

BURIALS OF THE BYZANTINE NEAR EAST (FOURTH-SEVENTH CENTURIES)

VOLUME 1 OF 2

by

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Abstract

Research on burials of the Byzantine Near East has focused on a transformation from 'pagan' to 'Christian' beliefs, the simplicity of Christian burial, and exceptional examples. To date, a large-scale data study on the Byzantine burials of this region has not been undertaken. This thesis provides the first big data study on burials of the Near East between 330 CE and the Arab invasions in the seventh century. The study explores different aspects related to burial and their study: tomb types, cemetery organisation, human remains and their study, grave goods, inscriptions, and iconography. These aspects are situated in a series of case studies that show the value in careful and detailed analysis. Two chapters are also dedicated to the study of human remains, which is identified as a key weakness in the current state of Byzantine studies.

This thesis offers a systematic critique of current theories which view early Christian burials as simplified forms of burial that focused heavily on the new religion's death beliefs and altered or opposed previous 'pagan' forms of burial. It stresses the need for a deeper understanding of what was fundamentally important to burial. This is carried out through a large-scale study that provides a general sense of the experience of death and burial to Byzantine people. This study demonstrates the agency of individuals related to burial decisions and allows for a discussion of societal trends in burial.

*The other shape,
If shape it might be called that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,
For each seemed either; black it stood as Night,
Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,
And shook a dreadful dart; what seemed his head
The likeness of a kingly crown had on.*

Description of Death. John Milton, *Paradise Lost* Book II, 666-673.

For

Michael Patrick Quinn

May heaven provide more exciting reading.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CIfA Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.

HE Historic England.

P. land Hummel, J. (1938) *Griechische Wirtschaftsrechnungen und Verwandtes. Papyri landanae, volume VIII*. Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner.

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NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY, REFERENCES, DATING, AND VOLUME 2

Terminology

The term “Near East” is used to refer to all the provinces in this thesis (Arabia, Egypt (Aegyptus, Arcadia, Augustamnica, and Thebais), Palaestina (Palaestina Prima, Secunda, and Tertia), Phoenice (Phoenice Prima and Secunda), and Syria (Syria Prima and Secunda)) as a group. This term refers to the area of north Africa and southwestern Asia around the Mediterranean Sea more generally,¹ but in the context of this thesis will refer only to the provinces listed above.

Place Names

I have chosen to use the ancient names for the provinces studied in this thesis to situate them within their Byzantine context. Where they are known, the ancient names of settlements are also used, following their Greek naming conventions. Where this has not been possible, I have used the names by which each site is most commonly referred to in modern publications, to ensure clarity.

¹ *The Near East* (n.d.), where Near East is defined as “the countries of northern Africa and southwestern Asia that are on or near the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea”; *Near East* (n.d.), where in British English the Near East is defined as “another term for the Middle East”. Near/Middle East are Eurocentric terms but there are currently no alternatives used in public discourse: *Are the Middle East and the Near East the same thing?* (n.d.).

References to Other Parts of the Thesis

Where I refer to other parts of the thesis, I use “Chapter X” and “Section X.Y”, where “X” refers to the chapter and “Y” to the section of the chapter. I also use “the appendix” to generally refer to Volume 2 (on which, see below).

Dating

The dates used in this thesis are based on the results of their excavation and study. While I have mostly followed the dating provided, I have in some cases questioned the date ascribed to cemeteries (for example, Kellis 2 in the Dakhleh Oasis, Chapter 2); in others, dating remains vague, for example referring only to the ‘Roman-Byzantine’ period (for example, at Sa’ad and Umm al-Jimal).² The dating follows the conventions used in the source material, with the following definitions:

- Bronze Age – c. 3300-1200 BCE. One tomb on the Mount of Olives was simply classified as ‘ancient’, with no further detail and it can only be speculated whether it belongs to this or a later period.
- Hellenistic period – fourth-first century BCE. The early Hellenistic period goes up to the middle of the second century BCE. The Nabataean period, mentioned at two sites, likely refers to the Nabatean Kingdom and thus the same time frame.
- Roman period – first century BCE-early fourth century CE. The early Roman period is up to the end of the second century; the late Roman period is the third and early fourth. One site (Horvat ‘Illin) specifically

² Rose and Burke (2004), Cheyney et al. (2009).

mentions beginning in the Herodian period, at the end of the first century BCE.

- Byzantine period – early fourth century (330 CE) to the Arab conquest of these provinces in the seventh century (beginning in 634 CE). The early Byzantine period is the fourth-fifth century; the late Byzantine period is the sixth-early seventh century.
- Coptic period – used sometimes in Egypt, refers to the third-ninth centuries CE.
- Umayyad period – 661-750 CE.
- Abbasid period – 750-878 CE, 905-969 CE (though may simply refer to the whole period 750-969 CE).
- (Early) Islamic period – general term which may refer to any time between the Arab conquest in the early seventh century to the First Crusade in 1099 CE. The Middle Ages, Crusader, and Mamluk periods all refer to dates after the First Crusade.

Unless specified otherwise, henceforth dates belong to the Common Era.

Volume 2 (The Appendix)

Volume 2 (henceforth the appendix) contains detailed archaeological information on all the tombs which were consulted to form the statistics, arguments, and conclusions in the main thesis (Volume 1). It is designed to support the information in the main thesis by presenting further information on the burials that have been studied and used as examples. However, it is supplementary material, and it is not necessary to read the appendix to understand the arguments and conclusions in the main thesis.

The archaeological data in the appendix is taken from published materials, both in print and online, with bibliographical information provided for each tomb. To create the statistics for the main thesis, this data was added to a spreadsheet to form a database, which is currently unpublished. This is due to the limitations of the data, because often excavation reports have not provided information on individual tombs and therefore the data can only calculate minimum numbers of tombs that, for example, contain grave goods, human remains, or have stelae.

the appendix is arranged in alphabetical order by site name. In some cases, sites have been grouped together, for example, the Egyptian Oases and burials close to Jerusalem, to create a more succinct the appendix. Sites may have all or some of the following information. Where information is not known, the category is omitted.

- Province.
- Settlement type.
- Cemetery areas (in relation to settlement areas, structures, and other cemeteries).
- Dating. Note that, unless stated, dates are CE.
- Number of tombs.
- Extent of looting.
- Excavation dates.
- Social stratification.
- Human remains analysis.

Tombs are listed either individually or in groups (where information is known on a group of graves rather than individual graves). The burials within tombs, for example, an arcosolium within a rock-cut tomb, are detailed within the information on the tomb, instead of being provided separately. The following information is provided on each tomb:

- Reference or name.
- Description of the tomb.
- Human remains.
- Grave goods.
- Date. Note that, unless stated, dates are CE.
- 'Additional notes': typically, this is information on inscriptions and decoration, or other information.
- Bibliography.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis concerns burials of the fourth-seventh centuries (henceforth referred to as “Byzantine”) in the provinces of Arabia, Egypt (Aegyptus, Arcadia, Augustamnica, and Thebais), Palaestina (Palaestina Prima, Secunda, and Tertia), Phoenice (Phoenice Prima and Secunda), and Syria (Syria Prima and Secunda). The aims of this thesis are to provide the first large-scale study of Byzantine burials in the Near East, to examine the methodologies used to study these burials, and to present a series of case studies. The case studies are used to demonstrate the value of reapproaching Byzantine burials to discover what they can teach us about death and burial.

The emphasis of this thesis is on two key aspects of burials and burial rites:

- The Byzantine period. However, as the term “Byzantine” does not reflect sudden changes in burial trends or practices, some of the tombs consulted date before or after these dates. The term Byzantine, instead of East Roman, is used to distinguish this period from the period before the fourth century, due to its common usage in most scholarship consulted.
- Christian theology on death and burial. This is due to the nature of our evidence (textual, material, and archaeological), which represents the perspectives of Christians far more frequently than those of Jewish people or members of other religions.

Aims

The primary aim of this thesis required the gathering of data on burials so that burial trends and the development of beliefs about death could be observed during a key period of the expansion of Christianity. Recently, a study (De Jong: 2017r) on burial in Roman Syria and Phoenice showed the value of such research; however, no tombs constructed after 330 were included in the database.³ Death and burial in Roman Egypt have received greater attention than in Byzantine Egypt, although Byzantine practices have been discussed alongside Roman ones.⁴ We therefore currently lack a perspective on Byzantine practices separate from Roman practices, which typically results in a focus on transformation or change rather than Byzantine burials in their own right. For Palaestina and Arabia, scholarship has been more focused on small-scale examinations, such as research on the contents of tombs from Roman-Byzantine sites.⁵

Furthermore, the burials and their contents throughout the Near East have been and, in some cases, continue to be examined using methodologies which can cast doubt on their conclusions. Two notable examples of this are the dating of the tombs themselves (see below) and the study of human remains (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4), the latter of which is severely understudied and misunderstood by many historians.

³ De Jong (2017r: 13).

⁴ For example, Boozer (2019) on cultural identity in Greco-Roman burials of Egypt; Rebillard (2015) which discusses funeral feasting and dining with the dead in the second-fifth centuries; O'Connell (2014b) as an example of coverage of the Late Antique period (defined as 250-800).

⁵ For example, Rose et al. (2007).

This thesis therefore aims to fill three important gaps in current scholarship: firstly, it follows work on Roman-period burials that end with the movement of the capital to Constantinople and tend to overlook Byzantine burial practices; secondly, it considers the provinces individually and in comparison to one another to allow for a much broader examination of burial practices during the Byzantine period than has previously been carried out; and thirdly, it considers how a reevaluation of the methodologies used to examine these burials may grant scholars greater understanding of burial practices during this period. As a result, through a large data project and discussion, this thesis will establish the foundation for research on societal trends and a general sense of what death and burial were like for Byzantines.

The data gathered for this thesis, which is presented in the appendix, has significant potential for future research, because this is the first time that such a large amount of data on early Byzantine burials has been collected and examined. It therefore provides a baseline on which future study can take place. The questions which this thesis asks of the data allow previously assumed beliefs about early Byzantine burials to be supported or challenged, with the data leading the discussion. This is especially important for the early Byzantine Near East, since religious change (conversion to Christianity) and the relationship between religious change and burial change are significant discussion points in scholarship.

Objectives

Burials are an essential form of historical evidence that can reveal a wealth of information on ordinary people and their lives, both at the local level and within

the cultural spheres of the wider empire.⁶ Tombs and cemeteries can inform a great deal on how people positioned themselves in both local society and more widely within the empire. They reflect the attitudes and behaviours of society, as well as ideals and rituals that were valued.⁷ Archaeological reports on burials of the Byzantine Near East often pay special attention to religious beliefs within burials, as a simple form of establishing an identity for the deceased person(s) and the society in which they lived and were buried.⁸

However, burials can inform on much more than this, including the lives of children, the socio-economic and cultural spheres of everyday Byzantines, and methods of expressing grief.⁹ For example, the Al-Bass cemetery in Tyre (first century BCE-seventh century) reflected the attitudes and desires of its users through burial location, inscriptions, and the reuse and adaption of cemetery space (see Sections 2.5.2 and 6a.3). While religion did play a key role in the adaption of the cemetery through the addition of crosses and Christian inscriptions, other elements dating to our period include detailed inscriptions

⁶ For a recent example, Johannsen and Peterson (eds.) (2019) includes chapters on the prosthesis, funeral sculpture, funeral iconography, mummy portraits, and burial offerings in the context of the Greco-Roman family.

⁷ De Jong (2016: 14). These may not necessarily be the values of the deceased person themselves, but instead the values of those who buried them: Schülke (1999: 95). Religious beliefs surrounding death and the afterlife are discussed in Chapter 1.

⁸ For example, the terms 'Christian cemetery' at Kellis 2 in the Dakhleh Oasis (see Chapter 2) and 'Jewish cemetery' at Beth She'arim establish a fundamental part of the identities of the people buried in these locations. See Bowen (2022) for the most recent publication on Kellis 2, and Mazar (1973) and Avigad (1976) on Beth She'arim.

⁹ Kellis 2 and Beth She'arim are again examples. At Kellis, studies have included nutritional disease stress on children and the feeding patterns of infants and young children. See Wheeler (2012) and Dupras (2010). At Beth She'arim, studies have included the expression of ethnicity through inscriptions and the limitation of certain burial spaces to rabbis and their families. See Peppard (2007) and Weiss (1992). For expressions of grief, see the doctoral thesis by Karlsson (2014) on 245 funerary stelae from Smyrna and Kyzikos in Asia Minor, mostly dated to the second century BCE, which looked at social and cultural expectations of grief.

from mourning parents and construction or a change in the use of space.¹⁰ This example demonstrates that the cemetery remained an essential element of the local environment and gives us a glimpse into wider societal trends relating to death and burial.

It is therefore essential for scholarship to have good and accurate information on the burials of ordinary people, so that these aspects of their lives may be studied. This information relies on the methodologies used to study burials. To achieve the aims of this thesis, each of the chapters considers a different aspect of burials and their study, presenting alternative ways of study and interpretation based on archaeological theory and research from western (especially British) burials.¹¹ The results of the application of these methods are presented in case studies, found at the ends of Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

The use of western archaeological theory is a Eurocentric (and Americentric) approach which reflects the growth of archaeology as a field in the west and the role of western academics in the region. It is, however, one undertaken here because of the benefits of applying current archaeological theory developed in the west to these burials. This is precisely the role of the case studies: to demonstrate the value of these theories when applied to Byzantine burials of the Near East.

¹⁰ See De Jong (2017p), Complex 24 for the addition of a chapel and an apse; Complex 28 for inscriptions from the parents of Lydios and Chryses.

¹¹ Beginning with Parker Pearson (2010) and Renfrew and Bahn (2017) and expanding into theory focused on the individual chapter.

Methodology: Data, the Appendix, and Constraints

The original plan for this thesis was to focus on a broader study of burials of the fourth-seventh centuries, with examples from across the Byzantine empire. The data on these burials was to be studied to create an overview of burial practices across all provinces. However, the data-gathering period was interrupted in the first year of the project by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns.

The first lockdown began in March 2020 and lockdowns officially ended in July 2021 (although some restrictions remained). This prevented me from visiting libraries and accessing unpublished information. As much of the data was not available in a digital format, the methodology required reworking.

Two major changes were made to combat the restrictions imposed by the lockdowns: firstly, the scope of the project was reduced to the Near East, where significant amounts of information were available in digital form. This, in addition, allowed the project to be greater focused on detail because of the smaller geographic area studied. Secondly, the methodology was altered to focus solely on published data and, in a small number of cases, other information that was available online.¹² Together, these changes permitted the main data-gathering period to continue, and I was able to support the focus on digital sources with library visits following the easing of restrictions. While this does mean that unpublished data on Byzantine burials of the Near East has not

¹² For example, information on the tombs at Abila and el-Bagawat, which include information uploaded to Fuller's staff page for St. Louis Community College and field notes available online from the Metropolitan Museum of Art respectively.

been consulted and is not represented within the dataset, the data gathered here will still prove an invaluable resource for students of these burials.

Volume II (henceforth the appendix) has been created to facilitate the study of the burials and provide additional information on the burials and cemeteries discussed in the main thesis. This is based on a database of burial information which I have gathered and created. At present, this is not published.¹³ It contains information on at least 9,205 excavated burial spots (in 8,779 tombs), 1,806 tombs identified at the surface which have not been excavated, and 18,410 estimated tombs. While examples are presented throughout the thesis, the appendix facilitates the study by presenting the details of all tombs consulted and provides further descriptions on the examples, their locations, and other burials.

Most tombs are categorized under a single province, but in some cases the sites lie on the borders of provinces, and it is unclear which province the burials belonged to. When figures from the appendix are used in the thesis, the duplicated figures may appear twice; this is shown in Table I.1.

Table I.1: Duplication of burials that may belong to more than one province.

Possible Provinces	Number of burials	Notes on duplication
Palaestina Prima or Palaestina Secunda	138	Only duplicated when Palaestina Prima and Palaestina Secunda are discussed separately.
Palaestina Secunda or Phoenice	65	Burials appear under both 'Palaestina' and 'Phoenice'.
Phoenice Prima or Phoenice Secunda	-	Not duplicated; provinces considered together due to low

¹³ This is due to the limitations of the data, where excavation reports have not provided information on individual tombs.

		numbers of burials outside of the Al-Bass cemetery.
Syria Prima or Syria Secunda	-	Not duplicated; provinces considered together due to low numbers of burials.

In some cases, information on individual burials is not available or the number of tombs is unknown. For example, at Qarara in Egypt an unknown number of tombs were excavated in 1902-1903, while 424 tombs excavated in 1913-1914 may only be discussed as a group, apart from special exceptions.¹⁴ This means the true number of tombs which contained a specific feature, such as a wrapped corpse, cannot be known. To best resolve this issue, I refer to the 'minimum' number of tombs. This is calculated based on the assumption that, where the number of tombs is not provided but is clearly more than one, the number is two.¹⁵ This means that the figures given in this thesis always present the smallest possible number of tombs that display a given characteristic.

In addition, the methodologies used to study the tombs and their contents can vary by factors such as excavator, location, and date of excavation. This is important to note when making comparisons between different sites, because the methodology used may affect the results obtained. Wherever possible, I have avoided such comparisons. However, comparison was unavoidable in

¹⁴ See Grenfell and Hunt (1903) and Ranke (1926). The special exceptions are occasions where tomb contents or other elements of the burial were given as examples in the published material.

¹⁵ For example, if an unknown number of individual graves contained 'men, women, and children', then the minimum would be two graves containing adult males, two graves containing adult females, and two graves containing children (or juveniles).

discussions on human remains, with methodological differences and resolutions discussed in Chapter 4.

Tomb Types

Due to the large-scale nature of this study, tomb types are arranged into general categories and sub-categories, to allow more meaningful discussion of tombs without an extensive list of types. For the purposes of this thesis, the word ‘tomb’ refers to a vault or structure, for example a pit grave or hypogeum, while the word ‘burial’ refers to both tombs and the graves found within them, for example, an arcosolium within a hypogeum. The typology broadly follows the definitions used in archaeological reports of burials from the Byzantine Near East, to remain as close as possible to the language used in the sources. In some cases, typologies have been shared between multiple sites, for example the tombs excavated at Ya’amun were typified based on the typology for tombs at Esbus.¹⁶ However, a notable outlier is the use of the term ‘rock-cut tomb’ primarily for tombs in Palaestina, which may refer to a tomb cut either horizontally or vertically in the rock, and which therefore includes hypogea. The tomb and burial types used in this thesis are provided in Table I.2. For detailed descriptions of the tombs, see the appendix.

Table I.2: Tomb and burial types used in this thesis.

Type	Definition	Possible burials within ¹⁷
Arcosolium	Arched recess in the wall of a tomb, usually closed with a slab.	May contain multiple troughs, coffins, and sarcophagi.
Bench	Bench which the corpse could be placed upon.	None.

¹⁶ Renfro and Cooper (2000: 581). For the typology of Hesban, see Waterhouse (1998: 3-16).

¹⁷ Only examples from the appendix are included in this column. Tombs may contain one of more of the possible burial types; often, the burial type is not known.

Burial Cell	Rectangular space used for interment. Used to describe two burials in a tomb north of the Damascus Gate at Jerusalem. The definition of these burials is not clearly defined but they were possibly two cists, separated by a walkway in the middle. ¹⁸	None.
Built Tomb, Mausoleum, or Polyandron	Tomb constructed above the ground, with one or more burial chambers containing graves in the floors or walls. Polyandron is a term usually reserved for a communal tomb, typically of warriors, in ancient Greece. ¹⁹	May contain arcosolia, benches, burial cells, cist graves, coffins, loculi, niches, ossuaries, pit graves, sarcophagi, and walled-up burial chambers. May be constructed above hypogea.
Catacomb	Tomb dug into the ground, possibly with constructed elements such as walls, usually with a passageway giving access to multiple burial chambers containing graves in the floors or walls. May be accessed via a corridor or vertical shaft. Typically used in the context of large Jewish or Christian hypogea.	May contain arcosolia, loculi, niches, and sarcophagi.
Chamber Tomb	An above-ground tomb which has one (or more) chambers containing graves in the floor or walls of the chamber. Walled-up chambers or burials may also be found in other tombs.	May contain cist graves, coffins, pit graves, and sarcophagi.
Chapel	Tomb constructed above the ground, with one or more burial chambers containing graves in the floors or walls. Space reserved for an altar. Typically used in the context of Christian built tombs.	May contain benches, cist graves, coffins, loculi, and pit graves.

¹⁸ Tzaferis et al. (1996: 112). The tombs were probably cists, based on figure 2-2 in the Hebrew version of the article: see Tzaferis et al. (1996: 71).

¹⁹ 9 tombs are classified as Polyandron, and they all come from the same site (Abila). They are presumably built tombs or mausolea, because these types were not mentioned at Abila but rock-cut tombs were a defined category of tombs at the site.

Cist Grave	Grave lined with stones and covered with slabs to create a coffin-like box.	May contain coffins and sarcophagi. In two cases, cist graves contained an additional pit that was used for burial.
Cistern	Cistern reused or repurposed for burial.	None.
Coffin	Long box, typically of wood. Evidence is typically limited to nails and wooden fragments.	None.
Crypt	Chamber beneath the floor of a church, typically with walls constructed of stone.	May contain niches and pit graves.
Dromos	Passageway, usually leading to a tomb or other building.	None.
Funerary Bed	Burial on the floor in a bed constructed either of wood or stone.	None.
Funerary Enclosure	An enclosure, usually square or rectangular, surrounded by walls which may contain one or more tombs.	May contain built tombs, hypogea, loculi, mausolea, pit graves, and sarcophagi.
Hypogeum	Tomb dug into the ground, typically with constructed elements such as walls, with one or more burial chambers containing graves in the floors or walls. May be accessed via a corridor or vertical shaft, and may be connected to a passageway leading to other hypogea.	May contain arcosolia, benches, cist graves, coffins, funerary beds, jar burials, loculi, niches, ossuaries, pit graves, sarcophagi, and walled-up burial chambers.
Jar Burial	Burial, typically of an infant, in a jar.	None.
Loculus	A small recess or occasionally small chamber cut into the wall of a tomb, usually closed with a slab.	May contain multiple troughs, coffins, and sarcophagi.
Niche	Small and shallow recess in the wall of a cave.	None.
Natural Cave	Natural cave which was used for burials in the walls or floor. Could lead to other natural caves or rock-cut tombs.	May contain arcosolia, burials behind a constructed wall, loculi, pit graves, and sarcophagi.
Ossuary	Niche or container in which bones were placed, typically in	None.

	secondary burial after they had been removed from their original burial location.	
Pit Grave	Shallow grave dug into the earth, often extremely simple in design. May be covered by earth or a stone slab.	May contain coffins, jar burials, ossuaries, and sarcophagi.
Rock-Cut Tomb	Tomb cut either horizontally or vertically into the rock, with one or more chambers and burials in the walls or floors.	May contain arcosolia, benches, cist graves, coffins, loculi, niches, ossuaries, pit graves, and sarcophagi.
Sarcophagus	Stone coffin, sometimes featuring elaborate decoration.	None.
Shaft Grave	Tomb dug into the ground entered by a long vertical or horizontal shaft. May be lined with stones and covered with a stone slab.	May contain arcosolia, cist graves, coffins, loculi, niches, pit graves, and sarcophagi.
Tower Tomb	Tomb constructed above the ground with multiple levels. One or more burial chambers containing graves in the floors or walls.	None.
Tumulus	Artificial mound of earth and stones raised over a grave.	May contain chambers and pit graves.
Unknown or simply called 'Tomb'	Typology unclear or undefined.	May contain cist graves, loculi, pit graves, and sarcophagi.

Before a study of the information in the appendix, several issues which impact the data must be explained. These are: geography and how it is related to burial type; the history of excavations within the area studied; the dating of tombs; and the identification of religion where it is not explicit (e.g., where a cross or menorah is not present related to the tomb).

Geography, Geology, and Climate

The geography and geology of a province has an impact upon the type of burials that could be constructed there, as well as the state of preservation of

human remains and grave goods. For example, in Palaestina (especially Palaestina Prima and Secunda), Syria, and Arabia, soft rock formations permitted the easy carving of tombs which naturally resulted in a greater number of tombs cut into the rock. Meanwhile, in places where these formations were not as easily accessible, reliance focused on other types of tombs, such as dug graves and built tombs, which would also have been impacted by access to resources (see Chapter 2).

Furthermore, the climate, geology, and treatment of ancient sites has impacted the preservation of tombs and their contents. The hot, dry, desert climate of Egypt has permitted better preservation of tombs, human remains, and grave goods than the other areas covered in this thesis, which is why certain grave goods (for example, textiles), appear more frequently in Egypt than in other provinces (Chapter 5). This raises the issue of uncertainty surrounding the presence of materials such as human remains, wood, and other objects, which may have either decayed or been destroyed by natural or manmade factors (such as looting). How can we know whether tombs contained these objects, if they are likely to have disappeared over time? We are reliant on what we can see, but some elements may provide clues: for example, for clothing worn by the corpse, buttons, pins, and buckles can provide evidence. The impact of this on the dataset is in two forms: firstly, there is an imbalance in terms of preservation, as the example of grave goods in Egypt attests; secondly, the results reflect the fact that objects may have been removed from burials or otherwise disappeared, and therefore it is highly likely that the figures provided are an underestimation of true numbers.

History of Excavations

The area studied in this thesis has also been impacted by modern issues, including conflict and political unrest. As I refer to modern issues, I here use the current names of the countries discussed. The mandate system of the first half of the twentieth century affected Israel/Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, while the British also occupied Egypt between 1882 and 1956.

The impact of western involvement can be felt in many aspects of the research, such as the treatment of burials and the focus on sites that interested western Christian scholars. This has impacted the types of sites that have been selected for study and excavation, the type of research that has been carried out, and the resources available to excavators and other researchers.²⁰ For example, British excavators in Israel/Palestine in the mid- to late-19th century surveyed and excavated with a focus on both mapping the empire and finding biblically significant sites.²¹ Most of the excavations dating to the British Mandate period were carried out by western archaeologists who again paid attention to biblical sites.²² The impact of this has been a lack of attention on sites that were not considered interesting to western scholars, a lack of integration with other research on the sites/regions, and the slow engagement and development of local archaeologists and other researchers.

²⁰ Excavators and institutions select sites which have specific interests to them, whether that is for cultural, social, religious, or other reasons. A similar bias can be seen in the architectural elements and artifacts found at the site that are chosen for study. Glock (1995: 49).

²¹ El-Haj (2001: 22-23).

²² Glock (1995: 50). The biblical focus includes the literal interpretation of the biblical record, which damages the amount that archaeological research can contribute to the history of this region (55).

Some common issues are shared across the geographic area studied in this thesis. Modern political boundaries may have no archaeological significance, but they are an inescapable part of the geography of our area that has created archaeological realities in areas including law, professional practice, and funding.²³ Political instability and military action have resulted in a lack of research and excavation in Lebanon and Syria, excepting the Al-Bass cemetery at Tyre which has been covered in some detail.²⁴ In addition, tomb looting has resulted in sometimes extensive or irreparable damage; a survey from one village in Palestine found 119 caves from 22 archaeological sites had been looted, including the removal and dumping of human remains and the estimated removal of approximately 6,000 objects.²⁵

The amount and quality of published research varies. Despite the early attention in Israel/Palestine, excavation methods and the standard of publication vary and for some sites we have only limited information. Tombs usually see little to no publication outside of preliminary reports in journals.²⁶ Few sites have received final reports, but examples include Beth Guvrin and Beth She'arim. Older, unpublished excavations are being published from Lebanon and Syria, but the amount of recorded and accurate information varies. The appearance of new

²³ Greenberg and Keinan (2009: 1).

²⁴ See De Jong (2010) and De Jong (2017r). The cemetery was originally excavated between 1959 and 1967, but a full report on the tombs was not published until 2017.

²⁵ Al-Houdalieh (2014: 224, 226) for the 119 tombs. See also Shehadeh (2015: 82); Al-Houdalieh (2012: 22); Al-Houdalieh and Jamal (2020: 490, 501-507, 514), and the number of sites which have experienced looting in the appendix.

²⁶ Greenberg and Keinan (2009: 19). See for example Gogräfe (2018: 61-85), where the only information known about a group of third-fourth century tombs from Chisphin, in the area of Hippos-Sussita in Palaestina Secunda, is their grave goods.

research is slow, but examples do exist, such as the publication of a group of hypogea in Damascus.²⁷

With regards to methodology, issues persist across our region. Excavations in Israel/Palestine are typically salvage excavations after a tomb or multiple tombs have been discovered during construction. The excavators have limited time to complete the work,²⁸ resulting in differences in the quality and extent of excavations.

In addition, excavation reports will often focus on subjects such as typology, dating, and grave goods, and ignore or overlook elements that the excavators were not interested in.²⁹ For example, the history of excavations in Egypt has focused on mummies, stelae, papyri, textiles, and jewellery.³⁰ This has left many finds without an accurate provenance and means that many tombs were excavated without accurate recording of their contents. A primary example is the cemetery at Qarara, its initial publications focused largely on material finds, with limited information on their findspots.³¹

Often there is no plan of the tomb or cemetery, or the plan does not have the burials, grave goods, or human remains numbered and identified clearly.³²

²⁷ Hamoud and Eger (2018).

²⁸ For example, Shehadeh (2015: 82) and Solimany (2020: 171).

²⁹ For example, the early 20th century excavations at Qarara focused on the discovery of papyri and mummy portraits: Huber (2008: 56). Those at Sarga were focused on inscriptions with the cemetery only receiving a cursory summary: O'Connell (2014a: 123).

³⁰ See for example, O'Connell (2012: 95-108), where the interests of the British Museum in Egypt are discussed. For the interest in human remains in Egypt, see Chapter 4.

³¹ See Ranke (1926). Tomb type, number of individuals within the tomb, and associated burial rites were afterthoughts.

³² For example, plans of the cemeteries on the Limestone Plateau are lacking; at Anthedon, the map in Nabulsi et al. (2010: 606) shows 2 tombs labelled 'Tomb 7', one in Group IV and the other in Group V. Perhaps one of these is Tomb 76, which, along with Tombs 31 and 40, is not identified on the map.

Human remains are typically given less attention than other elements; these may appear at the end of the report or separate from it and are often not integrated into the wider discussion.³³ Social questions are rarely considered. The results of these issues are excavation reports with different standards, some brief, and some with discrepancies where the tombs, human remains, and grave goods are reported on by different authors.³⁴

Some of these elements are changing, especially in Egypt where some large and well-excavated cemeteries are found. Research in Jordan has recently been highly focused on rural agricultural sites, which were typically occupied from many centuries through the Greco-Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic periods (or even longer), such as Yasileh and Sa'ad. Burials at some urban sites, particularly Esbus, have received detailed attention, but similarly to Israel/Palestine, in many cases a final report on the site has not been published. This makes sites like Esbus the exception rather than the rule. While the continued focus of research on the same sites limits the number of graves that can be studied, comments on subjects including the representation of social status in burials are insightful.

³³ For example, the report on human remains from Şallaḥ ed-Din Street in Jerusalem is published separately from the discussions on the tombs, grave goods, coins, an amulet, and a chemical and isotopic study of some of the lead objects. See Nagar (2015a) for the human remains.

³⁴ For example, the information on human remains from tombs in Figueras (2004) does not agree with the information on the table in Zias and Spigelman (2004: 313), the report on the remains in the same book. These factors have affected research more widely than just within our area. See for example, Dufton and Fenwick (2012: 156) on medieval Italian burials.

Methodology of Tomb Dating

Since broad dating criteria has been used for some tombs, the methodology of dating must be highlighted. Tombs are typically dated based on the categories in Table I.3. Note that, unless explicitly stated, I have trusted excavators' dates for the tombs studied in this thesis.

Table I.3: Common dating methodologies for Byzantine tombs in the Near East.

Method of dating	Issues raised by methodology
Grave goods. The date of objects, especially ceramics and glass.	Raises questions on the accuracy of dating, especially in cases where objects may have been in use for some time before being placed in a grave. A prime example is coins, which have been used not only to date burials but also other grave goods, without knowing how long they were in circulation. ³⁵ A coin can only provide a <i>terminus post quem</i> for a burial. ³⁶ For example, a tomb at Elkosh, dated to the fourth century, contained five coins of the fourth century, the latest at the entrance dated to 383-392 and three of the early-middle fourth century in graves. ³⁷ These coins would not have been in circulation for very long if the date of the tomb is accurate.
Iconography and inscriptions.	The dating of iconography and inscriptions relies on comparisons to examples where a date is either known or has otherwise been deduced. The simplest issue with this dating method is that the lack of iconography or inscription cannot disprove the use of a tomb in the Byzantine period. Tombs at Alexandria present an example, where the identification of Byzantine use is largely based upon the presence of Christian inscriptions or imagery. ³⁸
Tomb type, with comparison to other tombs.	Similarly, the reliance on previously excavated tombs to date other tombs assumes that the dating methodology used in previous cases is accurate. Comparisons between burial caves is common in Israeli scholarship; as one example, the caves at Ras Abu Dahud were dated both on grave goods and comparisons to caves at sites such as Eleutheropolis. ³⁹
Radiocarbon dating (carbon-14 dating).	Radiocarbon dating has been used less frequently than the above methodologies to date burials in the appendix. It relies on the presence of an archaeological specimen such as

³⁵ Travaini (2004: 162).

³⁶ Travaini (2004: 163).

³⁷ Vitto (2008: 119).

³⁸ See Venit (2002).

³⁹ Ben Ami et al. (2017: 119).

	<p>human bone. Carbon-14 atoms can be counted to estimate how long an organism has been dead for, but results can be affected by contamination if the sample is not clean or well-preserved. Once the results have been calibrated, a date range can be provided (for sites in the appendix this range usually spans hundreds of years).⁴⁰</p>
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These dating issues are important to highlight because they are unavoidable when working on such large amounts of data related to Byzantine burials.

Despite the flaws in chronological methodology that have been noted here, and the variable accuracy or attempts to be precise with dates, I have taken the excavators' suggested dates at face value in most cases (and, where I have not, this is noted and expanded upon in the discussion). There is not the scope within this thesis to thoroughly evaluate the dates of the sites covered, although this would be undoubtedly valuable to the field. The number of tombs covered in this study is significant enough to allow us to understand burial practices and burial rites despite these weaknesses.

Religious Belief

As a final issue, religious belief must be raised. The interest in religion, in particular Christianity, in the Byzantine period stems from a 19th century archaeological interest in the west to study Christianisation.⁴¹ Tombs which explicitly contain objects, imagery, inscription, or other indications of the religious belief (including burial location) of the deceased person are however a

⁴⁰ For a basic overview of radiocarbon dating and potential issues with contamination and interpretation of dates, see Renfrew and Bahn (2017: 146-155).

⁴¹ Schülke (1999: 77), who discussed Germany, but the argument applies to the Near East all the same. This interest in Christianisation can still be seen today, for example, at early Christian sites in Egypt.

minority. Most tombs do not outwardly or obviously display religious belief, meaning that religion is often ascribed based on other aspects of the burial, such as the lack of grave goods and the orientation of the burial. An example of where assumed religious belief, based on a change in burial orientation, has been questioned is the el-Gamous cemetery in the Faiyum Oasis (see Chapter 2).⁴²

Even more difficult to identify are burials of minority religious groups within a shared cemetery. Non-Christians may have had no other choice than to use cemeteries that were predominantly Christian and followed Christian rules regarding graves, for example due to control of the funeral trade by the church (see Chapter 1). Christianity, Judaism, and other religions could therefore have occupied the same cemeteries,⁴³ used the same types of tombs, and even practiced the same methods of burial as their neighbours who held different religious beliefs. To avoid misinterpreting religious belief, this thesis does not make any assumptions on religion unless beliefs are explicitly expressed in a burial, thereby avoiding placing religious identify or expression on a burial where it was not intended by the users.

⁴² Note that the research at el-Gamous was and is still carried out by Brigham Young University, which has a mission statement explicitly mentioning the quest for perfection and eternal life in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The interest in early Christianisation no doubt played a role in the claim that Christianity led to a change in the head-end of the burial from east to west as early as the first or second century. See Whitchurch and Griggs (2010: 216-218) and the discussion in Chapter 2.

⁴³ Stern (2013: 279); Rutgers (1992: 110).

Structure

The thesis is divided into six chapters, with each chapter building on the information from the previous chapters.

Chapter 1 presents an introduction to funerals and commemoration of the dead in the early Byzantine period, based mainly on Christian texts. It focuses on the beliefs of 'ordinary' people (as opposed to elites) and the extent to which the ordinary Byzantine would have understood Christian beliefs about death through exposure in church and through the cult of the saints.

The remaining chapters focus on the implications of the appendix and, in the case of Chapters 5 and 6, examples known from museum collections, or those which have been lost or destroyed since their discovery. The aim is to present each piece of burial information individually and demonstrate the benefits of approaching it using the theory discussed; the outcome is shown at the end of each chapter through case studies. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 end with case studies which build upon the information from the previous chapters; for example, the case studies in Chapter 4 include information from Chapters 1, 2, and 4, but not from Chapters 5 or 6. I have selected case studies which clearly demonstrate the value of each of the aspects of burials and burial rites discussed in the thesis.

Chapter 2 discusses tomb types. As discussed above, there are a great number of possible sub-types (e.g., rock-cut tombs with one chamber with burials in arcosolia, rock-cut tombs with one chamber with burials in loculi, rock-cut tombs with one chamber with burials in both loculi and arcosolia, rock-cut tombs with

two chambers ... etc.). Descriptions of individual tombs are provided in the appendix.

Chapter 3 is the first of two chapters which discuss human remains (mainly skeletal remains) and the value of their study to our discipline. Human remains are historically the most overlooked aspect of Byzantine burials. Chapter 3 presents the history of human remains research in the Near East, with focus on the Byzantine period, then a brief but essential overview of what can be discovered from the study of human remains. This includes a discussion of how pathologies may be identified and how historians who are not familiar with the study of human remains may approach and use this research. This chapter is a vital part of the thesis, as Byzantinists have typically been slow to adapt to research on human remains, but even non-specialists must be able to understand the benefits of using this information as well as the flaws in human remains research.

Chapter 4 follows Chapter 3 by providing data on human remains from the burials in the appendix, which highlights the different results that different methodologies may produce. The chapter then presents case studies which consider the value of human remains research to this thesis.

Chapter 5 discusses the objects which are deposited in the grave with the deceased person, called grave goods. It presents information from the appendix and provides an advanced methodology for interpreting grave goods which is yet to be adopted by researchers of tombs in the Byzantine Near East. It

concludes with case studies which showcase the value of adding grave goods to our discussion of tomb types and human remains.

Chapter 6 discusses epitaphs and tomb decoration. It presents interpretations for different imagery and common messages or phrases used in epitaphs. I present a final group of case studies, which combine the information on epitaphs and tomb decoration with the information from the previous chapters, to demonstrate the usefulness of our complete overview of Byzantine burials and how we can use these elements together to understand more about communities, ordinary people, and society.

Finally, I conclude that the demonstration, through case studies, of the theories applied to each aspect of burial discussed shows the value of introducing current archaeological ideas into the study of Byzantine burials of the Near East. This is especially true in the discussion on human remains, the study of which remains unfortunately lacking everywhere but in Egypt. Furthermore, although 'ordinary' Byzantines understood complex ideas about death and the afterlife and explored these through various aspects of their burials, practices related to funeral and burial transitioned slowly. The importance of this understanding of an ordinary person cannot be overstated and is connected to every aspect of this thesis because it shows a population that was consciously aware of the significance of decisions and rituals around burial.

CHAPTER 1: DEATH AND FUNERAL RITES

1.1 Introduction

Funerals are a natural place to start when examining burials. This chapter presents key texts on practices related to burials, including the funeral service and burial rites. It lays out the principal aspects of “death belief” – the ideology surrounding concepts of dying, death, and burial – mainly from Christian sources of the fourth to seventh centuries. The focus is on concepts ‘ordinary’ people (i.e., the general, non-elite, population) were probably exposed to, rather than the beliefs of elites. Through this discussion, I show the fundamental ideas that underpinned the burials discussed in this thesis, in the context of a funeral trade that was becoming increasingly connected to the church.

Even within the same ideological framework (in the context of this thesis, a religious belief system), communities do not develop their rituals at the same pace, because the transition from one form of burial rite to another is gradual and uneven.⁴⁴ Therefore, practices may have varied from location to location, and any changes from previous practices that can be identified in the archaeological record would have occurred at different paces. Throughout this thesis, I will show that the Christian-‘pagan’ transition which is often viewed as a radical change was not as radical as it is made out to be.

For example, several cemeteries in Egypt have been identified as ‘Christian’ cemeteries that differed from older cemeteries in the same area by aspects

⁴⁴ Alexiou (2002: 24).

such as tomb typology, including at Kellis, El-Deir, and Kysis.⁴⁵ However, at other locations, such as Alexandria and Kom al-Ahmar, Christians continued to use older tombs and adapted them to their needs, or continued to construct tombs in the same cemeteries and of the same or similar types as their non-Christian ancestors.⁴⁶ The practicality of older burial rites, tomb availability, pre-defined cemetery spaces and established practices meant that, in many instances, older elements of the burial or funeral service merely became redefined within Christian ideology rather than replaced entirely. These concepts underpin the discussion within this chapter.

