vulgate renderings of the verbs emphasise gathering together, freezing, and standing: "*διέστη/congregatae sunt*", "*ἐπάγη/stetit*", "*ἐπάγη/congregatae sunt*".

[117] Sidonius Apollinaris opens his 'Thanksgiving to Bishop Faustus' (*Carmina* XVI 1-10) with a parallel description of how Orpheus playing music by a spring "moved the stones" with his music and raised the walls, and then of the Israelites' musical celebration while walled in by "ramparts of water"; the parallelism of the walls along with water and music testifies to the memorability of the water as a wall.

this same solidity might contrast with or be undermined by the miracle of resurrection, and a Christian take on immortality.

In a Christian context, the song of Miriam cannot help but bring to mind the song of Mary in Luke 1. Mary of course shares the same name as Miriam including in Greek and Latin (*Μαριὰμ* and *Maria*), and similarly was responsible for the life of an infant male relation who would grow up to rescue his people, with Moses being one of the most recognisable types for Jesus.[118] Jerome's Latin translation, probably with an eye to this, renders Miriam's first words "*domino gloriose enim magnificatus est*", comparable to Mary's "*magnificat anima mea Dominum*".[119] There are obviously thematic parallels between the two songs, such as bringing down rulers, and Mary's particular emphasis on Israel's past fathers and future generations signals a reaching out to Jewish tradition. There are other similar phrases such as *"in magnitudine brachii"* and "*potentiam in brachio suo*".[120] The escape from Egypt was also invoked ironically in Matthew's nativity, when he has the holy family flee *to* Egypt from another infanticidal king; their subsequent return to Israel then retraces the steps of Moses.[121] Miriam is introduced as a prophet in the song passage, and on the sarcophagus her role in looking forward to Mary in this way is a prophetic one.

The prophecies enacted in this scene are not just biblical in nature, but also Virgilian. There are four examples of a man carrying a child on his shoulders and leading another by the hand, including all of the three from Arles (fig. 3.23). Elsner has drawn comparisons with Roman imperial art like the Ara Pacis, arguing that the images of men and children are motifs associated with imperial benevolence, here applied to the Christian god. In particular, the famous image of Aeneas, with his father Anchises on his shoulders and son Ascanius accompanying, is the obvious comparison. Like Aeneas, the Israelites led by Moses are refugees escaping destruction to a predestined homeland.[122] Aeneas flees Troy as the Israelites flee Egypt. Depicting the Jews thus, in the manner of greatest mythical founder of Rome, puts them on the same path. The two completely disparate traditions appear to line up, to be twin threads in the same mythical narrative, out of which is woven the founding histories of the fourth-century Christians of Rome. The sarcophagi also recall the defeat of Maxentius on the earlier Arch of Constantine, with the enemy troops falling into the Tiber in a similar fashion; Eusebius even compared the two events.[123] The appearance of Aeneas

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[118] Especially in Matthew's gospel; for the construction of his nativity in parallel to that of Moses, see Borg and Crossan (2008) 101-110, 136-145.
[119] Exodus 15.21, Luke 1.46.
[120] Exodus 15.16, Luke 1.51.
[121] Matthew 2.13-21; he notes that this fulfils a prophecy in Hosea 11.1.
[122] Elsner (2011c) 25-26.
[123] Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 9.9.5; Spier (2007) 211.

amongst the Israelites subtly transforms an originally anti-imperial story into a narrative of imperial destiny.

In his comparison of the Israelites and the Aeneas motif, Elsner begins with the statue of Aeneas: chiefly the marble sculpture paired with Romulus in the temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum of Augustus, as well as provincial public statuary (cf. fig. 3.24 in relief).[124] The type was repeated across other objects such as coins and gems, but on the marble monuments of sarcophagi, as we have seen, it was the original marble statuary that was of particular interest. Earlier grave reliefs, such as the first-century tombstone in Turin to which Elsner refers, feature the motif sculpted on a kind of plinth, explicitly referring to the imperial statue group in Rome. On sarcophagi, with their expected use of freestanding statue types, both in explicit settings on plinths and embedded into narrative friezes, the viewer could be expected to easily identify the cited statue. Thomas cites one depiction of Aeneas on a pre-Christian columnar sarcophagus (fig. 3.25) where his head reaches the entablature, as if a column support himself.[125] The statuesque visual language and metaphor of support of columnar sarcophagi is continued in the Red Sea type, both with connotations of heritage and imperialism.

3.4. Conclusion

The sarcophagi of this period form the final chapter to the arguments made in the previous two chapters about the significance of monumentality and supportive structures on Christian sarcophagi. In the context of those chapters, it is evident that the more explicitly expressed themes of columns and the statuesque considered here did not re-emerge in a vacuum, but were part of a continuous development from pre-Christian models in light of new Christian truths. The tension between pillar as frame and pillar as body runs through this chapter, anticipated by the material covered in Chapter 2, and is arguably related to the function of the sarcophagus that is both frame for the body and substitute for the body itself.

The previous chapters linked the use of classical architecture to attitudes to Roman culture and imperial power. The re-use of the caryatid motif illustrated a wish to assimilate to cultural traditions and claim the prestige of the past. The striking of rock and tomb, negating the need for one column while creating another, engaged subversively with the conventions of monumentality to build up new pillars of Christian identity, but was still in the process of solidifying active transformation. The sarcophagi of this chapter clearly make the most

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[124] Elsner (2011c) 26.
[125] E. Thomas (2011) 402; Lawrence (1951) 152f, fig. 41.

explicit use of an all-encompassing Roman architectural frame, while at the same time taking a more positive approach to Roman power in the treatment of Pilate and the Trojan-like Israelites. The full-blown use of Roman columnar architecture therefore contributes to the celebration of Christianity as the rightful heir to the imperial vocation prophesied for Rome. The process of construction and reconstruction glimpsed in the previous chapters seems now to be finally established with a new-found security.

This visual argument obscures the continuing battles within different Christian factions, and other contemporary threats of the Emperor Julian's paganism and barbarian attacks. Perhaps the challenges contributed to the insistent triumphalism, similarly to how the increase in scenes of intellectualism and 'the good life' on third-century sarcophagi has been linked to contemporary security troubles.[126] The overall thrust of the rhetoric though reflects the strengthening position of Christianity as it grows closer to the status of official religion in 380, and reflects the desires of late Roman patrons to present themselves in the most impressive manner possible. Against the background of other elite literary and visual art outside the church, the presentation of Christianity as traditionally prestigious was still a means to this end.

The final chapter will give further dimension to these claims in the fourth century and into the fifth by exploring the reuse of other classical *spolia* in Christian text, and architectural and material play in late antique domestic art.

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[126] Kousser (2008) 112.

Beyond Sarcophagi

A key argument of this thesis has been that early Christian sarcophagi benefit from being considered as a distinct medium within their late Roman context. This final chapter will therefore aim to round out this analysis by widening the picture to two case studies of different media, one relating firstly to early Christian text, and secondly to late antique art. Both of these case studies start to move beyond the fourth century, and the second also widens the geographical scope from Rome and the West to late antique Egypt, and leaves the funerary sphere for the domestic. It will pursue two themes that emerged in the course of the previous chapters. The first looks at the reuse of a 'canonical' classical past to present Christians as the fulfilment of Roman tradition. The second case regards both architectural frameworks and the importance of a medium-specific interest in materiality; considering these aspects in a different medium in depth will help to bring into sharper relief that which is specific to stone.

4.1. The afterlife of Virgil in Christian funerary inscriptions

The Virgilian echoes in early Christian inscriptions from Rome illustrate a different type of Christian reuse of the classics.[1] The repurposing of excerpted lines to put forward triumphalist messages, as we will see, has something in common with what we have seen from the sarcophagi, and suggests that similarly some sort of analogy with material *spolia* might be a fruitful way of understanding this type of reuse.[2]

Virgil's works had been central to Latin literary education since the early principate, and in late antiquity Christian and non-Christian pupils alike continued to acquire an intimate knowledge of the poet by committing large portions to memory and writing their own versions of the stories; Augustine for example tells us how as a student in a grammatical school, he won a prize for writing a passage from the point of view of Juno in *Aeneid* book 1.[3] Students in schools of rhetoric were also encouraged to develop anthologies by copying

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[1] Section 4.1 draws on some of the research for an essay written for my taught MA (2013a), entirely rewritten with further research and a new focus; the essay examined the reception of the Underworld as constructed by Virgil. On the question of the emergence of a distinctive Christian epigraphy, Cooley (2012) 228-50.

[2] Pelttari (2014) 10-11 also links poetic allusion with spoliation and segmentation in fourth-century art, though he focuses on poetry. Cf. also Elsner (2000).

[3] Augustine, *Confessiones* 1.17.

their favourite passages.[4] Servius's famous commentary on the *Aeneid* and Donatus's Life of Virgil were both written at the end of the fourth century.[5] Later Romans were therefore well acquainted not just with Virgil's canonical authority but with his malleability and capacity for reuse.

The fourth century is recognised as seeing a renewed inventiveness and creativity towards the treatment of Virgil in both pagan and Christian literature; for example the new popularity of the cento, a form of poetry entirely composed of lines or half-lines taken from other authors and reassembled, Homer and Virgil in particular.[6] Virgilian allusion in Christian inscriptions, however, has received comparatively little attention, despite a wealth of surviving material.[7]

This chapter will examine some significant Virgilian allusions from among the funerary verse inscriptions from the city of Rome in the fourth century and beyond, starting with the earliest examples of imperial and ecclesiastical dedications to Roman martyrs before focusing on the epitaphs that they in part inspired. In recent years most of these inscriptions have been discussed by Trout in particular, pointing out many of their Virgilian allusions.[8] This chapter aims to contribute to this discussion by considering in more detail the role played by these echoes in their fourth-century context. Their reuse of Virgil reveals much not just about Christian attitudes to death, but towards the classical tradition and culture, and how this relates to their identity as both Romans and Christians.

4.1.1. The dedication of Constantina

One early source of inspiration for Virgilian allusion in Christian epitaphs may have been a dedication to the martyr Agnes by Constantine's daughter Constantina, at the innovative circus-form basilica she built a hundred metres west of the current church in the 340s AD.[9] The stone seems to have been lost when the church was rebuilt in the first half of the seventh century, and the text survives only in certain manuscripts of Prudentius's *Peristephanon* following his own poem dedicated to Agnes.[10] The inscription has been well discussed by

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[4] Cribiore (2001) 226-230.
[5] Kaster (1988) 169-196 for Servius.
[6] Cf. McGill (2005). Rees ed. (2004) for fourth-century attitudes to Virgil. Courcelle and Courcelle (1984) for an extensive assemblage of late antique literary responses to the *Aeneid*.
[7] Cf. Hoogma (1959) for allusions to Virgil in inscriptions, including Christian examples.
[8] E.g. Trout (2013), (2014), (2015a), (2015b).
[9] Trout (2015b) 263-4.
[10] *ICUR* XIII 20752 and Trout (2015b) 264.

Trout, particularly in relation to its strong female voice and other inscriptions from the site, and its Virgilian and Ovidian allusions.[11]

Constantina deum venerans Christoque dicata
omnibus impensis devota mente paratis
numine divino multum Christoque iuvante
sacravi templum victricis virginis Agnes,
templorum quod vincit opus terrenaque cuncta,   *5*
aurea quae rutilant summi fastigia tecti.
nomen enim Christi celebratur sedibus istis,
tartaream solus potuit qui vincere mortem,
invectus caelo solusq(ue) inferre triumphum,
nomen Adae referens et corpus et omnia membra   *10*
*a mortis tenebris et **caeca nocte** levata.*
dignum igitur munus martyr devotaque Christo
ex opibus nostris per saecula longa tenebis,
o felix virgo, memorandi nominis Agnes.

I, Constantina, venerating God and consecrated to Christ,

having devoutly provided for all expenses,

with considerable divine inspiration and Christ assisting,

have dedicated the temple of the victorious virgin Agnes,

which surpasses the workmanship of temples and all earthly (buildings)

that the golden gables of lofty rooves illumine with reddish glow.

For the name of Christ is celebrated in this hall,

who alone was able to conquer Tartarean death,

borne to heaven, and alone carry in the triumph,

restoring the name of Adam and the body and all the limbs

released from the shadows of death and **blind night.**

Therefore, martyr and devotee of Christ, this worthy gift

from our resources you will possess through the long ages,

o happy maid, of the noteworthy name Agnes.[12]

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[11] Trout (2015b) and Trout (2014a).
[12] *ICUR* VIII 20752 7-11; date and trans. Trout (2014a).

The dedication forms an acrostic of '*Constantina deo'*.[13] Christ is described as the one "who alone can conquer Tartarean death", the only one able to rescue a person "from the darkness of death, released from blind night" ("*caeca nocte*"). 'Blind night' occurs twice at the end of the line in Virgil, at the death of Leander in *Georgics* 3, and when the Greeks are killed at Troy in *Aeneid* 2; both occasions clearly related to death.[14] The terminology of Virgil's underworld is recalled to triumphantly claim that it has been conquered, with a positive sense of victory that stands in contrast to the original Virgilian contexts.

Roberts, Pelttari, Kaufmann and Mastrangelo among others have argued that late antique poetry in general demonstrates "a retreat from referentiality", and that aside from more traditional allusions, there is a rise in the number of allusions that do not refer back to the original meaning of their sources, but instead serve to demonstrate the learnedness of the author, or to invite the reader to take a more active role in interpretation.[15] Trout also distinguishes between allusions in Constantina's dedication that are "relatively inert" and those that are "thematically 'appropriate'" and "more properly intertextual".[16]

Yet the examples Trout gives for "inert" allusions include "*summa fastigia tecti* (the gables of lofty rooves)" (line 6), used twice in the *Aeneid* to describe Troy and then the hut of Evander.[17] It does not seem insignificant that a phrase employed for two such foundational sites in Rome's early history is being reused for an important new basilica in the city, funded by the daughter of an emperor. It implies the idea that the church is foreshadowed in Rome's earliest origins, and is but one more step in Rome's continuous history. What is more, Constantina's gables are also described as golden, an addition that creates a sense of the basilica as the crowning achievement of this architectural heritage. Pelttari concedes that some allusions (in Prudentius for example) are "to some extent" referential, since "it is not irrelevant that the phrases chosen describe the glory of Rome at programmatic moments of the *Aeneid*."[18] The same is surely the case in this dedication.

Another example is "*per saecula longa*" (line 13), from Ovid's Metamorphoses 15, from Helenus's prophecy to Aeneas that Rome would be made more powerful "through the long ages" until Augustus.[19] Constantina uses it to say that the basilica will be left for the city "through the long ages", setting her church within the context of Rome's destined long-lived power. As we shall see, this theme of imperial predestination, fulfilment and triumph,

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[13] Cf. Zarker (1966) 129-130 and Somerville (2010) on acrostics in Virgil.
[14] *Georgics* 3.260; *Aeneid* 2.397.
[15] Roberts's phrase (1989); Pelttari (2014); Kaufmann (2016); Mastrangelo (2016).
[16] Trout (2015b) 269.
[17] *Aeneid* 2.302 and 8.366.
[18] Pelttari (2014) 139.
[19] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.446. Cf. Fielding (2014) and (2017) on Ovid in late antique literature.

including the conquering of Virgil's underworld by Christian hope discussed previously, will prove important in inscriptions that follow that of Constantina. Her sanctioning of this kind of commemoration may have inspired more ordinary citizens of Rome when fashioning their own memorials.

4.1.2. The elogia of Damasus

Damasus, who was pope from 366 until 384, famously did much to encourage the cult of the martyrs in Rome by restoring their tombs and setting up beautifully-cut verse inscriptions he had composed himself; inscriptions which no doubt played an important role in popularising this style of epigraphy with their learned allusions.[20]

This short inscription to the martyr Lawrence does not survive but is preserved in the *Sylloge Laureshamensis*; it is understood to be from his church in the cemetery of the ager Veranus:

> **verbera** *carnifices* **flammas tormenta catenas**
> *vincere Laurenti sola fides potuit.*
> *haec Damasus* **cumulat supplex altaria donis**
> *martyris egregii suspiciens meritum.*

> **Blows**, executioners, **flames, racks, chains** –
> Lawrence's faith alone was able to lay low.
> Damasus, a suppliant, heaps this altar with gifts,
> honouring the merit of a distinguished martyr.[21]

It contains two significant Virgilian allusions. First the list of "*verbera… catenas*" in the first line of the inscription is echoed by another "*verbera… catenae*" list in book 6 of the *Aeneid*, on the torments in the underworld:

> *Hinc exaudiri gemitus, et saeva sonare*
> **verbera**; *tum stridor* **ferri, tractaeque catenae**.

> Groans are heard from there, and the cruel **blows**
> resounding; then the grate of **iron, and of dragging chains**.[22]

The echo in the inscription applies the description of final *post mortem* torment to merely the tortures inflicted before death, which the next line makes clear the martyr was victorious over. It makes what is the final, eternal afterlife in Virgil into much more temporary worldly experience before death. This implies the triumph of Lawrence's Christian victory, that he has overcome death and is assured of a better afterlife. The implied comparison does not necessarily suggest however that Virgil's stories are to be discarded; they are incomplete but not invalid, just not having the full knowledge of Christ and salvation.