Many of the sources consulted in this study come from the first half of our period, the fourth and fifth centuries, when Christianity was becoming more popular and prominent early Christian elites such as John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus were writing. These include some texts from an elite perspective but also saint's lives and prayers, which would have been more accessible to ordinary people at pilgrimage sites or in church, and funeral laws (known from the sixth century but dating to the fourth), which would have impacted ordinary people at least in large urban centers.

Sources of the sixth and seventh centuries generally fall into these same categories, with the addition of wills, which reveal information on people's

⁴⁵ Kellis 1 is dated to the Ptolemaic and early Roman periods, while Kellis 2 is argued to have superseded Kellis 1 and become the sole cemetery for the nearby settlement (Kellis) in the third century. See Bowen (2019: 375) and Section 2.2.3.1. On the western 'Christian' cemetery at El-Deir, see Coudert (2012). Little has been published about the dovecote cemetery at Kysis, but it is mentioned occasionally, for example, by Dunand et al. (2005: 77, 99).

⁴⁶ At Alexandria, only a few tombs cut for Christian use have been identified, and older tombs were decorated with Christian symbols. See Venit (2002: 21). At Kom al-Ahmar, a church was constructed within an older Egyptian cemetery that continued to be used for burials, probably in the fourth or fifth century. See Huber (2017b: 5).

desires related to death and burial. A handful of sources dated to the late seventh and eighth centuries are also mentioned, to show the continuation or development of ideas throughout the period under consideration. In this way, the chapter demonstrates the fundamental principles that underpinned Christian thought about death and burial from the fourth century (or earlier), showing its development in the appearance of legal documents such as wills, through to (or beyond) the seventh century.

This chapter has four main sections. Section 1.2 discusses beliefs about death related to the corpse and the wishes of Christians expressed through their wills. In Section 1.3, I consider venerated Christian figures. Listening to the stories of their deaths or visiting their tombs may have impacted the ways that 'ordinary' people approached death and burial. Section 1.4 moves on to discuss burial itself, from the preparation of the body to the funeral service. Through this part of the chapter, as well as the discussion of saints' lives, we can understand the depth of an 'ordinary' person's awareness of Christian death beliefs, which, while not necessarily as complex as that of elite church figures, clearly included some detail. Finally, in Section 1.5, I present sources on commemorative practices.

I conclude that the increased involvement of the church and the influence of Christianity in burials of the Byzantine period were reactive to popular burial practices as well as, if not more than, attempting to promote their own burial practices. In different locations and sometimes even within the same cemeteries, groups of people were still able to demonstrate their own death beliefs. Given the dominance of Christian sources, we must carefully consider in

the coming chapters whether any changes that did occur in burials of the Byzantine period were primarily related to religious change, or whether they were occurring alongside religious change. Indeed, as we will see, there were burial trends occurring in this period which were, while adopted by Christians, not exclusive to Christian contexts, and therefore we must look at other aspects of culture and society to offer alternative explanations for changes.

1.2 Beliefs about Death

Not all aspects of death belief are observable within the archaeological record, especially those concerned with the motivation for performing certain rituals.⁴⁷ This is why we must use texts in combination with archaeological evidence, to better understand the death beliefs expressed through archaeology and material culture. While every death provided an opportunity for the ritual processes that dealt with human emotion, human nature, social structure, and community togetherness, death also provided the chance for the living to transform these processes, either consciously or unconsciously, and deliberately or accidentally.⁴⁸

The customs related to death are deeply imbedded within society.⁴⁹ Death rituals are not concerned with merely the reality that humans die and human bodies decay, but also with aspects of identity, culture, and society.⁵⁰ The inclusion of these aspects of a person, beyond their immediate death beliefs,

⁴⁷ Stutz (2015: 2).

⁴⁸ See, for example, the discussion of funerary practices in Britain and the USA in Parker Pearson (2010: 40-44), where aspects including cause of death, religious belief, cost, and social status have been identified as factors contributing to decisions on funeral practices.

⁴⁹ Davies (1997: 5).

⁵⁰ See particularly Parker Pearson (2010: 28-34, 40-44).

within burial contexts allows us a greater understanding of the different drivers of burial rites in the Byzantine period.

The rites given to the dead are intertwined, although not exclusively dictated by, death belief. The ideology of the next world was a substantial element within the fundamental key rights provided to the masses of the Byzantine period, but individuals and communities could also choose to practice additional rites such as traditional methods of commemoration (Section 1.5).

Christian death belief could be expressed to ordinary people through the church, their experience of funerals, or their interactions with the dead.⁵¹ Beliefs were also expressed through more classical traditions, such as funeral orations and poetry. Examples include Gregory of Nazianzus, a classically-trained orator,⁵² who wrote Christian versions of funeral orations in the fourth century. The first group of poems praised the Christian dead, while the second mocked tomb desecrators for believing that Christians, who understood earthly possessions were irrelevant in the next world, would bury their dead with valuable goods.⁵³ This approach allowed a connection to older traditions while simultaneously distinguishing Christianity from previous ideologies on its

⁵¹ See, for example, Parker Pearson (2010: 59-61) on medieval Europe and the bodies of saints, which is applicable to this study.

⁵² A synopsis of events in Gregory's life, including his education, orations, and poems, is available in McGuckin (2001: vii-xi). His father, a Hysistarian (a monotheistic sect likely influenced by Zoroastrianism and Judaism), was converted to Christianity by his mother, and became a bishop (3-5). While Gregory and his siblings received a strong Christian influence, they also achieved (or went beyond) the social aspirations of their parents, who were in significant social positions within their community (3-4, 7-9).

⁵³ Goldhill and Greensmith (2020: 29). The poems are known today from book eight of the *Greek Anthology*. The manuscript was discovered in the Palatine Library in Heidelberg in 1606; the first group of poems is 1-165, the second 166-254 (30). The poems primarily limited death belief to the idea that a Christian death is a good death that promises something greater than life on earth.

approach to death.⁵⁴ Christian ideas surrounding death could thus be represented in a way that was familiar to anyone educated in or exposed to the classical tradition.

Furthermore, even within Christianity itself the fourth-seventh century Near East saw religious subgroups and theological disagreements which could have held any number of small or large differences surrounding death belief.⁵⁵ While for ordinary people, often living in rural areas with minimal opportunities for learning and literacy and preaching of a lesser standard than those from urban areas, these disagreements may not have been fully understood,⁵⁶ they nonetheless demonstrate the flexibility within the concept of 'Christian' death and burial. However, theology was not the only way for a person to learn about Christian death belief: action and experience were primary teaching tools.

However, the Christian approach to death and burial cannot always be clearly identified within the archaeological record. In many cases, because the practices assumed by researchers are not archaeologically dissimilar from those of belief systems that preceded them, it is not easy to recognize the burials of one religion from another.⁵⁷ This is because Christians did not immediately start to identify their burials with obvious markers such as crosses upon their conversion, but maintained the traditions that they knew to be related to burial and particularly those which held emotional or other meaningful symbolism. I employ texts to explore the details that cannot be identified

⁵⁴ Goldhill and Greensmith (2020: 40, 42, 44).

⁵⁵ Tannous (2018: 11-15).

⁵⁶ Tannous (2018: 17-19, 79-80).

⁵⁷ Alexiou (2002: 33). See Chapter 2, especially Sections 2.2.3 and 2.5.

archaeologically. Attitudes towards death were expressed in wills, eulogies, funeral orations, letters, epitaphs (Chapter 6a), iconography (Chapter 6b), hagiographies, sermons, and legal texts.⁵⁸

I now explore aspects of Christian death belief that are significant to our study of burials in the Byzantine period. Attention is given to the corpse, practices which were unaccepted by the official church, and how Christians approached death in their wills.

1.2.1 The Corpse

The approach to the bodies of the dead, as well as the bodies of those who were sick, is one way that Christianity distinguished itself from other belief systems,⁵⁹ and it had a significant impact on how Christians interacted with their dead. This section discusses firstly the pollution of corpses and then the requirement of baptism to enter heaven.

Graeco-Roman and Jewish ideas saw the corpse as polluting, and even indirect contact with a corpse through touching objects or architectural features which had been in physical contact with a dead body could render someone unclean.⁶⁰ However, Christian authors of the fourth century argued that the bodies of the sick and the dead were not polluting, and instead encouraged the

⁵⁸ Constas (2006: 124).

⁵⁹ Samellas (2002: 147).

⁶⁰ Samellas (2002: 148-149); Stern (2017: 99). Numbers 5:2 “Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead”.

performance of good deeds to support those who required charity (see Section 3.3.8 on leprosy)⁶¹ and embrace the bodies of the saints.

The *Apostolic Constitutions* (fourth century) expressed this approach to the bodies of the dead:

*Μὴ παρατηρεῖσθε οὖν τὰ ἔννομα καὶ φυσικά,
νομίζοντες μολύνεσθαι δι' αὐτῶν, μηδὲ ἐπιζητεῖτε ἰουδαίκοις
ἀφορισμοὺς ἢ συνεχῆ βαπτίσματα ἢ καθαρισμοὺς ἐπὶ θίξει
νεκροῦ.⁶²*

“So do not keep observances about legal and natural (purgations), believing you are impure by these. Neither seek Jewish separations, nor continuous baptisms, nor purifications upon the touch of a dead body.”

The previous stigmas associated with the bodies of the sick and the dead were replaced with stigmas surrounding sinners, pagans, Jews, and heretical Christian sects.⁶³ Although one Novel of Theodosios (first half of the fourth century) criticised priests who polluted church altars with dead bodies, this was expressed within the context of tomb violation, rather than concern over the body itself:

Ferro accincti vexant sepultos et obliti numinis caelo ac sideribus praesidentis cinerum
contagione pollutas sacris altaribus manus inferunt.⁶⁴

“Prepared with iron tools, they (the clergy) harass those who are buried, and, oblivious of God who rules over the heavens and the stars, they bring hands that are polluted by the contagion of the ashes of the dead to the sacred (Church) altars.”

⁶¹ Davies (1999: 198). Key early Christian figures including Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom taught their flocks that it was the duty of Christians to assist lepers and provide them with assistance if they were unable to afford a living themselves, and Basil and Chrysostom both supported the construction of leper facilities. Miller and Nesbitt (2014: 28, 30). Although these facilities meant that those who suffered from the most severe forms of leprosy lived outside of major population centers, this approach to them may have put more people into contact with lepers than in previous periods. On the identification of leprosy from human skeletal remains, see Section 3.4.8.

⁶² Metzger (1986: book 6, chapter 30, lines 1-4).

⁶³ Samellas (2002: 177).

⁶⁴ Mommsen and Meyer (2006: 115).

Turning to the issue of baptism, we see that some inappropriate interactions with dead bodies may have been occurring. Our sources express concern that a Christian had to receive the baptism before death. In the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa advised a less experienced bishop that a dying Christian should receive the baptism; however, if they did not die, this baptism was considered nullified and a new one had to be performed, because the baptism had only been performed as an emergency:

*Εἰ δέ τις μὴ πληρώσας τὸν χρόνον τὸν
ἐκ τῶν κανόνων ἀφωρισμένον, ἐξοδεύει τοῦ βίου·
κελεύει ἡ τῶν Πατέρων φιλανθρωπία μετασχόντα
τῶν ἁγιασμάτων, μὴ κενὸν τοῦ ἐφοδίου πρὸς τὴν
ἐσχάτην ἐκείνην καὶ μακρὰν ἀποδημίαν ἐκπεμφθῆναι.
Εἰ δὲ μετασχὼν τοῦ ἁγιάσματος, πάλιν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν
ἐπανέλθοι, ἀναμένειν τὸν τεταγμένον χρόνον, ἐν ἐκεί-
νῳ τῷ βαθμῷ γενόμενον, ἐν ᾧ ἦν πρὸ τῆς κατὰ ἀνάγκη-
κην αὐτῷ δοθείσης κοινωνίας.⁶⁵*

“If someone has not completed the time determined by the canons, and is departing this life, the loving kindness of the Fathers commands they participate in the sacrament, so that they are not sent on that last and great journey without provisions. And if, having partaken of the sacrament, they return again to life, they should continue in the appointed time, at the stage they had reached before it was necessary to be administered communion.”

The *Apostolic Constitutions* provided similar instructions, presenting a list of categories for accepting or rejecting the baptism, advising:

εἰ δὲ θάνατος κατεπεῖγοι, προσδέχέσθω.⁶⁶

“But if (s)he is near death, receive him/her.”

⁶⁵ Migne (1863a: column 232, lines 39-47).

⁶⁶ Metzger (1987: book 8, chapter 32, lines 21-22).

One concern was that someone might die before receiving the baptism, and then receive the rite from their loved ones after death to grant them entry into heaven. The Council of Carthage (419 CE) prohibited the baptism of the dead:

*et ne jam mortuos homines baptizari faciat presbyterorum ignavia*⁶⁷

“And do not allow the laziness of the presbyters to baptise those who are dead.”

This prohibition was also repeated by the Council in Trullo in 691/2.⁶⁸

The failure to baptise before death was such a worry that some communities attempted to find a solution for it. One answer to the problem was provided in the *Life of Pachomius* (fourth century). In the text, a group of monks were taking their sick brother to be baptised by a priest, but he died before the baptism could be performed.⁶⁹ The text attempted to explain that those who were righteous but died before their baptism were not condemned, because angels would ensure they were baptised before their soul and body were separated. There is, however, no evidence that such an idea was more widely accepted by leading church figures, possibly because it may have discouraged baptism if it became a commonly held belief.

⁶⁷ Migne (1863c: column 190, lines 2-4).

⁶⁸ Migne (1863b: column 793, lines 28-29). *Σώματι νεκρῶ οὐ μεταδοτέον τῶν ἁγιασμάτων*. “Do not give the sacraments to a dead body.”

⁶⁹ “And while they were talking amongst themselves, before the sick brother gave his soul into the hands of God, the eyes of Pachomius and Theodore were opened; they saw the angels who baptised him in secret, before he [his soul] left the body. For the angels of light visit the virtuous brothers who are near death, as God has often revealed; but other times he hides it.” Amélineau (1889: 461). Translation by Amélineau. Pachomius was an Egyptian saint who is recognized as the founder of Christian cenobitic monasticism.

Another solution to the issue of death before baptism was mentioned by John Chrysostom (fourth-fifth century) in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:29.⁷⁰ Chrysostom complained about a practice which he associated with the Marcionites, in which they baptised a living person on behalf of a deceased person, to ensure that the unbaptized deceased person could enter heaven:

*Ἐπειδὴν γὰρ τις κατηχού-
μενος ἀπέλθῃ παρ' αὐτοῖς, τὸν ζῶντα ὑπὸ τὴν κλίνην
τοῦ τετελευτηκότος κρύψαντες, προσίασι τῷ νεκρῷ
καὶ διαλέγονται καὶ πυνθάνονται, εἰ βούλοιο λαβεῖν
τὸ βάπτισμα· εἶτα ἐκείνου μηδὲν ἀποκρινομένου, ὁ
κεκρυμμένος κάτωθεν ἀντ' ἐκείνου φησὶν, ὅτι δὴ
βούλοιο βαπτισθῆναι· καὶ οὕτω βαπτίζουσιν αὐτὸν
ἀντὶ τοῦ ἀπελθόντος, καθάπερ ἐπὶ τῆς σκηνῆς παί-
ζοντες.⁷¹*

“For whenever any catechumen departs among them, having hidden a living man under the couch of the deceased, they approach the corpse and speak and ask if he wishes to receive the baptism. Then, he not answering, the one who is hidden beneath says in his place that of course he wishes to be baptised, and so they baptise him instead of the departed, like jesters upon the stage.”

We have only Chrysostom’s word that such practices took place and that they were indeed related to Marcionites. However, an example from Antinoopolis, detailed in the appendix, suggests that baptism on behalf of the dead may have been practiced in one tomb. There is, however, no archaeological indication that the tomb’s users were Marcionites.⁷²

⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:29. “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for the dead?”

⁷¹ Migne (1862b: column 347, lines 26-34).

⁷² Grossman (2011: 90). Grossman suggested that the baptistery may have belonged to a group of Marcionites, based on John Chrysostom’s commentary. However, this does not mean that Marcionites were the only Christians who may have considered using baptismal fonts in a funerary setting. There is no archaeological evidence that the tomb’s users were Marcionites, and it is not clear whether there were Marcionites in Antinoopolis at the time of its construction.



Figure 1.1: Baptistery chapel and baptismal hall at Antinoopolis. From Grossman (2011: 102).

The small, private chapel and baptismal font (fifth-sixth century) from the north cemetery of Antinoopolis were connected to an underground burial chamber found full of human skeletons (Figures 1.1 and 1.2).⁷³ It is unusual to find a baptismal font in a cemetery setting, however burials have also been found near baptisteries in the Limestone Plateau in Syria.⁷⁴ The baptismal font at Antinoopolis does not appear to have been in use for very long after its installation: at an unknown time shortly after its construction, the font was filled with earth and debris, and a layer of bricks and lime flooring were laid over it, making it inaccessible.⁷⁵ Use of the font must have been limited, because it was filled and covered. As the baptistery and its associated burial chamber were

⁷³ Grossman (2011: 86-91).

⁷⁴ Griesheimer (1997: 208).

⁷⁵ Grossman (2011: 88-89).

discovered destroyed, while all the surrounding mausolea were found intact, perhaps the other users of the cemetery found the beliefs of the users of this tomb (even following the sealing of the font) offensive or intolerable.⁷⁶



Figure 1.2: Burial chamber of the baptistery chapel at Antinoopolis, looking from the west. From Grossman (2011: 104).

Regardless of its fate, the Antinoopolis baptistery chapel demonstrates that rules on Christian burials were not as straightforward as may be imagined. If

⁷⁶ Grossman (2011: 90). The case of a baptistery in a three-aisled church in Cilicia is also provided, which like that of Antinoopolis, was sealed not long after its construction.

some people were able to find a 'solution' to the issue surrounding baptism, then others would have adapted or justified alternate practices of their own. These do not always need to be major changes such as baptism for the dead; many of them may have been more subtle, and thus easier to tolerate or accept. Within the same faith, different beliefs surrounding death may have occupied the same burial spaces; the issue of baptism may simply have been identified as concerning enough to comment on and attempt to regulate through canons.

1.2.2 Evidence in Wills

So far, the Christian texts that have been discussed were written by early Church figures and councils. However, beliefs about death were also expressed by people through their wills.

Wills could include burial instructions or requests. Funerary clauses only appear in a minority of wills from our period, but those that do feature these express common themes. Christian wills often reveal a strong concern surrounding the soul, which, as would be expected, is placed above other issues such as tradition and instructions on the burial of the body.⁷⁷ We do not have extant wills from the fourth and fifth centuries with funerary clauses, meaning that it is unclear exactly when these concerns became important enough to be added to wills.

The wills surveyed here are from fifth to seventh century Egypt and the sixth century Petra Papyri. This means that they may not accurately represent

⁷⁷ Nowak (2015: 182, 190).

ideology and desires from other locations,⁷⁸ such as the Syrian provinces, or from communities where making wills was a less common occurrence (or where they have not survived). As we do not have evidence from other regions, we cannot assume that the same legal and religious issues were of equal concern everywhere. However, the wills consulted here are still important in giving us an insight into the attitudes of people who were not writing from the perspective of a church leader and were instead concerned with their own property.

Christian testators reveal desires regarding their burial, its location, who was meant to arrange it, and funerary clothes. Some testators found the matter of their burial important, but the more pressing concerns were related to activities performed in their memory to provide relief to their soul in the next life.⁷⁹ The requests specifically mentioning burial are discussed first, followed by instructions on deeds to be performed.

1.2.2.1 Burial Requests

Testators did not go into significant detail about the burial rites or aspects of the funeral service they desired. This is presumably because those who were left the instructions were expected to understand what these would look like,⁸⁰ whereas a body was a legal entity and so instructions could be given on what

⁷⁸ Nowak (2015: 10-17) discussed the issue that the examined wills were neither representative of people outside of Egypt or even the whole of Egypt itself, and offered alternative sources that could help to bridge the gaps in our knowledge.

⁷⁹ Nowak (2015: 190).

⁸⁰ The dominance of Egyptian wills in this matter may include several factors, other than the preservation of documents themselves: namely, the speed in which Egypt was Christianised, and the prevalence of local tradition (as mentioned in at least one will) and its influence on burial wishes. In many major urban centres and smaller rural settlements of the Byzantine empire alike, how one was buried and what commemorative activities were performed in their memory may have been relatively standard for most of the population, especially where the church had a strong involvement in the funeral trade or local practice, and thus requests in wills largely unnecessary.

should happen to it. The requests are intermingled with the “offering” (usually *προσφορά*) of gifts or alms for the poor on behalf of the testator following their death.

The will of Flavius Phoibammon of Antinoopolis (composed in 570) presents an example of the concerns that are expressed by Christian testators. Flavius left a vineyard to a monastery for the salvation and healing of his soul, on the understanding that the monastery would use this gift for his eternal *προσφορά*. The monastery was in turn asked to accept his mortal remains (which would be prepared by his sons) and add his name to a list of the names of everyone who had been buried there:

Βούλομαι οὖν' καὶ κελεύω τὸ εὐαγὲς καὶ πάνσεπτον μοναστήριον τὸ καλούμε(νον) ἄπα Ἱερημίου τοῦ ἐν ὀσίῳ τῇ μνήμῃ, μετὰ τὴν ἐμὴν ὡσαύτως τελευτήν, ἐπ' αὐθεντείας πάσης καὶ ἐξουσίας παραλαβεῖν εὐθέως μίαν καθ[α]ρὰν ἀμπελοφορίμου γῆς ἄρουραν ἐκ πλήρους ἀπὸ ἐξήκοντα τεσσάρων ἀμμάτων, μεμετρημένην τῷ δημοσίῳ σχοινί[ι]ω, [ἀτ]ελ[οῦ]ς καὶ ἀνυποτελοῦς γῆς, ἀποκρινομένην ἐκ τῶν ὄλων περιελθόντων εἰς ἐμὲ ἀμπελικῶν χωρίων ἀπο δια[δο]χῆς καὶ κληρονομίας τοῦ ἐμοῦ πατρὸς καὶ ἐν μακαρίοις τῇ μνήμῃ Εὐπρεπείου ἀρχ(ι)ιάτρο(υ) ...

Βούλομαι δὲ καὶ κελεύω τοὺς ποθεινίους μου υἱοὺς τὴν περιστολὴν ἧτοι κηδεῖαν κατ' ἀξίαν ἐμὴν τοῦ ἐμοῦ σώματος ποιῆσαι, ἐξορκίζω 'δὲ' τὸν εὐλαβ(ῆ) καὶ θεοφιλῆ ἡγούμενον τοῦ προειρημέ(ου) μον(αστηρίου) ἄπα Ἱερημίου, κατὰ τῆς ὁμοουσίῳ Τριάδος ἀγίας καὶ ἀηπτήτου, ὑποδέξασθαι τὸ ἐμὸν εἰς δαφνὴν καὶ μνήμα λείψανον εἰς τὴν εὐαγεστάτην μόνην, εἰς μνεῖαν τῆς ἐμῆς πάντοτε βραχύτητος, καὶ συναριθμ[ιον] ὀνομασίαν 'μου' ἐν τῇ τοῦ καταλόγου τῶν μακαρίων ἐκεῖσε πάντων ἀναπαυσασμένων ἐκφ' ῥ' ἄσει ἐνεραδνουμίου 'γενέσ[θαι]'.⁸¹

“Therefore, I want and order that the holy and most sacred monastery called (the monastery) of Apa Ieremios of hallowed memory, in like manner after my death, will have full power and authority to receive immediately one full aroua of cleared vineyard, measuring sixty-four hammata, according to the public measure, of tax-free and unburdened lands, which have been set apart from all of the vineyards which previously (came) to me as succession and inheritance of my father Euprepeios, chief physician of blessed memory ...

“I also want and urge these things that I desire from my sons: truly to prepare the wrapping up and care of my body, according to my rank, and I adjure the pious and god-loving leader of the aforementioned monastery Apa Ieremios, by the consubstantial holy and invincible Trinity, to receive the body of me and remember my holy being, in memory of me always, and to include me by name in the list which is recounted of all those who are resting there.”

⁸¹P. Cairo Masp. II 67151, in Nowak (2015: 422-423; 424).

This was all for the salvation of his soul and to atone for his sins, although the gift may also have been connected with the fact that his youngest children would be looked after by the abbot following his death.⁸² The driving concern behind the requests about his body and its burial seems to have been the fate of his own soul, so that his name would presumably be read out loud during certain events or memorial services.⁸³ This was believed to be beneficial for the dead, who were thought to derive some kind of relief or assistance from the prayers of the living (provided they were judged to be righteous).

Similar requests are found in other wills, often connected with commemoration or the *προσφορά*. The will of Aurelius Kollouthos, also of Antinoopolis (end of the fifth century), requests his burial, *προσφορά*, and donations to the masses, all for the salvation of his soul:

Τὸ σωματίον μοῦ περισταλῆναι βούλομαι καὶ τὰς ἀγίας μου προσφοράς καὶ ἀγάπας γίνεσθαι ὑπὲρ ἀναπαύσεως τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς παρὰ τῷ παντοκράτορι θεῷ.⁸⁴

“I want my body to be buried and holy prosphoras and alms to be made for the rest of my soul with almighty God.”

⁸² Nowak (2015: 192).

⁸³ Nowak (2015: 193).

⁸⁴ FIRA III² 52, in Nowak (2015: 399). Another example is the will of Flavius Pousi of Oxyrhynchus (sixth century), in which he requested the laying out and burial of his body, and that his heirs perform *προσφορά* and other services for the salvation of his soul. He left half his yearly allowance for this purpose: *διὰ δὲ ἀγαθῆς πίστεω[ς τῶν προκειμένων] κληρονόμων γενέσθαι βούλομαι τὴν περιστολὴν καὶ ἐκκομι[δ]ὴν [τοῦ ἐμοῦ σώματος] καὶ τὰς ἀγίας μου προσφοράς καὶ ἀγάπας ὑπὲρ ἀναπαύσεως [τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς,] καὶ βούλομαι καὶ κελεύω ὥστε τὸ ἥμιου μέρος τῆς ἐμῆς σια[ριχίας δοθῆναι] εἰς τὰς ἐμὰς ἀγάπας καὶ προσφοράς, καὶ τὸ ἄλλο ἥμισυ μέρος τῆς αὐτῆς μου] σιαρχίας δοθῆναι τῇ εἰρημένῃ Κυρίᾳ. “Through the charity of these who have been given inheritances, I want the wrapping and burial of my body, and the holy prosphoras and alms for the rest of my soul, and I want and order in this way that a half portion of my belongings to be given to these alms and prosphoras of mine, and the other half portion of my belongings to be given to the peaceful Kyria (his wife).” *P. Oxy. XVI 1901*, in Nowak (2015: 405).*

Abraham, a monk from Hermonthis (seventh century) requested the burial of his body and for the presbyter to perform the *προσφορά*, give alms, and commemorate his death on the appropriate days, according to his status and the local tradition:

Βούλομαι καὶ κελεύω μετὰ τὴν ἐμὴν ἔξοδον τοῦ βίου(υ) τὴν περιστολὴν τοῦ ἐμοῦ σώματος καὶ τὰς ἁγίας μο(υ) προσφοράς καὶ ἀγάπας καὶ τὰς τοῦ θανάτου(υ) ἐπισήμους ἡμέρας ἐκτελεσθῆναι προνοία σου κατὰ τὸν ἐπιχώριον νόμον καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν ὄψιν καὶ ὑπόλημψιν.⁸⁵

“I want and order with my passage from life the burial of my body and holy prosphoras and alms for me to be completed after my death, and these according to your provision of the customs and my position.”

The repeated connection between the burial or funeral service and the salvation of the soul indicates that these were not entirely separable in the minds of these Christians. Thinking of one’s burial naturally led to concerns about what would happen to the more important aspect of the soul following death, after its separation from the earthly body. The fate of the soul becomes the primary focus over that of the body and could be discussed without the need to mention the burial or funeral service at all.

1.2.2.2 The Προσφορά or Gifts

The *προσφορά*, or good deeds performed in the memory of the testator, is regularly discussed with more explicit instructions than those for the funeral or burial, indicating the importance of this concern for testators. This suggests that, when thinking about the future of their property, testators had heightened concerns with the fate of the soul over the fate of the body, and that this was significant enough for them to lay out the plan for their immortal soul in writing.

⁸⁵ P. Lond. I 77, in Nowak (2015: 444).

The fate of the body received less written attention, may have been understood by or discussed with others without being written, or was unimportant or followed standard local traditions.

The *προσφορά* was a form of commemoration that was expected to provide the deceased person an unclear form of benefit or relief in the afterlife. The concern for the *προσφορά* in wills demonstrates that testators understood its importance and that it was supposed to provide them with some benefit in the next life, whatever they perceived that benefit to be. It also had a very real benefit in the real world: where the names of those who had provided *προσφορά* were read aloud, the name became associated with the gift that had been given.

The will of Aurelius Panchab of Aphrodito (composed 525/526) left his daughters with the task of paying a regular *προσφορά* of wheat and wine to a monastery in his memory, probably annually. He also instructed the presbyter and monk of the monastery to demand this amount if his daughters did not obey his wishes. The offering was important enough to Aurelius that it could be taken by force if it was not presented willingly:

βούλομαι δὲ και το(ῦ)το, ὡς εἰ συμβαίῃ τῇ ράθυμ[ί]α τὰς κληρο(νόμους) μου] θυγατέρας οὔσας μὴ καταβα[λ]εῖν εὐ[υνω]μόνως, ἢ τοὺς κληρονόμο(υ)ς αὐτῶν, τὴν προορισθεῖσαν παρ ἐμο(ῦ) προσφ[ο]ρὰν τῷ ἁγίῳ μοναστηρίῳ σίτου τε καὶ οἴνω(υ)] ... κελεύω τὸν εὐλαβέστατον πρεσβύτερον το(ῦ) αὐτο(ῦ) μοναστηρίου(υ) καὶ τοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ εὐλαβεστάτους μονάζοντας ἀπαιτῆσαι τα(ῦ)τα{ς} ἐκόντας καὶ ἄκοντας διὰ παντός.⁸⁶

“And I want this: if it comes to pass that by laziness my heirs, my daughters, or the daughters of these (daughters), do not gratefully pay the prosphora I have already determined of both grain and wine to the holy monastery ... I order the pious elder priest of this monastery and those pious monks of it, to demand these things willingly or unwillingly, in any way.”

⁸⁶ P. Cairo Masp. III 67324 recto, in Nowak (2015: 409-410).

The draft of a will presumably from Petra, dated to the middle of the sixth century, presents a similar approach to salvation.⁸⁷ The testator leaves all their belongings to holy places, with particular interest in taking care of travellers, probably referring to pilgrims coming to visit the local shrines, and also mentions donations to at least one hospital.⁸⁸ The services are expected to be maintained and unopposed, offering salvation to the testator's soul following their death:

μει εἰς κληρονομίαν (καὶ) δεσποτίαν τῶν ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ... ὡν ἀ[π]λῶς εἶπεῖν τῶν ... δια ... [μέχρι ἄ]σσαρίου ἐνὸς πλὴν τῶν ὑπ' ἐμοῦ [... τ]όποις χαριζομένων ἢτοι ἀφοριζομένων] ἢ ... τ[ο]υ χάριν (καὶ) τῶν ὑπ' ἐμ[οῦ] λ ... ἐμοῦ τῆ διαθήχ εἰς λόγον τῶν παρερχομένων ... ὡς ξένων εὐχῆς χάριν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀγί[ω] ... μένην ψυχοφελῆ θεραπείαν ... [καταβαλ]λομένην καθ' ἕκαστον ἔτος ...

ἐμῖναι τοῖς περι... (καὶ) μηδὲν πρὸς ἐναντίοισιν τουτῶν ... καθ' οἷονδῆποτε τρόπον.⁸⁹

“Into the inheritance and ownership of my [property] ... simply to say [all of my things] ... to my final coin, except those I set apart for other places ... for the sake of ... and the things in my testament for ... travellers for the sake of prayer for the holy ... care for the purpose of the soul ... [being paid] every year ...

“To abide by these things ... and nothing opposing these ... in any way.”

Another example is the will of Flavius Theodoros of Antinoopolis (sometime shortly after 567). The testator stipulated that almost all his property should be given to the monastery of Senouthos, which was then to sell his assets and use the money to perform good deeds in his memory. He further requested that any money from additional sales be spent on *προσφορὰ* for his deceased wife, for her memory and salvation, showing that his concerns extended to his loved

⁸⁷ *P. Petra 5 52*, in Arjava et al. (2018: 93). As the will is a draft, it is not dated so can only be dated based on its place in the manuscript. It refers to “the city” ([τῆ]ς πόλεως), indicating it was written in Petra (96).

⁸⁸ *P. Petra 5 52*, in Arjava et al. (2018: 96).

⁸⁹ *P. Petra 5 52*, in Arjava et al. (2018: 95-97).

ones who had already died and that he believed giving away his money to perform good deeds was the way to achieve their mutual salvation:

Βούλομαι δὲ τοίνυν καὶ κελεύω Πέτρον τὸν εὐλαβέστατον ἀρχιμανδρίτην, ἦτοι τὸ δίκαιον το(ῦ) αὐτο(ῦ) εὐαγοῦς μοναστηρίου ἅπα Σενούθου, ἔχειν εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν ἔνστασιν πάντα τὰ παρ' ἔμο(ῦ) ἐν καιρῷ τελευτῆς ...

“διαπιπράσκειν, καὶ τὴν τούτων ἀποτίμησιν δια] δοῦναι ὡσαύτως ὑπὲρ ἀγίας προσφορᾶς τῆς αὐτῆς μακαρ[ίας] μο(υ) γυναικὸς ἢ καὶ εἰ[ς] ἐ[τ]έρας ε[ύ]σεβει]ς διαδόσεις ὑπὲρ ἀφέσεως [τῶν αὐτῆς πλημμελημάτων].⁹⁰

“Therefore, I want and order Petros the pious abbot, truly the *dikaion* of this holiest monastery Apa Senouthos, to have all of the property belonging to me at the time of my death ...

“To sell all of the properties for pious deeds, for the holy prosphora of both myself and my wife and also pious distributions for the remittance of her sins.”

These and similar stipulations were again for the same purposes of memory, soul, and salvation. However, some wills did not include either burial requests

⁹⁰ *P. Cairo Masp.* III 67312 recto, in Nowak (2015: 417-418). Another example is the will of Obodianos, who wrote his will after he contracted a disease (probably in the sixth century). He also planned to give away his belongings for pious purposes following his death. His belongings were expected to look after his mother for the rest of her life (administered by a presbyter) and, once she passed, half would be given to the House of Saint Aaron and half to the hospital of Saint Cyricus. Although no demands were made of his mother for regular donations, the gift would be provided once his loved ones no longer required it. See *P. Petra* 5 56, in Arjava et al. (2018: 111, 117-118). The will was written in both Greek and Latin. *[ἦ εἰς τὸν δ]εσπότην) καὶ φιλάν[θρω]πον θεὸν ἔ[χον]τα ἐξουσίαν ζώντων τε καὶ [νεκρῶν ἡγ]είσθω μοι πρότερον ἐλπίς. ἐπεὶ] τ[οῖ]νυν [ὡς ὁ]ρ[ᾶ]ται ἀνάκειμαι κ[α]ὶ τῆ κελεύσει τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν πάντων οὐδεὶς ἐναντιωθῆναι δύναται, διὸ τ[ὸ ἀ]νθρώπιν[ον] ἐννοῶν βούλομαι] καὶ κελεύω παρουσία ὑμ[ῶ]ν, εἴγε διὰ ταύτης μου τῆς παρόντος βίου ὑπεξέλθω, πάντα τὰ παρ ἔμοῦ καταλιμπαν[ν]όμενα οἰαδήποτε πράγματα διοικεῖσθαι [ὑ]πὸ Κηρυκοῦ Πέτρου τοῦ ὁσιωτ[ῆ]του πρεσβ[υ]τέρου) καὶ ἡγουμένου τοῦ ἁγίου ἀρχιερέως Ἀαρὼν καὶ Θεοδ[ω]ρίου Ὀβοδιανοῦ τοῦ προγεγραμμέ(νου) θεοφιλεστάτου [ὁ]ρθοῦ καὶ φιλοχρίστου σκοπ[οῦ] τυγ[χ]άννοντα) καὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν τρέφεσθαι καὶ ἐνδύεσθαι Θααιο[ῦ]ν τὴν ἐμ[ῆ]ν μητέρα τὸν πάντα χ[ρ]όνον τῆσ[] αὐτῆ[ς] ζωῆς, μετὰ δὲ θάνα[τον αὐτῆ]ς τὰ ὑπολιμπανόμενα [ἐκ τῶν το]ιοῦτ[ω]ν παρ ἔμοῦ καταλιμπανομ[ένων] οἰωνδήποτε πραγ[μ]άτων ἔρχεσθαι τὸ ἥμισυ [μέρος εἰς τὸν μ]νημονευθέντα ἁγι[ον] οἶκον τοῦ δεσπότη) ἡμ[ῶ]ν τοῦ ἁγίου ἀρχ[χ]υερέ]ως [Α]αρ[ῶ]ν καὶ τὸ ἄλλο ἥμισυ μ[έ]ρος εἰ[ς] τὸν [εὐ]αγέ(στατον)] ξεν[ε]ῶνα τοῦ ἁγίου μάρτυρος Κηρυκ[οῦ]. “First, my hope is in the Lord and loving God, who has power over those who are living and the bodies of the dead. Therefore, since, as can be seen, I am lying and no one can oppose the command of the God of all, reflecting on human (destiny), I want and order in your presence that if through this illness I do withdraw from my present life, all of these belongings I leave behind will be administered by Kerykos, son of Petros, the appointed presbyter and hegoumen of the Saint high priest Aaron and the previously mentioned God-pleasing Theodoros, son of Obodianos, who has a righteous and Christ-loving purpose, and that from these (belongings), Thaaious, my mother, should be nourished and clothed during the whole time of her life, and after her death, whatever she leaves behind of my things I leave behind, one half going to the mentioned sacred house of our lord, of the saint high priest Aaron, and the other half to the most sacred hospital of the saint and gloriously triumphant martyr Kerykos.”*

or instructions for salvation, such as the will of Gregory of Nazianzus (fourth century). Although Gregory gave his property in Nazianzus to the church, he stated that this was for the poor and did not express that he was concerned with the salvation of his soul.⁹¹ The action was framed as a singular donation of property, rather than repeated prayers or good deeds performed on his behalf, although the idea may still have been implied through the connection of his name with the church.

Extant wills show that the salvation of the soul within Christian thought became a major concern certainly among populations in large towns and cities during the fifth century, or perhaps in the fourth century. Whether this was the same for rural populations is unclear. The elite (including monks and clergy) and wealthy within urban areas were able to make extremely generous donations to protect their eternal souls and, in some cases, also the souls of others. In this way, they were able to maintain their elite status, through both the physical burial of their body in a high-status position such as a monastery and the continuation of their memory in the words and deeds of the living.

1.3 The Saints

The cult of the saints played a major role in the Christian approach to bodies and the breaking down of stigmas related to them.⁹² The ability to interact with these bodies in an intimate setting, and even to be buried close to them

⁹¹ Nowak (2015: 396).

⁹² Brown (1981: 5).

(Section 2.6), was a key element of the new belief system that encouraged Christians to embrace their dead in a different way.⁹³

A cursory examination of burials in saints' lives will grant insight into the standard of burial that stories about saints would have exposed Christian audiences to. These stories were likely more accessible and more widely known than some of the more intricate details from church fathers, councils, and records of the elite, because they could have been depicted in imagery, shared in churches or at other places dedicated to the saint, and dispersed more widely among ordinary people.

These stories are idealistic representations of death that use the saint's approach to death as one of the ways to confirm their sainthood. For this reason, the way in which the saint approached death was of more importance than the burial they received. A common trait among the stories is the awareness that death is coming, followed by preparation in the form of prayers,

⁹³ This relationship with the bodies of the saints was expressed, for example, in the life of Daniel the Stylite (end of fifth/beginning of sixth century). Daniel's corpse was placed on a plank set at the top of his column. The archbishop went up the column to kiss the corpse, as did other high dignitaries and officials. The body was then put on display by being raised upright and tied so that it would not fall, allowing more people to see the saint. When it was time to bury the saint, the archbishop was so worried that the people might tear apart Daniel's corpse in their desire to touch the corpse that it was placed in a lead coffin and carried down the column. The coffin bearers were nonetheless knocked off their feet by the crowd, who were still eager to be close to the coffin. See Dawes and Baynes (1977: 98-100). Gregory of Nyssa described a similar experience during the processions of Macrina's body (Section 1.4.1), when the people gathered around the coffin so tightly that it was difficult for the procession to move: *Ἐπει δὲ τοῦτο ἐδέδοκτο καὶ ἐν χερσὶν ἦν ἡ σπουδὴ, ὑποβὰς τὴν κλίνην ἐγὼ κάκεινον ἐπὶ τὸ ἕτερον μέρος προσκαλεσάμενος, ἄλλων τε δύο τῶν ἐν τῷ κλήρω τετιμημένων τὸ ὀπίσθιον τῆς κλίνης μέρος ὑπολαβόντων, ἦειν τοῦ πρόσω ἐχόμενος βάδην, ὡς εἰκός, καὶ κατ' ὀλίγον ἡμῖν γινομένης τῆς κινήσεως. Τοῦ γὰρ λαοῦ περὶ τὴν κλίνην πεπτυκνωμένου καὶ πάντων ἀπλήστως ἐχόντων τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἐκείνου θεάματος οὐκ ἦν εὐπόρον ἐν εὐκολίᾳ τὴν πορείαν ἡμῖν διανύεσθαι.* "Descending beneath the couch I called him (Araxius) to the other side. Two other highly regarded clergymen took the back parts of the couch. I went step by step, as was expected, our progress being but gradual. For the people gathered tightly around the couch and all were insatiable to see this holy sight, so it was not easy to pass through them to complete our journey." Maraval (1971: section 34 lines 1-9).

funeral arrangements, or wills. While some of these stories display extreme examples of simplicity in burials, these are merely an ideal showing the saint's piety; others describe more diverse burial options. The burials described in hagiographies reflect a variety of possible burial options for Christians, depending on their status, as well as a repeated motif of simple, unadorned Christian burials which are considered the norm for identifying Christian cemeteries where other evidence is limited or lacking. We also see the importance of the cult of the saints, and an attraction among worshippers to the bodies of the saints, presenting the dynamic relationship of ordinary Christians with select Christian dead. Ordinary people may have intended to mimic these burials, either to create equality among all in burial or to single out high-status local figures.

Two lives are discussed here; the first, the *Life of St Anthony*, showing the extreme basic version of burial through Egyptian monastic ideals, and the second, the *Life of St John the Almsgiver*, providing an example of a more elaborate burial designed for veneration.

The *Life of St Anthony* (fourth century) presents one of the most detailed accounts of a saint being concerned with his death and burial. The saint feared that he may be buried according to the Egyptian custom, wrapped in linen clothes and placed on couches that were kept in houses, rather than being buried underground as he desired:

*Τῶν δὲ ἀδελφῶν βιαζομένων αὐτὸν μεῖναι παρ'
αὐτοῖς κάκεῖ τελειωθῆναι, οὐκ ἠνέσχετο διὰ πολλὰ μὲν,
ὡς αὐτὸς καὶ σιωπῶν ἐνέφαινεν, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο δὲ*

μάλιστα. Οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι τὰ τῶν τελευτώντων σπου-
δαίων σώματα, καὶ μάλιστα τῶν ἁγίων μαρτύρων,
φιλοῦσι θάπτειν μὲν καὶ περιελίσσειν ὀθονίοις, μὴ
κρύπτειν δὲ ὑπὸ γῆν, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ σκιμποδίῳ τιθέναι καὶ
φυλάττειν ἔνδον παρ' ἑαυτοῖς, νομίζοντες ἐν τούτῳ τιμᾶν
τούς ἀπελθόντας ...

Αὐτὸς δέ, τοῦτο γινώσκων, καὶ φοβούμενος μὴ
καὶ τὸ αὐτοῦ ποιήσωσιν οὕτω σῶμα, ἤπειξεν ἑαυτόν,
συνταξάμενος τοῖς ἐν τῷ ἔξω ὄρει μοναχοῖς. Καὶ
εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὸ ἔνδον ὄρος, ἔνθα καὶ μένειν εἰώθει, μετὰ
μῆνας ὀλίγους ἐνόσησεν.⁹⁴

“And the brothers were compelling him to remain with them to die, but he did not tolerate this for many reasons, so he showed this by keeping silence, and especially for this reason:

“The Egyptians zealously attend the bodies of those who have died, and most of all the holy martyrs, taking special attention to bury them and wind cloths around (them), and not to conceal them under the earth but to lay them on couches and keep them in their homes, believing in this that they honour those who have died ...

“And he, knowing this and fearing for himself that they would do this to his body, hastened himself to leave the monks in the outer mountain. And entering the inner mountain, remaining there as he was accustomed, within a few months he became sick.”

Anthony considered it necessary to arrange his burial in secret, in case those who followed traditional burial practices found him or decided to disturb his burial:

Καὶ εἰ μέλει ὑμῖν περὶ ἐμοῦ καὶ μνημονεύετε ὡς περὶ
πατρός, μὴ ἀφήτέ τινας τὸ σῶμά μου λαβεῖν εἰς
Αἴγυπτον, μήπως ἐν τοῖς οἴκοις ἀπόθωνται. Τούτου γὰρ
χάριν εἰσήλθον εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ ἦλθον ὧδε. Οἴδατε δὲ

⁹⁴ Bartelink (2004: chapter 90, lines 1-9; chapter 91, lines 1-5). Anthony requested that the bishops corrected the burial practices of the local people and many of those who heard these teachings were indeed convinced to bury their dead underground, as appropriate for a Christian: Ὁ δὲ Ἀντώνιος πολλάκις περὶ τούτου καὶ ἐπίσκοπους ἡξίου παραγγέλλειν τοῖς λαοῖς. “And Antony often considered it suitable for the bishops to give commandment on this to the people.” Bartelink (2004: chapter 90, lines 9-10). Πολλοὶ μὲν οὖν, ἀκούσαντες, ἔκρυψαν λοιπὸν ὑπὸ γῆν καὶ ἠύχαρίστουν τῷ Κυρίῳ, καλῶς διδαχθέντες. “Many of them having heard, henceforth they (buried the dead) under the earth and expressed gratitude to the Lord that they had been taught rightly.” Bartelink (2004: chapter 90, lines 19-21).

καὶ πῶς ἀεὶ ἐνέτρεπον τοὺς τοῦτο ποιοῦντας, καὶ
παρήγγελλον παύεσθαι τῆς τοιαύτης συνηθείας. Θάψατε
οὖν τὸ ἡμέτερον ὑμεῖς καὶ ὑπὸ γῆν κρύψατε, καὶ ἔστω τὸ
παρ' ἐμοῦ ῥῆμα φυλαττόμενον παρ' ὑμῖν, ὥστε μηδένα
γινώσκειν τὸν τόπον πλὴν ὑμῶν μόνων.⁹⁵

“And if you care for me and thus keep me in mind as a father, do not permit anyone to take my body to Egypt, lest they place me in their houses. For this favour I entered the mountain and came here.

“Also, you know how I always rebuked those who practiced this custom and instructed them to stop it. So, bury me under the earth and conceal it (the tomb) yourselves, and in accordance with my words watch over it so that no one knows the place except you alone.”

The text seems equally, if not more, concerned with eradicating the ‘wrong’ Egyptian practices than with presenting the ‘correct’ Christian ones. Perhaps the popularity that Anthony received in Egypt and elsewhere granted his *Life* a chance to educate on acceptable and unacceptable burial practices.⁹⁶

Other saints are described as having more elaborate tombs related to their veneration. In the *Life of St John the Almsgiver* (seventh century), the saint was depicted spending a lot of time thinking about his mortality.⁹⁷ John was buried

⁹⁵ Bartelink (2004: chapter 91, lines 27-35).

⁹⁶ Anthony featured in two additional late fourth century lives, those of Paul the Hermit and Hilarion of Gaza. In the life of Paul, God instructed Anthony to find Paul and bury his body. Paul gave his meagre possessions to Anthony, then sent him away to fetch a cloak in which he wished to be wrapped for his burial. On his return journey, Anthony witnessed the ascension of Paul’s soul into heaven, surrounded by angels, prophets, and apostles. Anthony found the corpse knelt in prayer, wrapped it in a cloak, and carried it out of the hermit’s cave, chanting hymns and psalms, before burying it in a simple grave covered by a mound of earth. The idealisation of the burial as a simple, private affair accompanied by psalms provided a completely basic concept of a monastic funeral. Jerome (1952b: 234-237). The life of Hilarion similarly featured Hilarion preparing a will to give away his few possessions in anticipation of his death. He requested to be buried immediately following his death in his clothes. Jerome (1952a: 279-280).

⁹⁷ Leontios (1974: 375, lines 16-22). Θανατικοῦ δὲ τὴν πόλιν ποτὲ καταλαβόντος ἐξήρχετο καὶ ὁ δίκαιος οὗτος· ἔλεγεν γὰρ πάνυ ὠφέλιμον τὴν τοιαύτην θεωρίαν, λέγω δὴ τὴν τῶν ἐξοδίων καὶ τῶν τάφων. πολλάκις δὲ καὶ ψυχομαχοῦσί τισιν παρεκάθητο καὶ αὐτὸς τούτους ἰδίαις χερσὶν ἐκάμμυεν μνήμην ἔχειν βουλόμενος διηνεκῆ ἐκ τῆς τοιαύτης ἐργασίας καὶ φροντίδα τῆς οἰκείας ἐξόδου, ἐπέτρεπεν δὲ καὶ τὰς συνάξεις τῶν προκεκοιμημένων ἀπαραλείπτως ἐπιτελεῖν· πάνυ γὰρ ἄφεσιν ἔφασκεν ἐκ τούτου πάσχειν τοὺς κεκοιμημένους· “At one time when the plague was ravaging the city, this righteous man went to watch the funerals, for he said that this and the

with ecclesiastical rites in a sarcophagus which already contained the bodies of two bishops who had died before him:

*Προέκειντο ἐν τῇ τοιαύτῃ σορῶ ἔνθα καὶ ὁ δίκαιος ἤμελλεν κατατί-
θεσθαι δύο τινῶν ἐπισκόπων προκοιμηθέντων ὁσίων ὅσια ἀληθῶς σώματα,
ἅπερ ἐν ἀψύχῳ που τέως διάγοντα φύσει τῶν ἐμψύχων ὄντως ἴσην τιμὴν
προσενήνοχαν. ὡς γὰρ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ μακαριωτάτου πάπα τῶν δύο ἐκείνων
σύνθετον γενέσθαι ἤμελλεν, τιμήσαντες τὸν ἀρχιποιμένα οἱ ποιμένες καὶ
τὴν πολλὴν αὐτοῦ πρὸς θεὸν παρρησίαν αἰδεσθέντες ἅμα καὶ θαυμάσαντες,
ἐαυτῶν τὰ σώματα ὡσπερ ζῶντές τινες ἀποχωρήσαντες μέσον τοῦτον
τὸν ἱερὸν συνελάμβανον, τιμὴν καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡσπερ θεοτιμῆτῳ προσκομίζοντες
καὶ πᾶσιν εὐθύς ἐμφανίζοντες τὴν ἐκεῖθεν αὐτῷ πρὸς θεοῦ δωρηθεῖσαν
δόξαν τε καὶ ὑπερύψωσιν.⁹⁸*

“In the tomb, where the just and holy man was destined to be laid down, the holy bodies of two bishops who had previously fallen asleep were laid, and these very men, who had been in a lifeless state for some time, truly presented the saint as much honour as to the living. So, when the body of the blessed Patriarch was to be laid with the other two, these shepherds, honouring the arch-shepherd, and the wondrous confidence and respect he had with God, just like being alive they moved their bodies, by the command of God, and made space for the honoured and exalted saint between them.”

The story then goes on to describe a further element of the cult of the saints: the interaction of the souls of deceased saints with living people. A woman who wished to be absolved of her sins visited the sarcophagus and stayed by it for three days. On the third night, John and the two bishops appeared to her and absolved her. The scene implies that John’s soul is somehow still aware of the sounds of her distress by the side of his corpse:

τρεῖς γὰρ ἡμέρας προσκαρτερησάσης αὐτῆς τῷ μνή-

contemplation of burials were very beneficial. Often, too, he would sit beside persons who were dying, and close their eyes with his own hands, wishing in this way to have thoughts of his own death always in remembrance. He also ordered services for those who fell asleep to be performed without end. He said that this was very (beneficial) for those who have fallen asleep to receive the remission of sins.”

⁹⁸ Leontios (1974: 405, lines 16-25).

ματι τοῦ θεοτιμῆτου καὶ μηδὸλως βρώσεως γευσαμένης, τῇ τρίτῃ νυκτὶ ἐν ὄσῳ πάλιν τοὺς αὐτοὺς σκληροὺς καὶ πιστοὺς λόγους τῷ μακαριωτάτῳ μετὰ δακρύων ἔλεγεν, ἰδοὺ ἐξέρχεται ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ θεράπων ἐκ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ θήκης ὀφθαλμοφανῶς μετὰ καὶ τῶν δύο ἐπισκόπων τῶν συγκειμένων αὐτῷ, ἐνὸς ἔνθεν καὶ ἐνὸς ἔνθεν αὐτοῦ ἵσταμένων, καὶ λέγει πρὸς αὐτήν· «Μέχρι πότε, γύναι, τοὺς ἐνθάδε σιαίνεις; ἕα ἀναπαῆναι αὐτούς. κατέβρεξεν γὰρ ἡμῶν τὰς στολὰς τὰ σὰ δάκρυα.» καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτῇ τὸ ἴδιον πιπτάκιον βεβουλλωμένον εἰπών· «Δέξαι, γνωρίζεις τοῦτο; λῦσον, βλέπε.»⁹⁹

“For three days she stuck by the tomb of the Saint, without eating or drinking, and on the third night, when she again, weeping, spoke those harsh and faithful words to the blessed one, behold the servant of God came out of his tomb, plain to see, with the two bishops who lay together with him, standing one on either side of him, and he said to her: ‘For how long, woman, are you going to bother (us) here? Leave us alone to take rest. For you soak our robes with your tears.’ And he gave her the tablet which belonged to her, which was sealed, and said: ‘Take it, do you know it? Open and look.’”

Her sins were absolved, and she left.¹⁰⁰

The ability of the souls of saints to interact with the world of the living had been debated and defended to a great extent by this time. In the sixth century, Eustratios explained the concept and argued against those who claimed that souls could not interact with the world of the living:

Οὐκ οὖν οὐ

ψεῦδος, ἵνα μὴ ἀπώλεια, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ φαντασία, ὄντως οὐσα ὀπτασία. Μᾶλλον μὲν οὖν ἀλήθεια τῶν ἀγίων αἱ ἐμφάνειαι καὶ ἰάσεις γίνονται· οὐ γὰρ ὡς ἐπὶ σκηνῆς γελωτοποιῶν καὶ ἀπαταιῶνων ἢ ὑποκριτῶν χρεία, ἀλλ’ ἀληθείας· ὠφελείας γὰρ ἔνεκεν ψυχικῆς τὲ καὶ σωματικῆς αἱ τῶν ἀγίων δείκνυνται χάριτες. Οἷοι γὰρ ζῶντες εἴ τε θανόντες εἰσί, τοιούτους φαίνεσθαι αὐτοὺς ποιεῖ ὁ θεός, μὴ καταψευδομένους τὴν χάριν, ἢ κατασοφιζομένους τὴν δωρεὰν τῶν εὐεργεσιῶν. Εἰ γὰρ ἄλλου τιμηθέντος ἄλλος ἔσται ὁ εὐφραινόμενος, ὡσαύτως τοὺς κε-

⁹⁹ Leontios (1974: 407, lines 20-28).

¹⁰⁰ Leontios (1997: 46).

κρατημένους τῶν παθῶν ἀπαλλάττων φαντασίᾳ καὶ οὐκ ἀλη-
θείᾳ, παρ' οὗ τὴν ὠφέλειαν ὁ δεξάμενος ὡς δεξάμενος ἔτυχεν·
καὶ ἀμφοτέροι τῆς ἀληθείας ἐξέπεσον, ὃ τε εὐεργετηθεὶς, μὴ
εἰδῶς παρ' οὗ τὴν ἴασιν ἐδέξατο, ὃ τε πάλιν εὐεργετήσας,
οὐχ' ὡς ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ ἄλλου τὴν σωτηρίαν παρασχό-
μενος. Λέγειν δὲ τι τοιοῦτον ἐπὶ τῶν ἀγίων, ἀλλότριον πάντη
καὶ ξένον τῆς ἡμετέρας ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως.¹⁰¹

“Therefore, this is not a falsehood (which means destruction),¹⁰² not even a fantasy, but it is a true manifestation. So, certainly do the manifestations and cures of the saints occur in truth; for there is no need of jesters or cheaters or hypocrites on the stage, but of truth. For the graces of the saints are shown for spiritual and bodily advantage. God makes them appear however they were in their lives, even if they have died, not falsifying the grace, nor misrepresenting the gift of their benefits. For if we honour one, but another gains from our rejoicing, in the same way as supporting those who are being set free from their sufferings in fantasy, but not truth, who has the receiver received the benefit from? Both have lost the truth; both the receiver, not understanding where the healing he received was from, and also the benefiter, thus not having granted salvation by themselves, but because of another. And to say something like that about the saints is wholly strange and foreign to our orthodox faith.”

These stories and the principals that underly them – primarily, that the souls of the saints could appear on earth through God’s power – expand upon fundamental Christian beliefs about death, the body, and the soul, and give greater insight into the ideology of interaction between the living and the dead. Meanwhile, for ordinary people, there were three key moments when the living interacted with the *ordinary* dead: before, during, and after the funeral.

1.4 Burial and The Funeral Service

Information on Byzantine funeral rites before the tenth century is scant, but they were connected to the celebration of the eucharist and this connection existed at the beginning of our period (see below, the Apostolic Constitutions). The oldest extant record of a full Byzantine funeral service is the Italo-Byzantine

¹⁰¹ Eustratios (2006: 70, lines 1678-1694). Eustratios was the author of the biography on the Patriarch Eutychios.

¹⁰² ἵνα μὴ ἀπώλεια, literally “in order that (there is) not destruction/perdition”.

euchologion of Grottaferrata *ΓΒΧ* (tenth/eleventh century).¹⁰³ This presented separate funeral rites for clergymen, monks, and laypeople.¹⁰⁴ Later sources provided other categories, such as the Messina gr. 172's (1178-1179) rite for children.¹⁰⁵

Extant evidence on funerals before Messina gr. 172 provided examples of actions performed during the funeral service, allowing for a partial reconstruction of funeral rites before Grottaferrata. The Italo-Byzantine euchology Barberini gr. 336 (eighth century), presents a list of seven prayers, without instructions on when exactly during the funeral they should be delivered.¹⁰⁶ For the fourth-seventh centuries, we rely on rituals expressed in multiple sources, such as Pseudo-Dionysios' *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (end of fifth/beginning of sixth century) and funeral orations, to reconstruct funeral rites. Not all the rites expressed in these sources would have been performed in all Christian services; we cannot be certain which aspects were adopted by small, rural communities or at what time this adoption occurred.

The key areas discussed here are the preparation of the body for burial, the funeral itself, laws and the involvement of the church, prayers, and the eucharist.

¹⁰³ The full text is provided in Greek by Velkovska (2001: 46-51), who dated it to the 10th-11th centuries. Marinis (2017: 85) dated it to the 10th century.

¹⁰⁴ Velkovska (2001: 33).

¹⁰⁵ Velkovska (2001: 38).

¹⁰⁶ Velkovska (2001: 22-24). Three prayers were "for a dead person" (*τελευτήσας*), and there was one "inclination prayer" (*κεφαλοκλισία*) each for a layman, a bishop, and a monk. Finally, there was an additional litany for the dead at the end (*εις κοιμηθέντας*). The prayers can be divided into prayers that were meant to be directed towards the dead and prayers that were composed for the living. Velkovska reconstructed the service as a litany followed by two prayers, the latter being the prayer of inclination.

1.4.1 Preparing the Body for Burial

The treatment of the corpse seems to have largely been based on practical needs, so a significant element represents the continuity of older practices, but with some Christian amendments based on ideological requirements. Jewish and Christian approaches to the preparation of the corpse were similar,¹⁰⁷ excepting how the corpse was viewed (Section 1.2.1).

Jewish practices from as early as the First Temple Period (970-596 BCE) are known from Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic literature, in the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Talmuds.¹⁰⁸ Christian practices are indicated by church fathers, councils, in hagiographies, wills, and other texts, which forces us to reconstruct burial and funeral rites from scattered pieces of information. Not all practices may have been used by all people, and they may have been used at different times or in different places. The first action was to close the eyes and the mouth of the dead person, then arrange the corpse into the burial position.

A Christian example comes from Gregory of Nyssa, who described himself performing simple rites for Saint Macrina immediately following her death. He explained that her body had naturally settled into the appropriate burial position, with eyes and lips closed and hands on the chest.¹⁰⁹ The body was then

¹⁰⁷ Green (2008: 155-160). Some of these Jewish practices dated to the First Temple Period or even earlier (145).

¹⁰⁸ Green (2008: 155). Stern (2017: 96-98).

¹⁰⁹ Maraval (1971: section 25 lines 22-28). *οὐδὲν γὰρ τῶν ἐπορθούντων οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ προσεδέοντο, καθάπερ ἐπὶ τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν γίνεται ὕπνου, τοῖς βλεφάροις εὐκόσμως διειλημμένοι· τὰ τε χεῖλη προσφυῶς μεμυκῶτα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες εὐπρεπῶς ἐπανακλιθεῖσαι τῷ στήθει πᾶσα τε ἡ τοῦ σώματος θέσις αὐτομάτως κατὰ τὸ εὐσχημον ἄρμοσθεῖσα οὐδὲν τῆς τῶν κοσμοῦντων χειρὸς ἐπεδέετο.* “For her eyes needed no correcting, just as happens in natural sleep, her eyelids covered them gracefully. Her lips were suitably closed, and her hands were laid appropriately on her breast, and without external agency her whole body had laid in the proper position, and it did not need the hand of the layers-out.”

prepared, wearing the minimal clothing that Macrina had owned during her life. She was covered by a cloak.¹¹⁰

Closing the eyes and mouth was an ancient practice thought to prevent evil spirits from entering the body.¹¹¹ It also worked practically for the deceased to look asleep and at peace during their lamentation, agreeing with the language typically used to describe the dead as ‘sleeping’. Straightening out the body prepared it for the lamentation and burial in an extended position, again akin to sleeping. This may have been combined with tying certain parts of the body together as a way to maintain the desired shape or position, for example it is common to find toes and/or limbs tied together or to the body in the el-Bagawat cemetery at the Kharga Oasis (second-seventh century).¹¹² Undisturbed skeletons are usually found supine with outstretched legs and with arms either stretched or bent at the elbow with hands on the chest or pelvis. Careful thought was clearly made in the cases of some individuals, such as women and perinates who appear to have both died during or because of childbirth, for example two adolescent females, one buried with a foetus at her pelvis in Tomb 200 at Giv’at Sharet (fourth-fifth century), and the other in Grave 85 at el-

¹¹⁰ Maraval (1971: section 32 lines 1-8). *Ἐπεὶ δὲ πέρασ εἶχεν ἡμῖν ἡ σπουδὴ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐνότων περιεκοσμήθη τὸ σῶμα, πάλιν φησὶν ἡ διάκονος μὴ πρέπειν νυμφικῶς ἐσταλμένην αὐτὴν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς τῶν παρθένων ὁρᾶσθαι. Ἀλλ’ ἔστι μοι, φησί, τῆς μητρὸς τῆς ὑμετέρας τῶν φαιῶν πεφυλαγμένον ἱμάτιον, ὃ ἄνωθεν ἐπιβληθῆναι καλῶς ἔχειν φημί, ὡς ἂν μὴ τῷ ἐπείσάκτω διὰ τῆς ἐσθῆτος κόσμῳ τὸ ἱερὸν τοῦτο κάλλος λαμπρύνοιτο. Ἐκράτει τὰ δεδογμένα καὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον ἐπεβλήθη.* “And when our zealous work came to an end, the body was decked out from what things we had available to us; again, the deaconess spoke, saying that it was not fitting for her to be seen by the eyes of the virgins (clothed) in bridal fashion. ‘But I have,’ she said, ‘kept safe your mother’s grey garment, which I think would be good put over her, so that this holy beauty is not adorned with the unnatural ornamentation of clothing.’ Her opinions were adhered to, and the garment was put upon the body.”

¹¹¹ Kyriakakis (1974: 39).

¹¹² For example, graves 7, 64, 65, 70. See the appendix.

Bagawat (second-seventh century), buried with a foetus and placenta laid out on a sheet.¹¹³

Once the corpse was laid out, it could be washed with water, perfumes, wines, or herbs. These could be expensive or used in substantial amounts if the family of the deceased was wealthy.¹¹⁴ The body could then be dressed and adorned (Section 5.3.1). In some cases, mummification may have occurred which, while less common than in previous periods, was still carried out by Christian Egyptians with a focus on the wrapping and preservation of the body, without the opening of the body or removal of the internal organs.¹¹⁵ Examples of mummification in the appendix include the monastic community of Saqqara in Lower Egypt (fifth-ninth century)¹¹⁶ and the monastic/local Cemetery C at Naqlun in the Faiyum (sixth-seventh century).¹¹⁷ The corpse or mummy could then be covered or wrapped in a sheet. Before burial, the corpse would be placed on a bier or in a coffin, so it could be carried to the tomb¹¹⁸ by the funeral procession.

Burial occurred soon after death, often on the following day.¹¹⁹ Some communities (notably Jewish and monastic communities) could also practice

¹¹³ Seligman et al. (1996: 47); Bagawat: pit graves, no. 71-115 (tomb cards), circa 1907-1908 (1907-1908).

¹¹⁴ Kyriakakis (1974: 46); Conostas (2006: 126).

¹¹⁵ Fischhaber (1997: 257).

¹¹⁶ Jeffreys and Strouhal (1980: 29, 35), where resinous material had been found packed in/around three crania and some bodies were found covered with salt.

¹¹⁷ Ożarek (2008: 99), in which mummified soft tissue was present on five human skeletons. Evidence of mummification has further been found in the Dakhleh Oasis, the Kharga Oasis, Antinoopolis, and in a church burial at Dair Abu Fana (the appendix). Mummification continued in Egypt until around the end of the eighth/beginning of the ninth century: O'Connell (2014b: 7).

¹¹⁸ Alexiou (2002: 27).

¹¹⁹ Conostas (2006: 131).

exposure and secondary burial in ossuaries or other communal graves.¹²⁰ With the body prepared, let us now consider the funeral service itself.

1.4.2 The Funeral Service

The *Apostolic Constitutions* instructed Christians to gather in churches, dormitories, and at funerals to sing prayers and share the eucharist, not only for martyrs and saints but for all the Christian dead:¹²¹

*Ἀπαρατηρήτως δὲ συναθροίζεσθε ἐν τοῖς κοιμη-
τηρίοις, τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν τῶν ἱερῶν βιβλίων ποιοῦμενοι καὶ
ψάλλοντες ὑπὲρ τῶν κεκοιμημένων μαρτύρων καὶ πάντων
τῶν ἀπ’ αἰῶνος ἀγίων καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν τῶν ἐν Κυρίῳ
κεκοιμημένων, καὶ τὴν ἀντίτυπον τοῦ βασιλικοῦ σώματος
Χριστοῦ δεκτὴν εὐχαριστίαν προσφέρετε ἐν τε ταῖς ἐκκλη-
σίαις ὑμῶν καὶ ἐν τοῖς κοιμητηρίοις, καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἐξόδοις
τῶν κεκοιμημένων ψάλλοντες προπέμπετε αὐτούς, ἐὰν ᾧσιν
πιστοὶ ἐν Κυρίῳ.¹²²*

“And without these observances¹²³ assemble in the cemeteries, completing the reading of the holy books, and singing about the martyrs who have died, and all those who are holy for all time, and for your brethren who have fallen asleep in the Lord. And, appropriately representing the excellent body of Christ, offer the eucharist both in churches and in cemeteries, and in the funerals of those who have died, accompanying them with singing, if they were faithful in the Lord.”

These elements seem to have been well established in Christian funerary practice by the fourth century.

Pseudo-Dionysios’ *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* provides the most complete set of funeral rites of our period. These rites were based on the rank of the deceased

¹²⁰ Demonstrated at multiple sites in the thesis, including St. Stephen’s monastery and ^{Horvat} Rimmon. See Sheridan and Gregoricka (2015: 582-583) and Fabian and Goldfus (2004: 92-94) respectively.

¹²¹ Coxe (1886: 464).

¹²² Metzger (1986: book 6, chapter 30, lines 4-12).

¹²³ Purgations, baptisms, and purifications.

person, for example, the bodies of priests were laid at the altar, and monks near the holy sanctuary. Prayers and the promise of resurrection follow. The names of holy people of the same rank as the deceased are then spoken, and the dead person is kissed (or embraced).¹²⁴ Finally, oil is poured over the deceased in an imitation of the baptism, and the body is buried with others of their rank:

Μυστήριον ἐπὶ τῶν ἱερῶς κεκοιμημένων.
Συναγαγὼν ὁ θεῖος ἱεράρχης <τὸν> ἱερὸν χορόν, εἰ
μὲν ἱερατικῆς ἐγεγόνει τάξεως ὁ κεκοιμημένος,
ἐπίπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ θυσιαστηρίου κατακλίνας αὐτόν,
ἀπάρχεται τῆς πρὸς θεὸν εὐχῆς καὶ εὐχαριστίας. Εἰ
δὲ τοῖς εὐαγέσι μοναχοῖς ἢ τῶ ἱερῶ λαῶ κατετέ-
τακτο, παρὰ τὸ τίμιον ἱερατεῖον αὐτὸν κατακλίνει
πρὸ τῆς ἱερατικῆς εἰσελεύσεως, εἶτα τελεῖ τὴν πρὸς
θεὸν εὐχαριστήριον εὐχὴν ὁ ἱεράρχης. Ἐξῆς δὲ οἱ λει-
τουργοὶ τὰς ἐν τοῖς θείοις λογίοις ἐμφερομένας ἀψευ-
δεῖς ἐπαγγελίας περὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἡμῶν ἀναστάσεως
ἀναγνόντες ἱερῶς ᾄδουσι τὰς ὁμολόγους καὶ ταύτο-
δυνάμους τῶν ψαλμικῶν λογίων ὡδάς. Εἶτα τῶν λει-
τουργῶν ὁ πρῶτος ἀπολύει τοὺς κατηχομένους καὶ
ἀνακηρύττει τοὺς ἤδη κεκοιμημένους ἁγίους, μεθ' ὧν
ἀξιοῖ τὸν ἄρτι τελειωθέντα τῆς ὁμοταγοῦς ἀναρρή-
σεως, καὶ προτρέπεται πάντας αἰτῆσαι τὴν ἐν Χρι-
στῷ μακαρίαν τελείωσιν. Εἶτα προσελθὼν ὁ θεῖος ἱε-
ράρχης εὐχὴν ἱεροτάτην ἐπ' αὐτῷ ποιεῖται καὶ
μετὰ τὴν εὐχὴν αὐτός τε ὁ ἱεράρχης ἀσπάζεται
τὸν κεκοιμημένον, καὶ μετ' αὐτὸν οἱ παρόντες
ἅπαντες. Ἀσπασαμένων δὲ πάντων ἐπιχέει τῷ
κεκοιμημένῳ τὸ ἔλαιον ὁ ἱεράρχης καὶ τὴν ὑπὲρ
πάντων εὐχὴν ἱερὰν ποιησάμενος ἀποτίθησιν ἐν οἴκῳ

¹²⁴ ἀσπάζεται (welcome, greet, embrace, salute, or kiss the dead). I use kiss like in Volp (2002: 205).

*τιμίῳ τὸ σῶμα μεθ' ἑτέρων ὁμοταγῶν ἱερῶν σωμάτων.*¹²⁵

“Sacred rite (*mysterion*) over those who have religiously fallen asleep.

The divine high priest (hierarchy) brings together the holy choir, and if the one who fell asleep was a member of the priesthood, he lays him down before the divine altar, he offers prayer and thanksgiving to God; or if he was a member of the pure monks, or the holy people, he lays him down by the hallowed sanctuary, before the divine entrance. Then the priest finishes the thanksgiving prayer to God, and next, the servants, having read the trustworthy promises about our holy resurrection, contained in the holy scriptures, they reverently sing the Psalms of these teachings and power, which are spoken of in song. Then the chief of the servants sends away the catechumen and extols (the names of) the holy people who have already fallen asleep, with those who are proclaimed to be in the rank that the man who has just died is worthy of, and he urges all to ask for blessed consummation in Christ. Then the divine hierarchy approaches, and makes a holy prayer over him, and after the prayer both the hierarchy himself kisses the one who has fallen asleep, and after him all those who are present. All having kissed, the hierarchy pours oil over the one who has fallen asleep and, having made the holy prayer for all, he buries the body in a place that it is worthy of, with other holy bodies of the same rank.”

Although we learn few specifics about the performance of the service from these texts, they present the fundamental elements of Christians gathering, singing prayers or psalms (including commemorative prayers for those who had already died), performing the eucharist, and an understanding that the rank of the deceased could affect the presentation of their body and the burial they received.

By separating the clergy and giving them their own rites based on their rank, they were transformed into an ‘elite’ group who received special treatment beyond ordinary funeral practices. Unlike elite graves or burial spaces, which could be purchased either outside or inside of religious buildings (such as the donation left by Flavius Phoibammon, Section 1.2.2.1), these were presumably restricted to the clergy only.

¹²⁵ Migne (1857: column 556, lines 25-49).

To explore burial rites further, I examine funeral laws, the growing role of the church in funeral services, and funeral prayers.

1.4.2.1 Laws on Funeral Services

The laws on funeral services in our period inform us that basic funeral rites were granted to those who were unable to afford them, at least in some large urban settlements. Justinian's law codes (sixth century) provide information on Constantinopolitan funeral practices for the masses.¹²⁶ A central part of these laws was that the funeral services provided for the people of Constantinople were now administered by the church. While some information on funeral expenses is provided in the *Digest*, the *Novels* are our most important laws on funeral services, because they provide information on previous laws that had impacted the funeral trade in Constantinople, established by Constantine I and later improved by Anastasius I, before making amendments to this system.

The *Digest* included legislation on funeral expenses and how these should be paid if the dead person had not set aside money for their funeral (with the expectation that some people, depending on their rank, would have different amounts of money spent on their funeral). The necessary funeral expenses were the treatment and preparation of the corpse, the cost of the burial plot, and the transportation of the body to the grave.¹²⁷ By identifying the basic elements

¹²⁶ For a discussion of burial law in the early Byzantine empire, see Bond (2013).

¹²⁷ *Funeris causa sumptus factus videtur is demum, qui ideo fuit ut funus ducatur, sine quo funus duci non possit, ut puta si quid impensum est in elationem mortui: sed et si quid in locum fuerit erogatum, in quem mortuus inferretur ... Impensa peregre mortui quae facta est ut corpus perferretur, funeris est, licet nondum homo funeretur: idemque et si quid ad corpus custodiendum vel etiam commendandum factum sit, vel si quid in marmor vel vestem collocandam.* "The only expense to be incurred to carry out a funeral is that which, without, the funeral could not be conceived of: any expense of the removal of the corpse, and also any expense on the place where the corpse is buried ... The expenses to bring anyone who has died abroad home are included in the funeral (expenses), although they are not yet buried; and

of the funeral service within Byzantine thought, we can establish the rites that were thought to be essential for all burials.

The *Novels* gave the funeral trade significant attention, reflecting its importance for Constantinople and the experiences of the living following a death.

Constantine had established 980 tax-exempt workshops (*ergasteria*) in Constantinople. These were overseen by a bishop and were designed to provide everyone who lived in the city with inexpensive funerals. Anastasius added an additional 150 workshops to this number and ordered that a certain wage be paid to those who conducted the funerals:

*Constantino enim piaae memoriae nongenta octoginta ergasteria ex diversis corporibus felicissimae huius urbis sine tributis dante sanctissimae maiori ecclesiae, Anastasio vero piaae memoriae non solum ergasteriis illis quinquaginta et centum adiciente, et redditum certum largiente per duas pragmaticas formas, quatinus quod ex ipso redditu colligitur aurum proficiat ad ea, quae dantur a deo amabilibus oeconomis his qui ad hoc laborant.*¹²⁸

“For Constantine of blessed memory made nine hundred and eighty workshops from the different guilds of this fortunate city to the great church, being exempt from taxes. Anastasius of blessed memory not only added one hundred and fifty workshops, but also gave a fixed income, by two pragmatic sanctions, so that the money collected to accomplish this (the burial of the dead), would be paid to those working on this by the God-loving stewards.”

The additional changes of Justinian were justified based on the claim that the people of Constantinople were being charged extortionate sums of money for their funerals. The system therefore needed an overhaul, because funerals were supposed to be provided for free (or, if payment was required, for minimal expense):

the same is (permitted) of anything done to guard the corpse, or for preparing it, or anything to provide marble or clothing.” *Iustiniani digesta* (n.d.: 11.7.14) and Watson (1998: 351-352). The law attempted to offer a fair and just list of funeral expenses for all, but acknowledged this list was dependent on status. The same law indicated that the wishes of the deceased regarding their funeral did not need to be obeyed if they were too excessive.

¹²⁸ *Iustiniani novellae* (n.d.: 59).

*Plurimi plerumque adierunt nos dicentes non similiter causam procedere neque sine mercede fieri defunctorum exequias, sed exigi amare, et inveniri plurima foris nomina et corpora, quae etiam invitos exigunt lugentes et cogent dare non habentes. Haec omnia iustum iudicavimus competenti correctione digna facere.*¹²⁹

“Many of the people have approached us to complain that no equality is being given in this, nor is the burial of the dead happening free of charge, but (the expenses) are being collected with bitterness, and many find (the expenses) from family members the deceased left behind, who are compelled against their will and forced to pay what they do not have. As such, we have judged to make all these things just through proper correction.”

The typical funeral consisted of an *asceterium* (referring to the funeral procession), with eight chanting nuns and three acolytes:

*Non minus octo ascetriis seu canonicas esse quae ex unoquoque asceterio assumuntur, et tres acoluthos per singulum asceterium.*¹³⁰

“No less than eight female hermits or nuns shall be in each *asceterium*, and three acolytes for each *asceterium*.”

1,100 workshops were re-established by the *Novels*, and the revenues for each funerary worker listed with the instruction that, since they were provided with this money, nobody in Constantinople should need to pay them, unless they wished to purchase additional services that were not a part of the standard funeral package:

Oportet igitur supradicta mille centum ergasteria custodiri et deo amabilibus oeconomis et defensoribus semper sine tributis et sine deminutione ...

Recte nos trecentorum ergasteriorum crementum distribuimus huic parti, quatinus inculpabiliter quod hactenus datum est laborantibus circa funerum exequias deinceps detur, hoc est per singulum mensem quadringentos solidos dividendos decanis et acoluthis et ascetriis et canonicis secundum ...

*Si tamen aliquis voluerit competentium defuncto et exequias facientium ipse sponte cogente nullo et aliud asceterium unum vel duo aut etiam amplius assumere, hoc sit quidem eius munificentiae.*¹³¹

¹²⁹ *Iustiniani novellae* (n.d.: 59). Other problems that apparently plagued the system were imposters who impersonated funerary workers and unjust use of the tax loophole. Bond (2013: 151).

¹³⁰ *Iustiniani novellae* (n.d.: 59, chapter 4).

¹³¹ *Iustiniani novellae* (n.d.: 59, chapter 2 and chapter 4).

“Therefore, it is necessary for the said one thousand one hundred workshops to be preserved for the divine and loved stewards and defenders, always being without taxation and without deduction (from them) ...

“We have rightly assigned an increase of three hundred workshops, in order that the revenues which until now have been paid for those who labour on funerals of the dead are able hereafter to devote themselves, may be granted hereafter, this is to say, four hundred solidi divided every month among the deans and ascetics and ascetics and canons ...

“Yet if any of the mourners of the deceased freely wishes, without being compelled by another person, to have two *asceterium* or more, they may do this at their own expense.”

Payments could be added, for example if the procession was expected to travel a long distance, but the charges were expected to be small, to ensure that the funeral would not be too ostentatious an occasion:

*Sic nihil indefinitum erit, sed et mediocres sepulturas fieri volentes hac fruuntur dispositione et ad munificentiam respicientes non magis damnificabuntur, sed erunt cum mediocritate munifici.*¹³²

“So that nothing is unprovided for, those who desire to have moderate burials will enjoy this arrangement; and those who care for bountifulness will not be charged greatly, not being exhausted but provided moderate, generous service.”

1.4.2.2 *The Role of the Church*

While Justinian had made amendments to the funerary system to make it more effective, he did not amend the role of the church as the main provider of funerals for ordinary people or its involvement in the funeral trade. Because the clerics who worked in the funeral trade could receive tax and military service exemptions and work as clients for the local bishop, they had a new path to higher status.¹³³ This status, combined with the involvement that the church was permitted within the funeral trade through these laws, saw similar practices occurring in other cities.¹³⁴

¹³² *Iustiniani novellae* (n.d.: 59, chapter 6).

¹³³ Bond (2013: 150).

¹³⁴ Bond (2013: 150).