A second allusion can be observed by comparing line 3 with the passage in book 11 where Pallas's father Evander is imagined praying for his son's safety, not knowing he has just been killed by Turnus:

> *et nunc ille quidem spe multum captus inani*
> *fors et vota facit* **cumulatque altaria donis**

> And now he indeed captured by vain hope,
> perhaps he makes vows **and heaps altars with gifts.**[23]

Evander can be compared with Damasus, both piling up gifts for dead men – and perhaps casts Damasus as a paternal figure as the bishop responsible for caring for Rome's martyrs. Evander is unaware of the death however, and prays for Pallas's safety, but in vain; Damasus knows that Lawrence is dead and presents his offerings because of that fact, confident that his hope for salvation is not in vain. The gifts are owed to Lawrence because of his death, not to prevent it, embracing death as the way to true victory. Both allusions thus help to completely transform the earlier Virgilian conceptions of life and death, fitting with the message of this inscription and others.

A different dedication to Eutychius from a cemetery near San Sebastiano uses the word "*barathrum*" to refer to the prison in which the martyr is thrown before his death, the same word which in the *Aeneid* means the "abyss" of the underworld itself.[24] The reapplication of the word for an infernal abyss to a prison again transfers the pagan final destination to the other side of death, making it into a more temporary, even temporal state.

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[23] *Aeneid* 11.49-50, my translation; noted in *ICUR* and Trout (2015a) 141.
[24] *ICUR* V 13274.7; Trout (2015a) 122-24, no. 21. *Aeneid* 8.245; also 3.421 for Charybdis.

An inscription dedicated to Tarsicius, a third-century martyr killed in Rome, was set up by Damasus in the region of the cemetery of Callistus.[25] It is preserved in the *Sylloge Laureshamensis*, and it compares Tarsicius's death with that of Stephen, the very first Christian martyr who was stoned to death in Jerusalem according to Acts:

> *par meritum quicumq(ue) legis cognosce duorum*
> *quis Damasus rector titulos post praemia reddit.*
> *Iudaicus populus Stephanum meliora monentem*
> *perculerat saxis, tulerat qui **ex hoste tropaeum***:
> *martyrium primus rapuit levita fidelis.*
> *Tarsicium sanctum Xp(ist)i sacramenta gerentem*
> *cum male sana manus premeret vulgare profanis,*
> *ipse animam potius voluit dimittere caesus*
> *prodere quam canibus rabidis caelestia membra.*

> Whoever reads this, learn the equal merit of the two
> to whom the ruler Damasus gave inscriptions after rewards.
> The Jewish people had struck down Stephen with stones,
> while he was teaching better things, he who had carried off **a trophy from the enemy**:
> he first, the faithful deacon, seized martyrdom.
> When a senseless gang pressed holy Tarsicius,
> carrying the sacraments of Christ, to spread them among the impious,
> he wished rather to give himself up to be cut down
> than to abandon to rabid dogs the heavenly body.[26]

By commemorating these together, Damasus links a local Roman martyr with the prestige of the biblical protomartyr and emphasises the continuity from the earliest Christians in the Holy Land to contemporary Christians in Rome. This is reminiscent of the pairing of Jesus and Peter on sarcophagi in the twin miracles of the raising of Lazarus and striking the rock.[27]

The text of the inscription describes Stephen as carrying off a trophy from the enemy with his death, "*ex hoste tropaeum*".[28] This phrase, to which Ausonius's *Mosella* also alludes, appears in *Georgics* 3 similarly at the end of the line:

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[25] It is thought to have been situated on the surface above Area 1 of the catacomb with the Crypt of the Popes; cf. Trout (2015a) 111-113, no. 15.
[26] *ICUR* IV 11078, my translation. Acts 6.8-8.2.
[27] See Chapter 2.4.
[28] *ICUR* IV 9153.4, IV 10129.7.

> *addam urbes Asiae domitas pulsumque Niphaten*
>
> *fidentemque fuga Parthum versisque sagittis,*
>
> *et duo rapta manu diverso **ex hoste tropaea***
>
> *bisque triumphatas utroque ab litore gentes.*

> I will add Asia's vanquished cities, the routed Niphates,
>
> The Parthian, whose trust is in flight and backward-shot arrows,
>
> The two **trophies** torn perforce **from** far-sundered **foes**
>
> And the nations on either shore that yielded twofold triumphs. [29]

This passage describes the patriotic scenes that the poet will fashion on the doors of a temple of Augustus: "the two trophies torn perforce from far-sundered foes, and the nations on either shore that yielded twofold triumphs." Stephen's triumph in death is therefore loaded with the vocabulary of imperial triumph and the display of spoils.

Another Damasian inscription from the Crypt of the Popes, in the catacomb just beneath the location of the dedication to Tarsicius, also uses this phrase to describe the victorious deaths of Christian martyrs, in this case four of the deacons of Pope Sixtus:

> *hic congesta iacet quaeris si turba piorum*
>
> *corpora sanctorum retinent veneranda sepulcra*
>
> *sublimes animas rapuit sibi regia caeli*
>
> *hic comites Xysti portant qui **ex hoste tropaea***
>
> *hic numerus procerum servat qui altaria Xpi…*

> Here lies the gathered crowd of the pious, if you seek it;
>
> the revered graves preserve the bodies of the saints,
>
> the kingdom of heaven itself snatched away the exalted souls.
>
> Here the comrades of Sixtus who carry **trophies from the enemy,**
>
> here the number of princes who guard the altars of Christ…[30]

Both inscriptions also echo "rapta" from the same line in the Georgics with the verb "rapuit" in the fifth and third lines respectively. For Damasus this was clearly a resonant image, and we can expect that educated Romans would be familiar with the famous passage in the Georgics, particularly if it alludes – as some think - to an actual monument in Rome.[31] In a

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[29] *Georgics* 3.32, trans. adapted from Fairclough (1916).

[30] *ICUR* IV 9513 1-5, my translation; Trout (2015a) 113-15, no. 16.

[31] Harrison (2005) compares with the Mausoleum of Augustus, Mynor (1990) 181 with the *aedes Herculis Musarum*; cf. Wilkinson (1969) for connections with the Palatine temple.

sense, the monuments to the martyrs are being dressed in the same patriotic and triumphal imagery as a classical temple to the emperor – Damasus is presenting the Christian martyrs as the new heroes of Rome, carrying imperial spoils and winning glory for their city. Damasus was also responsible for much of the monumentalisation of the crypt itself, adding architectural marbles and an altar, as well as light wells in the ceiling and a new set of stairs for better access to show it all off.[32]

By using the language of trophies, Damasus seems to associate the display of the saints' bodies with the idea of spoils of victory. This is interesting in the context of the late Roman taste for *spolia* in art and architecture, especially given Elsner's assessment of this culture of *spolia* eventually evolving into the Christian cult of relics.[33] Damasus's choice of language seems to confirm that there is a link between the two phenomena, part of the late Roman culture of fragments evident in both art and literature of the period.

The idea of martyrs as new heroes is also evident in the inscription by Damasus to the martyrs Felicissimus and Agapetus, from the cemetery of Praetextatus, originally 100 x 250cm. It was recorded in the seventh-century *Sylloge Turonensis*, and the three surviving fragments were dug out of the pavement of a church in 1927:

> *[aspice et hic tumulus retinet caelestia membra]*
> *sanctorum subito rapuit quos regia c[aeli]*
> *hi crucis invictae comites pariterq(ue) min[istri]*
> *rectoris sancti meritumque fidemq(ue) s[ecuti]*
> *aetherias petiere domos regnaq(ue) pio[rum]*
> *unica in his gaudet **romanae gloria [plebis]***
> *quod duce tunc Xysto Xp(ist)i meruere trium[phos]*
> *Felicissimo et Agapeto sanctis martyrib(us) Damasus episc(opus) [fecit]*

> Look, this tomb preserves the heavenly limbs
> of saints whom the kingdom of heaven suddenly snatched away.
> These unconquered comrades and equally servants of the cross,
> following the merit and faith of the holy ruler,
> sought heavenly homes and the kingdoms of the pious;
> in these rejoices the singular **glory of the Roman people,**
> since, then under the leadership of Sixtus, they earned the triumphs of Christ.

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[32] Trout (2015a) 115.
[33] Elsner (2000).

For Felicissimus and Agapetus, the holy martyrs, the bishop Damasus made this.[34]

"Aspice" is a common Virgilian opening.[35] The martyrs are described patriotically as "*romanae gloria plebis*", which also recalls "*Troianae gloria gentis*", used of one of the future kings of Alba Longa pointed out in Virgil's underworld:

> *proximus ille Procas,* **Troianae gloria gentis**

> Next to him is Procas, **glory of the Trojan race.**[36]

With the adjustment of "Trojans" to the more inclusive "Romans", the martyrs are enlisted into the ranks of Roman heroes in the afterlife, with the authority of the words of Rome's greatest poet.

In another poem dedicated to Peter and Paul (fig. 4.1), the apostles are the "new stars (*nova sidera)*" of Rome.[37] In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas's son Iulus is told by Apollo that he is on a path to the stars ("*sic itur ad astra*"), while Ovid described the deification of Julius Caesar in terms of a star.[38] Damasus was concerned with "fashioning virtuous heroes, and promoting new celestial guardians" for the glory of the city, aided in part by appealing to the heroic language of Virgilian epic.[39]

As with Constantina's dedication, we should see these selected examples as making reference to and arguably comparison with their Virgilian sources, given that they come from important passages in the story of the glory of Rome, thematically and programmatically appropriate for the messages Damasus and other fourth-century Christians were communicating.

Virgilian imitation in other areas of late antique Christian literature has been taken as a sign of their complete acculturation to *Romanitas*.[40] The cultural authority of Virgil was arguably even more significant in the changing landscape of the fourth century, when Rome's significance as a city was in doubt; with emperors increasingly based elsewhere in the empire, its importance was increasingly ideological more than political. Virgil's importance lay in shoring up a sense of continuity with traditional Roman identity; his conception of Rome provided "a focus for a new kind of patriotism", as well as "a much needed sense of

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[34] *ICUR* V 13872, my translation; Trout (2015a) 126-28, no. 25.
[35] Trout (2015a) 126.
[36] *Aeneid* 6.767, my translation.
[37] *ICUR* V 13273.6-7; Trout (2015a) 121-22, no. 20.
[38] *Aeneid* 9.641; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.745-842; cf. Pandey (2013).
[39] Trout (2003) 519.
[40] Rees (2004b) 33.

continuity with the past."[41] In the context of accusations that Christian converts to Christianity were damaging the *pax deorum*, and with their loyalty to *Romanitas* questioned, this patriotism represented by Virgil was a valuable resource to which Christians could point.[42]

4.1.3. Epitaphs

We know of around 350 Christian verse epitaphs, which constitute just one per cent of surviving late Roman epitaphs.[43] Some repetition of Virgil has of course been identified in Christian inscriptions before. One of the most prominent, which was the subject of Zarker's 1961 article, is the whole line "*abstulit atra dies et funere mersit acerbo*", "the black day tore away and plunged into bitter burial".[44] Virgil uses this line twice in the *Aeneid*, and it is one of the most frequent quotations across both pagan and Christian metrical inscriptions.[45]

The epitaph of Ursa uses slightly surprising language for a Christian:

> *condita sepulcro hic pausat Ursa*
> *Crestiana fidelis an(norum) XXXVIII. Per partum*
> *subito ducente **inpio fato** est tradita **Tartaris***
> *imis, et me subito linquit…*

> Buried in this tomb, here rests Ursa,
> a faithful Christian of 38 years. Through childbirth
> suddenly with **impious fate** leading she was delivered to the **Tartarean**
> depths, and left me suddenly…[46]

The location of Tartarus does not seem initially appropriate for a "faithful Christian", but it is used twenty-one times by Virgil for the underworld as a whole. In *Aeneid* 6, the comparable formula "*ad impia Tartara mittit*" appears:

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[41] Witke (2004) 139; Rees (2004a) 6.

[42] Corke-Webster (2019) 279: "at root, most conservative suspicion of this new social group boiled down to fears about its ability and willingness to support the Roman state."

[43] Trout (2013) 3.

[44] Zarker (1961).

[45] *Aeneid* 6.429, 11.28. Hoogma (1959) lists six instances of reuse of more or less the whole line, and another 37 echoing to a less complete degree; Zarker (1961) 113 lists 72 certain echoes and 9 probable.

[46] *CLE* 240 1-4, my translation.

> *"...hac iter Elysium nobis; at laeva malorum*
>
> *exercet poenas, et **ad impia Tartara mittit**."*

> "…This is our road to Elysium; but the left exerts
>
> punishments on evil-doers, and **leads to impious Tartarus**."[47]

These lines were echoed in at least three other inscriptions in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, as well as being quoted by Lactantius, Sedulius and Jerome.[48] The imagery is slightly altered in the epitaph by describing "fate" rather than "Tartarus" as "impious", which avoids describing the afterlife as ungodly. The surprising choice of "impious" for the fate of a Christian might itself have been prompted by the fact that Ursa died in childbirth, with all the association of piety with family devotion in the *Aeneid* and elsewhere; fate is portrayed as having no regard for family duty, tearing the deceased away from her husband who is the voice of the epitaph.[49]

Another epitaph of two lines begins with the typical Christian formula "*vive deo*", 'live in God', but concludes with the image of being snatched away and "the black door of Dis":

> *vive deo, dum fata sinunt, nam curua senectus*
>
> *te rapit et **Ditis ianua nigra** vocat*

> Live in God, while the fates allow, for crooked old age
>
> snatches you and the **black door of Dis** calls. [50]

Three similar constructions all emphatically placed at the end of a line can be found in Virgil, but the closest is in *Aeneid* 6, "*atri ianua Ditis*", "the door of black Dis".

> *Tros Anchisiade, facilis descensus Averno;*
>
> *noctes atque dies patet **atri ianua Ditis***

> Trojan son of Anchises, it is easy to go down to Avernus;
>
> night and day the **door of black Dis** stands open.[51]

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[47] *Aeneid* 6.542-3, my translation.
[48] Cf. Hoogma (1959) for the epitaphs and Courcelle and Courcelle (1985) for literature. Lactantius, *Institutiones Divinae* 6.24.9; Sedulius, *Carmen Paschale* 2.293-7; Jerome*, In Ecclesiasten* 10.2.
[49] I am grateful to Francesca Modini for this suggestion.
[50] *CLE* 310, my translation.
[51] *Aeneid* 6.126-127, my translation. Cf. *Georgics* 4.467 and *Aeneid* 8.667, "*alta ostia Ditis*".

This seems then to have been a well-known Virgilian expression. The sixth book of the *Aeneid* has been described as the Roman reference book for life after death, and so some presence of it in the funerary context of epitaphs seems appropriate; in fact *Aeneid* 6 must be the book most alluded to across early Christian literature as a whole.[52] In one of his sermons, in the course of giving his own critical opinion of its view of the afterlife, Augustine reveals just how widespread knowledge of this part of the *Aeneid* was in late Roman society: "Almost all of you know this, though I wish few of you knew. A few know from books, and many from the theatre, how Aeneas went down to the underworld…"[53]

On a very superficial scan of the evidence, Hoogma (1959) dedicates 19 full pages to epigraphic allusions to book 6, while allusions to the other books take up between 6 (for book 12) and 14 pages (for book 1), with an average of 9. The popularity of book 1 for reuse fits with Morgan's finding that the most popular passages recorded on papyri tend to be from the most prominent parts, such as the beginning of works.[54] Of the graffiti found in Pompeii that quote the *Aeneid*, half repeat the first line of book 1, and another quarter contain the first line of book 2. In the fourth century, Donatus cites 22 references from book 1, but only 2 from book 12, which mirrors the relative popularity of these books in the epigraphic corpus.[55] The prominence book 6 takes amongst the epigraphic evidence as a whole compared to the Pompeian graffiti is noteworthy, and one reason must be the high proportion of funerary contexts represented in the former; the sixth book had provided for generations of Romans "une manière de se representer l'outre-tombe."[56]

These examples do not preserve the metrics or line positions of their Virgilian sources, and the inspiration therefore seems less explicit. The Virgilian origin of the phrases is not particularly trumpeted. However it is noteworthy that the source phrases in Virgil are both at the end of the line, in emphatic and prominent positions. These are therefore likely to have been memorable expressions that provided the inspiration for traditional ideas in these epitaphs, but the exhibition of their Virgilian origin was not of primary importance.

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[52] Zarker (1961) 114 for the description of *Aeneid* 6 as reference book.
[53] Augustine, *Sermones* 241.5.
[54] Morgan (1998) 105-10.
[55] Morgan (1998) 106.
[56] Courcelle and Courcelle (1984) 419.

Some epitaphs seem to treat Virgil in a different way that is more explicit in its borrowing. The epitaph of Evodia (fig. 4.2) dates from the second half of the fourth century and comes from the catacomb of Sant'Agnese fuori le mura. The last line has only recently been restored based on the discovery of a photograph.[57] As well as the small Chi-Rho in this line, there is a larger Chi-Rho to the left of the text.