In Alexandria, the *parabolani* (sick-nurses), a supposedly charitable group who took instructions from the bishop, had a duty to care for the sick and provide burials to the dead, although by the early fifth century it was necessary to limit their power because the bishops were using them as personal gangs:

*Quia inter cetera Alexandrinae legationis inutilia hoc etiam decretis scriptum est, ut reverentissimus episcopus de Alexandrina civitate aliquas non exire, quod quidem terrore eorum, qui Parabalani ... Praeterea eos, qui Parabalani vocantur non plus quam quingentos esse praecipimus.*¹³⁵

“Because, among the other useless claims of the delegation in Alexandria, this was also written in their decrees, how the most reverent bishop should not allow citizens of Alexandria to leave, because of the terror of those called *Parabolani* ... Additionally, we instruct that the number of those who are called *Parabolani* shall not be more than five hundred.”

The *parabolani* were still working in the city in the late sixth or early seventh century, as a list of ecclesiastical offices records the *παραβαλανεῦσι* (“sick-nurses”) after the *λεκτικαριοίς* (“corpse-bearers”), who were responsible for carrying biers.¹³⁶ An inscription related to a sarcophagus in Complex 15 at Al-Bass in Tyre (second-sixth century) mentions *Παχῦ* (“Pachu”), describing him as one of the *λεκτικαρ(ίων)* (“corpse-bearers”); they were evidently operating in Tyre. Bishops could also take it upon themselves to provide funerals, such as Bishop Hypatios of Ephesos, who set a decree up in his church in 530 which stated that the church was required to provide funeral services for all the

¹³⁵ *Imperatoris Theodosii Codex: liber sextus decimus* (n.d.: 16.2.42). Bond (2013: 141). See also Martroye (1923: 275-285) on the *parabolani*.

¹³⁶ *P. Iand. 8 154* (n.d.). The number of titles for funerary workers decreased over the course of the fourth-eighth centuries, perhaps due to the simplification of the burial process as mummification became rarer and the use of pit burials became common in many places: O’Connell (2014b: 7).

Christian faithful of the city, and further that it had a duty to pay for the gravediggers and nuns who would sing psalms during the funeral procession.¹³⁷

Constantinople was therefore not the only urban area in which the church was directly overseeing funerals throughout the early Byzantine period, as ecclesiastical positions were also provided in other cities for those involved in the funeral trade. In both Constantinople and Alexandria, this does not appear to have been without corruption, but the demonstration of the role of the church and the desire to provide burials for all are clear.

The church's control over the funeral trade was not immediate in all locations and appears to have strengthened during the fourth-seventh centuries. While in some locations older cemeteries continued to be used without the presence of a cemetery church, in others new cemeteries associated with cemetery churches were used, or else churches were added to existing cemeteries like the funerary basilica at Kom al-Ahmar (Roman-Byzantine), which was built on top of an older Ptolemaic cemetery.

¹³⁷ *καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἡ ἀγιωτάτη ἡμῶν ἐκκλησία τῆς παναγίας ἐνδόξου θεοτόκου καὶ ἀειπαρθένου + Μαρίας καὶ τῆς τιμίας αὐτῶν ἐκφορᾶς προενόησεν καὶ τοὺς εἰς τοῦτο διακονουμένους εὐαγεῖς δεκανοὺς καὶ τὰς εὐλαβεστάτας κανονικὰς παραμυθεῖαν ἔχειν ἐκ τῶν ἑαυτῆς διετύπωσεν πραγμάτων, ὡς μηδενὶ περιληφθῆναι φιλαργυρίας Ἰουδαϊκῆς πρόφασιν· καὶ εἴ τις ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν ὑπὲρ ἐκκομιδῆς τι λάβοι παρά τινος {λαβοι} {πα} ἢ δῶ τιμι τῶν ἐκκομιζόντων {περι} ἢ περιφρονήσοι τῆς αὐτῶν τιμίας ἐκκομιδῆς ἢ τοιοῦτό τι γεγονὸς μαθὼν μὴ προσαγγείλη, πρῶτον μὲν ἴστω τὴν τοιαύτην ἀσέβειαν εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ τοῦ κυρίου σῶμα τολμήσας, ἔπειτα καὶ ἡμῶν καὶ πασῶν τῶν ἀγιωτάτων ἡμῶν ἐκκλησιῶν ἀλλότριος ἔσται + “And our holy church of the all-holy and glorious Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary has provided for their decent burial, and that the charitable members of the brotherhood carrying out this service (dekanoi) and the pious religious women (kanonikai) should receive compensation from its own revenue, so that there may be no pretext for Jewish greed left. And, if someone, from now onwards, receives anything from anyone for funerary services, or pays one of those serving at funerals, or neglects decent burial, or, having knowledge about such an event, does not report it, first let them know that they have dared such an impiety against the body of the Lord itself, and then they will be alien to both us and all our holy churches.” Samellas (2002: 259-260). Nowakowski and Rizos (2021).*

1.4.2.3 Funeral Prayers

The increased involvement of the church in funerals granted the inclusion of hymns, psalms, and funerary prayers. There are a small number of extant funerary prayers from our period which demonstrate the concepts that people attending a Christian funeral would have been exposed to in this way.

Two funerary prayers are found in the Egyptian Prayer Book of the Bishop Sarapion (fourth century). The first prayer is a commemorative prayer, which asks God for intercession on behalf of the dead and to grant them a place in the heavens. The second prayer was probably performed either before or during the funeral service itself. The prayer calls for God to grant the deceased person's soul rest in heaven, provide them with the afterlife of which they are worthy, forgive their sins, and prepare them for the day of their resurrection. It ends with a request for all those who loved the deceased person to find their grief is healed and that each, in their own time, may also be found worthy of a place in heaven:

Εύχή περὶ τεθνεώτος καὶ ἐκκομιζομένου

*Ὁ θεὸς ὁ ζωῆς καὶ θανάτου τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἔχων, ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευ-
μάτων καὶ δεσπότης πάσης σαρκός, ὁ θεὸς ὁ θανατῶν καὶ ζωογονῶν, ὁ
κατάγων εἰς πύλας ἄδου καὶ ἀνάγων, ὁ κτίζων πνεῦμα ἀνθρώπου ἐν αὐτῷ
καὶ παραλαμβάνων τῶν ἀγίων τὰς ψυχὰς καὶ ἀναπαύων· ὁ ἀλλοιῶν καὶ
μεταβάλλων καὶ μετασχηματίζων τὰ κτίσματά σου καθὼς δίκαιον καὶ
σύμφoron ἐστίν, μόνος αὐτὸς ἄφθαρτος καὶ ἀναλλοίωτος καὶ αἰώνιος ὢν·
δεόμεθά σου περὶ τῆς κοιμήσεως καὶ ἀναπαύσεως τοῦ δούλου σου τοῦδε ἢ
τῆς δούλης σου τῆσδε· τὴν ψυχὴν, τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἀνάπασσον ἐν τόποις
χλόης, ἐν ταμείοις ἀναπαύσεως μετὰ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ καὶ
πάντων τῶν ἀγίων σου, τὸ δὲ σῶμα ἀνάστησον ἐν ἡ ὥρισας ἡμέρα κατὰ
τὰς ἀψευδεῖς σου ἐπαγγελίας, ἵνα καὶ τὰς κατ' ἀξίαν αὐτῷ κληρονομίας*

*ἀποδώς ἐν ταῖς ἀγίαις σου νομαῖς. τῶν παραπτωμάτων αὐτοῦ καὶ
 ἀμαρτημάτων μὴ μνησθῆς, τῆν δὲ ἔξοδον αὐτοῦ εἰρηρικὴν καὶ εὐλογη-
 μένην εἶναι ποιήσον· τὰς λύπας τῶν διαφερόντων πνεύματι παρακλήσεως
 ἴασαι καὶ ἡμῖν πᾶσι τέλος ἀγαθὸν δώρησαι· διὰ τοῦ μονογενοῦς σου Ἰησοῦ
 Χριστοῦ, δι' οὗ σοὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος ἐν ἀγίῳ πνεύματι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας
 τῶν αἰώνων. ἀμήν.¹³⁸*

“Prayer for one who is dead and is being carried out.

“God, who has power over life and death, God of the spirits and master of all the material things, God, causing death and giving life, who bringing down to the doors of Hades and raising up, who creating the spirit of man in him, and accepting the souls of the saints, and bringing them to rest, who changing and altering and transforming your creatures as is right and correct, who alone yourself is incorruptible and unchangeable and eternal: we pray to you for the sleep and rest of this your male servant or this your female servant: give rest to their soul, their spirit, in green places, in chambers of rest with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all of your saints, and raise up their body on the day you have determined, by your promises which are free from deceit, in order to give to them an inheritance of which they are worthy in these holy places. Do not remember their sins and transgressions but make their departure peaceful and blessed.

Heal the grievances of their kinfolk with a comforting spirit and give all of us a good end, through your only son Jesus Christ, through whom to you is the glory and strength of the holy Spirit through the ages of the ages. Amen.”

The prayer references multiple aspects of Christian death belief: the resurrection, the forgiveness of sins, names of key religious figures, the power of God, and the saving or forgiveness of those who are yet to die. These are all themes which Christians would have been able to recognise and relate to their own burial practices, and in combination with popular stories such as saints' lives, indicate that those who attended church would not have been ignorant of these beliefs, even if they did not understand them in as much depth as elite church figures.

A prayer of John of Damascus (seventh-eighth century) shows how these trends continued in funerary prayers to the end of our period. John's prayer

¹³⁸ Johnson (1995: section 18, lines 1-17).

pays less attention to the grief and world of the living, instead emphasising the experience of the soul of the deceased person and their hope to enter paradise:

Ἰδιόμελα ἐν ἀκολουθία τοῦ ἐξοδιαστικοῦ
 Ποία τοῦ βίου τρυφή διαμένει λύπης ἀμέτοχος,
 Ποία δόξα ἔστηκεν ἐπὶ γῆς ἀμετάθετος;
 Πάντα σκιᾶς ἀσθενέστερα, πάντα ὀνείρων ἀπατηλότερα.
 Μία ῥοπή, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα θάνατος διαδέχεται.
 Ἄλλ' ἐν τῷ φωτὶ, Χριστέ, τοῦ προσώπου σου,
 Καὶ τῷ γλυκασμῷ τῆς ὠραιότητος,
 Ὅν ἐξελέξω, ἀνάπαυσον, ὦ; φιλάνθρωπος.
 Οἴμοι, τότε πόσα δακρύει, καὶ οὐχ ὑπάρχει ὁ ἐλεῶν αὐτήν.
 Πρὸς τοὺς ἀγγέλους τὰ ὄμματα ῥέπουσα, ἄπρακτα καθικετεύει.
 Πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τὰς χεῖρας ἐκτείνουσα, οὐκ ἔχει τὸν βοηθοῦντα.
 Διὸ, ἀγαπητοί μου ἀδελφοί, ἐννοήσαντες ἡμῶν τὸ βραχὺ τῆς ζωῆς,
 Τῷ μεταστάντι τὴν ἀνάπαυσιν παρὰ Χριστοῦ αἰτησώμεθα,
 Καὶ ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἡμῶν τὸ μέγα ἔλεος.
 Πάντα ματαιότης τὰ ἀνθρώπινα, ὅσα οὐχ ὑπάρχει μετὰ θάνατον,
 Οὐ παραμένει ὁ πλοῦτος, οὐ συνοδεύει ἡ δόξα.
 Ἐπελθὼν γὰρ ὁ θάνατος ταῦτα πάντα ἐξηφάνισται.
 Διὸ Χριστῷ τῷ ἀθανάτῳ βοήσωμεν·
 Τὸν μεταστάντα ἐξ ἡμῶν ἀνάπαυσον,
 Ἐνθα πάντων ἐστὶν εὐφραينوμένων ἡ κατοικία.
 Ποῦ ἐστὶν ἡ τοῦ κόσμου προσπάθεια;
 Ποῦ ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν προσκαίρων φαντασία;
 Ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ χρυσὸς καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος;
 Ποῦ ἐστὶν τῶν οἰκετῶν ἡ πλεημμύρα καὶ ὁ θόρυβος;
 Πάντα κόνις,
 Πάντα τέφρα,
 Πάντα σκιά.
 Ἀλλὰ δεῦτε, βοήσωμεν τῷ ἀθανάτῳ βασιλεῖ.
 Κύρις, τῶν αἰώνιων σου ἀγαθῶν ἀξίωσον τὸν μεταστάντα ἐξ ἡμῶν,

*Ἀναπαύων αὐτον ἐν τῇ ἀγήρῳ μακαριότητι.*¹³⁹

“What worldly luxury persists free from grief, what earthly hope stands unalterable? All things are weaker than shadows, all things are more deceptive than dreams. In one moment, all of this is superseded by death. But in the light of your countenance, Christ, and in the sweetness of your beauty, give rest to the one who you have chosen to die, loving mankind.

“Oh! At the moment (of death) how greatly the soul weeps, and nobody shows it pity. It turns its eyes upon angels and prays earnestly but in vain. It stretches out its hands to men and finds no help. Therefore, my beloved brothers, considering the shortness of our life, beseech and request rest from Christ, and for the great mercy of our souls. All the vanity of human affairs is not as great as that which begins at death, treasures do not last forever, hope does not travel with us. For when death arrives everything is revealed.

“Therefore, immortal Christ, we cry for help: remove us from our rest, (to) the place where everything will be happy. Where is the attachment to the world? Where is the appeal of temporary things? Where is the gold and the silver? Where is the multitude of servants and confusion? All is dust, all is ashes, all is shadow. But come, let us cry out to the immortal king: Lord, think worthy of your eternal blessings the one who has left us, give them rest in your ageless bliss.”

The difference in focus between this prayer and the Sarapion prayer may be related to the former’s role as a bishop and John’s position as a priest and monk. While the prayers of Sarapion were aimed at general audiences, that of John of Damascus may have been more relevant to his fellow monks or other clergy. What they share is the concept that death, while appearing at first glance to be a terrible thing, is necessary for the blessings that are promised for Christians in a future immortal life.

1.4.3 The Eucharist and Funeral Feasts

The eucharist appears to have been practiced during Christian funerals from an early period. Evidence for this practice is largely seen through the institution of the church, but it seems to have been an attempt to replace the traditional practice of feasting at the graveside;¹⁴⁰ both were likely practiced simultaneously. The *Apostolic Constitutions* had permitted attending

¹³⁹ Migne (1864: column 1368, lines 13-49 and column 1369, lines 1-3).

¹⁴⁰ Mitchell (1990: 32).

commemorative feasts so long as Christians remained sober and self-controlled:

*Ἐν δὲ ταῖς μνείαις αὐτῶν καλούμενοι μετὰ εὐταξίας
ἐστιᾶσθε καὶ φόβου Θεοῦ, ὡς δυνάμενοι καὶ πρεσβεύειν ὑπὲρ
αὐτῶν τῶν μεταστάντων. Πρεσβύτεροι γὰρ καὶ διάκονοι
Χριστοῦ ὑπάρχοντες, νήφειν ὀφείλετε πάντοτε καὶ πρὸς
ἑαυτοὺς καὶ πρὸς ἑτέρους, ἵνα δύνησθε τοὺς ἀτακτοῦντας
νουθετεῖν.¹⁴¹*

“When you are invited to their memorials, feast with good order and the fear of God, as to be able to intercede on behalf of those who have departed. For, being presbyters and deacons of Christ, you ought to always be sober among yourself and among others, in order that you are able to counsel those who behave inappropriately.”

However, the Council of Carthage criticised heathen feasts that encouraged people (especially women) to behave inappropriately,¹⁴² and the Council of Trullo outright forbade love-feasts, which may have been held at funerals:

*Ὅτι οὐ δεῖ ἐν τοῖς κυριακοῖς ἢ ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τὰς λεγομένας ἀγάπας ποιεῖν καὶ
ἐνδον ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ ἐσθίειν καὶ ἀκκούβιτα στρωννύειν· οἱ δὲ τοῦτο ποιεῖν τολμῶντες,
ἢ παυσάσθωσαν ἢ ἀφοριζέσθωσαν.¹⁴³*

“That you will not hold, on the Lord’s Day or in churches, those things called love-feasts (*agape*), and will not eat within the house, and will not distribute dining couches; and if anyone dares to do this, either they will cease or be excommunicated.”

¹⁴¹ Metzger (1987: book 8, chapter 44, lines 1-6).

¹⁴² *Ita ut nunc a paganis Christiani ad haec celebranda cogantur ... saltationes sceleratissimas per vicos alque plateas exercent: ut matronalis honor, et innumerabilium feminarum pudor, devote venientium ad sacratissimum diem, injuriis lascivientibus appetatur: ut etiam ipsius sanctae religionis pene fugiatur accessus.* “So that now Christians are forced by pagans to celebrate these ... they dance sinfully, running through villages and streets, so that matronal honour, and the modesty of innumerable women who have come out devotedly for this holy day, are assailed by lascivious injuries, so that even approach to the sacred religion itself is nearly fled from.” Migne (1863c: column 202, lines 4-5, 12-17). Although this is not strictly a reference to funerary feasting, the practice was probably implied.

¹⁴³ Flogaus et al. (2013: canon 74).

Funeral feasting was not the only concern of these councils. It was apparently necessary to specify that the eucharist was not to be given to the dead, as both the Council of Carthage and the Council of Trullo repeated the same admonition:

*Μηδεις τοις σώμασι τῶν τελευτησάντων τῆς εὐχα-
ριστίας μεταδιδότω. Γέγραπται γάρ· Αὐβετε,
φάγετε· τὰ δὲ τῶν νεκρῶν σώματα οὐδε λαβεῖν
δύναται, οὐδε φαγεῖν.¹⁴⁴*

“No one may give the eucharist to the bodies of the dead, for it is written: ‘take, eat’, but the bodies of the dead can neither take nor eat.”

The ban does not prove that the dead were being offered the eucharist during the funeral service, but the possibility of this was recognised and considered dangerous.

It is difficult to find clear evidence for the practice of the eucharist in burials themselves. Any offerings, if it was being practiced by the open grave, are likely to have disappeared over time. Evidence includes the possible burnt remains of a eucharistic offering in a bowl from Grave 9 at site D/7 in the Dakhleh Oasis (third-fourth century),¹⁴⁵ but this is a rare case and cannot demonstrate anything more than the possibility of individual, occasional offerings – much like the

¹⁴⁴ Migne (1863b: column 792, lines 45-48) for the Council of Trullo. The Council of Carthage is almost identical: *Item placuit ut corporibus defunctorum eucharistia non detur; scriptum est enim: Accipite, et edite, cadavera autem nec accipere possunt, nec edere.* “Also, it seems right that the eucharist should not be given to the bodies of the dead, for it is written: ‘take and eat’, but the bodies of the dead can neither take nor eat.” Migne (1863c: column 189, lines 59-60 and column 190, lines 1-2). Matthew 26:26 “Take, eat; this is my body”.

¹⁴⁵ Bowen (2003a: 175).

baptistery in Antinoopolis, a small sample of people performing an unacceptable rite.

We may, however, use other evidence to indicate the possible performance of the eucharist (for the living). Chapels with spaces potentially for the bringing of portable altars have been found in Egypt at Oxyrhynchos (Byzantine) and el-Bagawat (fourth-fifth century);¹⁴⁶ some chapels could however be built with a fixed altar.¹⁴⁷ These private chapels would have been designed with the performance of a liturgy in mind.

Plates, chalices, liturgical fans, and incense burners could offer another form of evidence for the practice of the eucharist,¹⁴⁸ but as these were not considered unclean by Christians, they were likely reused for additional services rather than left behind in graves. The appendix does not contain a single example of a collection of eucharistic vessels in a tomb, and although incense burners have been found from caves in combination with glass and pottery vessels, it cannot be certain that these were used together for the eucharist during the funeral. Instead, the burners may have been used as part of a sensory experience during the funeral or on later visits to the tomb (Section 5.3.2.2). Vessels may also, when found inside sealed burials, represent the deceased person symbolically taking part in a feast with mourners, or, when found on top of or next to them, have played a role in a commemorative feast.

¹⁴⁶ Grossman (2002: 338, 340).

¹⁴⁷ Grossman (2002: 12-13).

¹⁴⁸ For example, the sixth century Syrian Riha Hoard, which contained a paten (dish), chalice, and fan. The incense burner was absent but has been found in other hoards. Hunter-Crawley (2013: 163-169).

1.5 Commemoration of the Dead

The commemoration of the dead occurred after the tomb had been sealed. We have limited extant sources from a Jewish perspective discussing actions performed at the graveside; their ambiguity and the general focus on death, preparing the body, and burial have, in combination with the concept of corpse impurity, led to the belief that Jewish mourners avoided burial spaces.¹⁴⁹

Archaeological evidence indicates that this is not necessarily the case: for example, commemorative graffiti has been extensively found in the catacombs at Beth She'arim (second-fifth century) (Section 6a.4.2).

Similar to funeral practices, commemoration remained dependent on locality and traditional forms of commemoration which held important connections to memory, ritual, culture, experience, and emotion. The adoption of openly Christian practices required both time and exposure. The adoption of openly Christian practices required both time and exposure. The traditional antique days for commemorating the dead were on the third, ninth, and thirtieth days after death; for Byzantines, this became the third, ninth, and fortieth days.¹⁵⁰

The *Apostolic Constitutions* connected these days to the lamentation of Moses.

Christians were instructed to celebrate with psalms, alms, and prayers:

*Ἐπιτελείσθω δὲ τρίτα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἐν ψαλμοῖς
καὶ προσευχαῖς διὰ τὸν διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν ἐγερθέντα,
καὶ ἔνατα εἰς ὑπόμνησιν τῶν περιόντων καὶ τῶν κεκοιμη-
μένων, καὶ τριακοστὰ κατὰ τὸν παλαιὸν τύπον· Μωϋσῆν
γὰρ οὕτως ὁ λαὸς ἐπένησεν, καὶ ἐνιαύσια ὑπὲρ μνείας*

¹⁴⁹ Stern (2017: 95, 98-99). Rabbinic writings provided some information on the mortuary behaviours of Jewish people, but these were often vague.

¹⁵⁰ Alexiou (2002: 7, 32); Marinis (2017: 93-94).

αὐτοῦ. Καὶ διδόσθω ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτοῦ πένθησιν
εἰς ἀνάμνησιν αὐτοῦ.¹⁵¹

“Concerning the third (day) of those who have fallen asleep, perform psalms and prayers, on account of He who was risen on the third day, and on the ninth (day) the remembrance of those who are living and those who have fallen asleep, and the thirtieth (day) according to the ancient model: for thus the people mourned Moses, and the anniversary of his memory. And give to the poor in commemoration of him.”

Christians were still expected to perform commemorative actions, as their non-Christian ancestors had done, although the church expected a greater focus on charity than traditional mourning practices and maintained the attention of Christians on the church and its teachings. Yet traditional practices did not end in our period, or rather, they were continued by some communities.

In this final section on death beliefs, I discuss the textual evidence on commemoration and mourning. Archaeological evidence for the commemoration of the dead can be found in Sections 2.5.1 and 5.3.2.

1.5.1 Non-Christian Mourning and Commemoration

While the *Apostolic Constitutions* acknowledged the value of adopting traditional practices and encouraging them to fit a more Christian perspective – even if these practices were not necessarily desirable – others were less accepting of what they considered to be unchristian methods of mourning.

One of the issues that concerned early church fathers was whether laypeople’s approach to mourning demonstrated a belief in the promise of resurrection.

While excessive public grieving was generally frowned upon, these complaints were especially directed towards women. As John Chrysostom said:

¹⁵¹ Metzger (1987: book 8, chapter 42).

Ψυχή γὰρ οὐδὲν περὶ ἀναστάσεως ἐπισταμένη,
 ἀλλὰ τὸν θάνατον τοῦτον θάνατον εἶναι νομίζουσα,
 εἰκότως ὡς περὶ ἀπολωλότων κόπτεται καὶ θρηνεῖ
 καὶ ἀφορήτως πενθεῖ· σὺ δὲ ὁ προσδοκῶν ἀνάστασιν,
 τίνος ἔνεκεν ὀδύρη; Ἄρα τῶν μὴ ἐχόντων ἐλπίδα
 ἐστὶ τὸ ὀδύρεσθαι. Ἀκούσατε τῶν γυναικῶν ὅσαι
 φιλόθρηνοι, ὅσαι πρὸς τὰ πένθη ἀφορήτως φέρεσθε,
 ὅτι τὰ τῶν ἐθνικῶν πράττετε. Εἰ δὲ τὸ ἀλγεῖν ἐπὶ
 τοῖς ἀπελθοῦσιν ἐθνικῶν, τὸ κατακόπτεσθαι καὶ
 καταξάινειν παρειάς, τίνων ἄρα ἐστὶν, εἶπέ μοι; Τί-
 νος ἔνεκεν θρηνεῖς, εἰ πιστεύεις ὅτι ἀναστήσεται,
 ὅτι οὐκ ἀπόλωλεν, ὅτι ὕπνος καὶ κοίμησις τὸ πρᾶγμα
 ἐστὶ;¹⁵²

“For a soul that understands nothing concerning the resurrection, but thinks that this death is (truly) death, naturally concerning those who are lost it beats its breast and grieves and unendurably mourns. But you, who expects the resurrection, on what account do you mourn? For to mourn is for those who have no hope. Hear, you women, many of you are given to lamentations, many of you are moved to mourning unendurably, that you behave as heathens. But if to grieve for the departed (belongs to) the heathens, tell me who it is who beats the breast and tears the cheeks? On what account do you grieve, if you believe that this person will be resurrected, that they have not perished, that this matter is a slumber and sleep in death?”

This emotional response to death was, at least publicly, an undesirable sight that showed a lack of faith. A similar argument was used by Gregory of Nazianzus in his argument against feasts to commemorate martyrs, which he considered akin to the worship of demons (compare to the *Apostolic Constitutions*' tolerance of funeral feasting provided Christians were sober, Section 1.4.3):

Δαίμοσιν εἰλαπίναζον, ὅσοις τὸ πάροιθε μεμήλει
 δαίμοσιν ἦρα φέρειν, οὐ καθαρὰς θαλίας.
 τούτου χριστιανοὶ λύσιν εὕρομεν· ἀθλοφόροισι
 στησάμεθ' ἡμετέροις πνευματικὰς συνόδους.

¹⁵² Migne (1860: column 430, lines 52-60 and column 431, lines 1-4).

νῦν δέ τι τάρβος ἔχει με· ἀκούσατε, οἱ φιλόκωμοι·

*πρὸς τοὺς δαιμονικοὺς αὐτομολεῖτε τύπους.*¹⁵³

“Honouring demons, those who formerly wished to gain the favour of demons celebrated impure banquets. We Christians found a solution for this, believing firmly in our spiritual gatherings for our martyrs. But now some terror grips me. Listen to me, you who are fond of feasting and dancing: you desert (us) for demonic rites.”

Perhaps ordinary Christians did not consider the way they mourned and commemorated the dead to be contradictory to their own beliefs.¹⁵⁴ Practices such as commemorative feasting were, much like funeral feasting, an integral part of mourning and interacting with the recently deceased person, and could have easily been carried out alongside more Christian practices, such as the giving of alms.¹⁵⁵

1.5.2 Christian Mourning and Commemoration

Alternatives to more traditional commemorative practices were available to Christians. The most accessible may have been those that were directly organised by or related to church services; in the same way that many would have heard the stories of the saints and gained their knowledge of Christian death belief through church services, so too may commemorative practices have been adopted in this way.

¹⁵³ Beckby (1965: epigram 175). Feasting at martyr graves was also criticised in epigrams 166-169.

¹⁵⁴ Jensen (2008: 120).

¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, commemorative feasts were undergoing or had already undergone transformations that may have encouraged the practice to become more acceptably Christian. For example, third century North Africa saw a major change in commemorative feasting when the practice of sacrificing to the dead was replaced by a greater focus on the funeral banquet. The same would appear to be true to our study, based on the general lack of animal bones and sacrificial altars found in the appendix. See Rebillard (2015: 269).

Commemorative prayers¹⁵⁶ could have been heard during funerals or special church services designed to commemorate the dead. The will of Flavius Phoibammon mentioned a list of names of the deceased in a monastery, which may have been read out loud at such a service (Section 1.2.2.1). Examples of commemorative prayers include one from the book of Bishop Sarapion:

*Παρακαλοῦμεν δὲ καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων τῶν κεκοιμημένων,
ᾧν ἔστιν καὶ ἡ ἀνάμνησις.
μετὰ τὴν ὑποβολὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων·
ἀγίασον τὰς ψυχὰς ταύτας, σὺ γὰρ πάσας γινώσκεις· ἀγίασον πάσας
τὰς ἐν κυρίῳ κοιμηθείσας καὶ συγκαταρίθμησον πάσαις ταῖς ἀγίαις σου
δυνάμεσιν καὶ δὸς αὐτοῖς τόπον καὶ μονὴν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ σου.¹⁵⁷*

“We also pray for all those who have fallen asleep, whom we commemorate.”

(Their names given)

“After the remembrance of these names:

“Sanctify the souls of these people, for you know everything. Sanctify all of those who fell asleep in the Lord and include all of them in your holy powers and grant them a place and dwelling in your kingdom.”

The anaphora of John Chrysostom also provides a prayer commemorating the dead, which is performed immediately following the *epiclesis* (calling for the Holy Spirit to descend) and immediately before a prayer to the Virgin, who is to be especially remembered:

*Ἔτι προσφερόμεν σοι τὴν λογικὴν ταύτην λατρείαν ὑπὲρ
τῶν ἐν πίστει ἀναπαυσασμένων πατέρων, πατριαρχῶν, προφητῶν, ἀπο-*

¹⁵⁶ Jewish mourners may also have had a commemorative prayer in the form of the Mourner’s Kaddish, but the history of the prayer and its origins are unclear. The Mourner’s Kaddish was to be recited by those grieving a death during the full mourning period, and thereafter on the anniversary of the death; however, the earliest examples of its association with mourning are later than the seventh century. The benefit of the prayer came from its recitation by a child, which reflected well on their parents and thus could alter the significance of the parents’ lives. See Luban (1962: 30-31).

¹⁵⁷ Johnson (1995: section 1, lines 54-58).

*στόλων, κηρύκων, εὐαγγελιστῶν, μαρτύρων, ὁμολογητῶν, ἐγκρατεῶ-
των, καὶ παντὸς δικαίου ἐν πίστει τετελειωμένου.*¹⁵⁸

“Further, we offer to you this spiritual sacrifice on behalf of those who have been given rest in the faith: the fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, preachers, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, ascetics, and all the just who brought to perfection in faith.”

The two prayers are different in that the prayer of Sarapion includes names, but the Chrysostom prayer refers to specific groups of venerable or leading Christian figures. In both cases, the prayers are short, and the commemoration is swiftly followed by a return to the contemplation of key concepts related to Christian death.

The purpose of these prayers and other commemorative activities was to offer the deceased person some form of benefit or relief in the afterlife, while they awaited the final judgement (see the *προσφορὰ*, Section 1.2.2.2).¹⁵⁹ According to the *Apostolic Constitutions*, these prayers, alms, and other forms of commemorations could only benefit Christians:

*Ταῦτα δὲ περὶ εὐσεβῶν λέγομεν· περὶ γὰρ ἀσεβῶν
ἐὰν τὰ τοῦ κόσμου δῶς πένησιν, οὐδὲν ὀνήσεις αὐτόν. Ὅτι
γὰρ περιόντι ἐχθρὸν ἦν τὸ θεῖον, δῆλον ὅτι καὶ μεταστάντι·
οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἀδικία παρ’ αὐτῷ. Δίκαιος γὰρ ὁ
Κύριος καὶ δικαιοσύνας ἠγάπησεν. Καί· Ἴδου ἄνθρωπος
καὶ τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ.*¹⁶⁰

“We say these things concerning the pious: concerning the ungodly, if you give the world to the poor, you will not benefit them. For to whom the deity was an enemy while alive, it is clear that this will also be when they are dead. For there is no injustice with Him. For the Lord is just and he had loved righteousness. And: behold the man and his work.”

¹⁵⁸ Parenti and Velkovska (2011: 36, lines 1-4).

¹⁵⁹ Grossman (2002: 130-131).

¹⁶⁰ Metzger (1987: book 8, chapter 43).

The dead could also receive benefit from the location of their burials, with some church burials indicating the desire to be buried in a prominent and privileged position which may have been thought to provide them additional benefit through location or visibility (Section 2.6). It is noteworthy, however, that the concept of burial within a church was criticised by some early church leaders. While western figures such as Augustine¹⁶¹ and Maximus of Turin¹⁶² expressed

¹⁶¹ Augustine discussed how *ad sanctos* burial offered the soul of the deceased person some kind of benefit in a letter to another bishop who had asked him about this very subject. Augustine considered little benefit beyond the enhancement of actions performed by the living on the dead person's behalf. *Quae cum ita sint, non existimemus ad mortuos, pro quibus curam gerimus, pervenire, nisi quod pro eis sive altaris sive orationum sive elemosynarum sacrificiis sollemniter supplicamus, quamvis non pro quibus fiunt omnibus prosint, sed eis tantum quibus dum uiuunt comparatur, ut prosint. sed quia non discernimus, qui sint, oportet ea pro regeneratis omnibus facere, ut nullus eorum praetermittatur, ad quos haec beneficia possint et debeant peruenire. Melius enim supererunt ista eis, quibus nec obsunt nec prosunt, quam eis deerunt, quibus prosunt. corpori autem humando quidquid inpenditur, non est praesidium salutis, sed humanitatis officium secundum affectum, quo nemo umquam carnem suam odio habet. quod uero quisque apud memorias martyrum sepelitur, hoc tantum mihi uidetur prodesse defuncto, ut commendans eum etiam martyrum patrocinio affectus pro illo supplicationis augeatur.* "Since this is so, we should not think that those who are dead, for whom we care, are reached by anything except our solemn sacrifices, by altar or prayer or alms. However, these things do not happen to benefit all, but those who prepared for the benefit while they were alive. But, because we cannot discern who these people are, it is right to do them for everyone who has been reborn, so that none are overlooked who can and should receive these benefits. For it is better to do these things uselessly for those who will not be helped or hindered, than to not do them for those who they could benefit. But whatever is spent on the burial of the body does not assist its salvation, but it is a duty of human kindness according to feeling by which 'no man ever hates his own flesh'. But for each person buried at the memorials of the martyrs, this seems to me to benefit the dead person, in as much as committing them also to the martyr's patronage increases the feeling of supplication for them." Augustine (2011).

¹⁶² Maximus of Turin believed that being buried *ad sanctos* was powerful enough that it allowed a person to avoid hell, and that this could be achieved through the Christian community. *Cuncti igitur martyres deuotissime percolendi sunt, sed specialiter hi uenerandi sunt a nobis quorum reliquias possidemus. Illi enim nos orationibus adiuuant, isti etiam adiuuant passione. Cum his autem nobis familiaritas quaedam est; semper enim nobiscum sunt nobiscum morantur, hoc est et in corpore nos uiuentes custodiunt, et de corpore recedentes excipiunt ... Cum sanctis ergo martyribus quiescentes euadimus inferni tenebras si non propriis meritis at tamen consortii sanctitate.* "Therefore, all the martyrs are to be very devoutly venerated, but those whose relics we possess are to be especially venerated by us. For the former aid us by their prayers, the latter also aid us by their suffering. Among them there is a certain familiarity with us: for they are always with us, they stay with us. And when we are living in the body they protect us, and when we leave the body they receive us ... Therefore, resting with the holy martyrs, we escape the darkness of the shades below (hell), not by our own merit but nevertheless by sharing (their) holiness." Trzeciak (2021).

that there were benefits to being buried close to saints and martyrs (*ad sanctos*), figures such as John Chrysostom were opposed to the practice:

*Εἴ τις ἔνθα ἐκάθευδες καὶ ἐδείπνεις, κατώρυξε σῶμα νεκρὸν, τί οὐκ ἂν ἐποίησας; σὺ δὲ ψυχὴν νεκρὰν κατορύπτεις, οὐκ ἔνθα ἀριστοποιῆ, οὐδὲ ἔνθα καθεύδεις, ἀλλ' ἐν τοῖς μέλεσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ οὐ δέδοικας μὴ μυρίοι κατενεχθῶσιν ἄνωθεν ἐπὶ τὴν σὴν κεφαλὴν σκηπτοὶ καὶ κεραυνοί;*¹⁶³

“If anyone, where you slept and ate, had buried a dead body, what would you not have done? And you are burying a dead soul, not where you dine, nor where you sleep, but in the members of Christ. Are you not afraid that innumerable thunderbolts and lightnings will strike from above upon your head?”

Chrysostom’s criticism is concerned with the act of burial in a sacred place, not any possible benefit from it. Yet the concept of praying over the tomb of a deceased person to give them a favourable chance during the judgement, for which a visible and accessible burial location would be beneficial, persisted within later Byzantium, and remained associated with personal prayers, monastic rites, requests to monasteries, and the eucharist.¹⁶⁴

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has covered aspects of Christian ideology surrounding death, burial, and the funeral that likely affected the way ordinary people buried their dead. By thinking carefully about how practices may have been replicated, transformed, and accepted alongside other beliefs (whether the church approved of them or not), we can better interpret both evidence that fits within this ideology and that which diverges from it. We also see the pressing concerns of ordinary people when they dealt with death – chiefly focused around needs for the afterlife – and how some adapted their burial practices to

¹⁶³ Migne (1862a: column 676, lines 31-36).

¹⁶⁴ Brooks (2010).

alleviate these fears, both in officially accepted (commemorative prayers) and unaccepted (baptism for the dead) ways.

The fundamental difference that distinguished the Christian approach to the dead from previous burial traditions – one that was occurring across the Mediterranean – was in the treatment of the corpse as a non-pollutant, which, in combination with growing interest in the cult of saints, permitted Christians to come into contact with the remains of venerated individuals and their tombs. At the same time, the church was confirming its control over the funeral trade, placing it in a prime position to influence visitors to popular pilgrim sites and funeral attendants to adopt or at least accept a more Christianised version of burial. At the local level, meanwhile, the appearance of churches could do much the same, by influencing through funeral services and control of cemeteries. This took time, and it was very possible for certain people, especially those in elite positions, to establish special burial rites for themselves or their family that were both intricate and expensive – either as a memorial or a way to ensure the salvation of their soul.

A variety of popular beliefs and practices from antiquity survived and continued to be used during this period. The church could accept, adapt, or refute these. Due to the significance of burial practices and mourning both socially and culturally, it was often easier to adapt old ideas that were embedded within the population and Christianise them, rather than remove them entirely. This was not without risk, as the complaints of church fathers on burial and mourning practices demonstrate. Yet we also see that some teachings may have been more popular or easier to accept, for example the approach to bodies through

the cult of the saints. While the ordinary Christian may not have understood these instructions in the nuanced way of elites, they were nonetheless exposed to the most important and fundamental death beliefs in church services, and many likely had a strong understanding of Christian death belief.

Burial trends were not universal. Different communities had different beliefs, such as the Jewish versus Christian approaches to the corpse. Despite this, however, there are certain common trends which we may consider 'burial trends' – rather than Christian or Jewish trends – of the Byzantine period.

Perfumes or incense, feasting, preparation of the body, and tomb type did not require association with a particular religion and may have been influenced by what was happening in the local area or desired by elites. Changes in trends were not merely a result of religious influence, despite the church's important role in urban areas. The social, cultural, and economic needs of the living affected the treatment of the dead, which the church may have been reacting to as much as, if not more than, it was promoting its own version of burial rites.

CHAPTER 2: BURIALS AND CEMETERIES

2.1 Introduction

Following the discussion of funerals and burial based on textual evidence, this chapter introduces burials and cemeteries of the early Byzantine period using the archaeological data from the appendix. It focuses on the archaeological data obtained from cemetery excavations. The examination of this archaeological data contributes to current debate by providing an overview of general trends occurring in burials at this time, which has not been attempted on such a wide scale before. This overview will permit further study into burial of the general population of the Byzantine Near East.

Section 2.2 discusses the data on tomb type, cemetery location, and tomb orientation. This is the first large-scale study that has been attempted on tombs of the Byzantine Near East, and thus the first dataset. I present the most common tomb types in the appendix, with a comparison between those that were used no later than the fourth century and those constructed or in use from the fourth century onwards, to show the continued popularity of older tomb types in this period. This indicates a general lack of change within the provinces studied, indicating that there was no significant shift in the type of burials used by ordinary Christians compared to their predecessors.

Section 2.3 discusses tomb construction. Important concerns during the process of tomb construction were the natural landscape, built environment, local resources, visibility, skills of the craftsperson, and socio-economic status, because each of these could impact the options available at local level. The

possibility of disturbance or looting is considered in Section 2.4. Section 2.5 follows by discussing cemeteries, their organisation and layout, and the concerns of their users.

Section 2.6 examines 'elite' burials in churches and monasteries. It is necessary to distinguish burials in designated cemetery areas outside the boundaries of settlement areas (extramural) from those within buildings such as churches and monasteries (intramural). The act of burying an individual within a space that was usually reserved for the living was deliberate and indicates a special status or inclusion within a special community of people. Finally, Section 2.7 explores local practices, with an examination of burial types in each province, which allows a discussion of each area in more detail and for any similarities or differences to be identified and examined. By examining the provinces individually through the data and with examples from each province, I identify similarities and differences in burial practices that may relate to local access to resources, the landscape, how identity and status were expressed, community, family or group bonds, and religious beliefs.