> *ne tristes lac[rimas ne p]ectora tundite v[estra]*
> *o pater et mater n[am reg]na celestia tango*
> *non tristis erebus n[on **p]allida mortis imag[o]***
> *sed requies secura te[net] ludoque choreas*
> *inter felices animas et **[am]oena piorum***
> *pra[estat haec omnia Xp(isti) q<u>ae Eu]odiam decorant.*

No sad tears, do not beat your chests,
o father and mother, for I touch the heavenly kingdoms;
neither sad Erebus nor the pale image of death
but safe rest holds me, and I play in the dances
among the happy souls, and the pleasant places of the pious.
Christ bestows all these things that give honour to Evodia.[58]

'Erebus' is used six times in the *Aeneid* for the underworld, while the "pale image of death" in line 3 is also parallelled: in book 6 "*tristis imago*" and "*pallentis imago*" refer to the shades, and "*plurima mortis imago*" appears in book 2.[59] Virgil always places '*imago*' at the end of the line, twenty-five times in total. In this epitaph, these Virgilian images are rejected by the deceased child in exchange for an alternative that is reminiscent of Virgil's Elysian Fields. The "pleasant places of the pious" in line 5 have a strong parallel in *Aeneid* 5 when the shade of Anchises describes where he now resides, in the "pleasant gatherings of the pious", and another two inscriptions use Anchises's image of "*amoena virecta*".[60] In fact this formula of rejection and assertion seems to draw on Anchises's own words: "impious Tartarus does not hold me, or the sad shades, but I live in the pleasant gatherings of the

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[57] Colafrancesco (2007).
[58] *ICUR* VIII 21015, my translation, adapted from (2013b). Cf. Trout (2014a) 225-226; he interprets the Chi-Rho as standing for '*Christus*' as part of the text.
[59] *Aeneid* 6.695, 6.480, 2.369.
[60] *Aeneid* 5.735. *ICUR* X 26678.5, VIII 23394.7

pious and Elysium".[61] This epitaph then makes use of a more positive and triumphal expression of the afterlife from among the images available from Virgil.

While Anchises provided assurance for his son that he was in one part of the underworld rather than another, however, the consolation for Evodia's parents is that she is not in the underworld at all, and while she may have the 'likeness of death', she is merely at rest. This contrast between death and sleep is evidently inspired by the Christian theology. In the story told in Mark and Luke, and in a shorter version in Matthew, Jesus is called to heal the dying twelve year old daughter of the leader of the synagogue, Jairus; but before he can arrive, having healed the woman with issue of blood on the way, he is informed she has already died.[62]

> "When Jesus heard this, he replied, 'Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved.' When he came to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with him, except Peter, John, and James, and the child's father and mother (τὸν πατέρα... καὶ τὴν μητέρα). They were all weeping and wailing for her; but he said, **'Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping.'** And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and called out, 'Child, get up!' Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then he directed them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astounded; but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened."[63]

In Matthew's shorter version particular attention is drawn to the details of the mourning, "the flute-players and the crowd making a commotion", and the crowd again laughs when Jesus claims the girl is just sleeping.[64] The relabelling of death as sleep is attested in the New Testament letters predating the gospels, such as in 1 Corinthians: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep."[65]

We can see that the words of Jesus in bold strikingly parallel the structure of Evodia's epitaph: "Do not weep ("No sad tears, do not beat your chests", line 1); for she is not dead ("neither sad Erebus nor the pale image of death", line 3) but sleeping ("but safe rest holds me", line 4)." There is thus an implied parallel between the two young daughters with their weeping fathers and mothers (*et patrem et matrem* in the Vulgate*; o pater et mater* in the epitaph), one in first-century Galilee, the other in fourth-century Rome, that makes the

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[61] *Aeneid* 5.733-735.
[62] Mark 5.21-43, Matthew 9.18-26, Luke 8.40-56.
[63] Luke 8.50-56.
[64] Matthew 9.23-24.
[65] 1 Corinthians 15.20; cf. 1 Corinthians 15.6 and 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18. Also Acts 7.60 and John 11.11-14.

allusion to this story through the death as sleep metaphor all the more pertinent. Seeking consolation for the premature death of their daughter, Evodia's parents could look to the biblical precedent set by Jairus's daughter, raised to life by Christ through faith. The epitaph manages to convey a Christian hope expressed in the classically poetic language of Virgil, cleverly combining the structures of Anchises's and Jesus' speech to create a unique fusion of Roman and Christian.

Moreover, the perhaps unusual choice of the verb "*tango*" or 'touch' for Evodia's contact with heaven might further recall the physical contact emphasised in the biblical story, with all three accounts saying that Jesus took the girl's hand to raise her to life. The intervening story of the healing of the bleeding woman, for which the story of Jairus's daughter is the literary frame, is even more famously based on touch; her character is a common addition to sarcophagus reliefs (e.g. fig. 2.1), crouching on the ground and grasping Jesus' cloak by which she is healed: "if I but touch (*tetigero*) his clothes, I will be made well."[66] Aware that power had gone out of him at the touch, Jesus asks "Who touched me (*tetigit*)?" before commending her faith.[67] In the same way that images of healing that proved so popular on sarcophagi functioned as assurances of God's power to work miracles and complete the resurrection begun with Christ, so the allusions to this healing story work to remind Evodia's family, and all the other readers of her epitaph, of God's past works and future promises.

4.1.3.2. The epitaph of Theodora

Another epitaph from S. Agnese is the epitaph of Theodora, or her pet name Aphrodite (fig. 4.3). It is dated to 382 AD from the names of the consuls, but its exact origin is unknown, other than that it marked a double tomb (line 2). It seems to have been deliberately broken up and reused as a paving slab at some point, to judge from the straight cut on the left hand side of the pictured fragment, and comparing the polished surface with the matte border where it would have been cemented into place.[68] The largest fragment is now on display further up the staircase from Evodia's epitaph. Another smaller fragment found separately in the wall of a vineyard is preserved on the opposite wall.

It is composed of 10 hexameter verses, with two non-metrical lines either side:

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[66] Mark 5.28.
[67] Luke 8.45; cf. Mark 5.30.
[68] The *ICUR* entry also suggests a former use as a paving stone.

> *Theodora que vixit annos XXI m(enses) VII*
>
> *d(ies) XXIII in pace est bisomu*
>
> **a**mplificam sequitur vitam dum casta Afrodite
>
> **f**ecit ad astr|a viam Christi modo gaudet in aula
>
> **r**estitit haec mundo | semper caelestia quaerens   5
>
> **o**ptima servatrix legis fideique | magistra
>
> **d**e<di>dit egregiam sanctis per secula mentem
>
> **i**nde per eximios paradisi | regnat odores
>
> **t**empore continuo vernant ubi gramina rivis |
>
> **e**xpectatque deum **superas quo surgat ad auras**   10
>
> **h**oc posuit corpus tumulo | mortalia linquens
>
> **f**undavitque locum coniunx Eva[grius ins]tans. |
>
> *dep(osita) die [---?]*
>
> *Antonio et Syagrio con(sulibus)*

Theodora who lived 21 years, 7 months,

23 days, is in peace in the double tomb.

During the time that chaste Aphrodite pursued a splendid life,

she paved a pathway to the stars; now she rejoices in the palace of Christ.

She stood firm against the world, ever seeking heavenly things.   5

An excellent guardian of the law and teacher of faith,

she surrendered her noble mind to the saints through the ages.

Thus she reigns amid the choice fragrances of paradise,

where the grasses ever bloom among the streams,

and she awaits God **so that she may rise up to the lofty breezes**.   10

Leaving her mortal remains behind, she set her body in this tomb,

and her husband, Evagrius, assiduously attending, secured the place.

Buried on the day [---?]

when Antoninus and Syagrius were consuls.[69]

Like Constantina's dedication, the epitaph's central metrical lines form an acrostic, 'Afrodite hf', for *honesta femina*. Interestingly the lines of each verse have not actually been preserved when they were inscribed on the stone but instead have been run together, which rather

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[69] *ICUR* VIII 20799; translation of metrical lines from Trout (2014a).

obscures the effect of the verses and acrostic; I have followed Trout in indicating the line breaks with vertical lines in the above reconstruction of the verses. The actual stone is laid out as follows:

> *Theodora que vixit annos XXI m(enses) VII*
> *d(ies) XXIII in pace est bisomu*
> ***a**mplificam sequitur vitam dum casta Afrodite   **f**ecit ad astr*
> *a viam Christi modo gaudet in aula   **r**estitit haec mundo*
> *semper caelestia quaerens   **o**ptima servatrix legis fideique*
> *magistra * **de**<di>dit egregiam sanctis per secula mentem   **i**nde per eximios paradisi*
> *regnat odores * **t**empore continuo vernant ubi gramina rivis*
> ***e**xpectatque deum superas quo surgat ad auras   **h**oc posuit corpus túmulo*
> *mortalia linquens   **f**undavitque locum coniunx Eva[grius ins]tans.*
> *dep(osita) die [---?]*
> *Antonio * et * Syagrio con(sulibus)*

This perhaps suggests a lack of space or forethought, or that the stonecutter was not very knowledgeable. The poem seems to be designed to be viewed because of the acrostic, which would not make the same impression when read aloud, so it is difficult to see this as just a record of a poem meant primarily to be read out at the funeral, for example. The first two lines have letters which are 4-5cm high, and then shrink to 3.5cm in the next three, and 3cm thereafter, adding to the impression that the carver may have misjudged the space. Even the first verses are still run together on the stone however, suggesting that the stonecutter set out from the beginning with no intention to preserve the layout. Other irregularities include the inconsistent carving of the 'A's (some with broken crossbars, some without any) and "*dedit*" inscribed erroneously as "*dedidit*" which spoils the metre - although these features are not unusual for the period.

Despite this, the metrical and non-metrical lines have clearly been differentiated, with some attempt made to centre the final two lines differently, with the very fact that two lines have been used when the text could have fitted onto one. Within the verse section we can also see a larger gap before "*optima*" which starts a new metrical line (see fig. 4.3a), so it seems that the stonecutter could have chosen to indicate a new line in this way.[70] There are also some leaf-shaped space marks indicated in the catalogue (as asterisks in the above transcription), with one visible in the final line after "*et*" – the mark before "*et*" is less easily spotted because it is a bit more squashed and has not been painted in, which is why it is lacking in

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[70] Trout (2014a) 227 n57.

the catalogue. Whether by coincidence or not, it is a nice touch that the first two leaves are placed close to the description of the grassy Elysian Fields-style paradise, particularly the second one beginning the ninth metrical line.

The stone itself is very thick and substantial in comparison with the other inscriptions displayed around it today (figs. 4.3b and c), at least 6cm deep when even Damasus's inscriptions were about 4cm, which makes it even more surprising if the text has been laid out poorly, as it surely must have been expensive and designed to be prominent. From the surviving portion on display at S. Agnese, the stone must have been much wider than it was high, yet if turned on one of the short sides it would not be wide enough to fit the verses on single lines. Perhaps the husband Evagrius prioritised a thick, good quality stone that was available, even if it was not quite the right proportions to be able to preserve the layout of the original poem. Kruschwitz has observed among the verse graffiti inscribed in Pompeii that while preserving the metrical structure was preferred, it was often abandoned when, for example, the space available did not best suit it.[71] While the context of quickly scratched or painted graffiti from the first century is very different to that of a fourth-century stone epitaph, those that deviate from the metrical layout would often use other means to indicate the metrical breaks, such as punctuation like dashes or larger gaps – just like Theodora's epitaph.[72] Kruschwitz wonders if similar patterns to those he has uncovered can be observed in stone epitaphs, and this inscription would seem to fit quite well.[73]

Perhaps this shows that the poem, complete with acrostic, was composed with the intention of preserving the metrical layout before the stone itself was selected. Having seen what was available, perhaps it was decided to sacrifice the layout for a more impressive backdrop; whether reluctantly due to time constraints and lack of other suitable options, or leaping at the chance to secure the most striking monument, with the issue of the text layout a minor inconvenience. While the visual impact of an inscription's text and any imagery has been increasingly emphasised in scholarship alongside its literary value, perhaps the importance of the visual impact of the stone itself can still be underestimated. There are many examples of late Roman epitaphs inscribed on highly coloured or detailed marbles, even when this must have made reading the text more of a challenge (for example see especially fig. 4.4, as well as figs. 4.5 and 4.6); they can sometimes make it easier to spot the late antique inscriptions from afar in museums. The fourth- to fifth-century Roman epitaph of Olimpiodorus (fig. 4.6) is comparable to Theodora's, in being a visually impressive stone (in this case due to the striking foliated marble), but with what seems like poor placement of the

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[71] Kruschwitz (2008) esp. 256.
[72] E.g. Kruschwitz (2008) 254-5.
[73] Kruschwitz (2008) 260 n.77.

text, running off into the frame, which could probably have been carved wider in the first place if it had been deemed necessary (unless pre-carved).

The choice of Aphrodite, emphasised in the acrostic that runs as a thread holding the whole poem together, is another striking feature. Aphrodite may have had Roman significance as the mother of Aeneas, but as the pagan goddess of romantic love might have been thought a surprising choice for a Christian.[74] The attached qualifications that accompany the name, "*casta*" in line 3 and "*h(onesta) f(emina)*" in the acrostic, may go some way to diluting it, or may even be intentionally playful, given how inappropriate they can seem as epithets for Aphrodite.[75] Roman women meanwhile had for a long time been depicted as Venus in funerary statues and on sarcophagi.[76]

After praising her character and accomplishments, the epitaph describes her current post mortem location, reigning "amid the choice fragrances of paradise", and she "awaits God so that she may rise up to the lofty breezes." The idyllic image of the "*gramina rivis*" in line 9, the grasses among the streams, refers back to the beginning of *Georgics* 4, another book in which Virgil famously deals with the afterlife, where it describes the ideal location to set up bee hives.[77] The reference to fragrance in the previous line might also recall this book to the reader, as there are more references to this word in *Georgics* 4 than in any other book in Virgil.

The formula '*ad auras*' in line 10 occurs ten times in Virgil and only at the end of the line. "*superas... surgat ad auras*", "she may rise up to the lofty breezes", echoes "*superas veniebat ad auras*" from later on in *Georgics* 4, as Trout notes:

> *redditaque Eurydice **superas veniebat ad auras***

> and Eurydice, returned, **was coming to the lofty breezes**[78]

This line refers to upper air that Eurydice approaches as she is following Orpheus out of the Underworld. While Eurydice's escape from the land of the dead was unsuccessful after Orpheus failed to follow his instruction not to look back, Theodora "awaits God" (*expectatque deum*); this strikes a triumphant note, since Theodora can depend upon more successful results than the tragic Eurydice to escape the Underworld. Furthermore Eurydice

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[74] Alan Cameron (1985) on such *signa* as domestic names.
[75] Trout (2013) 6 lists "*casta Afrodite*" as one of the examples of wordplay the epitaph delights in.
[76] Cf. Wrede (1981) on commemoration in the form of divinities.
[77] *Georgics* 4.19; noted by Trout (2013) 6 n.11.
[78] *Georgics* 4.486; Trout (2013) 7 and (2014) 228.

could only hope at best to re-emerge on earth, whereas Theodora expects to be transported to heaven. The Christian God will triumph where the classical hero failed.

This is particularly striking given the frequent comparison between Christ and Orpheus in early Christian art (e.g. fig 4.7); both share a power to tame nature and had a violent death, as well as this ability to visit and return from the dead.[79] Orpheus plays his lyre to lead Eurydice out of the Underworld, as Christ leads souls out of hell.[80] Eurydice is even said to have died after being bitten on the heel by a snake; this has an obvious resonance with the story in Genesis of the temptation of Eve by the snake, through which sin and death were said to enter the world. In a sense therefore Theodora shares a similar downfall as Eurydice at the hands of a snake, but can rely on a more dependable saviour for her vindication.

This line has another close parallel in *Aeneid* 6 noted by Trout, where the Sibyl warns Aeneas of the difficulty of returning to the land of the living from the underworld:

> *Tros Anchisiade, facilis descensus Averno;*
> *noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;*
> *sed revocare gradum* **superasque evadere ad auras**,
> *hoc opus, hic labor est. pauci, quos aequus amavit*
> *Iuppiter, aut ardens evexit ad aethera virtus,*
> *dis geniti potuere.*

> Trojan son of Anchises, it is easy to go down to Avernus;
> night and day the door of black Dis stands open;
> but to retrace your step **and escape to the upper air**,
> that is the task, that is the labour. Some few, those whom a kind Jupiter
> loved, or whom burning virtue carried up to the heavens,
> sons of gods, have succeeded. [81]

The Sibyl warns that only an exceptional few who found favour with the gods were able to return from the dead. "*superas quo*" in Theodora's epitaph echoes "*superasque*" particularly well; the implication of this passage being alluded to in Theodora's epitaph is that she is able to call herself one of these virtuous few, loved by the gods, or God, in this case. She, like the

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[79] Deckers, Seeliger, and Mietke (1987) plate 66b.
[80] Orpheus's lyre would also have recalled the original psalmist David, while the condition of salvation being not to look back recalls the story of Lot's wife in Genesis 19.15-26.
[81] *Aeneid* 6.126-131, my translation. Trout (2013) 7, (2014) 228.

epic heroes the Sibyl recalls, can call herself a child of God, delivered from death by following Christ, the true Son of God.

There are two other inscriptions in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* listed by Hoogma that echo just this phrase, with "*superas elatus ad auras*" and "*superas consurgere in auras*", as well as three others that allude to the preceding two lines, including the two-line epitaph discussed above with "*Ditis ianua nigra*".[82] Lines 128-130 of *Aeneid* 6 are also much quoted by late Roman authors: for example Lactantius quotes 128-129 exactly, while Ambrose alludes to them, and Tertullian and Sidonius Apollinaris both allude to 129-130.[83] This passage of the *Aeneid* is therefore probably the one that has received the most attention and repetition out of all the Virgilian lines considered in this chapter, and its reuse here could surely expect recognition.

The type of engagement with Virgil's text shown by Theodora's epitaph depends on the reader knowing the original context of the line; this is not just reuse for metrical convenience, but shows a real attempt to engage with and improve on the tradition. The position of the Virgilian allusions at the ends of the metrical lines seems to be carefully contrived to highlight and show off such learned references, with an expectation that the more educated readers of the inscription would recognise the allusions. This type of reuse encourages the reader to compare the new context of the allusion with the old, which can result in these kind of triumphal implications.

A final comparison noted by Trout can be found in the inscription on the base of the obelisk of Constantius II in the Circus Maximus, erected around 357. It proclaims that the monument had lain for a long time on the ground, "because none could believe that a monument of such great mass could rise into the upper breezes (*superas consugere in auras*)."[84] There is therefore precedent, within thirty years of Theodora's death, for the phrase being used in a more triumphal context than in Virgil, to suggest a kind of triumphing over the past, with Constantius II and his generation being the ones to succeed where their predecessors had failed, through a lack of faith. In one way this example is the closest to the wording of Theodora's epitaph, with the use of the verb "*consugere*" compared to her "*surgat*". The obelisk must have been a significant monument for Rome's civic pride, having been erected at the time of the emperor's only visit to the city, and having originally been intended for the new capital of Constantinople. Theodora's epitaph also echoes the

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[82] Cf. Hoogma (1959).

[83] Lactantius, *Institutiones* 6.24.9; Ambrose, *De Cain et Abel* 2.9.35; Tertullian, *Ad nationes* 2.13.20; Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistula ad Claudianum Mamertum* 4.3.10. Cf. Courcelle and Courcelle (1985).

[84] Trout (2013) 7.

imagery of imperial apotheosis in the description of a location among the stars, "*fecit ad astra viam*", and the use also recalls Damasus's description of Peter and Paul as "new stars (*nova sidera*)"

4.1.3.3. Into the fifth century: the epitaph of Baiolus

This triumphal imagery continued to be adopted in Christian funerary inscriptions into the fifth century. The epitaph of Baiolus, preserved among the inscriptions from the Via Latina and Via Appia in the seventh-century *Sylloge turonensis*, claims that his spirit will remain on Olympus, a striking choice for a Christian:

> *hoc tumulo Baioli conduntur membra sepulti*
> *sed pollens **anima praeclaro manebit Olympo***
> *meruit pontificum qui primus vestiarius esse*
> *quem servatur poli redimivit stola perenni*
> *haec Decorosus amici depinxit in vertice tymbae*
> *acolothus ne lateat quis hic humatus quiescat*

> In this tomb are interred the buried limbs of Baiolus,
> but his strong **spirit will remain on splendid Olympus**;
> he who deserved to be the prime dresser of the popes,
> who is preserved in the sky, encircled in an eternal garment.
> Decorosus inscribed these words about his friend on the top of the tomb,
> lest the buried acolyte who rests here should lie hidden.[85]

There are two important parallels for this second line in the *Aeneid*. When the god Mercury confronts Aeneas over his delaying with Dido in book 4, he describes how he has been sent by Jupiter 'from famous Olympus' to remind him of his destiny to found Rome:

> *…heu, regni rerumque oblite tuarum!*
> *ipse deum tibi me **claro demittit Olympo***
> *regnator, caelum et terras qui numine torque,*
> *ipse haec ferre iubet celeris mandata per auras*

> Have you entirely forgotten your own kingdom and your own destiny?
> The ruler of the gods himself **sends me down from bright Olympus**,

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[85] *ICUR* VI 15795, my translation.

by whose divine will the heavens and the earth revolve,

and bids me bring these commands to you through the swift winds.[86]

Most significantly, in *Aeneid* 6 the shade of Anchises points out Romulus and describes to Aeneas the coming majesty of Rome, 'whose spirit shall rise to the heights of Olympus':

> *en huius, nate, auspiciis illa incluta Roma*
> *imperium terris, **animos aequabit Olympo***

> Look at him, my son, under whose auspices will be founded Rome in all her glory,
> whose empire shall cover the earth, **whose spirits shall rise to the heights of Olympus**.[87]

The epitaph's contrast between Baiolus's body on earth and soul on Olympus echoes the juxtaposition of heaven and earth in both passages from the *Aeneid*: Mercury is sent down to earth from Olympus by the ruler of "the heavens and the earth", "caelum et terras", while Anchises says that Rome will "cover the earth" while its spirit rises to Olympus. Both can also be found in the context of looking ahead to the future might and triumph of Rome, setting one founder, Aeneas, back on course, and predicting the achievements of another, Romulus.

The second example is particularly striking, as there is a direct parallel between the spirit of Baiolus and the spirit of Rome, both of which are predicted to equal the heights of Olympus, with the epitaph preserving the future tense of Virgil's line. This suggests a particular awareness of the original Virgilian contexts. Yet while Mercury descends and Rome's spirit rises, Baiolus's soul "will remain" on Olympus, perhaps conveying a sense of reassuring stability, possibly with a Christian colouring that implies having been saved in Christ and died to the world, one's soul is already united with God.[88] The description of Christian salvation in the same patriotic terms as the divinely predestined glory of Rome recalls the representation of salvation on sarcophagi in terms of the creation of Roman architecture.[89]

The line in *Aeneid* 6 that this epitaph echoes comes from Anchises' description of the various peoples and nations that are destined to be encompassed within the Roman Empire.

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[86] *Aeneid* 4.267-70, trans. adapted from West (1990).
[87] *Aeneid* 6.781-82, trans. adapted from West (1990).
[88] Cf. Colossians 3.2-3: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."
[89] See Chapter 2.4.

In fact this passage was echoed by the Christian poet Prudentius at the turn of the fifth century, in his representation of the tomb of Hippolytus and the various pilgrims drawn to it.[90] At the start of his poem on Hippolytus, Prudentius had closely summarised the inscriptions of Damasus on the physical tomb.[91] Prudentius suggests that the pilgrims are the very same community as that which Anchises predicted, accomplished by the spread of Christianity. These inscriptions suggest that this claim that a Christian Rome is the ultimate culmination of Rome's history was not just being made by the poets, instead this was evidently a view of history that was well-diffused through educated society. Significantly, the "*incluta Roma*" of the previous line is also echoed in an earlier Damasian inscription to Agnes at Sant'Agnese (fig. 4.8), still in the same position at the end of the line but transformed into "*incluta martyr*".[92]

4.1.4. Conclusion

To conclude then, these inscriptions show the centrality of Virgil to Roman culture and education even into the Christian era, and are another example of the malleability of Virgil in late antiquity.

The language of spoils and triumphs seems to abound in late Roman inscriptions and sarcophagus reliefs alike, together with fragmentary approaches to composition that result in a patchwork effect evocative of *spolia*. The lingering association of *spolia* with trophies captured in war is therefore evident in late Roman and early Christian culture, and goes some way to explaining their renewed popularity as a concept and method of composition.

The reuse of Virgil in Christian inscriptions frequently works to promote Christianity as predestined and preordained for Rome, using the words of Rome's chief poet to write Christians into Rome's history. Christians can be seen not just accommodating classical traditions but still using them as foundations of identity, and not just in literary circles. The kinds of inherited Virgilian phrases and ideas that we have seen, with the vocabulary of Roman triumph applied to victory in death, makes Christian hope intelligible, prestigious, and reassuringly Roman.

The idea that the introduction of biblical imagery to sarcophagi represents a change from the traditional praise of the deceased does not seem to account for the lengthy verse inscriptions that wealthier Christians at the end of the fourth century commissioned (or even composed

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[90] Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 11; Witke (2004) esp. 135-6.
[91] Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 11.19-20 and 28-30; Roberts (1993) 150.
[92] *ICUR* 8.20753; Trout (2015a) n. 37 notes the allusion.

themselves) for their commemoration, which are explicit in their traditional praise of the deceased and their accomplishments.[93] Elsner has seen these epitaphs as expressing a different attitude altogether that only "to some extent temper[s]" the dominant narrative of collective Christian identity, but perhaps they could be seen as indicative of the aspirations of other contemporary monuments.[94] The complicated arrangements of biblical snapshots, varying from sarcophagus to sarcophagus, in any case do not seem the most obvious way of affirming an easily-intelligible collective Christian identity. However seeing them in the context of *paideia*, where complicated juxtapositions could be employed to show off your knowledge of the texts and ability to interpret visual language, the epitaphs and imagery come into line. Biblical imagery could be deployed in complex ways to demonstrate the knowledge and culture of the patron, with this implicit praise made explicit in extended verse inscriptions, for those who could afford them.

The sarcophagus of Bassa (fig. 4.9) might help to demonstrate the parallels between verse inscriptions and biblical imagery.[95] It is one of a late-fourth-century type of Bethesda sarcophagi (fig. 4.10), which usually feature a set iconography of specific healings followed by the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, interpreted as representing a narrative of salvation, mirroring the deceased's journey to heavenly reward.[96] On Bassa's sarcophagus however, the right hand half of the front that would normally depict Christ's *adventus* is instead taken up by an extensive two column verse inscription.[97] The epitaph describes the deceased woman's personal virtues and her ascent to heaven, as well as her consolatory address from there to her husband. Trout has acknowledged the "patchwork quality" of the sarcophagus's construction, conforming to the period's aesthetic of *spolia*, and has pointed out how the triumphant tone of the epitaph provides a parallel ending to Jesus' triumphant adventus; where Jesus entered Jerusalem (and metaphorically heaven), Bassa enters heaven itself. Jesus is the last figure depicted in the scenes of healing to the left, and where he normally is about to enter through the archway to heal the man at the Bethesda pool, here where that scene is replaced with the epitaph, he instead gestures towards the content of the inscription, as if pointing to it to conclude the narrative. This half-inscription, half-biblical scene sarcophagus encapsulates how the individual praise and victorious tone of extended verse inscriptions complemented the message of biblical imagery on sarcophagi, rather than the two being at odds.

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[93] E.g. the verse epitaph of Junius Bassus (*ICUR* II 4164).
[94] Elsner (2014) 341.
[95] *RS* I 556.
[96] Trout (2011).
[97] *ICUR* V 14076.

4.2. Unravelling materiality: Columnar wall hangings

We have seen in the previous chapters how columnar frameworks could be used to construct meaning in a Christian funerary context, and how the motifs on Christian sarcophagi can interact consciously with their own material. Thelma Thomas proposed defining late antiquity itself as "a period that witnessed the transformation of media," and we have seen a little of how other contemporary media present material-specific aesthetics, such as silverware.[1] This subsidiary chapter will change focus to two fragmentary wall hangings from late antique Egypt with columnar architecture, in order to show comparable strategies of reading columnar frameworks as the sarcophagi, and likewise that their intramedial aesthetic is not a unique phenomenon. The two main examples under scrutiny will be the two high quality pieces in the Abegg collection from the fourth century. While they may have once graced the walls of late antique homes, most of those whose provenance is known were actually found in burials.[2]

The first is a fourth-century, seven-metre long arcade of Dionysiac figures (fig. 4.11), thought to come from Panopolis in Egypt.[3] It was bought by Werner Abegg, the Swiss owner of a textile mill in Turin, and his wife Margaret (née Harrington Daniels), an art historian with publications on English embroidery, as they began acquiring larger textiles for their new museum at Riggisberg near Bern. In a series of round arches stands Dionysus, accompanied by Ariadne, Pan, a satyr, maenads, Silenus, and a mortal woman with a blue halo. It comes from a fifth-century burial, together with fragments of a silk tunic with scenes of Mary the mother of Jesus, threads of which were found on the chest of Pan.[4] Traces of ash and human remains were found adhered to the damaged portion with the first maenad, cut away with scissors. Patches show that the tapestry was used and repaired for a long period before burial.

This textile is the largest surviving ancient textile, and would have been suitable for covering at least an entire wall, perhaps in a dining room where it would provide a context and invitation for revelry. Though some favour a cultic context, its burial with a Christian tunic seems arguably more likely if its original purpose was more secular. The Christian Sidonius

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[1] T. Thomas (2002) 39. See Chapter 2.5 for self-referentiality on silverware; also 2.2.2 for gold glass.
[2] Myrup Kristensen (2015) 264-5, T. Thomas (2016) 28.
[3] Willers and Niekamp (2015) for cultic and religious interpretation and issues of restoration and reconstruction; Myrup Kristensen (2016) 461ff on Dionysus in late antique art; Bowersock, Brown, Grabar (1999).
[4] Willers and Niekamp (2015) 100-101; Kötzsche (1993).

Apollinaris describes in terms of mythological roleplay how dinner party guests should follow the example of Dionysiac worshippers: "each shall play the quivering Maenad".[5]

It was reconstructed by the Abegg Foundation (fig. 4.11a), though the original arrangement of the surviving fragments remains uncertain. Schrenk proposed a slightly different arrangement (fig. 4.11b), which is more convincing in a number of ways, not least its improved architectural symmetry.[6] The main disadvantage of Schrenk's viewing is that placing the well-dressed woman next to Dionysus interrupts the group of golden haloes with a blue one, and more importantly the colour of the linen ground surrounding the woman is inexplicably less oxidised than the figures either side. This chapter broadly accepts Schenk's reconstruction, with the exception of the placement of the richly dressed woman, thus leaving open the issue of whether the original centre of the composition was Dionysus, or the column between him and Ariadne. My analysis does not depend on any one specific arrangement, and unless specified, refers to Schrenk's version.

The second main case study is a narrower piece with three columns supporting a gabled roof, framing figures of the Greek heroes Meleager and Atalanta (fig. 4.12).[7] It was bought on the German art market in 1966 by Werner and Margaret Abegg.[8] The textile is said to have been found in Antinoopolis in Egypt, but like most late antique textiles, its provenance is otherwise completely unknown. This textile has been dated to either the fourth or fifth century AD, and again like other textiles of high quality, it has been suggested that it could have been made in a Roman workshop before being exported to Egypt.[9] Either way, at over two metres high, it would have been another very expensive purchase, with carefully depicted shading and a range of subtle colours comparable to high quality Hellenistic fabrics from Egypt.[10] The reconstruction presented by Simon (fig. 4.12b) proposes two acroteria at either end of the roof, and perhaps a boar in the pediment. It is also suggested that two of the fragments of the Meleager figure as reconstructed need to be slightly shifted, so that the square patches on the clothes line up and the arms are at the same height. This textile has not received the same scholarly attention as the Dionysiac tapestry.

This chapter will consider the two textiles side by side, beginning with their use of the columnar framework to construct meaning, in comparison with what we have seen with the sarcophagi. It will then distinguish between types of material play that are comparable with

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[5] Sidonius Apollinaris, *Letters* 9.XIII; discussed in T. Thomas (2016) 35.
[6] Schrenk (2004) no. 5; Willers and Niekamp (2015) favour this reconstruction.
[7] Simon (1970).
[8] Myrup Kristensen (2015); Schrenk (2004) no. 5.
[9] Schrenk (2004) no. 5.
[10] Simon (1970) 5.

those on sarcophagi, and those that mark a departure due to their differing media of stone and fabric.

4.2.1. Reading the framework

As on columnar sarcophagi, the structure of the colonnade in being able to distinguish but also link different isolated figures encourages the viewer to compare them. To start with the Dionysiac textile, the arrangements of arches and columns do have a compositional unity to them. In Schrenk's reconstruction, the 'overarching' scheme of the architecture springs outwards from Dionysus, who stands within two columns and an arch adorned with abundant vines and yellow grapes. All those to the left of him then have matching arches and left columns, and those to the right, matching arches and right columns.

As has been seen on sarcophagi, the choice of decoration on the depicted architecture frequently reflects the imagery it frames. The vines surrounding Dionysus are obviously appropriate to frame his character. His garland even seems to be made up of the same two-tone leaves that appear in the arch over his head. Ariadne meanwhile holds a fruit, probably a pomegranate, which we can also see depicted in two other columns, positioned at either end by Schrenk. This framing could link her with the myth of Persephone in the Underworld, who was also stolen away by an amorous deity.

Similarly for Meleager and Atalanta, the natural imagery of birds, flowers, and ivy also fits with the outdoor setting of the hunting myth. The back legs of the creature caught by the falcon in the gable look quite like those of a hare, but the fact that they are coloured blue means that Simon decided on a boar, which were depicted as blue-black on other late antique textiles, as all the other animals here are depicted with their typical naturalistic colouring.[11] The choice of a boar would correspond with the myth of Meleager and Atalanta taking part in the Calydonian boar hunt, but any caught animal could fit with the hunting theme to a lesser extent. The essential components of the myth are monumentalised in the architectural frame, a complementary backdrop to the main figures which can be expected to be interpreted by the educated viewer.

The combination of different columns and capitals on both hangings is also reminiscent of late Roman sarcophagi. Dionysus is marked out as an important figure by the elaborate arch and column(s) framing him. Onians has shown how in the first Roman churches and Christian mausolea, there existed a hierarchy of orders corresponding to the sanctity of the

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[11] Simon (1970) 14-15.

space and the movement of the participant through it.[12] For example, Ionic capitals in the least important spaces such as the entrance hall, then Corinthian, then in the most important area there would be Composite type capitals. On the Meleager hanging, we can see that there is a Corinthian type capital on the left atop the fluted column, and probably the same type on the right. In the middle there is a more elaborate capital that is more reminiscent of an Eastern style of capital, highlighted with blue details. The textile therefore seems to conform to the hierarchy of orders seen elsewhere in the empire, drawing in the eye to the centre of the arcade, creating a frame for imagery that a knowledgeable viewer could be expected to interpret.