I conclude that the cemeteries and tombs in the appendix represent the various primary concerns of their users. These concerns were mainly focused on the local environment, both natural and physical, and access to resources, to determine burial type and location. I further argue that, if we ignore church and monastic burials, which were a new way of indicating status for Christians, there are virtually no examples within this study of a site where a population abandoned an old cemetery and created a new one based on their conversion to Christianity alone. The primary focus of the cemetery was still to provide a

practical service and the decisions surrounding burial location, type, and visibility did not undergo any significant changes.

2.2 Archaeological Data

The basic archaeological data on the cemeteries and tombs from the appendix is examined here, to establish the foundation for further discussion. Tomb type, cemetery location (in relation to spaces for the living and the dead), and tomb orientation (in relation to Christian burial) are discussed. These are the primary pieces of architectural information that archaeologists discuss in relation to tombs, so it is essential to establish their frequency to consider common burial trends. The contents of tombs are discussed in future chapters.¹⁶⁵

2.2.1 Tomb Type

Tomb type varies by province and custom. It is important to establish the most common types of tombs in each area first, to understand which types were more frequently used and in which areas. To my knowledge, the data on tombs of our period has not been examined in this way before.

The total number of burials surveyed in the appendix is 9,205 and this figure includes individual burials in tombs, such as loculi and arcosolia burials in rock-cut tombs. For this discussion, I do not include the burials within rock-cut tombs, catacombs, or hypogea (etc.) individually, but categorise them under the enclosed burial space of the tomb chamber. This is to avoid both the internal burials and the whole chamber tomb being counted, which would create multiple entries for the same tomb. This results in 8,779 tombs, of which 920

¹⁶⁵ Human remains are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 and grave objects in Chapter 5.

are from Arabia, 5,308 from Egypt, 1,615 from Palaestina, and 964 from Syria or Phoenice.¹⁶⁶ Of these, there are 1,210 tombs (13.8%) with unknown or uncertain tomb types. Note that, while Egypt has a greater number of tombs, the majority of these have been published under the description of a general cemetery, rather than a description of each tomb individually.

These figures represent an absolute minimum (see Introduction) number of tombs which have been either excavated or reported on in archaeological reports. The actual number of tombs from the cemeteries examined in this thesis is much higher, because of cases where an accurate number of tombs is unknown or where only a sample of a much larger cemetery has been examined (for example, Phaeno, Section 2.7.3.3).

Table 2.1: Most common tomb types by province (8,779 tombs).

Tomb Type	Arabia	Egypt	Palaestina	Syria and Phoenice	Total	% of Total Graves
Pit grave	35	3,888	384	64	4,371	49.79%
Shaft grave	720	14	85	3	822	9.4%
Rock-cut tomb	65	13	510	51	611	7.0%
Built tomb¹⁶⁷	14	299	26	159	498	5.7%
Cist grave	29	1	379	4	413	4.7%
Hypogeum¹⁶⁸	9	43	70	95	217	2.5%
Total	920	5,308	1,615	968	6,925	78.9%

¹⁶⁶ See Section 2.7.4 on why Syria and Phoenice are considered together within this thesis.

¹⁶⁷ Category includes tombs classed as built tombs (170), chapels (275), dromos tombs (1), mausolea (41), polyandria (9), and tower tombs (2).

¹⁶⁸ Category includes tombs classed as catacombs (33), crypts (21), and hypogea (163).

Table 2.1 shows the most common tomb types in the appendix.¹⁶⁹ The dominant type is pit graves. 3,888 (89.0%) of pit graves are from Egypt; without these, there would only be 483 pit graves. Shaft graves are the second most common type, almost entirely coming from Arabia, followed by rock-cut tombs, which are most common in Palaestina. Built tombs, mostly from Egypt and Phoenice, and cist graves are also well-represented, the latter focused in Palaestina. Hypogea are also fairly common, and are more evenly spread among Egypt, Palaestina, and Syria and Phoenice. Overall, these six types represent 78.9% of tombs in the appendix.

Egyptian burials are frequently simple pit graves, with 73.3% of all Egyptian burials in the appendix classed as pit graves. In some cemeteries such as Qarara (fourth-ninth century) the total number of graves excavated is unclear,¹⁷⁰ so the number of pit graves should be understood as significantly higher. The dominance of pit graves and burials from Egypt in general must be understood as a reflection of the number and size of excavations that have been carried out in Egypt from the 19th century onwards, resulting in large amounts of data from the provinces of Thebais and Arcadia (Section 2.7.2). The natural geology of Egypt has also undoubtedly played a role in the choice of tomb types, with

¹⁶⁹ Table 2.1 does not include individual burials within tombs, for example individual *arcosolia/loculi* burials within rock-cut and built tombs. Numbers may not add up because some tombs are counted twice, in both Palaestina and Phoenice, as they may be from either province.

¹⁷⁰ The focus of the German 1913-1924 excavations was on finding papyri and other grave objects, so tombs were not individually published and were only occasionally mentioned in the published discussion of the most significant finds. Tombs had also been discovered by two English explorers in 1903, who again only cared for papyri and were unsuccessful in their search. Excavations in Qarara have recently been renewed by the University of Tübingen. Huber (2018a: 547).

settlements and cemeteries focused on the Nile and Oases, where large desert spaces would have been available for the construction of pit graves.

The cists in Palaestina are concentrated in Palaestina Prima (322, or 85.0% of cists in Palaestina). Palaestina Prima is the most urbanized region of Palaestina, and therefore the region where the most ancient tombs have been discovered (usually during construction work) and excavated. Rock-cut tombs, on the other hand, are more widely dispersed between Palaestina Prima and Secunda, and there are unknown numbers of rock-cut tombs that have not been excavated or published.¹⁷¹ The shaft graves are also mostly from Palaestina Prima and Secunda. It is noteworthy that most of the tombs excavated in Palaestina were from Palaestina Prima, and therefore this province is better represented than the others. Palaestina Tertia seems to show somewhat different burial trends (Section 2.7.3.3).

The most common type of tomb that has been identified in excavations in Arabia is shaft tombs (720, or 78.3% of tombs in Arabia). After this, the most commonly identified types are rock-cut tombs (65, or 7.0%) and pit graves (35, or 3.8%). Syria and Phoenice are somewhat different from the other areas. There are 521 tombs inside 36 large funerary enclosures at the Al-Bass cemetery in Tyre (first century BCE-seventh century), mostly built tombs and sarcophagi, which represent 57.8% of the tombs from these provinces. If we remove Al-Bass and examine the remaining 407 tombs, there are 110

¹⁷¹ For example, surveys have found rock-cut chamber tombs around Apollonia, some of which have been damaged through quarrying or building work, while others have simply not been excavated. These tombs are sometimes dated by archaeologists based on the finds from a small number of excavated tombs nearby. Tal (1995: 115-116).

sarcophagi (27.0% of tombs from Phoenice/Syria), 95 hypogea (23.3%), and 64 pit graves (15.7%).

2.2.1.1 Chronology

To frame this data within the context of burial trends, it is crucial to examine the tomb types according to their period of use.¹⁷² Many of the tombs in the appendix were in use before or after our period, whether this was constant use or periods of use, abandonment, and reuse.

5,556 tombs in the appendix were possibly or definitely in use before the fourth century.¹⁷³ According to their dating, 1,036 of these were only used until the fourth century; 225 until the fifth; 508 until the sixth; 1,892 until the seventh; 1,805 were used during the Byzantine period; and 86 continued to be used after the seventh century. 3,227¹⁷⁴ tombs were constructed between the fourth and the seventh centuries (or Byzantine period). 1,610 were constructed in the fourth century; 867 in the fifth; 283 in the sixth; and 168 in the seventh. These figures demonstrate the longevity of many of the tombs in this study, some over four centuries, and the continual use or reuse of tombs.

Tables 2.2 and 2.3 compare the tomb types of tombs constructed before the fourth century, but still in use in the fourth century or later, to those constructed during or after the fourth century. The aim of these tables is to indicate potential changes in type preferences.

¹⁷² See Introduction for a discussion on the issues of tomb dating in this study.

¹⁷³ As some tombs have multiple suggested start/end dates, a small number of tombs are duplicated in this data.

¹⁷⁴ In a small number of cases, the start date may fall into either category, hence the total number of tombs represented by the categories does not add up to 8,779.

Table 2.2: Most common tomb types constructed before fourth century that were in use during the Byzantine period (5,556 tombs).

Tomb Type	Arabia	Egypt	Palaestina	Syria and Phoenice	Total	% of Total Graves
Pit grave	25	2,721	125	49	2,920	52.6%
Shaft grave	93	0	69	3	165	3.0%
Rock-cut tomb	62	4	359	15	439	7.9%
Built tomb	9	269	13	125	416	7.5%
Cist grave	10	0	197	3	210	3.8%
Hypogeum	2	24	48	80	154	2.8%
Other type	18	601	97	539	1,255	22.6%
Total	219	3,619	908	8140	5,556	100%

Table 2.2 demonstrates the broad dating categories that are often applied to tombs: the vast number of pit graves were likely only used once, but they are difficult to date. Rock-cut tombs and built tombs, meanwhile, represent significant percentages of tombs constructed before the fourth century that were used in the Byzantine period. These large chamber tombs were likely in use for multiple generations.

Table 2.3, which shows the most common tomb types from the fourth century onwards, presents a somewhat different view, with cists and shaft graves becoming more frequent. Built tombs appear to have been constructed less frequently; the built tombs at Al-Bass and Kharga continued to be used throughout the Byzantine period, so newer structures may not have been required. Pit graves, shaft graves, and rock-cut tombs are the three most common types of tombs. The distribution of cists is almost entirely limited to

Palaestina and is dominated by the cemeteries at Be'er Sheva, while 80.4% of all pit graves are from Egypt.

Table 2.3: Most common tomb types constructed and used from the fourth century onwards (3,227 tombs).

Tomb Type	Arabia	Egypt	Palaestina	Syria and Phoenice	Total	% of Total Graves
Pit grave	10	1,167	259	15	1,451	45.0%
Shaft grave	627	14	19	0	660	20.5%
Rock-cut tomb	3	7	160	36	206	6.4%
Built tomb	3	30	19	31	83	2.6%
Cist grave	19	1	182	1	203	6.3%
Hypogeum	5	19	22	13	59	1.8%
Other type	30	451	56	82	592	18.3%
Total	697	1,689	717	151	3,227	100%

While Tables 2.2 and 2.3 indicate a possible change in the common types of tombs that were constructed before and during/after the fourth century, there is a caveat to this information. The number of newly constructed tombs decreases over time. This indicates that fewer new tombs may have been needed, due to the popularity of reusing older tombs; however, we should not discount the possibility that it may be down to the dating system of the excavator(s). It is unclear how many of the tombs generally dated to the Byzantine period were constructed in the fourth century and how many were constructed in the seventh.

Like Table 2.1, the type of tomb appears to be dependent upon location, with certain types favoured in certain places. This suggests that customs, resources,

and the skillsets of tomb constructors were still of primary concern in determining tomb type.

2.2.2 Cemetery Location

Having established a basic typology for the most common tombs used in the Byzantine Near East, I now consider the location of cemeteries. Tombs and cemeteries were places where the living could visit to look after and remember the dead, liminal spaces between life and death where both could meet.

However, since few cemeteries have been completely excavated and they were usually not demarcated by clear boundaries such as walls, it is often difficult to establish their full size.¹⁷⁵ There are three general areas where tombs of the early Byzantine period may be found.

1. In an extramural cemetery space.

This would either be outside of the walls of the city or, if the settlement did not have such an obvious boundary, separate from domestic spaces. There were, however, exceptions where some buildings used by the living might also occupy the cemetery space (for example, see the Al-Bass cemetery, Section 2.5.2).

Extramural burial was based on ancient tradition, established in the Twelve Tables (fifth century BCE), which stated that corpses should not be buried within the walls of the city:

*Hominem mortuum in urbe ne sepelito neue urito.*¹⁷⁶

“A dead person is not to be buried or burned in the city”.

¹⁷⁵ De Jong (2017r: 32).

¹⁷⁶ *Lex duodecim tabularum: the twelve tables* (n.d.: Table X, 1.).

This law was reiterated by Gratian, Valentinian II and Theodosius I in 381:

*Omnia quae supra terram urnis clausa vel sarcophagis corpora detinentur, extra urbem delata ponantur, ut et humanitatis instar exhibeant et relinquunt incolarum domicilio sanctitatem:*¹⁷⁷

“In all respects the corpses held in urns or sarcophagi that are kept above ground will be carried and placed outside of the city, to present human kindness and leave the homes of their inhabitants with sanctity.”

It appeared again in the Justinianic Code:

*Mortuorum reliquias, ne sanctum municipiorum ius polluatur, intra civitatem condi iam pridem vetitum est.*¹⁷⁸

“For a long time, it has been forbidden by law to bury the bodies of the dead inside the city, so to not pollute the sanctity of the citizens.”

The reissuing of these laws on these occasions was probably not related to substantial changes in or breaches of the practice, because most burials in the appendix were extramural and many of the sites in the appendix were rural.

2. In or around a church or a monastery (Section 2.6).

The main exceptions to extramural burial; church burials and burials related to monastic institutions could appear within settlement areas as well as outside of them. These tombs were usually reserved for venerated individuals, the clergy, monks, and elites who had donated to the church or monastery. They make up a small number of the examples from the appendix.

They could be individual burials associated with elite Christian figures such as saints, bishops, and monastic founders (Section 2.6), such as the examples

¹⁷⁷ *Imperatoris Theodosii Codex: liber nonus* (n.d.: 9.17.6).

¹⁷⁸ *In nomine domini nostri Ihesu Christi codicis domini nostri Iustiniani sacratissimi principis repetitae praelectionis: liber tertius* (n.d.: 3.44.12).

from Hawariya at Marea (fifth-sixth century?) and Rehovot-in-the-Negev (fifth-seventh(?) century). However, this category could also include communal burials, which were more commonly found in monasteries, such as at Saint Stephen's in Jerusalem (Hellenistic-Byzantine).

Not all churches or monasteries contained burials.

3. In another building with no clear religious function.

This is the rarest location for burials in the appendix. An example is the bathhouse at Ashkelon (Section 4.3.1).

In the first case, that of extramural burials, the spaces for the living and the dead were carefully defined and distinct areas (although this may be more obvious in urban than in rural locations). For burials within or associated with churches and monasteries, burial was in a defined sacred space which may have been easily accessible to clergy and monks, but to laypeople it was still largely a separate space from their domestic lives, or a special journey was required to visit the tombs of venerated individuals. The third case is the only example in which ordinary people may have encountered burials that were not in a space where tombs would normally be expected to be found – and they may not have even been aware that the burials were there.

2.2.3 Orientation

The final element considered here is the orientation of tombs. Orientation is not known for all tombs from the appendix due to poor recording and reporting practices; however, it has been recorded for 5,221 tombs.

In some cases, orientation is known from a description of the cemetery, but the total number of excavated tombs is unknown; these are mostly east-west burials. 4,726 tombs are listed as either east-west or west-east (usually with the head of the deceased person in the west). The other two significant categories are northwest-southeast at 277 entries, 208 of which are from Palaestina, and north-south at 195 entries, again with the majority (134) from Palaestina. The distribution of these according to province is shown in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Orientation of tombs, by province (8,779 tombs).

Orientation	Arabia	Egypt	Palaestina	Syria and Phoenice	Total	% of Total Graves
E-W	614	3,732	375	5	4,726	53.8%
NE-SW	0	10	11	2	23	0.3%
NW-SE	34	34	208	1	277	3.2%
N-S	6	11	134	44	195	2.2%
Total	654	3,787	728	52	5,221	59.5%

Tombs from Egypt were almost entirely oriented east-west, where orientation was recorded. Many more pit graves can be added to this number, including unknown numbers from sites such as Qarara (fourth-ninth century).¹⁷⁹ In Palaestina, the orientation is much more evenly split, with an apparent preference for east-west and northwest-southeast burials. Arabia features almost entirely east-west orientation. Figures for Syria and Phoenice are too small to reach any real conclusions on orientation, but most recorded orientations are north-south. Of the tombs constructed and/or used from the fourth century onwards, orientation is known for 1,970 tombs (61.0%): 1,675

¹⁷⁹ Ranke (1926: 2), in which tombs from the cemetery are described as east-west with head to the west.

(85.0%) of these were orientated east-west, 192 (9.8%) were oriented northwest-southeast, 41 (2.1%) were north-south, and 14 (0.7%) were northeast-southwest.

Tombs oriented east-west, with the head in the west, are often classed as Christian burials,¹⁸⁰ with this direction being connected to Christ's coming ascension from the east, the direction of the earthly paradise from which Adam and Eve were expelled, and east being the region of good and light.¹⁸¹

However, east-west orientation predates Christianity and may also be related to the direction of the rising sun, local or traditional practices, the orientation of older tombs in the same cemetery, relationships between the cemetery and walls or other built structures, and the natural environment.¹⁸² Note for example the cemetery at Horvat Karkur 'Illit (fourth-seventh century), where tombs beneath a church all featured heads to the east,¹⁸³ and the Basilica of Tall-al-Mahzan in Pelusium, where tombs (fourth century or later) were oriented according to the church walls.¹⁸⁴

Tomb orientation is particularly important when we consider Byzantine Egypt, as east-west burials have been found in far older Egyptian cemeteries. An example of a pre-Christian cemetery with east-west oriented burials is el-Gamous, which is discussed below (Section 2.2.3.1). Similarly, not all positively identified Christian graves were oriented east-west: the cemetery at Djeme

¹⁸⁰ For example, Tocheri et al. (2005: 329), where east-west oriented pit graves with head to the west and limited grave objects are referred to as 'Christian' style.

¹⁸¹ Rahtz (1978: 4).

¹⁸² Rahtz (1978: 2-3).

¹⁸³ Zias and Spigelman (2004: 308).

¹⁸⁴ Grossman (2002: 471).

(third-fifth century), west of Thebes, featured pit graves which were found oriented both east-west (with head west) and north-south (with head north). While the east-west tombs may be plausibly Christian, it is only from the north-south tombs that some painted crosses were found. The orientation of some of these tombs may have been dictated by the walls of a church, laying along its external walls; others, perhaps, had been oriented by a group of domed tombs located nearby.¹⁸⁵ Possibly earlier examples include cist graves at Eleutheropolis (first century-Byzantine) and shaft tombs at Scythopolis (first-seventh century), as well as the example of el-Gamous (below, Section 2.2.3.1). This indicates not only that Christian tombs may not be identifiable from their orientation itself, but also that east-west tombs are not necessarily the tombs of Christians and may be related to older customs.

2.2.3.1 The el-Gamous Cemetery

The Fag el-Gamous ('Way of the Cow') cemetery (first-seventh century) in the Faiyum is one example which demonstrates that the interpretation of east-west burials with head to the west as Christian-style is often incorrect, especially in the early Christian period, and can lead us to misunderstand the burial practices of a community.

Over 1,000 burial shafts have been excavated. The tombs are oriented east-west and there are multiple pit graves, each containing one individual, within each burial shaft. The deepest burials feature the head of the deceased in the east, while those buried closer to the surface were interred with the head in the

¹⁸⁵ Hölscher (1954: 43).

west. Originally, the excavators interpreted this as a sign of the local population converting to Christianity, at some time around the beginning of the third century.¹⁸⁶

Radiocarbon dating of human remains from the cemetery has however dated one of the head-east burials to 80-231, and one of the head-west burials to 128-284.¹⁸⁷ These were the deepest burials of each orientation that the researchers could access. Two burials from the same shaft, one head-east and the other head-west, were dated to 321-422 and 325-430 respectively.¹⁸⁸ These results show that head-east and head-west burials were occurring in the cemetery at the same time, as early as the first century, and that both were still occurring several hundred years later during the fourth and fifth centuries. Meanwhile, the earliest burial that can be proven as Christian, due to the presence of a cross-symbol in the tomb, dates much later than these, to 545-645.¹⁸⁹

This does not mean that this was the *earliest* Christian burial in the cemetery, but instead the earliest *conclusively* Christian burial. The identification of a cross (either as tomb decoration or an object depicting a cross, such as a pendant) is often used as a way to identify Christian burials in Egypt (for example, Byzantine tombs at Alexandria were identified largely on the presence of crosses as evidence of Christian reuse).¹⁹⁰ However, it is unlikely that Christians would have marked their tombs with this symbol from the moment of their conversion, especially in locations where they were a minority, perhaps

¹⁸⁶ Evans et al. (2015: 209); Muhlestein and Jensen (2019: 45).

¹⁸⁷ Evans et al. (2015: 212).

¹⁸⁸ Evans et al. (2015: 214).

¹⁸⁹ Evans et al. (2015: 213-214).

¹⁹⁰ Venit (2002: 21).

because they may have favoured traditional practices or the option to have a professionally carved or painted cross may simply not have been available.¹⁹¹

The formalisation of the practice of east-west burial with head to the west was likely changing gradually during the use of the cemetery.

The same argument has been made at Kysis (first-fifth century), where it has been suggested that some Christians may have simply been buried among their non-Christian counterparts in traditional tombs, instead of in their own, separate cemetery.¹⁹² While we cannot be certain that a tomb without a cross is *not* a Christian tomb – and Christians are unlikely to have started using the cross as soon as they converted – the early dating of head-west burials at el-Gamous supports the argument that conversion to Christianity was not the initial reason for the change in head placement.

There are two important points that emerge from this research: firstly, that we do not see a community deciding to make an immediate switch from head-east to head-west burials, indicating that both were welcome within the same cemetery for a significant time; and secondly, that the introduction of head-west burials is not necessarily a result of Christian beliefs among the population. Put simply, burial practices did not change purely because religious belief did.

The research at el-Gamous may allow us to reevaluate similar arguments from other Egyptian cemeteries. An example that can be examined is the Kellis 2 cemetery (third-fourth century?) in the Dakhleh Oasis. This is one of two cemeteries associated with the settlement of Kellis, which has been excavated

¹⁹¹ See Chapter 6b on tomb decoration and Christian symbolism more generally.

¹⁹² Dunand et al. (1992: 266).

since 1986.¹⁹³ Excavations at the cemetery are still ongoing and only limited information has been published on individual burials. Kellis 1 (Ptolemaic-third century), to the west of the settlement area, contains single-chamber rock-cut tombs. The dead were buried in the chamber floor with no apparent orientation and in various states of bodily treatment from mummification to natural burial.¹⁹⁴ It is believed that the population converted to Christianity at some point during the third century,¹⁹⁵ at which time burials moved to the east of the settlement area in the new Kellis 2 cemetery.

The burials of Kellis 2 are in pit graves, a small number of which were found within mudbrick mausolea. They are almost entirely individual burials, as opposed to the group burials of Kellis 1. Tombs at Kellis 2 were oriented east-west, always with head to the west.¹⁹⁶ Other differences between Kellis 1 and 2 that are highlighted as evidence that the latter is a Christian cemetery include 'traditional' grave goods at Kellis 1 and very limited objects from Kellis 2 (pottery, a beaded necklace, a glass vessel, and sprigs of rosemary and myrtle),¹⁹⁷ and the lack of children under four years of age found at Kellis 1,¹⁹⁸ compared to large numbers of infants and newborns in Kellis 2.¹⁹⁹

The remains of 11 individuals from 10 tombs in Kellis 2 were radiocarbon dated using accelerated mass spectrometry and the calibrated age results ranged between the first century BCE/CE to around 600. However, this was considered

¹⁹³ Hope (1988: 160).

¹⁹⁴ Bowen (2003a: 172).

¹⁹⁵ Particularly by Bowen. See Bowen (2003a: 168).

¹⁹⁶ Bowen (2019: 375).

¹⁹⁷ Bowen (2003a: 168).

¹⁹⁸ Tocheri et al. (2005: 337-338).

¹⁹⁹ Dupras et al. (2019: 112-114).

too broad based on material and archaeological evidence produced by the settlement and the fact that the users of the cemetery are assumed to be Christian. Therefore, the date range was narrowed to 220-380 (considered the minimal *termini*).²⁰⁰ While the reality is likely broader than this,²⁰¹ Kellis 2 is typically referred to as a Christian cemetery of the fourth century, with a distinct change in practices from the Kellis 1 cemetery.²⁰²

However, if we consider that the head-west burials of Kellis 2 are, as at el-Gamous, not the result of a mass and uniform change in burial style due to the widescale adoption of Christianity among the locals, we are able to explain the differences between burials at Kellis 1 and 2 in different ways. Firstly, we could accept from the radiocarbon dates that the cemetery was in use for longer than the third-fourth centuries, probably from an earlier period and possibly continuing later, although admittedly the settlement itself does not appear to date past the fourth century.²⁰³

If the cemetery was in use for a longer period, then the differences in burial types between Kellis 1 and 2 may be based on socio-economic differences, which would also account for the lack of burial objects in the Kellis 2 cemetery. The lack of infants in Kellis 1 may be explained through the significant proportion of burials at Kellis 2 that were of juveniles, with 61% of the 635 individuals who had been excavated up to 2004 having died before reaching the

²⁰⁰ Stewart et al. (2003: 377).

²⁰¹ Stewart et al. (2003: 377).

²⁰² Bowen (2008: 12).

²⁰³ Bowen (2003a: 168), where based on papyrological, ceramic, and numismatic evidence found in the settlement, it is believed to have been abandoned close to the end of the fourth century.

age of 15, one third of these foetuses or perinates.²⁰⁴ Perhaps infants were buried in Kellis 2 instead of Kellis 1, again permitting the cemetery to have been in use before the third century.

Further supporting the argument that Kellis 1 and 2 may represent different groups of people who may have been alive at the same time is the research on diet using stable carbon and nitrogen isotopes (see Section 3.3.5.1 for a discussion of estimating diet), which has indicated that the people of Kellis 1 and 2 had different diets.²⁰⁵ The people of Kellis 1 appear to have eaten more C₃ plants, while those in Kellis 2 ate more C₄ plants (or meat from animals that were fed on C₄ plants).²⁰⁶ This dietary difference may have been related to their socio-economic status, or it may have been related to cultural differences including religion – but it cannot, by itself, prove whether or not the burials were contemporaneous.

How can we explain the placement of the head at Kellis 2, if it is not related to religious change? The burials are oriented according to the position of the rising sun.²⁰⁷ Head placement could therefore either be at the east end or the west end, and the community of Kellis chose the west end of the tomb. Yet so did some of the people at el-Gamous, and we have seen already that the change

²⁰⁴ Wheeler et al. (2011: 110); Wheeler (2012: 228).

²⁰⁵ Dupras (1999: 207-211). The results were compared to a second ancient cemetery at the site, 'Ein Tirghi, which is dated to the Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (c. 1069-664 BCE). Dupras questioned whether the 'Ein Tirghi cemetery may have been used at the same time as Kellis 2 in some cases, based on similar diets between some of their occupants, and pointed out that, if this was the case, traditional Egyptian burial practices would have still been occurring in the Dakhleh Oasis during our period of study (255). However, most of the research on diet has been focused on juveniles, due to the large numbers of well-preserved examples that have been discovered in this cemetery.

²⁰⁶ Dupras (1999: 254). See 3.3.5.1 for an explanation of the difference between C₃ and C₄ plants and how the consumption of meat affects carbon stable isotopes.

²⁰⁷ Williams (2008: 153).

was not immediate, not unanimous, and not necessarily a result of religious change.

2.3 Tomb Construction

Having established basic information on the tombs of the Byzantine period, I now consider their construction. Every settlement required individuals who could construct new tombs and maintain old ones, but different individuals and communities would have had access to different materials, workers, and the amount of time, energy, and money that could be expended to build and maintain tombs.

The simplest types of tombs were graves dug into the ground, such as pit graves. These likely did not necessitate professional skills to create. Other forms of dug grave may have required some level of skill, for example cists which were built by creating stone-built boxes. These graves could have been sealed with earth or by one or more slabs of stone, some with carving or inscription, but most discovered plain. Examples are numerous, such as the covering slabs of the cist graves discovered in the Be'er Sheva' excavations (Roman-Byzantine), some of which were made of dressed limestone.²⁰⁸ Spolia, such as sarcophagus lids or upturned sarcophagi, could also have been selected to seal them.²⁰⁹ An example is Tomb 2 at Berytus (fourth century), where a rock-cut pit grave was covered by an inverted marble sarcophagus decorated with carved lion heads.²¹⁰ If the intent was to reuse a dug tomb for

²⁰⁸ Abadi-Reiss (2013); Michael (2018). In some cases, the tombs were described as "constructed of" or "lined with" limestone slabs, for example in Baumgarten (2004) and Peretz (2014). It is unclear whether these examples were referring to limestone covering stones.

²⁰⁹ Griesheimer (1997: 168, 171-172).

²¹⁰ De Jong (2017d).

later burials, then this cover could have been designed to be easily removable.²¹¹

For the more elaborate types of burial, such as built and hewn tombs, an industry of specialized tomb constructors was required, which included individuals of varying levels of ability. These spaces for the dead could have been sealed with doors or slabs, depending on whether their entrance was horizontal or vertical.²¹² Typically, they had rock-hewn doors, or, less frequently, wooden ones. Stone doors could be designed to roll or swing open to allow access to the tomb for commemorative ritual practices or additional burials. Rolling door stones have been found at many sites including at least one from Eleutheropolis (first-eighth century)²¹³ and another at Yavneh-Yam (third-sixth century). Some tombs from the latter site featured square door stones,²¹⁴ indicating perhaps a choice or different styles of construction.

The internal structure of tombs can vary even at the same site and may depend on various factors including construction date, the workers, or just the preference of the owner. Chamber tombs could have one or multiple chambers, which were mainly square or rectangular but sometimes circular, and included various options for burial type. For example, 45.5% of the rock-cut tombs in the appendix contained arcosolia burials, 31.0% contained loculi burials, and 4.6% contained both. Other burial options within both above-ground and

²¹¹ Griesheimer (1997: 171).

²¹² For example, Griesheimer (1997: 168-169) discussed the stone doors of tombs on the Limestone Plateau in Syria.

²¹³ Avni et al. (2008: 78).

²¹⁴ Piasezky-David et al. (2020: 482, 487-488).

subterranean tombs included burial in pits, sarcophagi, and ossuaries, among others (see Introduction).

A group of settlements in Arabia provide evidence of the access that rural agricultural communities, connected to one or more of the Decapolis cities, had to professional tomb constructors.²¹⁵ These are Yasileh, Ya'amun, and Sa'ad; all three sites feature rock-cut and shaft tombs dated to the Roman-Byzantine periods, cut into the sides of cliffs. They all had wine presses and at least one church, with Sa'ad being the smallest of the settlements.²¹⁶ The most professional tombs – with textured walls and symmetrical chambers – were found at Yasileh, where finely carved rock-cut chamber tombs and shaft tombs were arranged in rows along a limestone wadi wall, facing churches and other buildings.²¹⁷ Tombs in the north and west cemeteries of the site were not constructed with the same high standards of workmanship, indicating that people at Yasileh could afford different burial expenditures and therefore occupied different social classes.²¹⁸

Fewer professional tombs were found at the nearby settlement of Ya'amun. The rock-cut chamber tombs and shaft graves at this site were generally simpler and “more crudely carved” than those at Yasileh, especially those in the softer rock.²¹⁹ The population appears to have had less access to professional tomb constructors. At Sa'ad to the southeast, the quality – that is, the elaborate design, symmetry, and general appearance of the carving – of the rock-cut

²¹⁵ This research is by Rose et al. (2007).

²¹⁶ Rose et al. (2007: 61-66).

²¹⁷ Rose et al. (2007: 63); Al-Muheisen (2008: 218).

²¹⁸ Rose et al. (2007: 63).

²¹⁹ Rose et al. (2007: 64).

chamber tombs and shaft graves was lower than at Yasileh and Ya'amun.

There were also more shaft tombs at this site, indicating a greater reliance on them over chamber tombs, possibly indicating that the craftspeople required to carve the chamber tombs were not as readily available or affordable. The single exception was a cist tomb adjacent to the church, and the most well-constructed tombs were of the same standard of quality as the poorer tombs of Ya'amun.²²⁰

This is only one small group of sites from Arabia. Tombs have been described as skillfully, beautifully, or professionally built at other sites including rock-cut chamber tombs from Tefen (Byzantine)²²¹ and el-Bagawat (second-seventh century),²²² while varying levels of ability, indicating different amounts of financial expenditure and effort, have been noted at some urban sites such as the Decapolis city of Abila (Roman-Byzantine).²²³ The ability to expend energy and money on tomb construction is certainly connected to wealthy urban and rural elites versus less wealthy individuals and those in smaller villages who had access to fewer resources, but it will be explored further when diet is considered in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.3). While the quality of tomb construction can indicate economic differences within a population or between populations, this cannot be conclusive on its own and should be combined with other evidence such as differences in tomb types, grave goods (Chapter 5), and paleopathological data (Chapters 3 and 4).

²²⁰ Rose et al. (2007: 66).

²²¹ Lederman and Aviam (1997: 18).

²²² Hauser (1932: 44).

²²³ Mare (1994: 369).

2.4 Looting

An important element of constructing the tomb was ensuring that its closing mechanism protected its contents from disturbance. Disturbance could occur because tomb violators sought either the objects within the tomb, or the architectural elements of the tomb itself.

Tomb violators were a concern of early Byzantine legal codes. In 340, Constantine decreed that a person who violated a tomb should be sentenced to the mines, or, if their master had ordered them to do this, the master's gains should be confiscated:

*Si quis in demoliendis sepulchris fuerit adprehensus, si id sine domini conscientia faciat, metallo adiudicetur; si vero domini auctoritate vel iussione urgetur, relegatione plectatur. Et si forte detractum aliquid de sepulchris ad domum eius villamque pervectum post hanc legem repperietur, villa sive domus aut aedificium quodcumque erit fisci viribus vindicetur.*²²⁴

“If anyone is apprehended in (the act of) demolishing a tomb, and if he acts without the knowledge of his master, assign him to the mines. If, however, he is urged by the authority and order of his master, punish him with banishment. And, if by chance, anything taken from the tomb and carried to his house or villa should be discovered after this law, the villa or house or other building will be vindicated by force to the imperial exchequer.”

In 349 and 357, laws were introduced that fined looters and judges who failed to punish tomb violators:

*Si quis sepulchrum laesurus attigerit, locorum iudices si hoc vindicare neglexerint, non minus nota quam viginti librarum auri in sepulchrorum violatores statuta poena grassetur, ut eam largitionibus nostris inferre cogantur.*²²⁵

“If anyone violates a tomb, and the judges of the district neglect to punish them, fine them no less than twenty pounds of gold, established as the penalty for tomb violators, collect and bring it to the treasury of the emperor.”

²²⁴ *Imperatoris Theodosii Codex: liber nonus* (n.d.: 9.17.1). The same law is repeated in *In nomine domini nostri Ihesu Christi codicis domini nostri Iustiniani sacratissimi principis repetitae praelectionis: liber nonus* (n.d.: 9.19.2).

²²⁵ *In nomine domini nostri Ihesu Christi codicis domini nostri Iustiniani sacratissimi principis repetitae praelectionis: liber nonus* (n.d.: 9.19.3).

*Si quis igitur de sepulchro abstulerit saxa vel marmora vel columnas aliamve quamcumque materiam, fabricandi gratia sive id fecerit venditurus, decem pondo auri cogatur fisco inferre.*²²⁶

“Therefore, if anyone should steal from a tomb either stones, marble, columns, or any other materials whatsoever, for building purposes, or with the intention of selling them, he will be forced to pay ten pounds of gold to the treasury.”

Finally, in 363 Julian instructed that ornaments should not be removed from tombs to be used in decorating spaces occupied by the living, and imposed a fine for anyone who took building materials from a tomb for use or sale:

Pergit audacia ad busta diem functorum et aggeres consecratos, cum et lapidem hinc movere et terram sollicitare et cespitem vellere proximum sacrilegio maiores semper habuerunt: sed et ornamenta quaedam tricliniis aut porticibus auferri de sepulchris. Quibus primis consulentes, ne in piaculum incidant contaminata religione bustorum, hoc fieri prohibemus poena sacrilegii cohibentes.

“The audacity of violators to the corpses of the deceased and the consecrated burial mounds. In the past, to our ancestors, it has been for a long time a sacrilege to move stones and disturb the soil and tear up the earth, and also to steal ornaments from tombs to place in banqueting halls or porticoes. Thus, in the first place we decide, this crime of impure reverence of tombs is not to happen, it is prohibited under the penalty of sacrilege.”²²⁷

Looters also disturbed human remains. This was the biggest concern according to Gregory of Nazianzus, who stated that any treatment of the body, including burning, was better than the disturbance caused by looting:

*Λίσσομαι· ἦν γε θάνω, ποταμῷ δέμας ἢ κύνεσσιν
ρίψατε ἢ πύρῳ δάψατε παντοφάγω·
λίον ἢ παλάμησι φιλοχρύσοισιν ὀλέσθαι.
δεῖδία τόνδε τάφον τοῖα παθόνθ' ὀρόων.*²²⁸

“I beseech you, if I die, throw my body into a river, or to the dogs, or consume it in the all-devouring fire. That is more desirable than to be destroyed by hands greedy for gold. I am anxious about seeing a tomb which has suffered such a fate.”

²²⁶ *In nomine domini nostri Ihesu Christi codicis domini nostri Iustiniani sacratissimi principis repetitae praelectionis: liber nonus* (n.d.: 9.19.4).

²²⁷ *In nomine domini nostri Ihesu Christi codicis domini nostri Iustiniani sacratissimi principis repetitae praelectionis: liber nonus* (n.d.: 9.19.5).

²²⁸ Beckby (1965: epigram 213). Epigrams 176 onwards are on the subject of tomb looters searching for gold.

While we may see a concern that tombs were vulnerable to looting from the laws, these are notably all similar in that they decree that the fines or confiscated goods should be provided to the treasury, rather than any form of compensation for the owner of the violated tomb. Gregory of Nazianzus' expression of anxiety on witnessing a looted tomb may present us a closer representation of an ordinary person's concern about looting, although archaeological evidence indicates no significant difference as grave goods continued to be placed in burials (Chapter 5) and there is no obvious change in the methods that were used to protect the tomb from violators.

If a tomb was too easy to access, this might have encouraged looters to violate it – especially if it was known to, or appeared to, belong to a wealthy family. On the other hand, if the tomb was too difficult to reopen, it might not have been possible to use the tomb for later burials. The visibility of some tombs or the presence of grave markers may have made them especially vulnerable.

Some architectural elements may have been designed to provide additional protection beyond sealing slabs or door stones. Some of the third or fourth century coffins from Beth She'arim had their lids soldered to the rim or long side of the chest, to prevent them from being reopened.²²⁹ Coffins could also be tied up with rope, such as those found at Qarara (fourth-ninth century),²³⁰ which may

²²⁹ Hachlili (2007: 243).

²³⁰ Huber (2013: 79-80). Ranke also suggested that the tying together of toes found in burials at Qarara may have been for magical purposes, to prevent the dead from rising from the grave (and thus to prevent something from escaping the tomb, rather than someone getting into it). This was because he considered the possibility that it was for purely physical reasons, to prevent the legs from coming apart, to be impractical as it would have been easier to achieve this by winding and wrapping the legs. However, tying the toes together would have used less

represent an additional sealing of the burial; an alternative was carved rope, a symbolic representation of tying up the coffin.²³¹ Perhaps this was believed to work in a similar way to curse inscriptions that warned the potential violator against disturbing the tomb (Section 6a.4.1).

2.5 Cemeteries

The above discussion on the general archaeology of tombs facilitates a study of individual tombs, groups of tombs, and cemeteries detailed in the appendix.

However, there are many examples of burials which have not been published in detail, or which are known but remain unexcavated, dated to our period. In some cases, this includes entire cemeteries, such as two of the three Byzantine-period cemeteries at Phaeno which are known from surveys only.²³²

For the purposes of representing a greater number of burials, and to understand how individual burials can fit within their surroundings, I here examine cemeteries, with the caveat that these can vary significantly. I consider elements of space, visibility, landscape, and community to think about the locations of cemeteries, their use, and how they were organized.

2.5.1 Cemetery Organisation

Most cemeteries of our period, as discussed above (Section 2.2.2), were extramural. For this reason, these cemeteries are focused on in this section.

material than winding a cord around the legs, and therefore must be considered as a possible explanation for using a less practical – but still effective – method of restricting movement.

²³¹ Hachlili (2007: 244-246).

²³² Perry et al. (2009: 430).

Cemeteries did not necessarily begin as organised and structured plots of land. They may have been divided into groups or sections, making them clustered and inconsistent, with graves dug in various orientations even within the same clusters. The excavations at the cemetery(ies) of Be'er Sheva (Roman-Byzantine) are an example of such divisions, where some of the cist graves were grouped closer together than others, possibly based on family burial plots,²³³ or perhaps based on different groups or cultures. As the tombs have often been dated based on their similarity to others in the same cemetery, nothing can be said with certainty about trends over time, but it is an alternative possibility.

A similar argument has been made at Qarara (fourth-ninth century), where groups of burials in defined areas of the cemetery were found to contain the same identical types of equipment (such as wooden boards and coffins) and textiles, suggesting that the deceased belonged to a group such as a family that shared the same equipment within a relatively short span of time.²³⁴ The lack of individual dating of these burials and their contents means that this argument cannot be proven, and we remain reliant on the broad dating of the cemetery, the location of tombs, and their similarities for indications of relatedness between burials.