On both hangings, almost all the figures look to the left, while their bodies are twisted more to the right. Even the bust of Hermes above Meleager and Atalanta is clearly looking backwards, with emphatic shading under his turned chin (fig. 4.12c). This shading is executed in purple-dyed wool, the only instance of this colour in the whole textile, and thus a special addition introduced to accurately capture the shadow effect. The only exception is Silenus: befitting his drunken reputation, he leads the other characters in their revels, while perhaps comically missing his cue to look in the same direction.

The female figures are linked by their similar hoop earrings, pearly headdresses, and small flower garlands. Schrenk reconstructs them all standing under arches with twisting motifs, while the male figures are framed by archways filled with foliage. Pan and the satyr share identical vine garlands. There is thus a compositional unity to the piece that encourages reading across the niches. Meleager and Atalanta share the same pose, cloaks spreading out dramatically more to the left behind them, caught by the same wind; Atalanta probably stood in the same *contrapposto* pose.[13] Their arms are raised in the same positions holding their weapons, and they are both dressed in blue and gold patterned cloth. The viewer might therefore be led to reflect on the linked roles of these characters, and, if they imply the mythological role-playing of the patrons in the same way as on sarcophagi, potentially on the relationship between the cultured husband and wife of the household as well. The choice of an originally tragic couple for this comparison would not be out of place within the tradition on Roman sarcophagi of selecting potentially inappropriate mythological pairings, such as Phaedra and Hippolytus to represent either a loving couple or parent grieving for a child.[14]

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[12] Onians (1990) 60ff; see Chapter 3.2.
[13] Myrup Kristensen (2015) 274.
[14] Zanker and Ewald (2012).

Despite Schrenk's placement of Dionysus as the sole centre of the composition, the nude couple (figs. 4.11f and g) do seem set up in parallel, comparable to the pairing of Meleager and Atalanta. They are both nude and their skin is worked in pale tones, in contrast to the more tanned satyr, for example. They wear blue cloaks over their left arms that fall behind them, while their arms are in similar poses, and their legs mirror each other. Dionysus appears to have the upturned gaze typical of semi-divine figures in late antiquity, but he could also be interpreted as looking towards Ariadne. Her sensuality is emphasised as the object of his love: her exaggeratedly round hips are emphasised with the sharp framing of the dark cloak, and then by the curve of her right arm (now fragmentary). They are also echoed in the emphatic repetition of circles that make up her hairstyle and jewellery. All this highlights her desirability.

She, however, looks off to the other side. Even though she faces the same way as most of the other figures, this still destabilises their unity somewhat by interrupting the symmetry. Her glance is particularly sidelong in comparison with that of Dionysus. This arrangement of gazes is found in scenes of Dionysus discovering Ariadne in Roman wall painting, where the god looks at Ariadne who looks at the vanishing ship of Theseus.[15] It has a literary parallel in Catullus 64, where we are to imagine Bacchus gazing at Ariadne on the beach, while she gazes out to sea.[16] Similarly here, Dionysus looks at a nude Ariadne who looks elsewhere; like in the poem, Theseus is not visible. An educated viewer looking at this textile might thus feel prompted to supply a literary inspiration for the scene.[17]

The relationship between Meleager and Atalanta is rather ambivalent. The framing within a pair of intercolumniations seems to offer them more equal positions than customary, echoing each other very closely in pose and costume and of equal height. There are some aspects that suggest that Meleager is still the more important figure: his red cloak stands out more boldly against the background, while Atalanta's bare arms and legs mean that he appears to be more richly dressed. The pattern of his clothing is also slightly more ornate, with yellow four-leaf details in the diamond-shaped gaps between the encircled busts (fig. 4.12e), while Atalanta's are plain. Simon also sees the head of Hermes as looking down at Meleager, not just to the left.[18] Against this, Atalanta alone and unusually wears a jewelled diadem.[19] The

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[15] Elsner (2007) 88-109.
[16] Catullus 64.53ff; Elsner (2007) 68-77.
[17] Cf. T. Thomas (2002) 44-45 on the side-long glance as one feature of late antique textile that is shared with epigram.
[18] Simon (1970) 13.
[19] Myrup Kristensen (2015) 274.

question as to which of the figures is more prominent, more in control of the scene, remains teasingly open.

The bird catching its prey above the hunter couple, one of whom, Atalanta, is famous as a runner, would lead the viewer to expect that this is a scene emblematic of erotic pursuit. The drawn weapons could evoke a kind of erotic warfare. Meleager's drawn sword is a noticeable addition to the Greek myth, though not unusual on Roman sarcophagi where elements of traditional military virtus were added.[20] The detail of Atalanta drawing out an arrow might be a reference to the arrows of Cupid; she might be about to strike while Meleager is looking away. Alternatively, she could be sheathing it, accepting the advances of the hunter. It remains unclear what exactly the relationship is between them: are they looking as one in the same direction, or is Atalanta looking at Meleager while he looks away? Is Atalanta putting her arrows away, or are they preparing to fight? If so, is it someone approaching, or each other?

Atalanta, standing beneath the captured prey, and expected to be the focus of pursuit, is not looked at by anyone or anything; all the figures look emphatically away from her to the left. The resulting de-eroticisation of the scene is striking, and could be thought to be influenced by Christian attitudes to sex and the body in this period.[21] While Meleager's eyes are averted, his body is turned towards her, while hers turns away from him; perhaps instead she could be pictured as attempting to defend herself, while he averts his gaze against the desires of the body, mirroring the upward gaze of the falcon who could be construed as about to take flight and abandon his prey. The dove that he faces could equally be the symbol of Aphrodite or of Christian *pax*, and the interpretation of the couple's relationship remains equally ambivalent. Each of them seems to have the upper hand from moment to moment.

The three golden fruits emerging from behind the left column could recall the three golden apples with which Hippomenes later distracted Atalanta from their race, forcing her to fulfil her promise to marry him as the winner.[22] According to the fourth-century Servius, these apples were from the Garden of the Hesperides, like the ones given to Hera as a wedding present.[23] They are also a kind of wedding gift for Atalanta, luring a single girl into marriage. Above the fruit sits the dove, the symbol of Aphrodite, the goddess who had helped Hippomenes win his wife, and is framed on the other side by the head of Hermes, suggestive of the shrewdness and cunning with which he won her, as well as the speed of the

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[20] Lorenz (2011) 315-319, 328-329.
[21] Cf. Brown (1988).
[22] The lack of name label means that we could even reconstruct the male figure as Hippomenes in the pose of Meleager. The temple-like structure and potential lion struck down in the pediment could recall this couple's fate, turned into lions for their transgressive relations in the temple of Cybele.
[23] Servius, *Aeneid* 3.113.

race. A golden apple was also delivered by Hermes to Paris, to be given to the most beautiful goddess, Aphrodite, in exchange for the most beautiful mortal woman – thereby provoking the start of the Trojan War.[24] Finally, the eleventh labour of Heracles was to steal these apples from the garden.[25] A Christian parallel to these fruits stolen from a mythical garden is clearly the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden, accompanied by a serpent as the classical garden is guarded by a dragon. This means that the mythological pair also take on shades of the prototypical man and woman, conveying a universality to the scene of a couple in contention, wrestling over whether to taste 'the forbidden fruit'. The golden fruits therefore strongly connote love, marriage, beauty, desire, temptation, and divine paradise, entwined with war, contention, and trickery; perfectly fitting to bring out the theme of erotic warfare.

The compositions thus use the columnar framework with its different levels of juxtaposition, between the individual figures and the framing architecture, to create plenty of well-signalled opportunities for the viewer to make connections with reference to their own literary knowledge. This shows how viewers of columnar sarcophagi could be presented with clear frameworks that they could be expected to interpret in similar ways with reference to biblical texts. In the same way that these mythological textiles provide visual points to provide an opportunity to show off one's literary knowledge, so with the same strategy sarcophagi could signal the cultural engagement of the patron.

4.2.2. Play with architecture

While providing a stable framework for the enclosed figures, the architecture also plays with the viewer's understanding of the depicted space. The images seem to open up the possibility of depth by the way that the figures seem to stand slightly further back from the columns, especially the placement of Pan's legs. On the Meleager and Atalanta example, the dark background implies depth, while the top of Meleager's spear just crosses the pediment, and the edge of Atalanta's bow must also have crossed in front of the column on the far right. On another Dionysiac fragment in Cleveland (fig. 4.13a), the maenad's right foot crosses in front of a column while the left remains further back in the space.[26] She appears as if she could either be interrupting the satyr's scene, swinging backwards off the base of the

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[24] The judgement of Paris is the subject of a fourth- to fifth-century tapestry in a private collection; Lewis (1969) no. 235.

[25] The role of Atlas in guarding the apples could resonate in this image of architectural supports from which the fruit sprouts, holding up the level of the gods above the mortals as Atlas held up the heavens. Parallel between people and columns explored in Chapter 3 and 3.2.

[26] Arensberg (1977) 15 on both details, T. Thomas (2016) 30 on the satyr's foot.

column, or stepping away from him and breaking out from the frame. Thomas believes the figures on this tapestry (figs. 4.13a-c) could be reclining from their ambiguous poses, but says that the composition "emphasises the unresolved".[27] It is impossible for the viewer to decide one way or the other; the figures are held in playful ambiguity.

As a kind of flexible architecture, wall hangings are pieces that play with this contrast between mobility and solidity, as well as the boundaries between the physical and depicted worlds; they are capable of either opening up the walls of the house by depicting a world of myth beyond their columns, or else screening areas from prying eyes.[28] Kondoleon describes how hangings could dissolve the solidity of walls in a house, in a similar way to how geometric illusions in mosaic floor designs could "destabilise" those walking on them.[29]

The Dionysus hanging features one of the most common late antique textile patterns, the twisted strands that make up some of the columns; the Meleager tapestry has a similar motif forming the pointed pediment.[30] The former are perhaps supposed to represent spiralling fluting, though the way the twists are left with gaps in between the coils, and their depiction as sitting on top of arches and columns with defined red edges, means that this is quite a loose interpretation of that kind of architecture. The three-dimensional effect implied by echoes of carved fluting, combined with the flatness implied by the strong two-dimensional drawn edges of the structure, creates a playful mix of modes of representation that eludes the eye's search for a comprehensible architecture, unable to be pinned down; like an optical illusion, the elements pop in and out of different dimensions.

Furthermore, there is a blurring between different levels of representation in the matching motifs of architecture and figure. The basket on the floor (currently next to the satyr) contains yellow grapes of the same type depicted on the vine surrounding Dionysus (fig. 4.11d). They could have just been picked, playfully opening up the impossibility of an inanimate vine being so lifelike as to produce real grapes. Similarly the leaves of Dionysus's wreath and the pomegranate held by Ariadne could have been plucked from their neighbouring columns. This conceit goes back to Pliny's account of the contest of painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius: Zeuxis painted grapes so lifelike that birds tried to eat them, but Parrhasius won by painting a curtain so realistic that his rival tried to draw it back.[31] The columns of the tapestry too depict grapes, but this time so realistic that they actually become real – or at least as 'real' as the other woven figures. This beats both the contributions in the

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[27] T. Thomas (2016) 30-31 on the possibility of the figures reclining.
[28] T. Thomas (2016) 22,
[29] Kondoleon (2016) 92.
[30] Willers and Niekamp (2015) 16. See also figs. 4.13a and b.
[31] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 35.36.

artistic legend, and even Callistratus's descriptions of art that achieved such successful *mimesis* that it seemed more alive than inanimate.[32]

The architrave and base of the Meleager hanging are decorated with jewel motifs, which raises questions of scale. The white circles that make up the petals are meant to represent pearls, surrounding a diamond-shaped red stone in the centre, and are therefore flowers simulated by gems, simulated in textile.[33] Simon has suggested that the alternating blue shapes might also be precious stones such as lapis lazuli and turquoise, simulating rose petals which are found frequently on imperial-era monuments in Egypt as sacred to Isis; rose petals could be enlarged and imitated in different materials and unrealistic colours, as scarabs were. They were evidently known in Rome as well as they also adorn a ceiling in the Aula Isiaca on the Palatine.[34] The effect of this is to miniaturise the scene, since the jewels and pearls would have to be very large to be life-size, working against the monumental size and style of the architecture. The architrave and base are also parallelled in Atalanta's jewelled diadem: both set rows of blue gems within horizontal bands of gold, linking architecture to enclosed figure.

The yellow ivy too could be intended to represent gilding, as Thomas believes for the golden borders of the Kelsey fragment.[35] There are therefore several recessions of representations, where textile depicts precious materials that depict natural forms. Yet combined with the natural forms rendered non-naturalistically as jewels or gold, there are also the birds and roses in the spandrels and pediment which appear very realistic; is the viewer to imagine that they are static parts of the architecture, or real birds that have perched briefly among real climbing flowers? The juxtaposition of different styles of representation unsettles the eye. The Dionysus columns are also filled with trailing vines, leaves, and fruit, which at various points appears in the possession of the figures, breaking the boundaries of art: the pomegranate held by Ariadne, the basket of fruit.

As on sarcophagi, the columnar framework can also encourage the viewer to view the enclosed figures as potentially statuesque. Meleager has a famous statue type, such as a version now in the Vatican (fig. 1.25). This Meleager would also once have held a spear, and with his pose and the arrangement of his flowing drapery, he appears to be quite close to the mirror-image of the woven Meleager – the main difference being that the latter is fully dressed rather than nude with a longer cloak. The dramatic effect of the deeply carved ridges of the drapery is echoed in the cloaks of both figures on the textile. The couple are depicted

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[32] See Chapter 1.4 for Callistratus.
[33] Simon (1970) 12.
[34] Simon (1970) 12.
[35] Simon (1970) 12-13; T. Thomas (2002) 41.

together as a statue group on Roman sarcophagi, including examples where they are emphatically placed on plinths (figs 1.23 and 1.24).[36] Meanwhile the pose of Dionysus's raised arm is known in free-standing sculpture, as well as the reclining figures on sarcophagi.[37] He and Ariadne were both extremely popular choice for pre-Christian sarcophagus reliefs. Literary accounts of the pair refer to the later fate of Ariadne in being turned into stone by Perseus, including the fifth-century *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus. In Catullus 64, where a depiction of Ariadne on a textile is described, in grief she is said to look like a stone effigy of a bacchant ("*saxea ut effigies bacchantis prospicit*") – proleptic in more than one sense as this is prior to her meeting Bacchus.[38]

The wall hangings thus evoke a range of multisensory responses: from the sound of music, the scent of roses, and taste of fruit and wine, to the range of tactile surfaces in marble fluting, leafy vegetation, polished metal and jewels, dripping liquid, soft clothing, the rough fur of animals, and bare skin that could also be cold stone.[39] Late antique art often demonstrates a particular interest in playing with representation in different media, often to show off artistic skill and luxurious materials. This example of opus sectile from Rome depicts part of a textile with Hylas and the nymphs with an Egyptianising border (figs. 4.14 and 4.14b).[40] It accomplishes this with a range of very costly coloured marbles, including the most expensive green porphyry. Opus sectile is not the natural medium for rendering realistic human figures in particular.[41] The hardness of the stone also contrasts with the soft draping of the material and the flowing water in the top scene, and there is also an irony in using actual stone to represent the rocky landscape.[42] In particular, the stone reused for Hylas to kneel on retains a bit of architectural moulding at the bottom, which gives him the character of a freestanding statue on a plinth – yet another playful reference to a different medium to delight the viewer.

4.2.3. Play with textile

Thomas has described the "visual puns" and playful surprises included in other late antique textiles, particularly in relation to the spatial ambiguities they could create; one example depicts a servant pulling back a curtain (fig. 4.15), with the joke being that the real textile is

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[36] *ASR* XII,6 147 and 146.
[37] Arensberg (1977) 8 on the Lykeios pose.
[38] Catullus 64.62.
[39] T. Thomas (2016) 31 on multisensory experiences.
[40] Gasparri and Paris (2013) 482-5, no. 352.
[41] Kiilerich (2016) 46.
[42] Kiilerich (2016) 45.

still obscuring the viewpoint it pretends to reveal.[43] The pattern of the servant's dress even closely matches the stripes of the curtain, making more explicit that the servant himself is made of textile, as well as that he is almost 'part of the furniture'. He even appears suspended in mid-air in line with the curtain; although fragmentary, the way he has been cut out suggests he was originally an isolated figure. This is another knowing nod to Pliny's famous painting contest, taking the joke one step further by simulating textile in textile.[44] We can see that the nod to this legend on the Dionysiac tapestry discussed earlier similarly had another level of irony by depicting grapes in textile, incorporating both elements of the legendary artistic battle.

The comparable ways sarcophagi and tapestries explore the boundaries of architecture and stone can be put down to their shared columnar frameworks that permitted these opportunities for play. However in the medium of textile, there is a huge interest in similar playfulness with clothing and fabric, in a much more intense way than on sarcophagi with their own particular interest in stone.

The women in the arcade explore themes of covering and revealing. The clothing of the mortal woman with blue halo, the most respectably dressed, is ironically more revealing than the maenads. Her chest in fact shows through the fabric (fig. 4.11h and i). This adds another level of irony, as the outlines of the breasts are of course themselves worked in fabric. The weaving of the textile should produce a protective fabric, but here it actually weaves what it is ostensibly meant to be covering; it simultaneously covers and reveals, it creates clothing and exposes the body. The playfulness of depicting nudity in textiles has often been noted, but this seems to go even further. The shaping of textile around her body is highlighted by the stripes, which curve in and out around her breasts and waist. The fabric is even pulled into a fold in the cleavage by the tightness of her belt, and the form of the buckle mirrors the form of the breast showing through. The textile therefore works on many levels to emphasise the woman's fertility and sexual attractiveness, from the imagery to the fitting, even though she is very richly dressed and entirely covered apart from her head, right hand and left forearm.

One side of the body of the first maenad is covered by a cloak and long skirt, but on the other her whole arm, chest and leg are bare. She is even wearing only one shoe, a state of half-undress fitting for the wine-fuelled revels of Dionysus. Yet her one bare breast is partially covered by her hand, toying with the gaze of the viewer and playing with the idea of textiles as covering and uncovering. She is possibly in the act of pulling over her robe to

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[43] T. Thomas (2016) 22; Dunbabin (2003).
[44] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 35.36.

cover herself, yet her hand itself is of course made of textile. If she is undressing, her bare skin is still textile. She stands in a similar pose to the well-dressed woman, raising her right hand to her chest and holding a garland in her left; this draws attention to the contrast between undressed and richly dressed. She is the only figure who does not look to the left, but gazes out at her viewers somewhat coyly, teasing them by denying them a full look at her. We can imagine her gaze being somewhat startling, as if she alone has caught us looking, and her look back at us is a self-conscious acknowledgement of the role of the viewer, at the purpose of this work of art to be looked at. The artwork looks back at its viewers, and catches them looking.

Finally the figure of Ariadne has an obvious level of irony in that she is naked but made of fabric. We have already considered the relationship with her depiction in Catullus 64, which is a section of the poem particularly concerned with gazes, but also with textiles: as she looks, Ariadne's clothes are lingeringly described as being stripped away one by one by the lapping waves, symbolising her desolation but also inspiring desire in the watching Bacchus – and all depicted on the textile described by the poet.[45] The poem's emphasis on lost clothing as the spur for their union is an interesting reference point when the married couple are now depicted in textile, nude but in some sense still clothed. Acts of covering and uncovering are inherently focused on the viewer, and such attention to gazes is therefore intrinsic to depicting this aspect of textile.

Ariadne was of course responsible for providing the thread for Theseus in the labyrinth prior to her union with Dionysus, which formed part of Catullus's elaborate textile metaphor around her; the round fruit that she holds here is in a material sense a literal ball of thread. Another mythological text with elaborate textile symbolism, the *Argonautica*, might also have relevant connections. For example, the bed coverlet on which Dionysus and Ariadne consummated their marriage is now owned by the hero Jason as a cloak.[46] Ariadne's extensive association with textiles, from Theseus's thread to Jason's cloak, provide rich material to prompt an educated viewer to remember when viewing her likeness in cloth. The refinement of Jason's woven cloak is contrasted with the lion skin of Herakles, and the bull hide of Akastos, reflecting on their rougher, less sophisticated characters.[47] The pre-textile on which Jason and Medea consummate their own union, the Golden Fleece, also provides a contrast with the usual woven marriage bed coverlet.[48] A similar contrast between wild and contrived is made on the wall hanging, where another playful detail for the viewer to delight

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[45] Catullus 64.53-71.
[46] Apollonius, *Argonautica* IV 423ff.
[47] Rose (1985) 30.
[48] Apollonius, *Argonautica* I 324-6.

in is the legs of the faun. His wild tufts of natural goat's hair are rendered in the carefully spun and woven sheep's wool, an ironic depiction of a natural, unspun fabric in a highly processed textile, similar to contrasts made with textile images in literary texts.

On the Meleager and Atalanta hanging, the luxuriously patterned clothing of the figures also plays on the theme of textile simulating textile. Their clothing is patterned with silhouettes of tiny busts in circles (fig. 4.12e), as well as square inserts with larger busts - woven figures on the clothes of woven figures. These inserts could represent just the kind of patch portrait that was so common on late antique clothing (fig. 4.16). The main patterned cloth seems to be imitating the fine woven silk of the most elite dress, and one early-fourth-century fragment of a silk tunic does show some notable similarities (fig. 4.17). Its pattern of roundels containing small figures (in this case erotes), interspersed with diamond shapes with a four-leaf motif, is matched exactly on Meleager's tunic. It is worked in yellow wool, in imitation of gold thread, on a dark ground. Meleager's motifs are comparably worked in gold and light blue on dark blue. Finely worked wool such as this was often used to imitate silk due to its sheen, light weight and the ease of dyeing.[49] This was therefore an apt imitation. The fabric seems to shift to another material as the eye reaches the silk clothing; perhaps this then spreads out to the rest of the work, assuming the appearance of expensive and exotic silk. These representations of clothing are much more elaborate than those of Meleager and Atalanta on marble sarcophagi that they look so much like; the medium is clearly the important factor.

Since the small decorations on real silk tunics would only be intelligible up close, Thomas wonders whether they were worn in private settings such as festivities, to invite friendship and congeniality between close associates.[50] In fact the bust medallions on the clothing of Meleager and Atalanta are so small and indistinct, that the viewer will never be able to make out exactly what they depict. The scene always remains just out of focus, even as it is within reach and touch. By defying close inspection, the mythological couple remain in a separate realm and dimension to passers-by. Scholars have emphasised the role textiles played in the late antique house in creating boundaries and regulating the flow and behaviour of guests in the house.[51] This textile seems to invite viewers to look closely and interpret, but only so far; it leaves something of a boundary between the observing guest and the mythological characters, retaining a little mystery and grandeur by standing just out of full scrutiny. The viewer is therefore unable to read what their clothing conveys about their characters or the context for which they are dressed, and is ultimately unable to connect with them fully on a

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[49] T. Thomas (2002) 43.
[50] T. Thomas (2016) 31.
[51] E.g. T. Thomas (2016), Stephenson (2014).

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level of shared cultural knowledge. However, the bust of Hermes in the spandrel above ironically plays the role of guide as to the interpretation of the busts: they establish a link between architectural frame and clothing, both of which frame the body; here they frame the bodies with little bodies.[52]

The richly-dressed woman on the Dionysus tapestry (fig. 4.11h and i) has two bands of black and gold decoration on her robe running from shoulder to hem. They depict golden pomegranates and leaves sprouting from a vine weaving from side to side, which seems to echo the twisting forms of some of the arches and columns, especially those with their own vines. The form of the leaves is reminiscent of the patterns surrounding Pan and the satyr, while the fruit also pick up on the pomegranates in the two framing columns (in Schrenk's reconstruction). There is evidently a playful overlap between architectural forms in textile hangings and column-like vertical bands of decoration in actual clothing. Indeed, a portrait of a richly-dressed woman exists with the kind of twisting seen on some of the other columns, depicted in very similar stripes on her robes in the same position (fig. 4.18).[53]

At the end of the fourth or early fifth century, a sermon of Asterius of Amasea famously criticised figured clothing that broke the boundaries of its medium by using motifs from domestic decoration:

> "…lovers of like vanity… having found some idle and extravagant style of weaving, which by the twining of warp and the [weft], produces **the effect of a picture**, and imprints upon their robes the forms of all creatures, they artfully produce, both for themselves and for their wives and children, clothing beflowered and wrought with ten thousand objects. Thenceforth they become self-confident… When therefore, they dress themselves and appear in public, they look like **pictured walls** in the eyes of those that meet them… On these garments are lions and leopards; bears and bulls and dogs; woods and rocks and hunters; and **all attempts to imitate nature by painting**. **For it was necessary, as it seems, to adorn not only their houses, but finally also their tunics and their mantles**."[54]

Asterius's claim that ornate figural clothing was an extension of domestic adornment fits with the picture we have of late antique culture as one in which display was increasingly competitive. It also fits with the breakdown of traditional boundaries between media in this

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[52] Cf. a fifth-century Egyptian textile in the British Museum (inv. EA43049) with black-figure Actaeon and Artemis in between columns decorated with black figures; Phillips (1996) 579, 7.44.
[53] Musée Guimet, Paris.
[54] Asterius of Amasea, 'On Lazarus and the Rich Man', trans. Anderson and Goodspeed (1904), emphasis added. See discussion in T. Thomas (2002) 42-43.

period. Perhaps it was necessary to draw on other modes of display to create the biggest impression.

Columns and arcades become a very common motif on clothing, enduring in more stylised monochrome forms into later Coptic dress, from multiple medallions with single figures standing next to a single small pillar, to the rows of colonnades across the fronts of tunics. As Asterius claims, this seems to be a new development, as it is difficult to find classical depictions of clothing with extensive architectural imagery. To depict architecture on clothing seems to conceive of the body as a building, and thereby a potential frame for displaying meaningful imagery. It is also a typically ironic application of motifs, since flexible fabric is in one way the least appropriate medium to support the contrasting strength and immovability of monumental architecture. Just prior to the previous passage in his sermon, Asterius criticises the vain use of expensive materials and dyes:

> "…if you abandon the sheep and the wool, and the indispensable provisions of the Creator of all, leading yourself astray by vain notions and capricious desires, and seek after silk, and join together the threads of the Persian worms, you will weave the windy web of a spider. And then you come to the dyer of bright colours, and pay hefty sums to have the shellfish drawn out from the sea, and anoint the garment with the blood of the animal. **This is the deed of a wanton man, who abuses his property for want of a place to expend its superfluity**."[55]

He emphasises what he sees as the inappropriate crossing of boundaries, and it is this transgression in subject and media that Asterius finds so objectionable that other wealthy people outside the church in late antiquity evidently found so appealing.[56] Once again, he explains the motivation for using these materials as coming from a need to find somewhere else to spend one's wealth beyond the walls of the domestic sphere.

Fabric is compared with architecture in other ways. On the Dionysiac fragment in the Abegg collection (fig. 4.13c), the green column with dark flutes is echoed by the green billows of the performer's cloak with its deep folds, as well as the vertical fluting mirroring the strings of her kithara. The fluting of the column next to the kithara player stops halfway down, approximately in line with the fold in the dress; similarly the satyr's skirt ends at the same point at the fluting on his column. Similar themes can be read on a smaller fragment of fourth-century Egyptian fabric, perhaps from a tunic, depicts Dionysus leaning on a column with a maenad (fig. 4.19). The column is both a marker of classical culture, and the

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[55] Asterius of Amasea, *Homily* 1, trans. A. Kaldellis in T. Thomas (2002) 43.
[56] Cf. T. Thomas (2002) 41.

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borderline architectural function of textiles. The flowing cloths, central column and the maenad's clothing are lined with fluting or draping, drawing a typical contrast for this medium between flexible fabric and solid architecture. The human figures fit literally in between, and the viewer is unclear whether they are mobile, living characters, or made of marble like the column – is the maenad's draped clothing in fact carved fluting? Like strigillation on sarcophagi, the figures flip between solid and mobile, between marble, flesh, and, ultimately, textile. The image offers several potential layers of representation to elude the mind's eye, finished off by setting the monochrome central medallion within a brightly and realistically coloured frame of fruits and foliage.

Sarcophagi may also include textiles in their material playfulness, in relation to their chief focus on their own medium of stone. Drapery is often deeply carved and curving in a way that echoes fluted columns, highlighting the traditional correspondence between person and column, as well as playing on the contrasting materials of mobile fabric and hard stone.[57] The same is true of strigillation, to the degree that Goette suggests textile hangings might be one prototype for the strigillated motif on *kline*-type sarcophagi with other details from furnishings.[58] Though Huskinson dismisses this idea as strigillated sarcophagi predate the *kline* type, there do seem to be some correspondences with the way textiles drape and screen, and between strigillation and textiles as both flipping from solid and architectural, to fluid and mobile.

A late-fourth-century sarcophagus in Avignon that combines columns and strigillation seems perhaps particularly interested in this (fig. 4.20).[59] The curves of two large strigillated panels are echoed by both the arch over Christ in the central panel, and the drapery of the end apostles, particularly the swathe of cloth over the left man's shoulder. On the lid, behind draped busts of a couple, cupids with flowing capes hold *parapetasmata* with unusually uniform and compact lines, which appear contrived to follow the strigillation below. The woman on the left (fig. 4.20b) holds a folded scroll in one hand and the first two folds of her cloak on the other; the similarity between the two juxtaposes gestures of modesty and

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[57] E. Thomas (2011), including 425 n.202 on the "spirally-fluted" leggings of the three "caryatid-like" Good Shepherds on the late-fourth-century sarcophagus in the Museo Pio Cristiano (*RS* I 29).
[58] Goette (1991) 313-316.
[59] *RS* III 160 and 164; most authors follow Garrucci (1873-80) 54-55 in judging that though lid and sarcophagus were associated "in antico", they did not originally belong together, except Caillet and Loose (1990) figs. 29, 84, 91 who assume otherwise. Garrucci's reasoning is that the lid is slightly too long, though against this notes that the joining holes do match up. There are strong links between lid and front that lead me to suspect they were always one tomb, in addition to those discussed here, such as the very similar hand gesture of Christ and the male portrait with two overly long fingers, and the elbows of Christ and the woman tucked into their robes, thus linking both portraits to the central figure below. Nevertheless, the points made about each part still stand even if we cannot accept the cumulative picture.

learning, while eruditely recalling the ancient equation of textile and text. The same kind of cupids that hold the *parapetasmata* also support the central panel for inscribed text; though left empty, the design again intends to juxtapose text with textile. Finally, in the central panel the bleeding woman clutches at the hem of Jesus' robe, opposite a bundle of scrolls, while Jesus gives a blessing (a fluted strut between his fingers drawing attention to the gesture).[60]

The late-fourth-century Anastasis sarcophagus in Arles, considered earlier, plays with the same issues, this time featuring a frieze of saints (fig. 3.10).[61] Each saint in the chain of bodies appears to hold a scroll (excepting two whose hands do not survive), until you reach the man immediately to the right of the central cross: his hand instead clutches the edge of his robe (fig. 3.10b). Behind their heads is depicted a textile with a pattern of stars. On the lid, the outer two pairs of cupids holding the portrait medallions are naked apart from cloaks behind, while the inner pair holding the tabula are partially clothed; where these different cupids adjoin, they appear like mirror images apart from their different states of dress. The repeated wreath motifs, discussed previously, help link each level together.

There is overall a thought-provoking dynamic between the fully-clothed figures in the main relief, with the detail of textile substituted for text in the replacement of scroll with robe; the semi-clothed cupids supporting the text panel in the centre of the lid; and, moving further out again, the nude cupids holding the clothed portraits. It is a dynamic that fits with Elsner's insights into the layering of nude and clothed bodies on sarcophagi as related to their function of surrounding bodies that are slowly being 'undressed' of their soft tissues. To a degree, this sarcophagus seeks to challenge that ever-present awareness by reversing the order, and positioning the most clothed bodies at the most central level of decoration, fading out to mere architectural heads at the outermost point, the very edges of the lid. What is important here is the relationship between text and textile, set up in the interchangeability of scroll and cloth, and the hierarchy of half-clothing to accompany the potential funerary inscription, and full clothing for the lettered sign of the Word above all words.

We have seen on sarcophagi how the act of carving could be evoked in the uniquely Roman and materialistic miracle of Peter striking the rock, reflecting back onto the rest of the

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[60] Gerke (1940) and *RS* identify the woman as the grave owner; Garrucci (1873-80) as a woman who prepared Jesus' tomb; van Dael (1978) as Mary Magdalene. All notice that she is touching Jesus' robe, and so an identification of the owner of the tomb with the woman healed by Jesus seems most likely.
[61] See Chapter 3.2.

marble casket.[62] On textiles too, the art of weaving can be brought to the foreground in these compositions in various ways.

The back and forth movement across the textiles, achieved by the contrasting turns of bodies and gazes, creates a sense of drama that plays on the medium; the weaving backwards and forwards is intrinsic to their construction, as well as the composition. On the Meleager and Atlanta tapestry for example, the strong verticals of the columns and figures are crossed by the horizontals of the two bejewelled friezes, the column cross-bands, and the lines created across the figures by the alignment of the square inserts and perpendicular arms – all suggesting a grid effect that recalls the intersecting warp and weft of the fabric.[63]

The twisting motifs on the arches can be compared to the spinning of each thread, spun individually from the raw wool and then woven with others to create the subtle shading. The repeating curves of the arches up and down, echoed in the curve of the acanthus detail at the bottom of each column, seem to mimic on a macro level the path of the weaving shuttle, up and down. The layers of matching patterns from arch to column create a continuous flow from the top of the fabric through to the bottom. This all creates a picture of a very self-consciously woven composition, highlighting the unique qualities of this medium.

Significantly, in Schrenk's reconstruction in particular, the twisting arches are located over each of the female figures. Women were fundamentally linked to textiles and weaving in Graeco-Roman thought, not least since they were traditionally responsible for spinning and weaving in the household.[64] The alternation between the women under these weaving motifs, and the male characters under natural foliage and vines, switches between indoor and outdoor worlds. This picks up on the architectural play with space and dimensions discussed earlier: where is the procession located, and where is it leading? Is the architecture public or domestic?