In other locations, burial spaces (or types of tombs) may have been divided according to the socio-economic status of the deceased and their family. One

²³³ Nikolsky (2004: 67); Israel (2009). Some of the inconsistencies noted by the excavators may be exaggerated by the fact that the burial space has been excavated in parts, and that these parts are often disconnected from one another.

²³⁴ Huber (2018b: 212).

site like this is Umm al-Jimal, where Roman-Byzantine period tombs have been found at cemetery areas AA, BB, CC, and Z, on the north, south, and west sides of the settlement area (Figure 2.1). The tombs may have been divided according to status within the community, as it has been suggested that tombs in area AA may have been of low-status individuals, because of a general lack of grave goods and the use of very simple, unlined pit graves in the area.²³⁵

However, genetic testing of the human remains from some of the tombs has indicated biological relationships between occupants, not unlikely in a rural settlement, suggesting an alternative – but not contradictory – explanation that the tombs may have been divided according to land ownership, with families buried on their own land.²³⁶ If this were the case, wealthier families would have been able to afford more lavish burials that represented a different socio-economic class from the burials of other families, and simpler graves may have been provided for non-family members such as agricultural workers.

Alternatively, cemeteries could be well-planned or have the space necessary to afford a clear, structured layout. All or most tombs in these cemeteries were of the same type or a few different types, perhaps still with some clustering but with a generally well-organized spacing and layout of burials, in rows or associated with a clear structure. In this type of cemetery, there may be no clear

²³⁵ Brashler (1995: 464). It is possible that the people buried in this area simply did not provide grave goods for the dead or care for elaborate tombs, however this does not seem to be likely as the tombs were constructed close to an elaborate chamber tomb. If the nature of the burials and their contents was not important, burial in a separate space would likely have been preferable.

²³⁶ *Skeletal Remains* (n.d.).

area or tomb type reserved for one person, family, or socio-economic group, or these may exist in limited numbers.

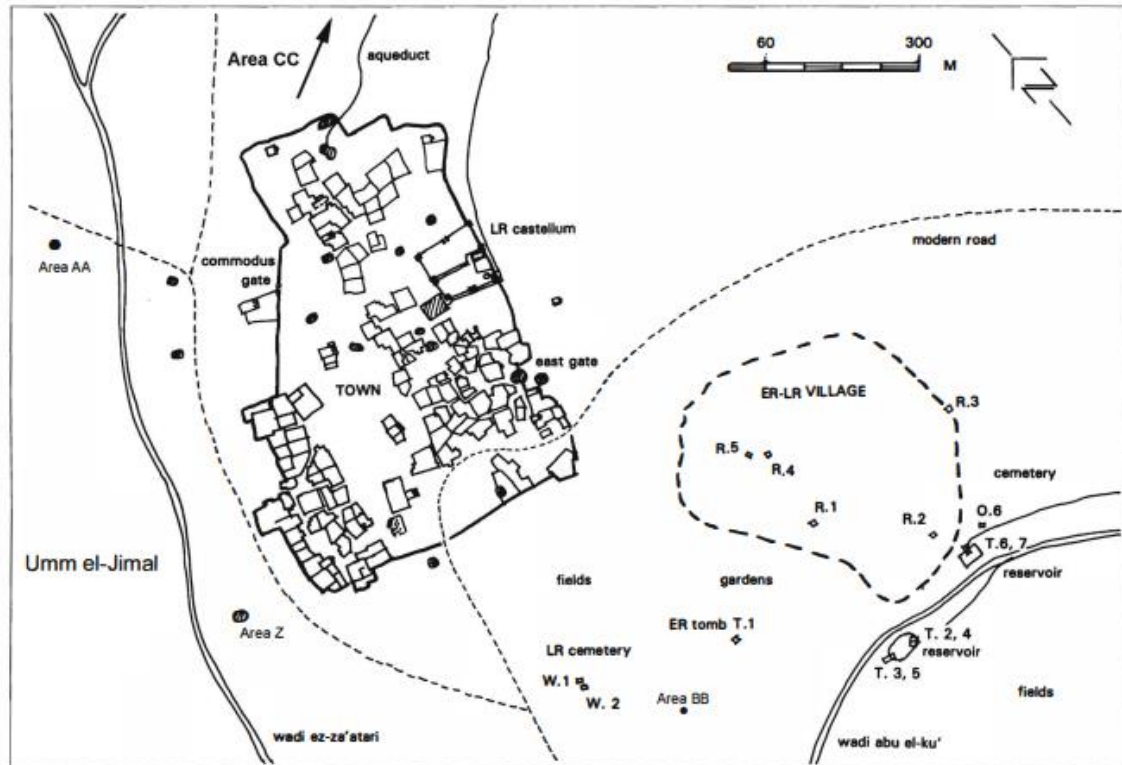


Figure 2.1: Umm al-Jimal, with cemeteries in Areas AA, BB, CC, and Z. From Cheyney et al. (2009: 346).

One example of this type of cemetery is the South Cemetery at Phaeno in the Wadi Faynan (fourth-seventh century) (Figure 2.2). Only a small sample of tombs were excavated, but many examples of stelae were found at the surface and indicate that the cemetery was arranged in rows, with all graves oriented in the same direction (east-west).²³⁷ The majority of the tombs from this cemetery were oblong pit graves dug directly into the soil that varied in length according to the height of the interred person.

²³⁷ Findlater et al. (1998: 79).

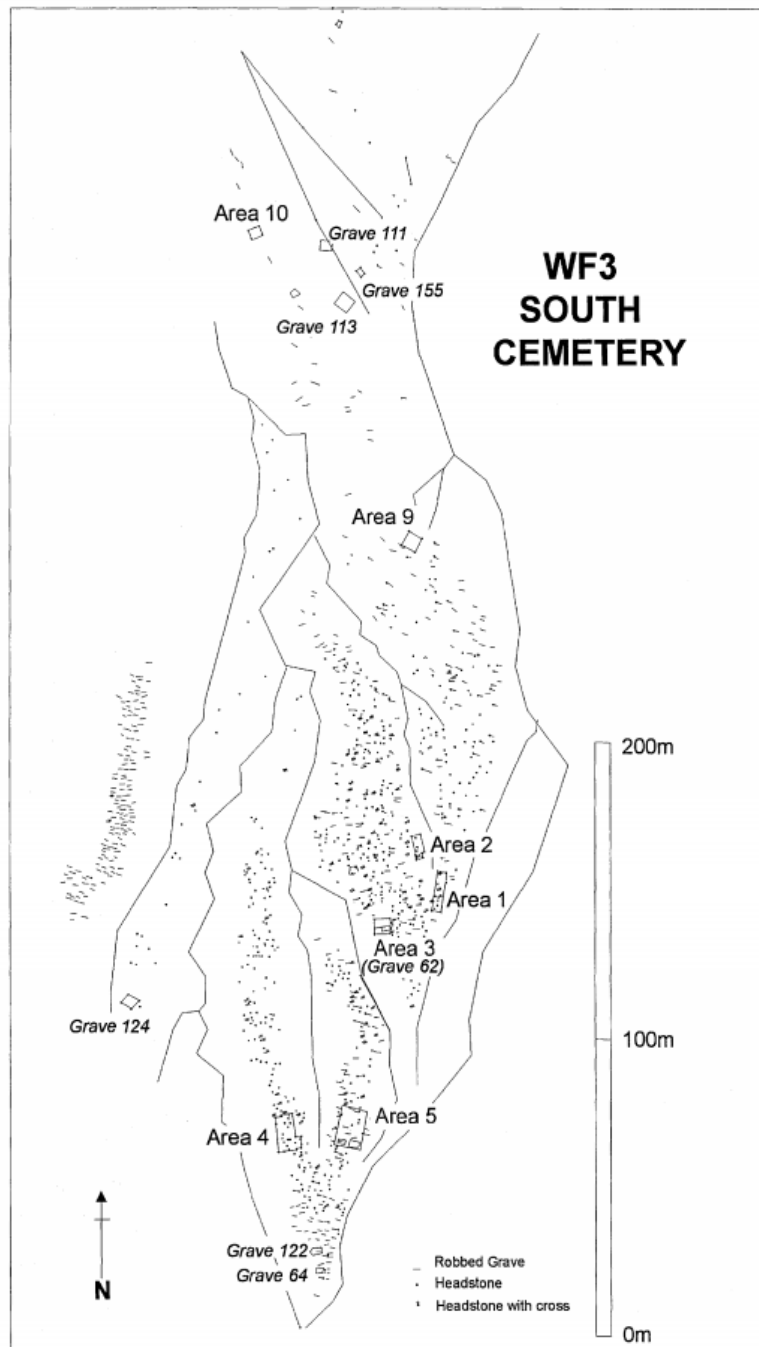


Figure 2.2: The cemetery at Phaeno. From Findlater et al. (1998: 70).

Two graves, both from the same section of the cemetery (Area 10), were slightly different from the regular grave cut because they had a ledge for placing capping stones and were narrower at the bottom.²³⁸ One of the excavated

²³⁸ Findlater et al. (1998: 72).

graves contained a coffin, while three others had been marked by an arrangement of sandstone rocks on top of the grave cut.²³⁹ There were also nine or ten graves with superstructures, which may have attracted clusters of later burials.²⁴⁰ With an estimated 1,700 graves,²⁴¹ these superstructures are the exception to the general rule of simple pit graves in the cemetery. Burials appear to have remained consistent – with small differences such as the coffin and ledges – resulting in a cemetery with a clear arrangement and typology, organized to provide all members of the community, except for a privileged few, the same type of standard burial.

Not all sites feature *in situ* stelae, as these may have been removed from their original location, perhaps to be used as building material, or else they feature in museum collections without a clear provenance (see Section 6a.2.2). Other indicators that the cemetery was well-organised or maintained include communal buildings or other installations, as these suggest that the cemetery (or parts of it) had been built for community use. There are two categories of buildings associated with cemeteries. The first is religious buildings, or those which are presumed to be religious buildings, such as a fifth century building associated with the Phaeno cemetery which is presumed to be a church²⁴² and a synagogue at the settlement of Ḥorbat Rimmon.²⁴³ Examples are discussed in Section 2.6.

²³⁹ Findlater et al. (1998: 74).

²⁴⁰ Findlater et al. (1998: 72, 74, 78). Two burials near to the superstructure of Grave 62 cut into earlier burials, suggesting that the burial space was considered especially desirable. See Section 5.4.2 for a discussion of these burials.

²⁴¹ Perry et al. (2009: 430).

²⁴² Findlater et al. (1998: 71).

²⁴³ Fabian and Goldfus (2004: 87).

The other category is a building or installation that was designed for the living to use during interactions with the cemetery and/or the dead, but which does not have explicit purposes outside of this (such as being a place of religious worship). Examples of this category are the *miqwa'ot* (ritual baths) found at Beth She'arim (first-fifth century),²⁴⁴ which were likely concerned with cleansing the living after contact with the dead, and Building 180 at el-Bagawat (fourth-fifth century), originally thought to be a church but now understood to be a place for funeral or commemorative feasts (Sections 1.4.3, 1.5).²⁴⁵

The living had been able to gather to honour the deceased person and share a graveside meal with them in Roman tombs, and they could also do this in some Byzantine tombs. More elaborate tombs could include built-in facilities where food offerings could be shared and eaten, including benches and dishware (Section 5.3.2.1).²⁴⁶ While multiple tombs in the appendix feature benches, some were used for burials, but commemorative purposes have been suggested for benches in a hypogeum at the Hawariya-South church (fifth-sixth century?)²⁴⁷ and the open area associated with Catacomb 14 at Beth She'arim (second-fourth century).²⁴⁸ In other cemeteries, where these spaces were desired but were not built into tombs (for example, because the cemetery was composed of pit graves or the owners may not have had the means to construct these facilities), communal areas could provide spaces for the living to feast.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Amit and Adler (2010: 74-83).

²⁴⁵ Grossman (2002: 318). The building was enlarged during a second phase of construction (318-319).

²⁴⁶ Jensen (2008: 107).

²⁴⁷ Grossman (2002: 320).

²⁴⁸ Longenecker (2000: 258).

²⁴⁹ Jensen (2008: 107).

Examples are Building 180 at el-Bagawat,²⁵⁰ and a possible example at Ashkelon in an ancient cemetery that continued to be used in the Byzantine period, where the remains of burnt animal bones and the possible remains of altars were found.²⁵¹

Another form of commemoration are libation holes, where drink may have been poured into a tomb as an offering to the dead or a form of honouring them. At the tomb of St Menas at Marea, a large vessel, covered by a marble slab with a hole in it, was buried in the floor beneath the altar of the church, directly above the tomb. The hole was probably a libation hole for pouring oil into the vessel, which was found full of coins covered in a chemical residue. The oil was likely fragrant and allowed the suspended incense to permeate the tomb.²⁵² Other examples of libation holes are Tombs L533 and L537 at Hippos-Sussita (sixth-eighth century); in the latter, a lead pipe with a funnel-shaped top was placed between two covering stones, extending into a sarcophagus.²⁵³ While not common in non-holy burials, Tomb 3 at Hish Beit Idis at Pella (Roman-Byzantine?) featured a libation hole in an altar,²⁵⁴ and visitors to the tomb of St Menas likely understood its privileged nature.

Cemeteries were therefore organized according to one or a combination of the concerns of their primary users – on whether they were reflecting family ties, socio-economic ties, or community ties, and on how the living would interact with the dead. They may have been planned on small group scales or on larger

²⁵⁰ Grossman (2002: 318).

²⁵¹ Eisenberg-Degen (2017).

²⁵² Hunter-Crawley (2017: 193).

²⁵³ Segal et al. (2003: 45).

²⁵⁴ Smith (1973: 8).

communal scales. These elements of organisation indicate that cemetery users had specific concerns and needs that they wished their burial spaces to fulfil, including the representation of identity and relationships. These concerns can be further understood by considering two integral elements of cemetery design: the use of the landscape and local environment, and the selection of burial space, including what made one space more appealing than another. These will now be discussed.

2.5.2 Al-Bass and the Landscape

The case study of the Al-Bass cemetery (first century BCE-seventh century) is one of the best and most detailed examples of the use of landscape and the local environment in this study, showing how people and landscape interacted with the cemetery. It features as an example for many urban cemeteries of the Byzantine Near East.

One of the most important aspects of a cemetery is space, both the internal structure of the burial area and the landscape that surrounds it.²⁵⁵ This includes the natural landscape such as the type of rock or the visibility from the hillside, but also the built landscape such as walls and roads. This often coincided with the natural resources available. Rock-cut tombs and burials in natural caves took advantage of the features of the hillside, while subterranean tombs could be sunk into the bedrock, and pits, cists, and shafts dug out of the ground, giving the natural landscape a key role in determining the possible tomb types that could be used and how visible they could be.²⁵⁶ Although burial spaces

²⁵⁵ De Jong (2017r: 20).

²⁵⁶ De Jong (2017r: 28).

were, for the most part, distinct from the spaces of the living, they were not places devoid of everyday life: they became a part of the landscape, visited by locals and travellers, that were understood to not be settlement areas.²⁵⁷

The Al-Bass cemetery flanked the main road into Tyre.²⁵⁸ The tombs were spread along the road, covering approximately 1.4km,²⁵⁹ and making them visible to anyone who approached the city (Figure 2.3). As time went on, this area became increasingly dense with the addition of more tombs.²⁶⁰ The cemetery itself was therefore a central aspect of the landscape of the city, as one of the first things that a traveller to Tyre would have seen up close. This is seen at other sites, such as Apamea (first-sixth century); however, it is not a universal trend, as cemeteries at sites such as Eleutheropolis (first-eighth century) do not appear to have had any relationship with the roads leading into the city.²⁶¹

Excavations at Al-Bass uncovered 449 built tombs featuring loculi burials and 357 stone sarcophagi, mostly made out of local stone but some made from stone imported from Egypt, Turkey, and Greece.²⁶² 19 pit graves were also discovered, sealed by stone slabs, for a total of 825 tombs.²⁶³

²⁵⁷ De Jong (2017r: 24-25).

²⁵⁸ De Jong (2017r: 21-29).

²⁵⁹ De Jong (2017r: 21).

²⁶⁰ De Jong (2017r: 21-22).

²⁶¹ Avni et al. (2008: 209).

²⁶² De Jong (2010: 607-608).

²⁶³ De Jong (2010: 598, 607-608, 610).



Figure 2.3: The cemetery of al-Bass during the early Byzantine period. From De Jong (2010: 618).

The sarcophagi were found either inside the funerary enclosures, outside of them facing the road, or on the roofs of the funerary platforms.²⁶⁴ The doors of

²⁶⁴ De Jong (2010: 607-608).

the enclosures also faced the road.²⁶⁵ Unlike the small number of pit graves at the site, which would have been harder to notice from the road, the enclosures were designed to be seen. Behind the tombs, less visible but likely not hidden from view, were gardens and water features, including basins and canals, which were mainly in use in the second-third and fifth-sixth centuries.²⁶⁶

The road was, however, not solely for the cemetery. While the tombs along the road entering Tyre presented a landscape, both built and natural, that came together to enhance the visibility and grandeur of the cemetery, they also shared this space with a group of large public buildings. A fourth-fifth century theatre or arena sat on top of an older first century building.²⁶⁷ Fifth century reservoirs for the production of purple dye were constructed over an old second century building, which had possibly been a marketplace.²⁶⁸ There were two Roman bath complexes, one possibly of the second century.²⁶⁹ Finally, a circus was constructed in the second century, directly to the south of the cemetery.²⁷⁰ As the cemetery became larger, it approached these public buildings, sharing the space just outside of the city walls with other places where the public would gather and could have spent a significant amount of their time.

The Al-Bass cemetery is an excellent example of a cemetery that was designed to be seen by as many people as possible, as often as possible. The same has

²⁶⁵ De Jong (2010: 607).

²⁶⁶ De Jong (2016: 18, 20). This suggests the possibility of water-based rituals related to the tombs, although whether this was still the case in the early Byzantine period is unclear.

²⁶⁷ De Jong (2010: 599-600).

²⁶⁸ De Jong (2010: 600). Note that the inscriptions on tombs from the Al-Bass cemetery in the appendix often reference the production of purple dye, for example, sarcophagus 771: *Θεσίδι διαφέροτα τοῦ μακ(α)ρίου Ἡλία κ(ογ)χ(υ)ροκό(που) κάτος τῶν τῶ διαφ(ε)ρώ(ντων) ΜΗΟΗΔΙΓ* ("Grave belonging to blessed Elijah, crusher of purple, as well as those who belong to him ---").

²⁶⁹ De Jong (2010: 600).

²⁷⁰ De Jong (2010: 602).

been well-documented at Rome.²⁷¹ It took advantage of the landscape around it to define its space, its visibility, and its structures. The visually impressive and dominating appearance of the cemetery as the first group of structures a visitor to Tyre would see placed the dead in a position worthy of being seen and remembered. This placement of the dead and their tombs was true of both pre-Christian and Christian burial traditions.

2.5.3 Selecting a Burial Space

This discussion has established that the primary concerns of the users of cemetery spaces in this period were related to:

1. The surrounding environment, both natural and built landscape.
2. The available resources, both natural materials needed to construct tombs and human resources to build, organise, and manage the cemetery space.
3. Their visibility and accessibility, either to locals, travellers, or both.
4. The socio-economic situation of the users of the tomb, as well as family or group ties.

These concerns remained significant in the Byzantine period, which is reflected in the continued use of many older tombs and cemeteries, explaining why communities often continued to use the same cemetery spaces as their ancestors. New tombs and new cemetery spaces did, however, emerge. This may have been because old cemeteries could no longer accommodate the growing population, or because the cemetery area had encroached upon the

²⁷¹ Toynbee (1971: 73) for the cemetery on the Via Appia, where tombs were found along the road for miles to the Porta Appia.

settlement area.²⁷² As new settlements appeared, naturally so did new cemeteries.

Breaking away from older burial spaces and creating new ones for the same population would have been a deliberate decision and a clear attempt to distinguish those buried in the old cemetery from those in the new one. New cemetery spaces are most notable in locations where new settlements, churches, and monasteries appeared. This may, in some cases, be related to the lack of reliable dating of cemeteries. Due to the number of older tomb and cemeteries which remained in use, or which were reused, there is little to indicate that the primary concerns of cemetery users changed in the Byzantine period.

The exception to this rule is the emergence of Christianity. A sense of religious community would have been a determining factor that might have created such a significant change. However, the appendix does not feature many sites where this movement, from pagan space to entirely new Christian space, has been identified; indeed, Christian communities seem to have adapted older burial spaces to suit their purposes just as, if not more, frequently than they made their own new burial areas. I have considered the case of the Kellis 2 cemetery (third-fourth century?) above (Section 2.2.3.1), which would be one of the few exceptions if the cemetery was truly a new one established for a Christianised population. With this information in mind, the concept of a Christian cemetery in our period is not as straightforward as it first seems.

²⁷² De Jong (2017r: 29).

New cemeteries do appear at other sites, but the old cemeteries often remain in use regardless. The cemeteries at Eleutheropolis have been dated to different periods: North Cemetery (first/second century-Byzantine), Northeast Cemetery (second century-Byzantine), South Cemetery (third-eighth century), East Cemetery (fourth-eighth century), and West Cemetery (Roman-Byzantine, but without datable finds).²⁷³ The general expansion in this region around the sixth century may have necessitated the foundation of cemeteries in some locations.

It has been suggested that the Northeast Cemetery might have originally been used by the Jewish population, but the presence of crosses in some caves shows that Christians also used the cemetery (with cists for the less affluent and rock-cut tombs for those who were better off).²⁷⁴ Some caves of the East Cemetery featured Christian symbols, suggesting that this cemetery may have primarily served members of the Christian population.²⁷⁵ It may also have served the moderately and least affluent, based on tomb types and grave objects, suggesting socio-economic factors may have been involved in the choice of cemetery as well; if this is true, people of different faiths may have been interred in these tombs, but evidence of Christianity is all that has survived.²⁷⁶

Even if the East Cemetery was created for Christians, they did not exclusively move to this cemetery, nor did they abandon the cemeteries that were used by people of other religions. The continued use of ancient cemeteries with the

²⁷³ Avni et al. (2008: 79, 89, 95, 97-101).

²⁷⁴ Avni et al. (2008: 95-96).

²⁷⁵ Avni et al. (2008: 89, 201).

²⁷⁶ Avni et al. (2008: 89, 201).

addition of Christian imagery is also found at other sites, including Al-Bass²⁷⁷ and at Gabbari in Alexandria (Ptolemaic-Byzantine).²⁷⁸

Sites with multiple cemeteries in use at the same time, such as Eleutheropolis, indicate that, for most of the population, something other than religion usually determined which cemetery an individual was buried in. The primary focus of the cemetery space continued to be the provision of a practical service and personal decision about displaying identity through the location of one's burial does not appear to have been a central concern of most people in the early Byzantine period (this could be expressed in other ways, such as through the inclusion of grave objects). They either may have wished or been unable to afford such a burial or may not have considered the location – among non-Christians or exclusively Christian – to be of significance at all.

2.6 Church and Monastic Burials

Having considered extramural burials, I now examine intramural burials closely associated with churches and monasteries. These are a minority, as most, especially the burials of ordinary people, remained extramural (Section 2.2.2). This new phenomenon of the Byzantine period added additional possibilities for the elite and other individuals, such as the clergy and monks, to receive a privileged burial.²⁷⁹

Grossman published a book on the early Christian churches of Egypt in 2002, while Griesheimer discussed privileged church burials of Syria in 1997, and

²⁷⁷ De Jong (2010: 614).

²⁷⁸ Sabottka (1985: 284).

²⁷⁹ Samellas (2002: 178).

Eger presented some examples from Arabia more recently, in 2018. It is clear from these works that the archaeological information we have on burials in churches, and by extension also monastic complexes, varies greatly. In some cases, the tombs were not among the primary concerns of the excavators, who were more focused on the layout of the church itself, its architecture, and inscriptions. Therefore, there are some churches and monasteries where it is assumed that a space such as a crypt was used for burials, although no evidence of either human remains or grave objects have been found, or suspected tombs which have been marked by slabs at the surface have not been excavated. Examples include Caparbaricha (fifth-seventh century), where the only extant evidence for a tomb is the presence of a chapel,²⁸⁰ and the monastery of Marytrius at Ma'ale Adumim (sixth century), where a tomb marker was found but the tomb was not excavated.²⁸¹

The most privileged burials were of martyrs and saints. Their remains, burial sites, or the places where they had once lived often became the focus of memorial ritual practices. Elite Christians also desired burial spaces within or near religious buildings, believing that they would benefit from burial close to the location of the eucharistic sacrifice, intercessory prayers, or the saint's advocacy on the day of judgement.²⁸²

Elite members of society were willing and able to pay, either through services or patronage, for burial in such a privileged position. Requests for such burials are

²⁸⁰ Hirschfeld (1990: 13-15).

²⁸¹ Hirschfeld (1990: 20-22). The tombstone of Paul, the second head of the monastery, was discovered.

²⁸² Grossman (2002: 130-131); Samellas (2002: 246); Bond (2013: 143).

evidenced in wills, such as the sixth century will of Flavius Phoibammon of Antinoopolis, in which the testator left property to a monastery in exchange for the burial of his body and the addition of his name to a list of people who were buried within this monastery (Section 1.2.2.1). Some wealthy people may have been willing to give up large quantities of their earthly possessions for the promise of spiritual benefit as they approached their judgement.

We cannot assume that burials in churches and monasteries were made purely due to spiritual purposes, however. Venerated tombs and churches were not only places for the dead, but also places where the living would gather, often in large numbers. Just as tombs built along roads or on hillsides were visible to large numbers of people, so were burials within many churches and popular pilgrim sites, where tombs would be very visible to local Christians and travellers. The presence of a burial close to that of a saint or martyr therefore gave the dead person additional privilege, as they were connected to those who visited and prayed at the venerated grave, and any inscriptions or iconography related to them would be seen by these visitors. This created a complex series of relationships between the venerated grave, the grave of the privileged person, and anyone who visited the site,²⁸³ where the elite person became known to the visitor through their visibility and burial location. The demonstration of status, and the possibility of visitors at the graveside, may therefore also have been influential elements for some church burials.

²⁸³ Yasin (2005: 433).

An example of this is demonstrated by the tomb of Bizzos, the son of Pardos. Bizzos was apparently a generous donor of the sixth century church in Ruweiha, Syria, and was buried in one of its two mausoleums close to the martyrion.²⁸⁴ His generosity to the church permitted him burial in the location of his choice. An inscription in Greek invited those who passed by his mausoleum to pray for him and provided a prayer for them to use.²⁸⁵ This served the dual purpose of both connecting him with the people who visited the church and saw his mausoleum, and the perceived spiritual benefit of the closeness to the martyr's remains and the prayers of the living.

*Βίζζος Πάρδου· ἐπηδήμησα καλῶς, ἦλθα καλῶς, καὶ κίμε καλῶς. εὐξῆται ὑπὲρ ἡμοῦ*²⁸⁶

“Bizzos (son) of Pardos. I sojourned well, I journeyed well, and I lie to rest well. Pray for me.”

1,205 burials in the appendix were either inside churches or around them in small annexes, courtyards, or cemeteries. Of these, 1000 tombs are from inside or around the basilica at Kom al-Ahmar (Roman-Byzantine). The number of tombs at Kom al-Ahmar that contained human remains is unknown; the other 205 tombs contained the remains of at least 184 people. Tombs in or close to churches likely belonged to individuals whose families paid for the privilege of being buried so close to the church.

These tombs vary in type, but they were usually either subterranean chamber tombs or graves cut beneath the floor of the church (especially pit graves).

²⁸⁴ Griesheimer (1997: 208-209). The church is some distance away from the fourth-fifth century cemetery area of the associated village, so it seems that the martyr grave attracted other burials to it.

²⁸⁵ Griesheimer (1997: 208-209).

²⁸⁶ Prentice (1908: 265). An inscription in the church simply says: *Βίζζος Πάρδου*, “Bizzos, (son) of Pardos” (266).

Sarcophagi have also been found, most of these coming from Syria Prima. Of those with a known orientation, most were oriented east-west with head to the west, with the north-south oriented exceptions at Deir Abu Fana possibly either from before the fourth century or the construction of the church itself.²⁸⁷ The other exception is the burial chamber of the Basilica of Tall al-Mahzan of Pelusium (fourth century or later), where burials are found both north-south and east-west oriented.²⁸⁸ Multiple interments are more common in Palaestina and Arabia than in Egypt, where they are the exception rather than the rule.

Notably, we do not see any new tomb types in churches, other than crypts.

While the more elaborate construction of some of these tombs, especially those that were expected to be visited, displays the privilege of those who were buried within them, it is their location combined with their grandeur that truly ensures they stood out.

Church burials can be divided into two categories: the first category is the tombs of saints or martyrs, or their relics. The second is privileged graves for elites or members of the clergy;²⁸⁹ I will discuss these two types separately. I will then discuss burials in monasteries.

2.6.1 The Tombs of Saints

As the burials of venerated individuals could attract graves, I begin with a discussion of these. The tombs of saints or martyrs are usually in crypts beneath the church, and often beneath the altar. Reliquaries, containing the

²⁸⁷ Buschhausen et al. (1996: 36), in which they were considered pagan graves that pre-dated the church.

²⁸⁸ Grossman (2002: 474).

²⁸⁹ Grossman (2002: 128).

remains of venerated individuals, were also often buried beneath the altar (or its presumed location), such as the stone reliquaries found in the B126 Church of Hawara (Byzantine) and the church next to the stylite tower north of the settlement of Umm al-Rasas in Arabia (sixth century, based on two coins found with the reliquary).²⁹⁰

The construction of the burial places of venerated individuals can however differ, especially in cases where they needed to be expanded to accommodate the popularity of the saint. An example of this is the tomb of Saint Menas at Marea, southwest of Alexandria, which became a major pilgrimage center and experienced its most monumental phase during the sixth and early seventh centuries.²⁹¹

Saint Menas' tomb was an extremely popular Egyptian site with pilgrims travelling long distances in the hopes of experiencing the healing power of the saint and to collect holy oil.²⁹² The crypt dates from the fourth century, but before this it was a hypogeum containing multiple burials with a mausoleum constructed above it on the surface. In the early fifth century, this mausoleum was replaced by a three-aisled basilica with access to the crypt from the outside of the basilica.²⁹³ At this time, the saint's tomb was redesigned, with some neighbouring burials sacrificed to create a staircase.²⁹⁴ It was updated again later in the same century, when a second flight of stairs was added to ease the

²⁹⁰ Schick (2018: 171-172).

²⁹¹ Yasin (2017: 173). The site then declined in the seventh century: Hunter-Crawley (2017: 190).

²⁹² Hunter-Crawley (2017: 190).

²⁹³ Hunter-Crawley (2017: 192-193); Grossman (2002: 401-402).

²⁹⁴ Grossman (2002: 401).

movement of pilgrims and ensure that one staircase could serve as entrance and the other as exit.

The other tombs in the hypogeum were also closed at this time, so only the saint's tomb could be accessed.²⁹⁵ In the sixth century, the basilica was replaced by a double tetraconch church, probably to accommodate an increasing number of visitors.²⁹⁶ Two underground burial chambers were added in the apse, probably for privileged members of the clergy who wished to be buried close to the saint.²⁹⁷

A well-designed crypt, especially one with separate staircases for entrance and exit, like the final design at Marea should be interpreted as the burial place of a venerated individual who likely received a large number of visitors.²⁹⁸ Other indicators include the visual repertoire of the crypt, such as the tomb of Saint Shenoute at the White Monastery (fifth century), which is connected to a funerary chapel.²⁹⁹ Shenoute's tomb was decorated with an elaborate depiction of Paradise, as well as an image of the saint himself (Section 6b.3.5).³⁰⁰

While it is possible to say that crypts found associated with churches, especially those found beneath the altar, are the tombs of saints, other less clear examples do exist. A tomb and complex discovered in 2011 at the Newe Yam Dalet in Ashkelon (sixth-seventh century) has been interpreted as the possible

²⁹⁵ Grossman (2002: 404).

²⁹⁶ Hunter-Crawley (2017: 193).

²⁹⁷ Grossman (2002: 408).

²⁹⁸ Grossman (2002: 132).

²⁹⁹ Blanke (2017: 207, 214).

³⁰⁰ Blanke (2017: 214). A group of possible *ad sanctos* burials were also constructed close by.

tomb of a locally venerated figure.³⁰¹ There is no staircase to descend; instead, the tomb is merely a cist grave cut into the floor of a funerary chapel (Figure 2.4). The burial complex is composed of a courtyard, with the tomb situated in its southwestern corner, and a roofed chamber with a mosaic floor featuring geometric patterns and epitaphs. The bones of one individual were recovered from the grave, although there was no indication of who they were or why they were considered special enough to be buried in the complex.³⁰²



Figure 2.4: The possibly venerated tomb and chapel at Newe Yam Dalet. From Seriy (2012).

³⁰¹ Ustinova and Seriy (2018: 147). Pottery and glass fragments found in the chamber dated from the sixth and seventh centuries, indicating that the site was still functioning in the seventh century (151).

³⁰² Ustinova and Seriy (2018: 155).

No church has been discovered in this location, however other graves have been found nearby, suggesting burials may have been attracted to the area.³⁰³

The burial was special enough to warrant the construction of the courtyard and the roofed chamber, with the latter being perhaps slightly later in date than the tomb and courtyard.³⁰⁴ Four mosaic inscriptions present additional information: the date of 543, a wish of good luck to the city, and two references to the Lord.³⁰⁵ Finally, a jar was buried in the floor next to the cist, likely to receive offerings.³⁰⁶

The theory that this is the burial of a venerated individual cannot be conclusively proven, but they were clearly someone special enough to the local population to warrant a distinguished burial. The tomb was meant to be visited and viewed, and the extensive workmanship that would have been required to bury and commemorate a single individual shows that this was designed for more visitors than merely family members. The local community, and possibly also visitors from further afield, were involved in some form of cultic activity at the site involving the tomb.³⁰⁷

Related to this are older tombs upon which churches were constructed, because they were believed to belong to saints. One example is from Gadara,

³⁰³ Ustinova and Seriy (2018: 147).

³⁰⁴ Ustinova and Seriy (2018: 155).

³⁰⁵ Ustinova and Seriy (2018: 152-154). The two inscriptions referencing the Lord were: Inscription no. 2, *Φως κυρίου*, "The light of the Lord" and inscription no. 3, *Αὕτη ἡ πύλη τοῦ κυρίου, δίκαιοι εἰς ἐλεύσονται εἰς αὐτήν*, "This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous shall enter into it".

³⁰⁶ Seriy (2012).

³⁰⁷ Ustinova and Seriy (2018: 155). The authors suggested that the site was arranged to guide visitors into the courtyard, where they could perform activities by the tomb before entering the roofed chamber and exiting via a second opening.

where a church was constructed over a monumental hypogeum which was deliberately left untouched during the city's expansion of the third century.³⁰⁸

Byzantine Palaestina was a particular focus-site of the discovery of ancient tombs and their connection to Christian figures, as these could be taken from the Old or New Testaments and gave the churches a claim to a sanctified individual and a holy space.³⁰⁹ These burials were believed to belong to venerated individuals, regardless of their true original users.

2.6.2 Privileged Church Burials

Having discussed the tombs of saints, it is necessary to discuss the tombs of other individuals who were buried in churches, to gain a fuller understanding of this burial location.

As in the case of the tombs of saints, these burials were not necessarily constructed at the same time as the church. In some cases, tombs cannot be more precisely dated, either because they do not contain any datable finds or have not been fully excavated. Some indicators can help to estimate the date of the tomb – for example, if the church floor was cut to create the grave, such as the graves in Trenches 4, 9, and 14 at Deir Abu Metta (sixth-seventh century),³¹⁰ then the grave must post-date the laying of the floor.

In his study of Egyptian churches, Grossman divided privileged church burials into two categories: those of the clergy, and those of elites, donors, or people who had performed services for the church. These categories can be

³⁰⁸ Weber (2002: 81, 131).

³⁰⁹ Di Segni (2007: 386-391).

³¹⁰ Bowen (2012: 437-442).

distinguished between one another by location: the clergy were buried in the chancel, while the elites could be buried in various locations such as the church entrance, side aisles, or even outside of the church itself.³¹¹ As burials more frequently belong to the latter category, the chancel must have been reserved for the most privileged burials of individuals who were significant to the church.

Examples of tombs in the chancel come from the Transept Basilica of Hermopolis Magna (fifth century or later), the Episcopal Church of Pharan (sixth century?), and the Basilica of Tall al-Mahzan of Pelusium (fourth century or later).³¹² The Church of Kaianus in the Wadi 'Uyun Musa (sixth century), related to a monastery on Mount Nebo, also featured burials in the chancel.³¹³ A sarcophagus at the North Church of Dēḥes in Syria (Byzantine), close to the entrance of the diaconicon, also belongs to this category.³¹⁴

Outside the chancel, privileged burials express a greater variety in terms of location and type. Some are found beneath the floor of the church, others in sarcophagi, and still others in mausolea or other buildings attached to or in the vicinity of the church. Examples are a tomb in the entrance of the main church of the Jeremias monastery near Saqqara (fifth-ninth century), where the grave is marked by a small cross at the head end,³¹⁵ and another in the portico of the church at Dēḥes (Byzantine).³¹⁶ They also appear in the aisles, such as at the church of Saints Cosmas and Damian at Pharan, where a tomb was located at

³¹¹ Grossman (2002: 128, 130).

³¹² Grossman (2002: 129). Grossman considered the burial at Pelusium to be a possible donor grave.

³¹³ Sanmori, (1998: 418-419).

³¹⁴ Griesheimer (1997: 205).

³¹⁵ Grossman (2002: 130).

³¹⁶ Griesheimer (1997: 207).

the west end of the north aisle (sixth century?),³¹⁷ and in four graves in the northern and southern aisles of the church at Rehovot-in-the-Negev (fifth-sixth century).³¹⁸

The tombs of adults and juveniles are found alongside one another, for example five shaft burials beneath the nave of the C101 Church at Hawara (sixth century) contained two juveniles and three adults, while at the West Church in Gadara (fourth century-Byzantine) a crypt contained multiple graves clustered around a central (presumably venerated) grave, with Graves 7 and 18 containing juveniles and Grave 13 a woman with an infant.³¹⁹ The inclusion of newborns, infants and children is also noted in two tombs at Hippos-Sussita (sixth-eighth century), six from the Dakhleh Oasis (fourth-seventh century), and one at Khirbat as-Samra (seventh century). In these instances, the parents may have paid for their children to be buried in the church, perhaps for an additional level of spiritual protection for one who died at such a young age.

Burials in a courtyard, annex, or otherwise close to the church in small clusters that were not associated with a larger cemetery, are also likely to have been of privileged people. For example, at Ruweiḥa in Syria, a group of three or five mausolea (fifth-sixth century) and 12 pit graves (Byzantine) were grouped close to or immediately around the church, separate from the cemetery to the south of the settlement (fourth-fifth century).³²⁰ In some cases, small groups of burials

³¹⁷ Grossman (2002: 130).

³¹⁸ Tsafir et al. (1988: 36-37).

³¹⁹ Schick (2018: 172-173). The two children at Humayma were discovered with grave objects including a cross pendant, while the adult graves were devoid of objects. See Section 5.2.4 for a discussion of grave goods according to the age of the deceased person.

³²⁰ Griesheimer (1997: 209-210).

appeared around other structures close to the church, such as the pit graves (third-fourth century) clustered near West Tombs 1 and 2 (second-fourth century) at the West Church in the Dakhleh Oasis. Nine pit graves were found in three clusters: four against a cemetery wall, two against the east wall of the church, and three against the east wall of West Tomb 1, which may have been considered the tomb of some important or venerated figure.³²¹

The variety of examples of these burials demonstrates multiple options for those who could afford privileged burial within or close to a church. They also show an increasing popularity among wealthy Christians for being buried in this new elite position, attractive certainly for its element of salvation but also to display a new type of privileged identity and remain visible in death.

2.6.3 Monastic Burials

The other location for new Christian burials was in monasteries. Burials within or associated with monasteries typically represent different people than those in churches.

In many cases these are the burials of monks, interred in the monasteries where they had lived and thus maintaining their community in death.³²² Some of the burials in monasteries may also be of people who were looked after in monastic hospitals or privileged members of the local community who wished to be buried within the monastery or its grounds instead of a church. These privileged groups may have viewed burial in a monastery as providing the same

³²¹ Bowen (2019: 377).

³²² The monastic community maintained their exclusiveness as a select group of individuals within the wider Christian community. They were simultaneously distinguished from their fellow Christians and provided with the future prayers of their own community.

service as burial in a church. They may have been buried close to a venerated individual (or founder) or might have ensured prayers for the salvation of their soul.

317 tombs in the appendix were within or associated with monasteries, including monastic churches, containing the remains of at least 486 individuals. They frequently feature multiple rather than individual interments, making them different from church burials. While the individuals who were interred in the tombs may be different, monastic burials can be further distinguished from church burials in that they are more often in shared chamber tombs, hypogea, or communal pits or cists, rather than the individual tombs, sarcophagi, and graves cut into the floors of churches.