As well as the twists and turns of the architecture being appropriate for the medium of textile, the Dionysiac subject itself, a particularly popular choice for late antique textiles in Egypt, could also be suited. Weaving arguably lends itself to depicting dancing in the way that the shuttle 'flies' and 'dances' speedily between the warp threads. One testament to the perceived speed of the shuttle in the ancient world can be found in a melancholy metaphor from the book of Job: "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle".[65] At the same time,

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[62] See Chapter 2.4.
[63] Simon (1970) 12 on contrasting verticals and horizontals.
[64] See Scheid and Svenbro (1996).
[65] Job 7.6.

tapestry-weaving was a highly refined process and contrived art, in contrast to the wild bacchic revelry with all its natural imagery.

As well as being visibly fast, weaving was also noisy from beating the weft threads, which meant that from at least the fifth century BC there was an overlap in the imagery of textiles and music in Greek poetry.[66] In Aristotle's Politics he compared the two arts, both producing sound from agitation of strings or threads: "weft-beaters should beat the weft of their own accord, and plectra should pluck the kithara of themselves".[67] The inclusion of a kithara player in this textile arcade is therefore obviously significant; the strings even line up with the threads of the fabric. The same is true of Pan's pipes; as Pan blows through the reeds, so the threads might seem to run through them. Their golden colour brings to mind the process of producing gold thread: as in Paulus Silentiarius's description, "gold leaf has been wrapped round thread after the manner of a pipe or a reed".[68]

Elsewhere Silentiarius describes the interior decoration of Hagia Sophia in a way that links marble decoration with weaving:

> "Before one comes to the glitter of cut mosaic, the mason, <u>weaving</u> together with his hands thin slabs of marble, has figured upon the walls connected arcs laden with fruit, baskets and leaves, and has represented birds perched on boughs. The twining vine with shoots like golden ringlets winds its curving path and <u>weaves</u> a spiral chain of clusters. It projects gently forward so as to overshadow somewhat with its twisting wreaths the stone that is next to it. Such ornament surrounds the beauteous church. And above the high-crested columns, underneath the projecting stone edge, is deployed a <u>tapestry</u> of wavy acanthus, a wandering <u>contexture</u> of spiky points, all golden, full of grace."[69]

Silentiarius associates the art of opus sectile with that of tapestry, using the metaphor of weaving to describe the artist's arrangement of marble pieces. What seems to prompt the comparison is partly the subject matter of "arcs", the "curving path" and "spiral chain" of the "twining vine", and the "wavy acanthus": the twists and curves evidently remind him of the art of tapestry, with its spun threads waving in and out and around each other. It is therefore notable how abundant this kind of twisting natural imagery is on the Dionysiac tapestry. Wavy vines weave up columns and over arches. Curved acanthus leaves sit at the base of the pillars, and in a similar location to at Hagia Sophia, at the top of the columns "underneath

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[66] Fanfani (2017). See also Snyder (1981).
[67] Aristotle, *Pol*. 1253b34-1254a1.
[68] Paulus Silentiarius, *Descriptio S. Sophiae* 755ff.
[69] Paulus Silentiarius, *Descriptio S. Sophiae* 647ff.

the projecting stone edge".[70] The "spiral chain of clusters" recalls the chain of encircled leaves that snakes over the niches of the faun and satyr.

All this suggests that not only were the weavers of this tapestry reflecting architectural features that could be found in real life, but that they consciously chose motifs that already had similar qualities to their own art. Whether simply on the basis of these inherent qualities in waving architecture, or precisely because of this type of playful use in high quality domestic furnishings, we know that at least one viewer a century or two later was inspired to describe them in the same terms.

4.2.4. Conclusion

Analysis of these fourth-century wall hangings reveals a self-consciously material aesthetic woven into their very fabric. As a kind of flexible architecture, they are pieces that play with this contrast between mobility and solidity, as well as the boundaries between the physical and depicted worlds. They demonstrate an elaborate playfulness in their depictions of clothing, evocations of the art of weaving, and imagery of covering and revealing, interacting with themes found elsewhere in classical and late antique literature. Their owners and their guests could delight in the visual puns and simulations on offer, and be prompted to show off their literary and mythological knowledge.

In the following century, the fact that these textiles were reused in burials might testify to the longevity of the idea of an architectural frame for the dead, albeit in a very different part of the empire. Myrup Kristensen notes that the whole scheme of the Meleager tapestry looks like a tomb with a pediment, and compares the figures to the mythological characters on sarcophagi with portraits of the deceased.[71] Originally around 1.3m, the figures on the textile are three-quarter lifesize, close enough to the scale of a real body to imagine how one of the figures could be placed on top of the deceased.[72] The architectural frame of these textiles encircling a body might certainly be thought to provide an appropriate symbolic tomb in place of a more concrete monument.

Little attention has been paid to the potential funerary significance of these textiles, despite the possibility that many may have been chosen for having imagery appropriate for a funerary context.[73] The sarcophagus-like architectural frame, the associations with luxury

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[70] Kondoleon (2016) 92 notes that the marble acanthus frieze on pilasters in the late antique domus discussed earlier bears a strong resemblance to this kind of foliage on textile architecture.
[71] Myrup Kristensen (2015) 274-5.
[72] Simon (1970) 5 for scale.
[73] Myrup Kristensen (2015) on funerary significance of late Roman/Egyptian textiles.

and literary culture, and paradisiacal connotations of the abundant vegetation all seem appropriate for a burial. On the Meleager and Atalanta textile, the head of Hermes might suggest his role in guiding souls to the Underworld, while the Dionysiac tapestry shares much with sarcophagus imagery. The semi-reclining pose of the nude Dionysus under an arc of vines might also recall the depiction not just of the pagan figures of Ariadne, Endymion and the like, but also of Jonah under the gourd.

Dionysus was even associated with Christ in late antiquity, not least by Nonnus, himself from Egypt, who wrote epic works on both Dionysus and the Gospel of John in the fifth century. The parallels in his treatment of the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine with the wine symbolism of Dionysus have been noted by scholars.[74] In the same way as for Nonnus, the two traditions were evidently not considered exclusive by the family of the deceased in this case.[75]

Willers and Niekamp interpret Dionysus's wine cup in the tradition of wine miracles associated with the god, so that the wine is being produced miraculously in the divine presence.[76] The wine is rendered with dye, and perhaps the relationship of the artists behind the textile and their work is seen in parallel with the divine force and creation. The god could be letting fall the substance of the creation of the work itself. This resonates the most in a Christian context, where wine was associated with blood, and there are interesting resonances between this wine miracle and that of Jesus at Cana, as seen on sarcophagi in the second chapter. The playful parallel between playing music and weaving similarly juxtaposes two forms of creation, depicting the figures moving the strings to create, echoing how they themselves have been created through moving threads. The maenad on the right side has been thought to be playing castanets, but her pose is so similar to that of the kithara player from the other textile that she might also originally have held one.

No columnar textiles with woven biblical scenes survive on such a scale from the fourth century that would help us to see if they show a comparable material treatment of biblical figures as on sarcophagi. In Asterius's sermon discussed earlier, he turns his critical attention to clothing with woven biblical motifs:

> "But such rich men and women as are more pious, have gathered up the gospel history and turned it over to the weavers; I mean Christ himself with all the disciples, and each of the miracles, as recorded in the Gospel. You may see the wedding of Galilee, and the water-pots; the paralytic carrying his bed on his

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[74] Willers and Niekamp (2015) 100-107; Myrup Kristensen (2016).
[75] T. Thomas (2016) 48.
[76] Willers and Niekamp (2015) 27-8.

shoulders; the blind man being healed with the clay; the woman with the bloody issue, taking hold of the border of the garment; the sinful woman falling at the feet of Jesus; Lazarus returning to life from the grave. In doing this they consider that they are acting piously and are clad in garments pleasing to God. But if they take my advice let them sell those clothes and honour the living image of God…

"Do not portray the paralytic on your garments, but seek out him that lies sick. Do not tell continually the story of the woman with the bloody issue, but have pity on the straitened widow…" etc.[77]

Other than the opening example of the Cana miracle, the only image to be accompanied by an additional note is the woman with issue of blood, "taking hold of the border of the garment". This could be another indication of the media-conscious aesthetic explored thus far. The story's key detail of the woman grasping the hem of Jesus' coat is not consistently portrayed on sarcophagi, where there is perhaps more interest in comparisons with the statue group of a victorious emperor and kneeling personification. When imagining the scene on clothing however, it is a detail that stands out to Asterius. There may even be a double meaning, where the scene 'takes hold' of the space available on the edge of the actual garment.

A frieze hanging in the Abegg collection depicts scenes from Genesis apparently linked by themes of food, though painted onto cloth rather than woven.[78] A fourth-century resist-dyed hanging depicting the Annunciation includes the apocryphal tradition that Mary was preparing threads for the temple veil when Gabriel appeared to tell her of the child she would bear (fig. 4.21).[79] She pulls long strands of combed wool from a prominent wicker basket beside her that follow the shape of Gabriel's wing, and also echo the flutes of the column beyond him marking the end of the scene. Depicting the scene in textile is particularly self-referential. Jesus' unformed body is imagined as the unformed, unspun wool, waiting to be shaped by Mary's body. This scene does illustrate how biblical motifs on textile could be subject to the same material play as observed on other hangings and sarcophagi in this period.

In the sixth century, Paulus Silentiarius's description of the altar cloth in Hagia Sophia prioritises Christ's clothing and his interpretation of its colours and draping, and which parts

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[77] Asterius of Amasea, 'On Lazarus and the Rich Man', trans. Anderson and Goodspeed (1904).
[78] Kötzsche (2004).
[79] Fluck, Helmecke, O'Connell (2015) fig. 185.

of the body are clothed and which bare.[80] The ekphrasis opens with an oxymoronic image of revealing the textile by covering the altar:

> "…spread out with your hands the veil dipped in the purple dye of the Sidonian shell and **cover** the top of the table. Unfold the cover along its four sides and **show** to the countless crowd the gold and the bright designs of skilful handiwork."

Although later, this helps to confirm a continuing Christian interest in earlier artistic themes relating to textile.

It can be concluded that the taste for explicit materiality was a widespread aesthetic that crossed boundaries of Christian and non-Christian, domestic and funerary in this period. Examination of these tapestries has confirmed key shared visual strategies with sarcophagi, interacting with either literary or biblical texts to enable shows of knowledge, but crucially that this playful materiality is specific to each medium, whether carved stone or woven fabric. These tapestries have thus helped to disentangle a thread that runs through much late antique art.

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[80] Paulus Silentiarius, *Descriptio S. Sophiae* 755-806, also discussed in T. Thomas (2002).

Conclusion

This thesis has proposed a new way of viewing early Christian sarcophagi, attempting to re-position them in their context of late Roman culture. I want to close with one further example of such a viewing, with one sarcophagus that does not fit as neatly into the inevitably artificial divisions necessitated by the chapter structure of a thesis. This will take into account several aspects of viewing fourth-century Christian sarcophagi from across the chapters: the statuesque, in particular support figures; stone-centred materiality; self-referential and microcosmic motifs; and even a triumphal echo of Virgilian destiny.

A late-fourth-century strigillated sarcophagus (fig. 5.1) was preserved in the crypt of St Honorat at the end of the Alyscamps (fig. 5.2), a cemetery that was the source of several other sarcophagi considered so far.[1] The central double-register panel depicts the Nativity and the Magi (fig. 5.1b), framed by outer scenes of Moses receiving the Law (fig. 5.1c) and the sacrifice of Isaac (fig. 5.1d).[2] The short sides and back are smoothly finished; the lid is missing. Strigillated sarcophagi from this period typically feature male saints or apostles in the outer panels, with a central Christ or orant (cf. fig. 4.20).[3] Examples with biblical scenes seem rarer; compared with 26 from the first two thirds of the fourth century, Huskinson compiles only four biblical strigillated sarcophagi from the latter third, including this one.[4]

The back-and-forth motion of the strigillation is emphasised by the choice of marble. The white stone is striped horizontally with lines of grey all the way across, and the back and sides are unusually all polished to show this off to best effect (fig. 5.1e). The grey lines are concentrated within two broad bands, in the top and bottom halves of the sarcophagus. The split level of the New Testament panel conveniently lines up with the midway point between these two; the top band runs across the top half of the strigils, and the lower band runs across the bottom half of the strigils. This helps to draw the eye from one panel to another and back again across its two horizontal paths. The marble was probably chosen especially to match this decoration, suggesting careful thought and expense invested in the scheme.[5]

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[1] *RS* III 84; Benoit (1954) no. 73.

[2] For Moses receiving the law on sarcophagi, Wilpert (1929-34) 237-41; Koch (2000) 145-6. For the sacrifice of Isaac on sarcophagi, Wilpert (1929-34) 231-4; Koch (2000) 140-1. For nativity scenes on sarcophagi, Wilpert (1929-34) 279-90.

[3] Huskinson (2015) 220-6.

[4] Huskinson (2015) table 10.1, 303-7. The other three are *RS* II 108 (350-375), *RS* III 83 (c.390, fragments), *RS* III 85 (c.390, fig. 5.4).

[5] See Chapter 1.2, 1.3.1, and 2.3 on stripy marble and strigillation. See Chapter 1.3.1 on the pattern of combining 'boxed-in' strigillation with plinths strengthening into the Christian period.

The scenes of Moses and Abraham are elevated to the level of the statuesque through the addition of very large plinths. As we have seen, the materialistic emphasis of the framing pair continued through biblical scenes such as the raising of Lazarus and rock miracle of Peter, but plinths were still typically reserved for single figures or couples rather than narrative snapshots. The biblical scenes introduced in the statuesque positions of strigillated types, in the first half of the fourth century, are made explicitly statuesque here by the addition of plinths.[6]

The two Old Testament scenes on the ends share some commonalities, such as the appearance of the divine hand at the top left corner to which the main figures turn. Below each hand there is the bush in which the substitutionary lamb is caught, and the burning bush from which came the voice of God, merged here as it often is into the scene with the reception of the Ten Commandments. Both bushes therefore provided the medium for displaying either God's voice or the lamb that symbolised his son.

These framing scenes are presented as the models and *exempla* for the New Testament scenes in the centre, foretelling how the new-born Jesus will grow up to fulfil the Law (Matthew 5:17-20) and take the part of the sacrificial lamb to save mankind (the ram that is substituted for Isaac in the text). Placing the end scenes on plinths strengthens their force as *exempla* in this reading, with all the associations plinths have been seen to have with exemplarity. Through their allusion to statuary, they evoke the authority of the past, and create the same sort of relationship between the Old and New Testaments as between Augustus and Aeneas, for example; by implication, they also provide a 'classic' biblical past for the Romans of the fourth century. In the supportive end positions, Moses and Abraham more literally provide the support for the central image of Christ.

All three figural fields are linked more closely by a point of divine intervention in each top left corner: the hand of God in the outer scenes, and the star to lead the Magi in the centre (fig. 5.1b). Most of the figures acknowledge these signs by the direction of their gaze or hands. In the framing of the nativity with the star and the shepherd's staff, there might be a coded reference to the vision of Balaam in Numbers: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near – a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel".[7] This relies on the knowledge of the viewer to interpret the scheme behind the imagery. The focus on the birth of Jesus, in relation to prototypes for what he will later accomplish, also rather

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[6] See Chapter 2.
[7] Numbers 24.17a.

fits in with the new theme of the birth and upbringing of heroes that became so popular in late antiquity.[8]

One similarity between the stories of Isaac and Jesus is that they both carried up the wood for their own deaths (Isaac the kindling for the sacrificial fire, Jesus the cross), and both sacrifices were thought to take place on hills in or near the site of Jerusalem.[9] The ram that appears to take the place of Isaac is also interpreted as a symbol of Jesus, the Lamb of God; it is said to be caught in branches, as depicted on the sarcophagus. Jesus is also said to 'hang from a tree' in Galatians, where Paul quotes the Jewish law from Deuteronomy:

> "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree' – in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."[10]

This passage, important to Roman Christians as pertinent to their salvation as gentiles, links the Crucifixion to the Law of Moses and to Abraham, the two prophets on the sarcophagus. The linking trees speak together here of the other invisible (but implied) tree, the cross, that opened up the Jewish signs and promises to the whole world.

We can note that the upper register with all the unique details from Luke's gospel (the emphasis on Mary, the shepherd, the manger and animals) is clearly demarcated from the Magi of the lower register who are found only in Matthew. The central dual panel seems to distinguish two texts, and relates one to the other through a series of looks, gestures and echoes. Across the sarcophagus therefore the viewer is invited to compare two Old Testament patriarchs (from the first two books), two Testaments, and two gospels.

Both outer scenes in the text are set on mountains: Mount Sinai for Moses and Mount Moriah for Abraham (potentially later the Temple Mount in Jerusalem). Abraham's scene makes this explicit with the detail of the rocky landscape on which the small altar is set. The biblical settings are appropriate for scenes set on tall plinths carved in rock themselves. The Ten Commandments being handed to Moses (now damaged) were also famously stone tablets, another appropriate choice for a statuesque motif carved in stone. Justin Martyr, Origen and Jerome all testify to the belief that Jesus was born in a cave, potentially setting the central panel in a rocky landscape as well – although the tiled roof might detract from

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[8] Leader-Newby (2004) 129-136 and Alan Cameron (2009) on the popularity of the theme of heroes' childhoods in late antiquity.
[9] Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, Origen, and Ambrose, among others, all describe parallels between Christ and Isaac in the fourth and fifth centuries; Jensen (2000) 143-148, and Moore Smith (1922) for an overview of depictions in early Christian art.
[10] Galatians 3.13; Deuteronomy 21.23. Cf. Acts 5.30 and 1 Peter 2.24.

this.[11] Another late-fourth-century sarcophagus in Arles has a nativity scene on its right side with Mary and Jesus sitting on a rock (fig. 5.3), which might testify to this belief on sarcophagi.