While there are examples of some monastic tombs that have not been excavated extensively, others have received significant and well-researched attention. The communal burial of 544 people, mostly adult males and juveniles, in Hypogeum 1 at Saint Stephen's monastery in Jerusalem (fifth-seventh century),³²³ has seen much interest. The remains were found in a single, below Chambers 6 and 8 (Figure 2.5).³²⁴

At other sites, burials were made outside of buildings and away from the spaces occupied by the living, in nearby caves or separate funerary areas. This occurs at the monastery of Pharan, where two monastic complexes have been discovered with burial caves (sixth-eighth century) approximately 1km to their

³²³ Sheridan and Gregoricka (2015: 582, 586), where 96% of the individuals buried in the tomb were said to be male. See Section 3.3.3.1 on sexing methodologies and Section 4.2.1 on the data from the appendix.

³²⁴ Coblentz-Bautch, et al. (2000: 564-565).

east.³²⁵ Mount Nebo features a burial area, chiefly of the fourth-sixth centuries, at Siyagha. The cists in this area were covered with stone slabs, some with holes presumably to facilitate their reopening, (although the presence of these holes does not show any relation to actual reuse). Some were apparently primary burials and others used as ossuaries for successive interments in secondary burial.³²⁶ Hypogea were southeast of the memorial, in the funerary area of Robebus (third-seventh century).³²⁷

Evidence of the burials of non-monks is found in tombs at Deir 'Ain 'Abata, where six cist graves (Byzantine) have been excavated and contained the remains of four juveniles, one newborn, and one foetus, who may have been deliberately buried at a holy site.³²⁸ Meanwhile, a communal grave contained 28 male adults (presumably monks), one female adult, and three infants or children. These bones featured a significant number of pathologies (Chapter 3), suggesting that this may have been the burial place of weak and/or sick members of the community who were treated in the monastery hospital.³²⁹ Another example is the infants and children found in graves at Kursi (sixth-seventh century), which was a major pilgrim site that included a bathhouse and hostel building.³³⁰

³²⁵ Hirschfeld (1990: 6-7).

³²⁶ Sanmori (1998: 413-414).

³²⁷ Sanmori (1998: 414).

³²⁸ Politis (2011: 18).

³²⁹ Politis (2011: 18).

³³⁰ Tzaferis and Bijovsky (2014: 184-186). Nagar (2014b) examined the human remains from the three tombs that were excavated and suggested that the low presence of squatting facet suggests the presence of pilgrims among the deceased. This supposes that the population buried at the monastery were neither local people who requested burial there nor monks who were not engaged in work that required squatting, and therefore did not develop them.

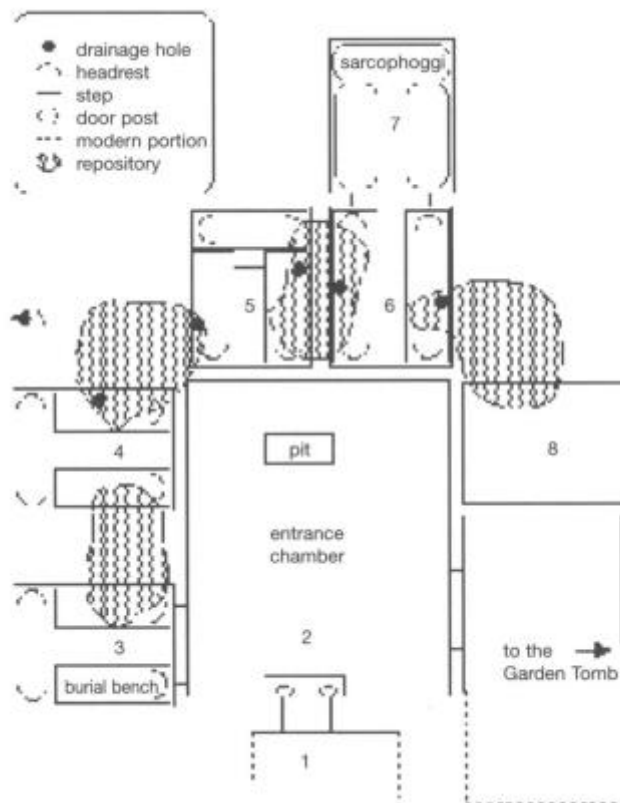


Figure 2.5: Hypogeum 1 at Saint Stephen's monastery. From Coblenz-Bauch (2000: 563).

While monastic burials reflect some differences in style and typology, much like those found within or around churches, monastic burials place greater significance on group rather than individual burial, including examples of secondary burial in ossuaries. A sense of community was more important for monastic burials (see, for example, the inclusion of sleeping mats in Section 5.2.3), with the monks identified as a special and privileged group within the wider community of people who practiced Christianity.

2.7 Local practices

The information established above provides an overview of tombs of the Byzantine Near East from the appendix. I now examine individual provinces in

more detail, to consider more localised aspects of burial rites. This examination of individual provinces will facilitate a more in-depth analysis of tombs at the local level, to identify how landscape, resources, and other conditions affected the types of burials that occurred in different provinces.

I have previously discussed the history of excavations in each area (referring to the current countries rather than the ancient provinces) and issues that arise from these in the Introduction. The main issues which should be kept in mind are the difficulties of excavating in this area, the impact of modern conflict, the differing qualities of published material, and the lack of final reports for many sites. In particular, it should be remembered that the difficulties of excavation in the provinces of Phoenice and Syria, and the lack of meaningful data on many post-Roman tombs in these provinces (excepting al-Bass at Tyre), has resulted in a small number of identified tombs from Phoenice and Syria and thus these provinces are discussed together.

2.7.1 Arabia

The burials of Arabia cover the areas of northeastern Jordan and southern Syria (Figure 2.6). 920 tombs from Arabia (many of them from Khirbat as-Samra) are in the appendix. Only limited tombs are represented from southern Syria, and these have unfortunately received minimal attention, due to the difficulties of excavation in Syria.

Shaft tombs, ending in either pit or cist graves, are the most common tomb type. The shaft graves are found at five agricultural sites and one urban site. While the shaft graves at Ya'amun and Necropolis II at Sa'ad were mostly

single interments, burials of multiple people within the same tomb was common in Arabia. This is especially the case for those tombs in northern Jordan where research has in recent years paid more attention to the contents of the tomb, including human remains.

An unknown number of built tombs, tumuli, and sarcophagi are known from the West Cemetery of Bostra (second century-Byzantine) and the cemetery at Suweida in the Hauran (first century BCE-Byzantine?). Tumulus burials, where a mound of earth and stones was built over the grave to form a mound, are very rare and the only other site where they were found in the appendix is Oxyrhynchos in Arcadia (Byzantine). In contrast, they appear in significant numbers in Nubia, at sites such as Kalabsha and Wadi Qitna (both third-fifth century), which have received much attention but fall outside of this study.³³¹

A small number of hypogea were also found at Bostra (fourth-sixth century) and the monastic site of Mount Nebo (fourth-eighth century). Built mausolea were used up to the fourth or fifth century and were found at Bostra and various sites in the Hauran. Rock-cut tombs were more common and scattered more widely throughout the region, associated with both urban and rural sites. They commonly featured loculi burials, arcosolia burials, and/or pit graves; there were also less frequently examples of sarcophagi, coffins, ossuaries, and other burial types within rock-cut tombs.

³³¹ See Strouhal (1984) and Strouhal (2020).



Figure 2.6: Sites in Arabia.

The use of rock-cut tombs is similar to Palaestina Prima and Secunda, indicating their popularity in these areas. The natural landscape was necessarily

a factor in determining the location of and construction of these tombs³³² and their preference over built tombs is notable.

2.7.2 Egypt

Pit graves are very frequent in Egypt, with hundreds or even thousands reported at single cemeteries, including Kellis 2, Kom al-Ahmar, and Saqqara. Egypt has received greater attention than other provinces on variations between local practices, with research on the use of space, decoration, and treatment of the body by location available for the Greco-Roman and Byzantine periods.³³³ Post-Roman burial practices have, however, received less attention than their Roman and pre-Roman counterparts.³³⁴ Older tombs and traditional burial styles continued to be practiced by many,³³⁵ while in some places these practices were combined with new ones, or the older burial practices were adapted to suit the needs of the new users.

Egypt also had many built tombs, often reused tombs which were built before the fourth century and presumably used by the same family for centuries, chiefly those at el-Bagawat (second-seventh centuries) and Kysis (first-fifth century), both in the Kharga Oasis.³³⁶ Despite their location in the same oasis, there are significant differences between these two groups of tombs. Tombs at Kysis

³³² For example, see Al-Bataineh et al. (2011: 83), who discussed where tombs were constructed at Ya'amun in relation to the layers of limestone and their hardness. Locations for tombs appear to have been selected where the softer stone could be worked to create the interior of the tomb and the harder stone could be used as the ceiling.

³³³ Boozer (2019: 373).

³³⁴ O'Connell (2014b: 7).

³³⁵ O'Connell (2014b: 8).

³³⁶ For example, the tombs at el-Bagawat in Fakhry (1951); Tomb 20 at Kysis, Dunand et al. (1992: 48).

maintained traditional Egyptian burial rites, while many tombs at El-Bagawat featured Christian iconography (Section 6b.3.1.1).³³⁷

Most Egyptian burials in the appendix are from Thebais and Arcadia (Figures 2.7-2.9). For this reason, these two provinces are discussed individually, while the remaining burials are considered as a group.

2.7.2.1 Thebais

Thebais covers the southern half of Egypt. 2,109 burials from the appendix are from Thebais. The two main tomb types in this province are pit graves and built tombs, with both types spread throughout the province. Pit graves are the more common, found from the cemeteries in the Kharga and Dakhleh Oases far away from the Nile to the cemeteries of Matmar and Mostagedda directly by the Nile. They are often the simplest possible type of grave, very rarely with evidence of any kind of coffin or other furnishings. Stelae are sometimes found *in situ* marking the location of a grave but have often been removed or reused as building material.

Most of the built tombs, used for multiple burials, are the chapels found in the Kharga Oasis (first-seventh century), but they are also found in smaller numbers at the Dakhleh Oasis (second-fourth century) and along the Nile, for example at Antinoopolis (second-seventh century). Many of these were older tombs that continued to be used or were reused in the Byzantine period, while a small number date from the fourth century or later. The North Cemetery in Antinoopolis featured some built tombs which have seen preliminary publication

³³⁷ See Dunand et al. (1992) and Dunand et al. (2005) on ancient tombs at Kysis.

(for example, see baptistery chapel discussed in Section 1.2.1). The Tomb of Tg'ol (third-seventh century), for instance, was in the middle of a peristyle complex and contained the remains of a woman and a newborn baby in an open-topped wooden coffin, covered by a gravestone.³³⁸

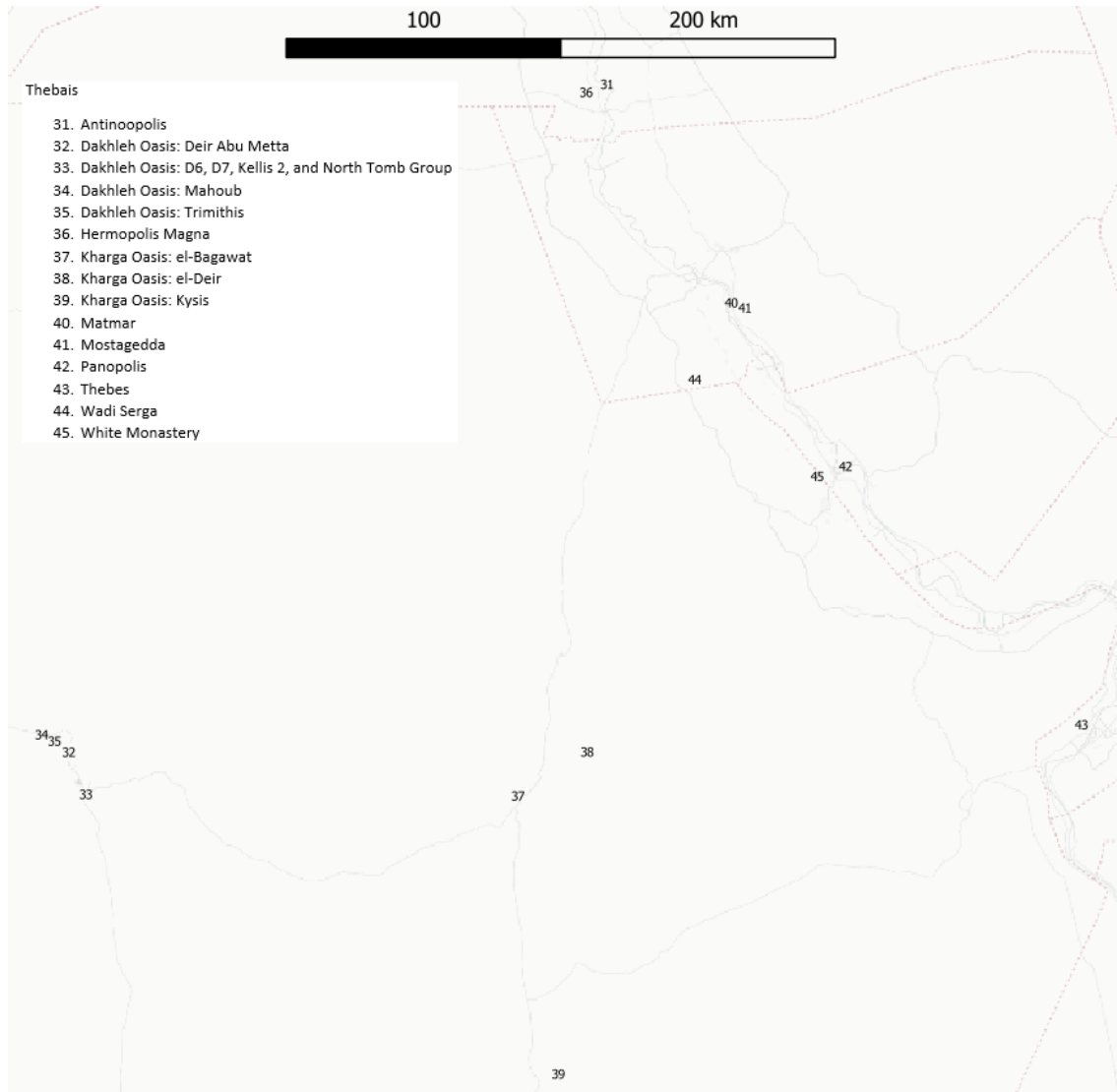


Figure 2.7: Sites in Thebais.

While a small number of tombs from the Dakhleh Oasis that were used for multiple burials, mostly rock-cut or mudbrick tombs, the difference between

³³⁸ Fluck (2014: 115).

these and the tombs of the Kharga Oasis is striking. While in the Dakhleh Oasis they are found only rarely and burial is significantly more often in simple pits, in the Kharga Oasis the mudbrick tombs can be found as domed chapels or with barrel-vaults.³³⁹ Whether this is based on the location of Dakhleh, which was further from the Nile and other large cities of Egypt, or a choice of the local populations is unclear.

While graves of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods in Thebais have been labelled as largely traditional, there were some new innovations such as painted shrouds and wooden mummy portraits lasting roughly between the third and fifth centuries at Antinoopolis.³⁴⁰ Yet despite these innovations, we see a lengthy use of most cemeteries, excluding those which appear in relation to churches and monasteries, supporting a long tradition of burial practices that continued in the Byzantine period.

2.7.2.2 Arcadia

Arcadia spans central Egypt. 3,159 burials are recorded here. The province is almost entirely dominated by pit graves, coming from the Faiyum, Qarara, Saqqara, and the monastery of Deir Abu Fana. At least 93 pit graves contained either coffins, nails, or wooden boards, with the majority of these coming from Qarara.

³³⁹ Lythgoe (1908b: 204).

³⁴⁰ Boozer (2019: 376).

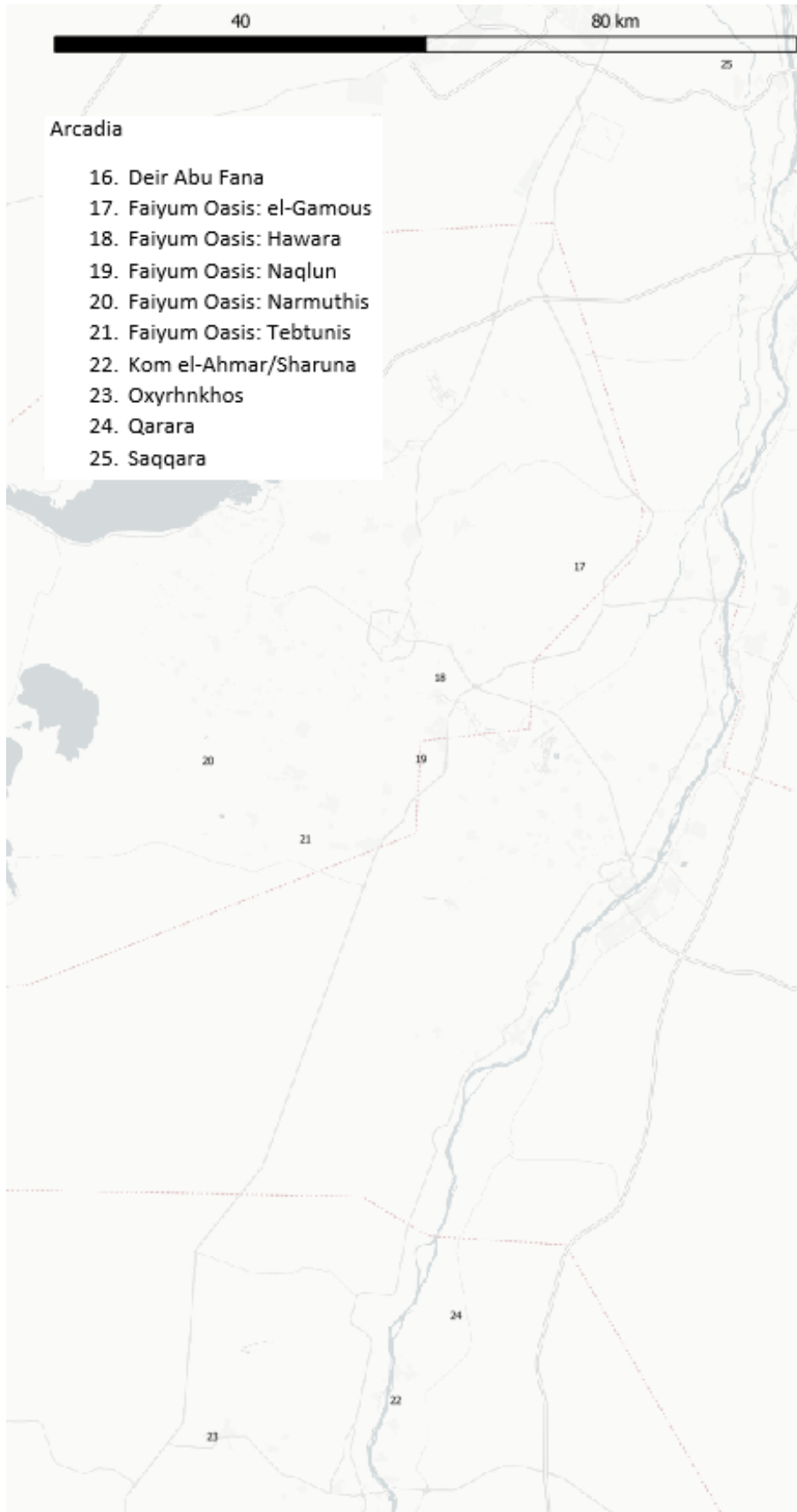


Figure 2.8: Sites in Arcadia.

The coffins from Qarara (fourth-ninth century) typically contained one individual, with a triangular gable-like roof structure over the head end of the coffin.³⁴¹

Additional coffins with gable-shaped structures have also been found in rock tombs at Qarara and the same effect is achieved within coffins through the use of palm leaves,³⁴² while grave 2003 at Saqqara (fifth-ninth century) had gable-shaped heaps of reed and chopped straw over both the head and foot ends of the burial.³⁴³ Other examples have been found in Tebtunis and Qasr el-Banat (close to Qarara),³⁴⁴ both also within the province of Arcadia.

Aside from pits and coffins, tomb type within Arcadia seems to vary on a more localized level. These likely reflect availability and the local environment.

Hypogea, rock-cut tombs, and tumuli have been excavated at Oxyrhynchos (Byzantine), while shaft graves were used for individual and multiple burials at Naqlun in the Egyptian Faiyum (sixth-seventh century). Rock-cut chamber tombs have also been found at Qarara, but date as early as the Ptolemaic period.³⁴⁵ Many cemeteries were in use before the fourth century, and in some cases, notably at Qarara and Saqqara, continued to be used after the seventh.

2.7.2.3 Aegyptus and Augustamnica

Aegyptus and Augustamnica represent the northern part of Egypt, including Alexandria and the surrounding areas.

³⁴¹ For example, tomb 1952 70 at Saqqara and the Peacock Coffin discovered in 1913 at Qarara.

³⁴² Huber and Nauerth, (2018: 459); Ranke (1926: 3).

³⁴³ Quibell and Thompson (1912: 37).

³⁴⁴ Huber (2013: 80).

³⁴⁵ Huber and Nauerth (2018: 438).



Figure 2.9: Sites in Aegyptus and Augustamnica.

The built and subterranean tombs of Alexandria remained in use from pre-Christian times and thus the use of traditional group tombs, rather than individual burials, is better known here. The subterranean tombs at Gabbari, Alexandria (Hellenistic-Byzantine) were enlarged from as early as the first century BCE, as the demand for burial space increased. This demand continued in the Christian period and multi-storey groups of loculi were added to the walls once the original tomb plans proved insufficient.³⁴⁶ Despite the lack of space, burials continued, suggesting that this limitation did not outweigh the want or expectation that these tombs should continue to be used for burial.

In other areas of these provinces, new burial grounds appeared, typically related to either churches or monasteries. Some of these date to the fourth century, but most are only as early as the fifth or sixth centuries. Unfortunately, the low number of burials (42) in the appendix does not allow more in-depth analysis.

2.7.3 Palaestina

The burial sites that have been consulted in this thesis from the provinces of Palaestina Prima, Secunda, and Tertia are shown in Figures 2.10-2.12. The reuse of older tombs and cemeteries in the Byzantine period was common across all three provinces.

2.7.3.1 Palaestina Prima

Palaestina Prima covers the central areas of present-day Israel, the Gaza Strip, and almost all of the West Bank. 1,118 tombs from the appendix were within

³⁴⁶ Sabottka (1985: 279).

Palaestina Prima (47 of which may either be in Palaestina Prima or Secunda). This is the largest number of entries from a single province outside of Egypt.

Cists, rock-cut chamber tombs, and pit graves are the best represented tomb types. Cists are mainly from Be'er Sheva, Anthedon, Jerusalem, Eleutheropolis, and Ashkelon, while pit graves are found at Gane Tal and Jerusalem. Many of these tombs are for individual interments, while a few contain multiple burials.

One pit grave on Jerusalem's Sallah ed-Din Street (third-fifth century) contained the remains of nine people and a cist at Ashkelon (fourth-fifth century) contained 17 individuals. These may represent cases when a mass grave was required, perhaps due to accident or disease, especially at Sallah ed-Din Street where none of the other graves contain more than three individuals (and most only one).

Multiple burials were mainly in chamber tombs, mostly rock-cut tombs but some hypogea, natural caves, and built tombs as well. These are mainly at Eleutheropolis, Jerusalem, and around Apollonia in the Southern Sharon, but they are also distributed widely around the province. Most chamber tombs featured burials in loculi or arcosolia, and sometimes both, as well as burials dug into the floor. A select number of tombs also feature ossuaries, indicating secondary burial, an ancient Jewish practice which had been in use since the Second Temple Period (516 BCE-70), but which was demonstrably less popular by the beginning of the Byzantine period, as shown through their rarity and the lack of secondary burial practices in known Jewish tombs.³⁴⁷ Some of the

³⁴⁷ Hachlili and Killebrew (1983: 125-127).

examples of ossuaries in Eleutheropolis come from tombs used between the fourth and fifth centuries to as late as the eighth century.



Figure 2.10: Sites in Palaestina Prima.

2.7.3.2 Palaestina Secunda

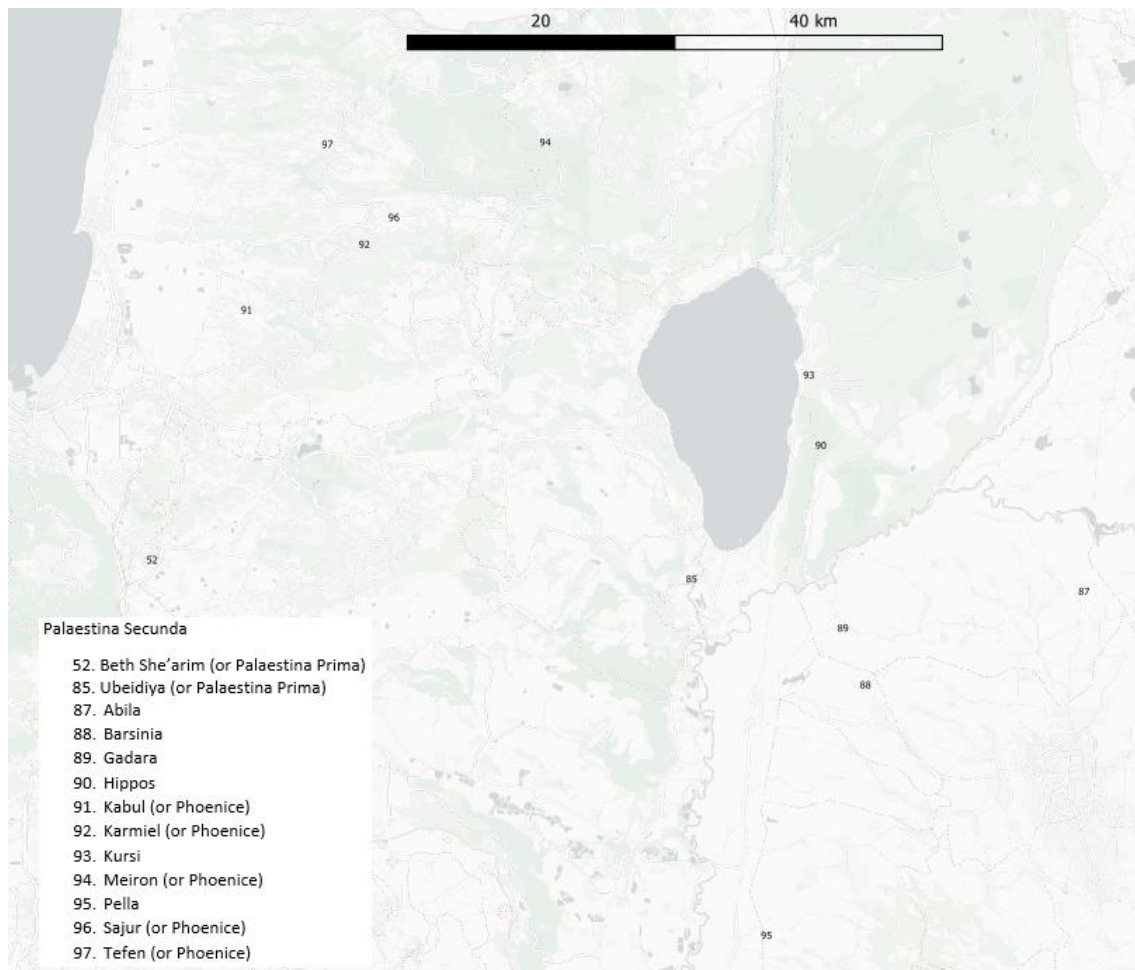


Figure 2.11: Sites in Palaestina Secunda.

Palaestina Secunda is to the north of Palaestina Prima, covering northern Israel and a small part of northern Jordan, and was a smaller province. 323 tombs come from this province (of which 47 lie on the border with Palaestina Prima and 28 on the border with Phoenice Prima). Most of the tombs are rock-cut tombs, by far the most common type found widely dispersed throughout the province. Ossuaries are again found in a small minority of tombs such as Tomb 30 from the North Cemetery of Scythopolis (fourth century), indicating the practice of secondary burial. Cist and pit graves are mostly absent, apart from

at a small number of sites including the monastic complex at Kursi (sixth-seventh century) and the church at Hippos-Sussita (sixth-eighth century).

The catacombs of Beth She'arim (first-fifth century), which lie on the border between Palaestina Prima and Palaestina Secunda, are relatively unique within the dataset. A subterranean tomb complex was also found at Kursi, but rock-cut tombs were favoured in both provinces.

2.7.3.3 Palaestina Tertia

Palaestina Tertia presents a different picture from the other Palestinian provinces. It covers the southern part of Israel, as well as parts of Jordan and the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. The tombs from this province are more spread out than in Palaestina Prima and Secunda. While 221 excavated tombs are represented, the province includes Phaeno (fourth-seventh century), which has an estimated 2,100 pit graves (1,700 graves in the part-excavated south cemetery and an additional 400 from the unexcavated western and eastern cemeteries).³⁴⁸ Pit graves were much more common in this province than in other areas of Palaestina, also found at Aila (fourth century), and one pit containing a coffin at Bir Madhkur (third-fifth century), in a cemetery ranging from the Classical to Islamic periods where 60-75 burial features were identified.³⁴⁹ East-west oriented burial of a single individual was the norm.

32 cist tombs were excavated at Aila (fourth-fifth century), each containing one individual. A small number of other cist graves were found at the monastery of

³⁴⁸ Perry et al. (2009: 430).

³⁴⁹ Perry (2007a: 83-85). Another 13 burials were noted east of the site and were thought to be related to the Late Roman/Byzantine period of the site, although they were not investigated.

Deir 'Ain 'Abata (Byzantine), and the only notable burial of more than two individuals (rare in Palaestina Tertia) is Tomb 7 from the same monastery, a possible example of the weak members of the community who were looked after in the monastery hospital. A group of caves and a single crypt both come from the Sinai Peninsula, the first associated with the monastery of Pharan (sixth-eighth century) and the second with the church of Saint Catherine's Monastery (sixth century). While the use of caves for burial was rare, this may be an issue of data or excavations in the province, as I consider it highly unlikely that they were not used based on the presence of these tombs in large numbers in other parts of Palaestina and in smaller numbers in Egypt.

It is notable that the increased reliance on pit graves over cists or shaft graves in Palaestina Tertia is comparable to the dominance of pit graves in Egypt. Despite neighbouring both Palaestina Prima and Arabia, which had their own cultural connection, the burials excavated in Palaestina Tertia more closely appear to resemble the Egyptian preference for very simple, shallow pits, rather than the cists and deeper shaft graves that found greater popularity in Palaestina Prima and Arabia respectively.

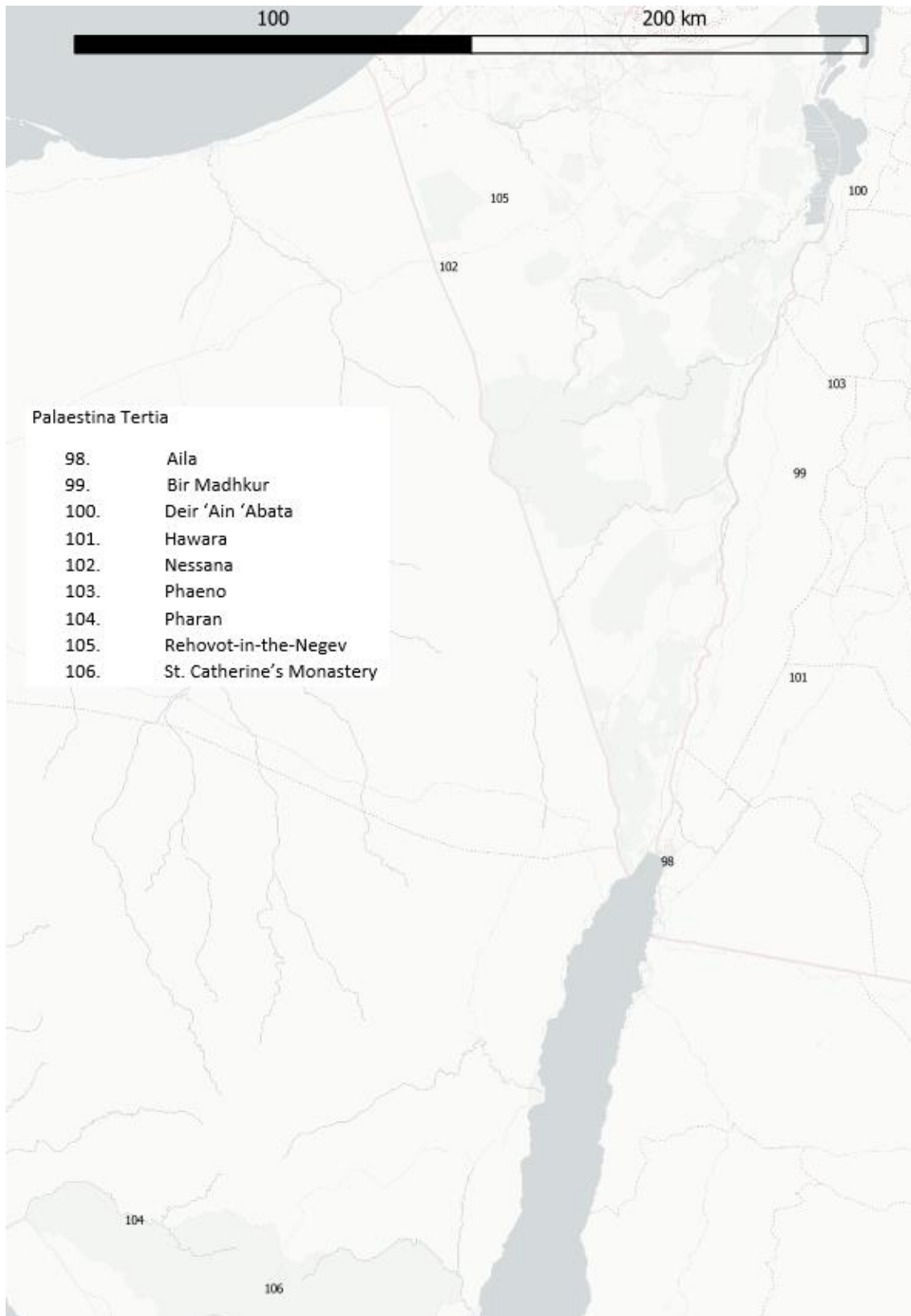


Figure 2.12: Sites in Palaestina Tertia.

2.7.4 Phoenice and Syria

Phoenice Prima and Secunda primarily cover modern Lebanon, but also some parts of northern Israel and southern Syria; Syria Prima and Secunda cover most of modern Syria, excepting the northeast (Figures 2.13-2.14). I examine these provinces together because, although 968 tombs are represented, the Al-Bass cemetery in Tyre accounts for more than half – 557 – of these tombs, and the two provinces have received the least archaeological attention. The database features only 235 tombs from the Syrian provinces. Any conclusions on common burial practices in these provinces must, by the size and nature of the evidence, remain preliminary.

Many of the tombs of Syria are from the Limestone Plateau, including some related to churches. Sarcophagi seem to have been particularly associated with church burials. Hypogea, pit graves, and rock-cut tombs were the most common tomb types after sarcophagi. Although most of the chamber tombs contained burials in either loculi or arcosolia, coffins were discovered in tombs at El-Kabri (third-fourth century) and sarcophagi in tombs at Emathous (second century-Byzantine) and in a catacomb at Emesa (third-seventh century).



Figure 2.13: Sites in Phoenice.

Hypogea and above-ground chamber tombs could have courtyards and walls surrounding them, such as some on the Limestone Plateau (fourth-sixth

century).³⁵⁰ These enclosures may have delineated the space around the tomb to show that it belonged to the tomb, or else were for protecting the monuments, and similar to al-Bass (Section 2.5.2) they may have contained gardens.³⁵¹ The tombs on the Limestone Plateau differ from those at al-Bass, however, in that they are each surrounded by an enclosure wall, rather than a wall enclosing a much larger tomb complex. The difference may indicate that single-family tombs were each delineated on the Limestone Plateau, while at al-Bass some larger community connection between the initial users of the tombs (if not necessarily the later Byzantine users) was instead represented. Both sites demonstrate a clear understanding that the entrance of the tomb is an important space that should be marked or delineated. While the tombs of Phoenice and Syria are not alone in having courtyards and enclosure walls, little attention has been given elsewhere to the possible presence of gardens in these areas.

The representation of sarcophagi, hypogea, and mausolea over graves that were dug into the ground must surely be related to their physical presence (and that of the associated churches) in the landscape. If the tombs from Tyre are removed from the dataset, the presence of pit graves as one of the most common types of burial (64 of 443, or 14.4%) suggests that these may have been more popular and that they have either not been excavated or published. They may simply have been ignored or avoided by excavators who sought the more prominent and easily identifiable tombs. Comments on the visibility of

³⁵⁰ Griesheimer (1997: 193, 195).

³⁵¹ Griesheimer (1997: 195-196).

sarcophagi and other tombs, which clearly dominate the landscape,³⁵² support this conclusion.

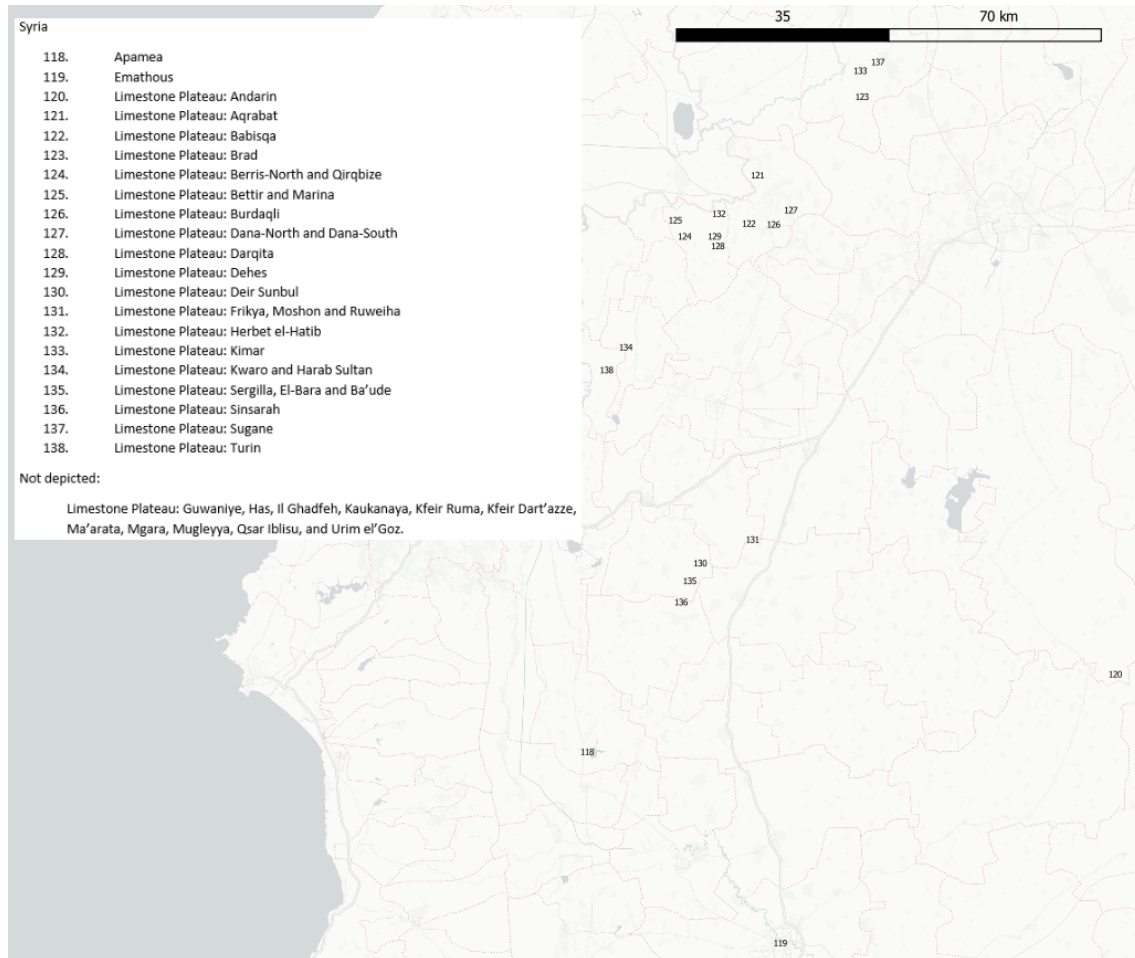


Figure 2.14: Sites in Syria.

2.8 Conclusion

The cemeteries and tombs covered by this thesis represent the various primary concerns relating to death and burial of their users. While cemeteries were organized in different ways and for different reasons (according to the natural landscape, the built landscape, family or community bonds, socio-economic

³⁵² Griesheimer (1997: 183).

status, etc.), they were organised spaces that were distinct from the settlement areas of their users.