The stone of the tablets was a particular focus in biblical references to the story. Paul tells the Christians in Corinth that they are a witness written "not on tablets of stone but on tablets of hearts of flesh."[12] This references a passage from Jeremiah that describes how God will make a new covenant with his people; not "like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt", but one where he will write his law on their hearts.[13] Later in Ezekiel, God tells his people "I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."[14] Paul sets up Christians filled with the Spirit as the fulfilment of these hints of a law dwelling inside the body, and the replacement of the stone of Moses's tablets with the flesh of the body. While the specific references might not necessarily be expected to be recalled by viewers of the sarcophagi, they help create the sense of the wider stone-related image that the story inspired, a metaphor gathered around the pivotal story of the tablets of the law.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the silent potential of the central reclining figure can reflect back on the silent occupant of the sarcophagus.[15] The deceased Christian has experienced a similar new birth through baptism, so can expect that their body's visible state, recumbent and incapable of speech, will not be their eternal one. Whether their resurrection was expected to be spiritual and instantaneous, or physical and yet to come, in either case they too are being watched over by the saints, who rejoice over them. The mourners gathering around the body of the deceased are mirrored in the relief by figures who realise the significance of the central character and express praise and joy, transforming grief into celebration. On the other hand, Mary wrapped in her drapery with chin on hand reminds us of the pose of a muse listening to a philosopher, a type which is sometimes given portrait features on Roman sarcophagi; therefore the fixed image of Mary contemplating Jesus could be the role played by the deceased, eternally gazing at Christ.

The cycle of images around the Nativity can reflect the mourning context. The procession of Magi potentially provides a parallel to the visiting mourners bringing grave gifts.[16] In

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[11] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 78; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.51.
[12] 2 Cor. 3.3; "*οὐκ ἐν πλαξὶν λιθίναις ἀλλ' ἐν πλαξὶν καρδίαις σαρκίναις.*"
[13] Jeremiah 31.33
[14] Ezekiel 36.25-26, cf. 11.19.
[15] Elsner (2012) 184 for a parallel on a sarcophagus from Syracuse: on the lid, Jesus in the manger; below, the raising of the son of Nain from a strigillated coffin.
[16] The food offered by a bystander in scenes of Daniel (Chapter 2.2.1) could also be significant in a funerary context.

Matthew, the wise men bring gold, suitable for a king, frankincense, for Jesus' priestly role, and myrrh, in anticipation of his death and burial.[17] Myrrh always had a funerary significance, but frankincense too by this time was used to preserve and pack the body, and was burnt during the funeral.[18] The gift in the hands of the first wise man, expected to be gold, often takes the form of a wreath – a traditional motif on tomb monuments, and which could also adorn the dead body. Another traditional aspect of a Roman funeral was the attendance of slaves freed by the deceased, identifiable by their Phrygian caps, just like the Magi paying tribute to their master.[19] This is another biblical scene that can be seen to comment self-reflexively on the funerary nature of the coffin it adorns, preserving the memory of the honours paid to the deceased eternally on their final resting place, while overlaying the cold fact of death with one of rebirth, transforming how mourners who saw the scene might then see the funeral rites.

The manger is held up by two prominent and presumably wooden supports, each shaped like two branches sprouting from one trunk – rather like the forked roots of each tree. The circular dots at the top of each support echo the small round fruit on the trees. A similar sarcophagus from Arles, with a differing choice of iconography without trees for the end panel, has a different form for the manger (fig. 5.4).[20] In a similar way to how the two Old Testament scenes on plinths on either side provide the scriptural underpinning for the New Testament fulfilment in Christ, key divine elements from the former two are echoed in the latter as literal dual supports on either side of the central image of divinity. This scriptural underpinning is expressed not just by Christian typology, but by the formal framework of the sarcophagus. Just as the sarcophagus is supported by two panels each featuring a tree, the manger is held up by two tree-like legs. The manger is thus constructed effectively as a microcosm of the sarcophagus itself.

The pose of Mary as a muse seems somewhat ironic since the object of her reflection at the centre of the scene is an '*infans*', incapable of speech. As it happens, this is quite consistent with the subversion of ancient and classical expectations of speech in the gospels, namely the scene so popular on sarcophagi of Jesus' appearance before Pilate, in which Jesus does not answer the false charges against him.[21] Ancient readers would have been surprised by Jesus' silence: pagans like Porphyry of Tyre seized on this point ("how is it that Christ

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[17] Matthew 2.11.
[18] Cf. Mitschke and Paetz gen Schiek (2012) 121 on resins.
[19] Toynbee (1996) 45. Cf. MacCormack (1981) 66 on the parallel with Persians submitting to emperor in imperial art.
[20] *RS* III 85.
[21] Mark 15.2-5. Cf. Matthew 27.11-14, Luke 23.3-9. See Chapter 3.2.3 on depictions of Pilate on sarcophagi.

uttered nothing worthy of a wise and divine man?") and Christians educated in the classics like Origen were forced on the defensive ("It might well cause amazement among those with moderate intellectual powers that a man who was accused and charged falsely did not defend himself and prove himself not guilty of any of the charges, although he could have done so").[22] Origen's assertion that only the truly educated would be able to understand the true significance of Jesus' silence must also be at play in the sarcophagus relief.

There is another model for the two scenes on plinths from the Roman side of fourth-century heritage. The sacrifice of Isaac, in subverting scenes of the emperor executing a captive, might recall Anchises's injunction to "spare the conquered" in Virgil's *Aeneid*.[23] Opposite, the giving of the tablets of the Law might recall the other responsibility paired before it: "to impose laws (*morem*) upon peace".[24] The choice to abandon chronological order might be informed by a desire to echo the order of the famous Virgilian lines, first with a representation of the imposition of law, and then one of sparing the captive. Placing them on plinths gives them an air of Roman *exempla*. Furthermore, widening the context a little further, it can be noted that Anchises refers to the creation of two kinds of statues, bronze and marble, that provide a particular statuesque background to the allusion, as Anchises begins his outline of the different arts assigned to different peoples:

> *excudent alii spirantia mollius aera,*
> *credo equidem, vivos ducent de marmore voltus,*
> *orabunt causas melius, caelique meatus*
> *describent radio, et surgentia sidera dicent:*
> *tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento:*
> *hae tibi erunt artes; pacisque imponere morem,*
> *parcere subiectis, et debellare superbos.*
>
> Others will beat bronze into figures that breathe more softly,
> I do not doubt it; others will draw living likenesses out of marble;
> others will plead cases better or describe with their rod
> the courses of the stars across the sky, and predict their risings:
> your task will be to govern the peoples in your empire, Roman, and do not forget it:
> these will be your arts; and to impose laws upon peace,

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[22] Cf. Elsner (2000) for a consideration of the Pilate scenes on fourth-century sarcophagi.
[23] See Chapter 4.1 on Christian reception of Virgil.
[24] The Vulgate usually renders law as '*lex*', but uses '*mores*' in the phrases "customs of Moses" or "customs of our ancestors", where the Jewish law is implied (Acts 15.1 and 28.17).

to pardon the defeated, and war down the proud.[25]

Anchises's reference to the others who "will plead cases better or describe with their rod the courses of the stars across the sky, and predict their risings" acquires significance. It maps on to this central register surprisingly well: above ironically with the *infans* who so famously fails to plead his case at the crucial moment; below with the astrologers who saw the star "at its rising" and not only charted but physically followed it across the sky. That these arts of "others" are included as central to the sarcophagus narrative, alongside possible representations of the arts of Rome itself, could fit with the similar Roman and Christian themes of drawing in all peoples. In a late fourth-century Christian context, this exemplifies the triumphal vision we see elsewhere of Christianity as the culmination of Rome's destiny, where Christianity goes further and accomplishes more than even Anchises had foreseen. The final group of "others", those who make statues and carve marble, can be represented by the makers of the sarcophagus itself, breaking the 'fourth wall' of the display and including the world of the creator, viewer, and recently deceased. Anchises might have assigned skill in carving marble to others, but he need not have.

Finally, this sarcophagus seems to commemorate the process of viewing. The reactions of the Magi in the bottom half of the centre panel parallel the sequence of the elements in the Nativity above. The first wise man points to the star directly above; the second listening to him recalls the thoughtful pose of Mary, chin resting on bent fingers; the third magus stands similarly to the shepherd, both raising right hands in recognition and praise while looking towards the manger – they both hold their left hands in the same position, and wear the same split tunics (less usual for a shepherd) that overlap the edge of the panel. These parallel sequences of 'Look!', thought, and acclamation are echoed for a third time in the response of the viewer: looking at the imagery, reflecting on it, and recognising it, as well as of recognising the depicted Jesus as Lord. The idea of 'seeing as believing' in the gospels is emphasised in stories such as Jesus' appearance to Thomas. The chronological progression of the response of each of the Magi from left to right is emphasised: the first speaks to the second, who gestures to the third. The first two have the familiar fluted struts on their left hands that are placed between the three figures, emphasising the chain of communication. Here they do not carry their usual gifts; the emphasis is all on the gestures and the gazes, the viewing and the response. The importance of the parallel between upper and lower registers is shown by the fragment of a similar sarcophagus from Arles (fig. 5.4), which has the same Nativity elements but in reverse, with the gesturing shepherd on the left and the thoughtful Mary on the right; correspondingly, the order of the reactions of the Magi is switched.

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[25] *Aeneid* 6.847-853, trans. based on West (1990).

The series of responses is also circular: the first magus points to an element in the upper register, turns away and mediates it to the second who ponders his words, before the third gestures back to the register above with new understanding. The viewer can be imagined taking on the role of each identically dressed magus in turn; they could be snapshots of the same person. The direction of the strigils from top to bottom first emanates out from the Nativity to the end panels, and then back in to the Magi, who gesture back to the Nativity. The viewer first sees the Nativity, is directed to look at the Old Testament 'statues', then returns to the centre panel to reflect on the combination, where they will also see the depiction of their own role in the Magi below. This explicit staging of the interaction between art and the viewer is self-consciously visual, colouring the biblical texts in the light of the increased role for the viewer/reader in late antique artistic culture.[26] The Magi look at a symbol, and use it to interpret the sight in front of them.

Readers of Luke's gospel would be reminded of Mary's response to the story the shepherds tell of how they heard about Jesus' birth, and what they were told about him: "…all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured (συνετήρει) all these words and pondered them (συμβάλλουσα) in her heart."[27] Mary first preserves what was said, and 'brings them together' in her mind. Her role of preserving, to prevent from being forgotten, stands in line with the Muses whose mother is Memory. Mary is a receptacle to knit together words as well as the Word in this scene, the ultimate Muse inspired by God. She is in the pose of the muse Polyhymnia ('many hymns'), and earlier in Luke's Nativity Mary speaks the famous hymn of praise, the Magnificat. Sharing her pose with the central considering wise man below, the corresponding biblical verse confirms that she is also in the act of pondering. Like the full sequence of Magi below, the gospel makes explicit how she takes note and then considers. The gospel also makes clear that the acclamation of the shepherd, here corresponding to the final acknowledging magus, is based on what he has been told by the angels. The upper register acts out a series of tellings and hearings, speaking and not speaking. Mary has produced the Word in front of her, who prompts the words of the shepherd (having heard the words of the angels from God), who speaks words to be internalised by Mary again – all centred around the Word who does not speak. Like the lower tier, the upper register is cyclical, this time in terms of speech. This sarcophagus dramatises the acts of both speaking and viewing, significant for works of art that are rooted in literary texts.

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[26] Cf. Pelttari (2014) 138-160.
[27] Luke 2.18-19.

The cumulative picture is one of investment in Roman as much as Christian culture; the very idea of a Christian culture is constructed within a Roman framework. All this analysis is possible with only the body of the sarcophagus surviving; we can only imagine how these interpretations could have been enhanced and reviewed within new frameworks if we could see the original decorated lid in the crowning position. It therefore exemplifies the fact that our modern interpretations of Christian sarcophagi, this one included, will always be to some extent incomplete. We can never fully recapture what a fourth-century viewer might have seen. Their gaze was directed through a specific prism, unique to their time, through the ever-evolving spheres of biblical knowledge, classical learning, and artistic familiarity, which we can only attempt to laboriously bring into focus, adjusting for the different lenses of class, gender and other life experiences. These interpretations might sound lengthy, but only because we must untangle and elaborate what could be understood instinctively by the fourth-century viewer.

A main problem that this thesis has tried to address is that Christian sarcophagi have been treated differently to pre-Christian sarcophagi, and separately from other spheres of late antique art, while on the other hand grouped with other very distinct forms of Christian art. In an attempt to correct this imbalance, it has emphasised the cultural over the religious, and tried to begin from the visual over the textual, emphasising that the case for meaning can be built more from the level of visual culture than has previously been argued. Although sarcophagi tend to be treated according to separate types, I hope to have shown that their underlying structure and framework for viewing have more in common than is immediately obvious to viewers today. Equally, although often divided in the scholarship historically into pagan and Christian, these ways of viewing, not to mention the actual imagery selected, work across these artificially imposed religious boundaries, and the surviving corpus of late antique sarcophagi benefits from being seen as a whole.

The thesis has identified sculptural frames, the statuesque, and materialistic self-referentiality, which could be termed collectively as a self-conscious monumentality. This is one aspect of the reuse of the classical heritage of Christian Romans, for purposes from assimilation, prestige, and legitimacy, to ultimately triumphal fulfilment. The structural support offered by the various architectural elements, from caryatids to columns, also presents a metaphor of support in another sense: analysis of the architectural foundations of Christian Roman sarcophagi can reveal the ideological foundations of Christian Roman identity. We see the statuesque underpinnings of Roman monuments being adopted in the third century, undermined and transformed by the mid-fourth, and triumphally restated by the start of the fifth. Simultaneously, a construction of Christianity that could fit within an imperial framework is being built up. This transformation of the past should be seen in the

tradition of Roman cultural transformations over the past few centuries, from Augustus to the Second Sophistic, and beyond that as part of wider patterns of cultural interaction.

Late antique elite culture was forged when classical elite culture (including funerary commemoration and traditional education) met the changing circumstances of late antiquity, including social, political and religious upheaval. This was an increasingly competitive intellectual culture, one with a heightened interest in displays of classical culture both literary and artistic. It favoured maximum opportunity for complex interpretation by the viewer, showing off the *paideia* of the patron, and could be expressed in visual art no less than in text. There seems little reason to see Christian sarcophagi as excluded from the aesthetics of this intellectual culture. They were commissioned by the same aspirational middle and upper class patrons, and display the kinds of complex interpretative schemes that in other media would be associated with cultural display. This should not be overshadowed by the new use of the Bible as a source text. The 'break' seen between classical and Christian art seems to be a symptom of the success of Christianity in pervading history and culture in many parts of the world ever since, somehow making ancient Roman Christianity seem less ancient and less Roman than the rest of its contemporary context.

The past assumption has been that static figures meant less technical skill, judging static as lifeless and therefore negative. But as 'static' can be understood to have suggested the statuesque and thus to have evoked prestige, this style of depiction should be seen in a more positive light. Late antique compositions show complex decisions and negotiations of motifs and messages being made. Fragmented patterns of reading and composition, and excerption in art, can all be interpreted as part of the ongoing late antique reassessment of the past. As in literature, this preoccupation with the past did not mean a strictly traditional form, but a complex negotiation and rearrangement of forms in light of this retrospective reflection. Past scholarly denigration of late antique art and literature has been based on its deviation from the parameters set by earlier periods, and perhaps it has been judged on these terms because late antique culture looked so much to this past and claimed continuity and renaissance. Scholars would appear to have taken them at their word, instead of analysing the nature of this reception and considering the context of when and why these claims were made.

These sarcophagi testify to the continuing importance and relevance of classical frameworks to late Roman culture, consciousness and commemoration. The attempts to meet the considerable challenges faced with assimilating the present to an increasingly different past show the importance of evoking this past and preserving its culture.[28] How these challenges were met to a great extent determines how we encounter the classical past today, and that so

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[28] Kousser (2008) 135.

much of it survives is a testament to the success of late antique attempts to integrate rather than reject their Graeco-Roman cultural heritage. The attitudes to materiality traced here look ahead to later late antique developments of relics and icons; starting from the perspective of looking to the past has also revealed the early origins of some future developments.[29]

What is clear is that the dichotomy introduced in the introduction to this thesis, between religious or eschatological on the one hand, and cultural or classical on the other, is a false one. 'Religious' imagery could be used to emphasise cultural prestige, while the destiny of Rome was built into eschatological concerns. This thesis has shown that highlighting cultural influences and classical frameworks can actually reveal even deeper Christian meanings, which in turn could feed back into traditional constructions of prestige. Fourth-century Christian art is a valuable witness to a period of cultural challenge and mutual absorption, where we can see the "two great Powers" being carved in the "one stream" of water from the rock.

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[29] See Squire (2011) 167-86.

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