Although cemetery areas inevitably fell out of use as their communities became smaller or the settlement area began to expand into them, there are very few examples where it can be claimed that a single community stopped using one cemetery and began to use another during the fourth-seventh centuries. This is because the primary focus of the cemetery was to provide a practical service and the decisions surrounding burial location, type, and visibility did not undergo any significant changes at this time. The single exception to this rule is the emergence of Christianity, which encouraged the appearance of burials in or around churches and monasteries.

Social hierarchy is represented strongly through these new burial locations. Burials associated with churches and monasteries identified specific groups of people: for churches, venerated religious figures, clergymen, and elites who could afford to donate to or provide services for the church; for monasteries, usually monks but also possibly the sick or weak and travelers who died on their journeys, as well as a few elites. However, social hierarchy was also expressed in other ways, through the location, style, and visibility of tombs, and elites did not need to be buried within churches or monasteries to demonstrate their wealth through burial. The importance of community was also expressed in various ways through burial, but noticeably through the burials of monks as a special group within the wider Christian community, and in family or group tombs or burial plots.

Burial in this period was not static. It was fluid and adaptable according to the practical, social, spiritual, and economic needs of people, as well as according to the natural landscape, built landscape, and access to resources. Yet it also maintained many of the visual and physical elements of previous generations. The main concerns of those who were burying the dead were focused on immediate and physical needs, rather than spiritual needs, which were secondary elements that are more notable in discussions of grave goods (Chapter 5), funeral rites, and ways of commemorating the dead (both Chapter 1).

CHAPTER 3: HUMAN REMAINS: TECHNIQUES

3.1 Introduction

Having discussed tomb typology and aspects of the cemetery, I now move onto the contents of burials, starting with human remains. The study of human remains can inform on basic demographic information such as ageing and sexing, as well as data on population health, access to resources, adaptability, occupational stress, and other quality of life information.³⁵³ In most cases where human remains of the Byzantine period are discovered, they are skeletal remains. The quality of preservation can range from little more than a few fragments to complete skeletons in anatomical position, with the best-preserved samples being the most desirable for study, due to their likelihood of providing more in-depth and accurate information. However, sometimes mummified remains are discovered, notably from Egypt where both burial and environmental conditions have assisted their preservation.³⁵⁴

This chapter introduces the study of human remains by explaining methodologies used to estimate sex and age, examine diet and population movement, and discuss stress and disease. This is because there is currently no standard framework in either the Near East or Byzantine studies to examine human remains, and various methods of study are employed depending on the researcher, where study is carried out, and access to human remains or technology; therefore, it is important for anyone using the information obtained

³⁵³ Driscoll and Sheridan (2000: 458).

³⁵⁴ See Parker Pearson (2010: 201) on the survival of soft tissue, including preservation in dry environments with natural or artificial mummification.

from the study of human remains to understand the methodologies that researchers use. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss key methodologies used in this research and present a list of skeletal damage and pathologies.

Human remains are relevant to the study of burials because they allow us to consider differences in burial rites based on sex, age, socio-economic status, geographic origin, occupation, and illness or disease. Historians of Byzantine studies have been very slow to use data from human remains as a form of evidence.³⁵⁵ While the use of more scientific-led investigations is becoming steadily more popular within Byzantine studies,³⁵⁶ there is still much that historians can gain from greater engagement with this research.

This chapter is largely descriptive, laying out the basic information required to discuss the data from the appendix and case studies that follow in Chapter 4. This descriptive discussion is necessary because of the unfamiliarity of many Byzantinists with interpreting this data, understanding the historical background of this research, and evaluating the results. Data from human remains needs to be examined carefully, in the same way that other sources (such as texts) are evaluated.³⁵⁷ The ability to analyse work on human remains is integral to understanding its value to discourse.

To facilitate this study and make this chapter more accessible, I have used the general framework provided by Historic England (HE) advising osteologists on

³⁵⁵ Kollig et al. (2011: 479).

³⁵⁶ Alongside other more scientific disciplines such as environmental study. I was fortunate enough to (virtually) attend the 53rd Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies in 2021 when Izdebski gave an excellent keynote on the emerging use of the sciences in Byzantine studies. Izdebski (2021).

³⁵⁷ Perry (2007b: 486). This also occurs in the opposite direction, with researchers on human remains treating textual sources as truthful narratives.

their role in fieldwork and how to carry out their research; this is available online and was last updated in 2018.³⁵⁸ HE provides information on:

- The excavation, including planning stages.
- Assessment of the quality, nature, and condition of the skeletal assemblage and the possibility of its use for scientific analysis.
- The data that should be gathered and reported, and how the report should be created.
- Archiving of the data and human remains.
- Case studies.

In addition, I also use the guidelines published by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) of 2017.³⁵⁹ CIfA provides information on:

- Ageing and sexing methodologies.
- Recording and analysing human dentition.
- Guidance on articulated, cremated, disarticulated, and commingled human remains.
- Recording ancestry.
- Metric and non-metric studies.
- Guidance for recording pathologies.
- Guidance for sampling bone chemistry.
- Skeletal collections.

³⁵⁸ *The role of the human osteologist in an archaeological fieldwork project* (2018).

³⁵⁹ Mitchell and Brickley (2017).

Both HE and ClfA are considerably more up to date than the methodologies which are typically relied upon by Byzantine bioarchaeologists. These frameworks provide easy-to-read introductions to research on human remains that I use to evaluate the methodologies used in Byzantine studies.

The data used in Chapters 3 and 4 is the synthesised work of others who have studied and published this material, which I have collected, rather than my own work on human remains. This chapter contains three parts. Section 3.2 explains the history of research in our area. Section 3.3 discusses methodologies used to study human remains in Byzantine archaeology, including the use of skulls, sexing, ageing, and identifying stress, pathologies, diet, and population movement. Section 3.4 presents a list of skeletal damage and pathologies mentioned in the appendix, explains how they are identified, and their possible interpretations. This information is then used to support the arguments and case studies in Chapter 4. The conclusion emphasises the importance of becoming familiar with the techniques used to study human remains, their interpretations and historical contexts, and analysing the value of their conclusions.

3.2 History of Research

Early researchers and explorers of the Near East paid minimal attention to human remains and the information that could be obtained from them, but recently more scientific approaches, such as isotopic studies, have been undertaken.³⁶⁰ Research on early Byzantine remains has been largely focused in areas such as Italy and Greece, although greater attention is now being given

³⁶⁰ Perry (2012: 451).

to areas previously overlooked, including Cyprus and Anatolia.³⁶¹ With the exception of Egypt, the geographic areas in this thesis have been largely overlooked.

Many of the sites in the appendix have not produced human remains, or the human remains that were discovered have not been subject to further study. There are various reasons for this. In some cases, the preservation of the sample was not good enough to undergo investigation, because of the deterioration of bones due to ground conditions or disturbance of the sample.³⁶² An example of this is the study by Nagar and Sonntag on skeletons from the excavations at Be'er Sheva, which were considered too fragmentary and poorly preserved to identify pathologies.³⁶³ In addition, legislation on working with human remains and factors affecting their study also differs according to country,³⁶⁴ which has huge implications on the research that can be carried out, including limiting methods of analysis, access to human remains, and even the ability to complete an excavation (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Factors affecting the study of human remains. Based on Ikram (2011), Nagar (2011b), and Sheridan (2017).

Country	Authority	Legislation and study	Other information
Egypt	Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.	No legislation on excavation of human remains. Export permit required to study human remains outside of Egypt, difficult to obtain.	Conferences and universities focus on training researchers and care of human remains.

³⁶¹ For example, Rubini and Zaio (2009: 2771-2779) (Italy); Bourbou (2003: 303-313) (Greece); Fox (2012: 60-79) (Cyprus); Schmidt-Schultz and Schultz (2017) (Anatolia).

³⁶² See *The role of the human osteologist in an archaeological fieldwork project* (2018: 15-16) on the preferable condition and nature of a skeletal assemblage.

³⁶³ Nagar and Sonntag (2008: 85).

³⁶⁴ Sheridan (2017: 111).

Israel	Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA), with standards from the Ministry of Religious Affairs.	Reburial of all human remains since 1994. Set of mandatory measurements, non-metric traits, and pathological information taken <i>in situ</i> .	Protests from ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups can disrupt excavations or demand the reburial of excavated bones.
Jordan	Department of Antiquities and Heritage.	Permanent loan of skeletal collections to researchers in other countries for the purposes of study.	Growing influence in bioarchaeological study with a focus at excavations by Yarmouk University in particular.
Lebanon	Lebanese Directorate General of Antiquities.	Very little bioarchaeological study, but human skeletal collections available.	Destruction of sites. Research greatly affected by the Civil War and its aftereffects.
Palestine	Palestinian Antiquity Authority (PAA) in Area A; Palestinian civil and Israeli military control in Area B; IAA in Area C.	Inconsistent laws, with little effective legislation and restricted access to the region.	Destruction of sites.
Syria	Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums.	Human remains have not been protected alongside other archaeological artifacts.	Destruction of sites. Research greatly affected by the Civil War and its aftereffects.

Regardless of legislation or common practice, additional problems to research are presented through preservation, disturbance, and the type of burial itself. Disarticulated remains (a skeleton which is not found with the bones in the correct order) and commingled remains (the bones of more than one skeleton found mixed together)³⁶⁵ make it difficult to ascribe bones to an individual person, can take longer to study, and generally yield more limited results

³⁶⁵ Commingling can also occur post-excavation, during the transport or storage of human remains. See Fox and Marklein (2014: 193, 195).

compared to articulated remains. Despite this, some information on sex, age, disease, trauma, and diet may still be obtained from these assemblages.³⁶⁶

Regarding commingled burials, these have often been overlooked in favour of individual burials, because the latter are easier to work from. However, this creates an inaccurate view of the past which ignores individuals interred in mass burials and therefore misses a substantial portion of the population.³⁶⁷

Commingled burials require the calculation of a minimum number of individuals, which is usually a significant underestimation of the actual population interred within the tomb.³⁶⁸ Despite the difficulties associated with the study of commingled burial assemblages, it is possible to produce more in-depth research on them if enough time and resources are available, such as the work completed on remains from the burials at Mount Nebo (fourth-eighth century), Deir 'Ain 'Abata (Byzantine), and Khan-el-Ahmar (fifth-thirteenth(?) century).³⁶⁹

Guidance by HE also favours whole, articulated skeletons over disturbed and mixed assemblages, viewing the latter as a less important assemblage because of the greater difficulty in obtaining and analysing data.³⁷⁰ This is something to bear in mind when dealing with research on human remains, as commingled

³⁶⁶ Fox and Marklein (2014: 194).

³⁶⁷ Sheridan (2017: 121). Commingled burials will often include broken and mixed bones, making work more difficult.

³⁶⁸ Brickley and McKinley (2004: 14-15); Sheridan (2017: 124).

³⁶⁹ Judd (2020: 70). Judd examined the health of the monks to see whether their remains indicate they may have been drawn to these sites because of their proximity to places associated with healing (the Dead Sea, Liviya Baths, and the Jordan River). Monks from Mount Nebo and Deir 'Ain 'Abata had similar levels of injuries, severe osteoarthritis and osteoporosis in the lower legs, and tooth loss. Pathologies at Khan el Ahmar were mostly limited to dental pathologies (81). Leprosy was not discovered in any of the 217 individuals examined, suggesting that the monks had not been attracted to monasteries for healing purposes (78). While leprosy only appears in a minority of individuals who are affected by it (Section 3.4.8), we might reasonably expect some indication of its presence if it was a significant contributor that attracted people to monasteries.

³⁷⁰ *The role of the human osteologist in an archaeological fieldwork project* (2018: 16-17).

and disarticulated individuals may not be included in the data. Communities which performed secondary and/or commingled burial will thus be underrepresented, and research on these groups is rare but valuable.

Within Byzantine studies, analysis of human remains will often appear in the appendices of archaeological reports, or separate from them altogether, and are therefore not typically integrated with the burials or discussed in their archaeological context. For example, the excavations published in *'Atiqot*, a journal which regularly publishes on excavations in Israel/Palestine, have separate reports for the excavation itself, human remains, and grave goods, thus preventing their combined analysis.³⁷¹ In too many cases, the presence of bones is simply mentioned with little or no additional detail provided, or is passed over completely. For example, the presence of broken skeletal remains is listed as one of the “finds” (alongside grave goods) in a burial cave at Horvat 'Illin (Herodian-Byzantine).³⁷² By mentioning bones as simply one of the objects discovered during the course of the excavation, they become a find of secondary importance in a situation where they, in fact, are the reason for the burial and its associated finds in the first place.

The following sections of this chapter provide more in-depth information on the history of research in the countries covered in this thesis.

3.2.1 Egypt

Egypt is the country with the longest history of study on human remains in this thesis. European and American scholars have long been fascinated by

³⁷¹ This occurs at, for example, Şallah ed-Din Street in Jerusalem.

³⁷² Seligman and May (1993: 78).

mummified remains from Egypt: for example, interest in mummy unwrappings dates to the seventeenth century, although the remains were treated more like objects than human beings.³⁷³

At some Egyptian sites, including el-Gamous (first-seventh century), reburial and commingling of human remains occurred following their excavation, although the bones had previously been interred in individual graves.³⁷⁴

Alongside a lack of correct labelling in collections, this has resulted in a lack of context for later research.³⁷⁵ The inability to identify the original context of the remains affects analysis of burial rites, dating, and discussions of the individual and the cemetery population.

Despite these drawbacks, the natural environment of Egypt has granted better preservation of human remains than elsewhere, and especially the remains of infants and children. This has permitted more systematic studies of cemetery populations when compared to other geographic areas.³⁷⁶ These studies can provide useful information on non-elite cemeteries, the lives of ordinary people, the burial rites of the young, and the mortuary practices of communities.

2,627 tombs from Egypt in the appendix are known to have contained human remains at the time of their excavation (probably far more), with pathological analysis more common in recent years.

³⁷³ Ikram (2018: 46).

³⁷⁴ Wood (1988: 31-44).

³⁷⁵ Kirkpatrick (2019: 256-270).

³⁷⁶ For example, research on human remains in the Faiyum and Dakhleh Oases are far more extensive than most of the sites outside of Egypt. See the appendix.

3.2.2 Israel and Palestine

Research on human remains in Israel and Palestine is hindered by several factors that limit the amount of information that can be obtained, the most important of which are the reburial of human remains and access to excavations and collections.

Since 1994, human remains excavated in Israel must be reburied immediately following their analysis, which is usually limited to an *in situ* or macroscopic analysis. This prevents future research, including laboratory analysis and long-term studies, as well as extensive investigation during the excavation itself.³⁷⁷

Ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups have been known to overrun excavations to prevent the disturbance of the dead, such as the protestors who prevented the complete excavation of tombs at Gane Tal in 2010.³⁷⁸

The IAA has attempted to combat these limitations by creating a human osteological database containing data from the study of human remains from all their excavations, beginning in 1994.³⁷⁹ This database contains selective demographic information and descriptive data on the human remains, collected using standardised criteria to facilitate comparison between sites. The information which is typically collected is:

- Age, determined by multiple methods including dental wear.

³⁷⁷ Nagar (2011a: 1); Sheridan (2017: 118).

³⁷⁸ Some basic information on the tombs is still available, but contextual information for the burial finds is not known. Arbel and 'Ad (2021: 149). See Sheridan (2017: 118) for the beliefs of ultra-orthodox groups that removing human bones is a form of desecration that causes the deceased pain, humiliation, and compromises their resurrection, even if they were non-Jewish.

³⁷⁹ Nagar (2011a: 1, 13). As of 2011, over 30,000 sites were categorized.

- Sex, determined by skull and pelvic morphology, or, where these are fragmentary, measurements of the femoral head and distal humerus.³⁸⁰
- Postcranial measurements, cranial measurements,³⁸¹ and non-metric epigenetic traits.
- Selected pathologies including cribra orbitalia, porotic hyperostosis, trauma, and periostosis.³⁸²

As long-term study or re-examination are typically not possible in Israel and Palestine, and excavations are the result of salvage operations with limited time for examination of the human remains, we are reliant on the information reported in publications on human remains analyses, often appearing without photographs, and the skeletal damage and pathologies that were recorded during excavations. 606 tombs from Israel and Palestine in the appendix are known to have contained human remains at the time of their excavation, with pathological study common.

3.2.3 Syria and Lebanon

Human remains in Syria and Lebanon have often been treated with less importance than in Egypt and Israel/Palestine, and research has been slow to adopt new methodological approaches.³⁸³ Human remains are poorly represented in Syria and Lebanon, and research in both locations has been heavily impacted by conflict and political unrest.

³⁸⁰ Nagar (2011a: 3).

³⁸¹ Israeli scholarship is particularly interested in skull morphology. It is used mostly to differentiate between populations, race, and religious groups (particularly, to identify Jewish populations).

³⁸² Nagar (2011a: 2). Nagar uses the term 'periostitis' instead of periostosis; see Section 3.4.9 on why periostosis is the more appropriate term.

³⁸³ Perry (2012: 451).

Archaeologists working on sites in Lebanon rarely paid attention to skeletal material they encountered before the 1960s, instead focusing on grave goods.³⁸⁴ Although the number of individuals (3,995) from Tyre's Al Bass cemetery (first century BCE-seventh century) is known,³⁸⁵ this is based on the number of skulls only and no additional research was undertaken on the remains besides counting them. Political unrest has majorly limited research, meaning that very little quality research has been undertaken, and although collections of human remains exist, their study is virtually non-existent.³⁸⁶

Research in Syria is comparable to Lebanon, largely due to their political unity before Lebanon became a separate country in the early twentieth century.³⁸⁷ The interest in skulls decreased and, until the 1960s, most published research on tombs focused on grave goods.³⁸⁸ Limited information on human skeletal remains can be found, usually only basic information such as position, demographic information, sex, and age; these are usually treated as a separate study rather than being integrated into the overall discussion of the tomb(s).³⁸⁹ Furthermore, the application of a scientific method has often been overlooked, and Syrian pathological research is often region-specific rather than integrated into broader publications, hindering the exchange of ideas and improvement of research techniques.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁴ Perry (2012: 452).

³⁸⁵ De Jong (2010: 601, 610).

³⁸⁶ Perry (2012: 452); Sheridan (2017: 119).

³⁸⁷ Perry (2012: 452).

³⁸⁸ Perry (2012: 452-453).

³⁸⁹ Perry (2012: 453-454).

³⁹⁰ Perry (2012: 454).

Despite the limited studies on human remains that have been carried out, there is an abundance of skeletal material.³⁹¹ Bones have reportedly been left exposed to the elements, and are unlikely to have survived recent conflict.³⁹² 135 tombs from Syria and Lebanon in the appendix are known to have contained human remains at the time of their excavation, most of which have not been examined for age and sex, and only one features pathological study: Tomb GX in the Karm el-Haurani cemetery at Emathous (third-sixth century).

3.2.4 Jordan

Research on human remains in Jordan has historically been slower than both Syria and Lebanon,³⁹³ but has made strides in recent years. The 1946 Treaty of London opened more opportunities for researchers³⁹⁴ but it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that there was an increase in research on human remains (in particular, placement of the body and demographic information). Basic information like sexing and ageing was rarely discussed, with the exception of grave goods used to sex the deceased person,³⁹⁵ a concept which assumes that certain grave goods are only found with one sex (see Section 3.3.3.1 and 5.2.3).

Excavation methods and the presence of a physical anthropologist became essential elements of excavations in the 1990s.³⁹⁶ Despite this, skeletal analysis was often little more than a description, or otherwise lacked details on

³⁹¹ Sheridan (2017: 119).

³⁹² Sheridan (2017: 119-120).

³⁹³ Perry (2012: 455).

³⁹⁴ Perry (2012: 455).

³⁹⁵ Perry (2012: 455).

³⁹⁶ Perry (2012: 456).

methodology.³⁹⁷ The twenty-first century has, however, seen an increase in the number of preliminary publications of skeletal data from Jordan, although these often remain descriptive and lack context or interpretation.³⁹⁸

Much of the research on human skeletal remains from sites in Jordan, with the exceptions of a few that have captured the attention of researchers, exists in the form of unpublished MA theses, the abstracts for which are available online.

652 tombs from Jordan in the appendix are known to have contained human remains at the time of their excavation, with pathological examination regularly carried out either during or following the excavation. Sites where human remains have been examined include Phaeno (fourth-seventh century),³⁹⁹ Sa'ad (Roman-Byzantine),⁴⁰⁰ and Yasileh (Roman-Byzantine).⁴⁰¹

3.3 Methodology

Having presented an overview of the history of the research on human remains, with examples related to Byzantine studies, I now present the main methodologies that are used to analyse human remains in Byzantine archaeology of the Near East. These are compared with the guidance provided

³⁹⁷ Perry (2012: 457).

³⁹⁸ Perry (2012: 457).

³⁹⁹ Abu Karaki (2000: x-xi). 52 individuals. Prevalence of osteoarthritis in male (66.6%) and female (52.4%) vertebrae. Schmorl's nodes in males (moderate and high expressions) and females (moderate expressions). Osteophytes in males (54.2%) and females (42.9%). Porotic hyperostosis in child (42.8%) and adult (31.1%) skeletons.

⁴⁰⁰ Al-Awad (1998: iv-v). A study of dental pathology and morphology to examine differences in age, diet, and stress between the different cemeteries at the site. Al-Koufahi (2000: v-vi). A study of human bones from Tomb 4 Graves 1, 2, and 3, and Cave 1 Grave 1, covering age, sex (both unreliable), minimum number of individuals, and pathologies (fractures, inflammations, Schmorl's nodes, degenerative arthritis). People appeared to be generally healthy but Grave 4 Tomb 3 showed increased evidence of occupational stress compared to the others.

⁴⁰¹ Khalil (2002). A study on age, sex, and pathologies based on an estimated 5,000 bone fragments indicated low prevalence of osteoarthritis, osteophytes, and fractures, and suggested the people were relatively healthy. Khwaileh (1999: ix-x). A study on the dental pathology of the people, based on 938 teeth from the site, which indicated environmental and nutritional stress was common but not necessarily severe.

by HE and ClfA, to discuss their reliability and indicate up-to-date and professional methods.

Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994) is the standard work for methodological guidelines and is used as a basis for examining human remains at sites such as Trimithis (fourth century) in the Dakhleh Oasis.⁴⁰² However, researchers working on human remains in the Byzantine Near East often do not clarify the method used to examine human remains (for example, whether they sexed a skeleton using the skull or the pelvis), resulting in a variable quality of published research. The lack of complimentary methodology is a major flaw in Byzantine archaeology. Having up-to-date, standardised guidelines on the study of human remains (even at national levels),⁴⁰³ which are clearly stated within research, would allow Byzantine researchers to easily compare data and overcome the flawed reliance on outdated or inappropriate concepts.

3.3.1 Common Methodologies

Different techniques may be used to study the remains, depending on access to technology and the methodology chosen. For example, a visual examination of an *in situ* burial, followed by reburial, prevents the physical removal and examination of the bones from the grave and ensures that no additional research can be carried out at a later date. A macroscopic analysis of the remains in the field or a laboratory uses the naked eye to identify skeletal

⁴⁰² Aravecchia et al. (2015: 27). For more information on these guidelines, see Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994): ageing and sexing adults (15-38); ageing immature individuals (39-46); dental data collection (47-68); adult cranial and postcranial measurements (69-84); epigenetic (nonmetric) traits (85-94); 9 categories of pathological conditions (107-158).

⁴⁰³ While the guidelines in Israeli Archaeology apply to all excavations carried out by the IAA, they rely on outdated principals, such as the concept that religious identity can be identified in human remains. See Section 3.3.2.

damage and pathologies but may provide a greater ability to examine the remains than if they were *in situ*. The visual recording of bone is recommended⁴⁰⁴ and would be especially useful in studies where bones are reburied, but the number of images which appear in Byzantine studies on human remains is usually limited to exceptional cases deemed worthy of publication.⁴⁰⁵

Other techniques are less common in Byzantine archaeology (see Table 4.2 for sites and methodologies). Microscopic analysis can present additional and more accurate evidence of stress and disease processes that are not visible or easily interpretable by the naked eye (such as helping to identify possible types of cancer),⁴⁰⁶ by involving the use of microscopes to examine skeletal lesions more closely. Radiographic, chemical, isotopic, and DNA analyses have all been used less frequently but can provide still greater accuracy by using more advanced technology and techniques to study the remains.⁴⁰⁷

Regardless of methodology, there are inherent biases in skeletal populations related to excavation methods, recovery methods, and survival biases (such as bone survival, age- and sex-related survival).⁴⁰⁸ For example, the remains of some individuals, especially the very young, may not have survived in the archaeological record. This is why cemeteries such as Kellis 2 (third-fourth century?), where large numbers of juveniles have been discovered, receive

⁴⁰⁴ Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 8-9).

⁴⁰⁵ For example, while arthritic lesions of the vertebrae and long bones and dental pathologies (caries and tooth loss in particular) are mentioned in Nagar (2015a: 76), the reader is directed to a report in the IAA archives and no photographs of these bones or teeth are provided.

⁴⁰⁶ Binder et al. (2014).

⁴⁰⁷ Kollig (2011: 479).

⁴⁰⁸ Pinhasi and Bourbou (2008: 31).

significant attention from researchers interested in aspects of childhood, such as weaning.⁴⁰⁹

As most cemeteries are not excavated in their entirety, and it is highly unlikely that a whole population will be examined,⁴¹⁰ we must consider how accurately the excavated portion is representative of the whole population: for example, if the human remains from chamber tombs have been studied but those from pit graves have not, the data will be representative of those buried in chamber tombs only.

The following sections go into greater depth about the methodologies of research on human remains studied from sites in the appendix and discuss them in the context of the general frameworks from HE and ClfA.

3.3.2 Skull Fixation

The first methodological issue which must be addressed for the Byzantine Near East is that there has been, and sometimes continues to be, too much focus on the cranium. Attempts have been made to create cranial typologies by which ancient and modern populations can be compared, and aspects of migration and relatedness studied.⁴¹¹ This focus on skulls has resulted in a lack of focus on the rest of the skeleton and, in some cases, limited later studies to the examination of skulls only. For example, a study on violence in ancient populations based on remains from the Tel Aviv University osteological

⁴⁰⁹ Dupras et al. (2001).

⁴¹⁰ Pinhasi and Bourbou (2008: 32).

⁴¹¹ Perry (2012: 451).

collection was focused on skulls,⁴¹² but would certainly have benefitted from evidence of ageing, sexing, and trauma from the postcranial skeletons if these had been available for study.

We must be aware of the history of human remains research in this region and the methodological issues that have been raised, as well as the intentions of the researchers themselves. The use of skull morphology in the geographic areas covered by this thesis assumes that race and ethnicity can be determined through the shape of the skull. The concept that each 'race' of humans has a uniquely shaped skull particularly affected Native American remains in the 19th and 20th centuries, when their skulls were collected and categorised; it was used, among other things, as a method of demonstrating that whites were superior to other races – or, even, that white humans were a separate and superior species to other groups of humans (polygeny).⁴¹³ Attempts to determine racial affiliation through skull morphology are rare in the appendix, such as the determination of “Caucasian racial stock” in the South Cemetery at Phaeno,⁴¹⁴ and an “African” at Deir ‘Ain ‘Abata.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹² Cohen et al. (2014: 724). Roman/Byzantine sites (and number of skulls): Ein Gedi ($n=121$), Palmachim ($n=1$), Michmar HaEmek ($n=1$), HaGoshrim ($n=11$), Museum exhibit ($n=1$), Yavne-Yam ($n=1$). Byzantine sites (and number of skulls): Rehovot in the Negev ($n=66$), Castra ($n=11$), Beersheba ($n=9$), Kursi ($n=8$), Tira ($n=5$), Shakak ($n=3$), Palmachim ($n=1$), Mishmar HaNegev ($n=1$). Most injuries were considered likely to have been accidental, or possibly related to interpersonal violence within a community, rather than evidence of warfare or broader violence between peoples (733). While more injuries were found on male skulls than female skulls, the sexing was based on Buikstra and Ubelaker's cranial score, and other methods of sexing could not be used due to the lack of postcranial remains (725, 729).

⁴¹³ Gulliford (1996: 123). On polygeny, see Gould (1996: 62-104), particularly the discussion on 71-88 about polygeny as a basis for scientific racism and the link to cranial capacity.

⁴¹⁴ Findlater et al. (1998: 81).

⁴¹⁵ Politis (1995: 480), where the individual was described as 'African' based on their 'bones', very likely meaning the skull itself.

Furthermore, Israeli examinations of human remains attempt to determine “Jewish” from “non-Jewish” populations using cranial (and sometimes postcranial) measurements of metric and non-metric traits and morphology.⁴¹⁶

The concept that the Jewish population can be distinguished from the non-Jewish (Christian) population is mentioned frequently in Israeli studies.⁴¹⁷

ClfA recognises attempts to identify ‘ancestry’ (an individual’s genetic descent), relating to biology and genetic heritage and *not* to social, cultural, religious, or political identities, through skeletal morphology.⁴¹⁸ The situation is more complicated when discussing Jewish skulls, because the discussion regards an ethnicity that has proven difficult to define.⁴¹⁹

ClfA acknowledges that assessment of ancestry is usually based upon traits of the skull⁴²⁰ with assessment relying on a well-preserved skull offering a good visual examination of the observed traits, but that there are methodological

⁴¹⁶ Much of the recent Israeli research on human remains comes from settings that are obviously or probably Christian, for example monasteries (Nagar (2015b)) or tombs featuring Christian iconography or inscription (Nagar (2014a)). It is central to Israeli archaeology to identify whether skeletal remains are of Jewish or non-Jewish people because the remains of Jewish people must not be disturbed. This results in claims such as from Tomb 200 at Giv’at Sharet (fourth-fifth century), that the presence of riveted sandals in burials indicates a non-Jewish population, because Jewish law prohibits fastening something on the Sabbath and Jewish people of this time likely, for socioeconomic reasons, did not own two pairs of footwear. See Seligman et al. (1996: 60).

⁴¹⁷ For a key example, Arensburg (1973) attempted to divide skulls of the Roman-Byzantine period into three groups: “Roman”, “Byzantine”, and “Jewish”, and considered the Jewish group to “stand apart” from the others. Arensburg (1973: 79-81). However, note the definitions of these groups: the Romans are soldiers, the Jewish population are locals, and the Byzantines are composed of Jewish converts to Christianity, native groups (whether descended from the Romans or other groups is unclear), and foreign groups. Arensburg (1973: 27). It is not clear how these groups are to be understood as distinct when the Byzantine group seems to be partly composed of descendants of both of the other groups.

⁴¹⁸ Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 35).

⁴¹⁹ For example, see the discussion in Falk (2017: 12-16) on biology and Jewishness, and the conclusion that “any general biological definition of Jews is meaningless ... Jewish communities have never been reproductively isolated from their neighbours” (208).

⁴²⁰ Although other postcranial elements have been examined; the femur is identified as the one with the greatest potential. Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 36).

problems and any information obtained is limited to very broad identifications of ancestry.⁴²¹ However, there are essentially no skeletal markers in humans that can show geographic origin.⁴²² HE only advises the use of DNA analysis of bones to establish genetic relationships between skeletal assemblages, and does not mention the determination of ancestry.⁴²³ What, then, can cranial morphology realistically inform us about? Variation is related to population history, before occasions such as migration and expansion; some aspects of morphology are related to climate; cranial measurements may be taken and, if enough traits from a single ancestry are found, the individual may be assumed to belong to that ancestry.⁴²⁴

Due to the practice of attempting to determine aspects of identity from the skull in our area, it is necessary to emphasise this point with an example demonstrating that cultural groups cannot be identified through skull morphology or measurements. A case study demonstrates the flaw inherent in the belief that humans can be classified into groups using the shape of their skulls. The study of Anglo-Saxon and Viking populations has long interested scholars who wished to identify who exactly these people were. It has often been thought that these populations should be viewed in racial terms, and that ancestry was a key aspect of both groups. Studies on human remains of both Anglo-Saxon and Viking populations have revealed that identity markers –

⁴²¹ Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 35-37). While ClfA refers to software programs which can use measurements of the skull to provide geographic classification, note that the samples discussed are related to North American and European ancestry. The lack of representation from populations of the Byzantine Near East in these samples means that they are not accurately represented within the data, and so may be unreliable.

⁴²² Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 35).

⁴²³ *The role of the human osteologist in an archaeological fieldwork project* (2018: 19).

⁴²⁴ Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 35-37).

which could result in people being given, for example, specific burial rites related to that identity – were not primarily based on genetics but were instead focused on the language and culture of the individual, who could adopt these aspects regardless of their history or where they had been born.⁴²⁵

Membership of these groups does not, therefore, require biological relationships, and is more focused on shared culture and language, allowing societies in which people could share an identity regardless of where they were born or the family they were born into. The belief that populations may merely be grouped into modern concepts of historical peoples, based on their genetic relationship to one another, or assumed to be part of a group based on their burial rites, denies these central elements of identity and the complexity of a world in which trading and networks create multiracial populations that are united through language and culture, rather than a shared biological relationship.

Some further issues inherent in cranial fixation are revealed in a study on the populations of the Negev Desert: Nagar and Sonntag (2008). In this example, skull morphology was used in attempts to identify both religious groups and cultural groups, as well as small-scale differences in biological ancestry, and a non-representative sample population was used.

Table 3.2: Skulls used in Nagar and Sonntag (2008). From Nagar and Sonntag (2008: 86).

Date	Number of skulls	Sites
Byzantine period	39 male skulls (Group C)	Rehovot-in-the-Negev and Horvat Ma'aravim

⁴²⁵ For a recent study on the mixed ancestry of Anglo-Saxon skeletons, see Plomp, et al. (2021). For a recent study on the mixed ancestry of Viking remains, see Margaryan et al. (2020).

Roman-Byzantine period	40 "Jewish" skulls (Group E) and 29 "non-Jewish" skulls (Group D)	Horvat Lissan, Horvat Liqit, and Be'er Sheva
"Modern"	"Reference population" of 52 "Indian" (Native American) skulls (Group A)	Tel Aviv University collection
"Modern"	41 "Bedouin" skulls (Group B)	Tribes of the Negev Desert

The skulls used in Nagar and Sonntag (2008) are shown in Table 3.2. The aim of the study was to suggest, through morphology and measurements, that the skulls of the Byzantine-period Negev dwellers and modern-day Negev dwellers were very similar to one another, and thus that the population of the Negev was continuous from the Hellenistic period into the modern era.⁴²⁶

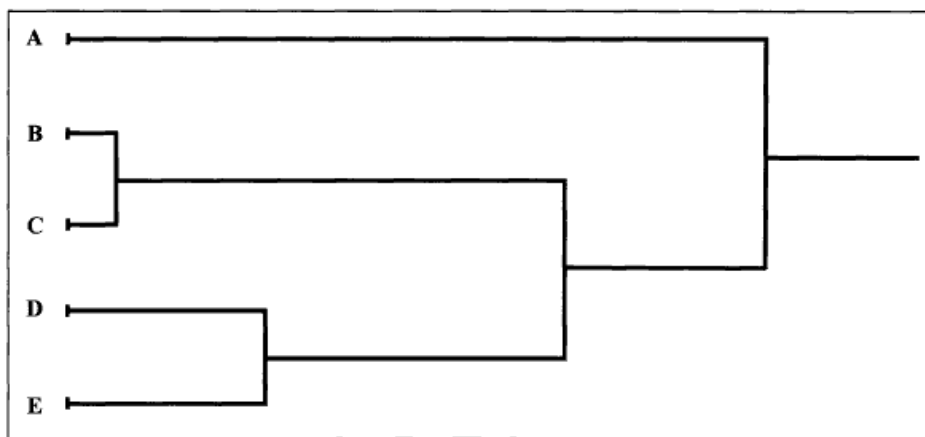


Figure 3.1: Morphological characteristics from Nagar and Sonntag's study, supposedly showing morphological similarity between the present-day Bedouin (B) and Byzantine-period Negev dwellers (C). (A) is the "Indian" skulls used as a control group and (D) and (E) are Roman-Byzantine skulls of "non-Jewish" and "Jewish" populations respectively. From Nagar and Sonntag (2008: 86).

The results of this study were presented in a table of morphological features and a chart (the latter is shown in Figure 3.1). Figure 3.1 supposedly shows the morphological similarity between the different sets of skulls used in the study,

⁴²⁶ Nagar and Sonntag (2008: 86-90).

although line length is arbitrary.⁴²⁷ The five groups in the chart are indicated in Table 3.2.

The group of “Indian” skulls,⁴²⁸ are (not unexpectedly) very different from the four groups of skulls local to the Negev. The authors do not specifically state that these were Native American skulls, but the bibliography references an article on racial classification according to Native American and white American skulls. Meanwhile, Figure 3.1 presents the skulls of the Byzantine Negev population and the modern-day Bedouin population as extremely similar, to support the article’s conclusion that this population was continuous from the Hellenistic period into the modern era.⁴²⁹ The chart is designed to indicate that the “Jewish” and “non-Jewish” skulls in Groups D and E are morphologically similar, but noticeably distinct from the Byzantine and Bedouin skulls.

Nagar and Sonntag’s study makes two major assumptions. Firstly, that the broad applications of biological ancestry from morphology and measurements of the skull discussed by ClfA can be applied on much smaller geographic scales. ClfA is clear that this research is limited and should only be applied in large-scale and broad research.⁴³⁰ The second assumption is that groups C, D, and E are also (or mostly) genetically and ethnically distinct enough, and representative enough of their groups, for comparison. Furthermore, the lack of clear explanation and discussion surrounding the samples selected in the

⁴²⁷ Nagar and Sonntag (2008: 86).

⁴²⁸ The misuse of Native American skeletons in archaeology is well-documented and remains a contentious issue today. See Gulliford (1996) on the repatriation of Native American remains; for a recent example, see Ferguson (2019).

⁴²⁹ Nagar and Sonntag (2008: 86-90).

⁴³⁰ Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 35).

research indicates selection bias to create these results: the “Indian” skulls are, owing to the genetic distinction between group A and the other groups, evidently going to be the most different, while there is no clear discussion of how the “Bedouin” skulls are supposed to be representative of all modern-day tribes living in the Negev.

This case study demonstrates that we should be clear on the distinction between research with attempts to determine genetic relationships or heritage, which may give broad information about the deceased person if carried out correctly, and research which attempts to determine social, cultural, religious, or political identities, which cannot be identified from the skeleton. Importantly, it is an excellent example of the focus on the skull in research on human remains from the Byzantine Near East.

3.3.3 Establishing Sex and Age

Sex and age are the basic, and in some cases the only, data gathered from skeletal remains within Byzantine archaeology. Both are useful in studies on burials because they allow us to identify differences (or lack thereof) between the burials of people based on either category. However, like other methods of assessment, they can be imprecise; for example, sex estimation may be biased towards males.⁴³¹

In the following sections, I examine the methodologies most used within the Byzantine Near East to estimate age and sex and compare these to the guidelines from HE and ClfA. In both sex and age estimation, the use of

⁴³¹ Parker Pearson (2010: 95-96).

multiple estimators is recommended over a single estimator, and the preferred modern reference population – which is used to create the estimations of age and sex – is one as similar to the sample studied as possible (for example, of the same geographic origin).

3.3.3.1 Sex

Figure 3.2 shows the basic differences between male and female skeletons.

Both HE and ClfA recommend estimating the sex of adults on the morphological shape of the pelvis and skull.⁴³² The pelvises of males and females are different because of female adaption for childbirth, meaning that the sciatic notch is wider and 'U'-shaped in female skeletons, but narrower and 'V'-shaped in male skeletons; however, not all populations show the same degree of difference between men and women.⁴³³ While the pelvis is used in our region to assess sex, this cannot be done in some skeletal assemblages, for example where only the skulls survive or have been kept in museum collections. Therefore, the use of skull morphology is a more commonly used method of estimating sex in Byzantine archaeology.

ClfA recommends following Buikstra and Ubelaker's methodology for determining sexual dimorphism in skulls (1994), which is a common methodology used in the appendix. This methodology scores the morphological features of the cranium on a scale of one to five and assigns them a characteristic based on their 'gracileness' (one, female) or 'robustness' (five,

⁴³² *The role of the human osteologist in an archaeological fieldwork project* (2018: 15); Brickley and McKinley (2004: 23; 2017, 33).

⁴³³ Renfrew and Bahn (2017: 435).

male).⁴³⁴ ClfA warns that exact morphological variation between males and females will vary, as well as differences in younger males and older females.⁴³⁵ ClfA guidelines also update the determination of sex based on the mandible, recognising a greater variety of trends based on biological sex than Buikstra and Ubelaker.⁴³⁶ While Buikstra and Ubelaker warn that populations can vary greatly in respect to biological sex based on the cranium, and the determination can be challenging,⁴³⁷ ClfA adds the caveat that the variation of 'maleness' and 'femaleness' will depend upon the population under study.⁴³⁸ For the Byzantine Near East, where the use of Buikstra and Ubelaker is popular, such differences demonstrate the need to keep up to date with standards and an awareness of the drawbacks of the methodology.

⁴³⁴ Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994: 19-21). Also see Moore (2013: 97).

⁴³⁵ Brickley and McKinley (2004: 23).

⁴³⁶ Brickley and McKinley (2004: 23-24).

⁴³⁷ Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994: 19).

⁴³⁸ Brickley and McKinley (2004: 23).

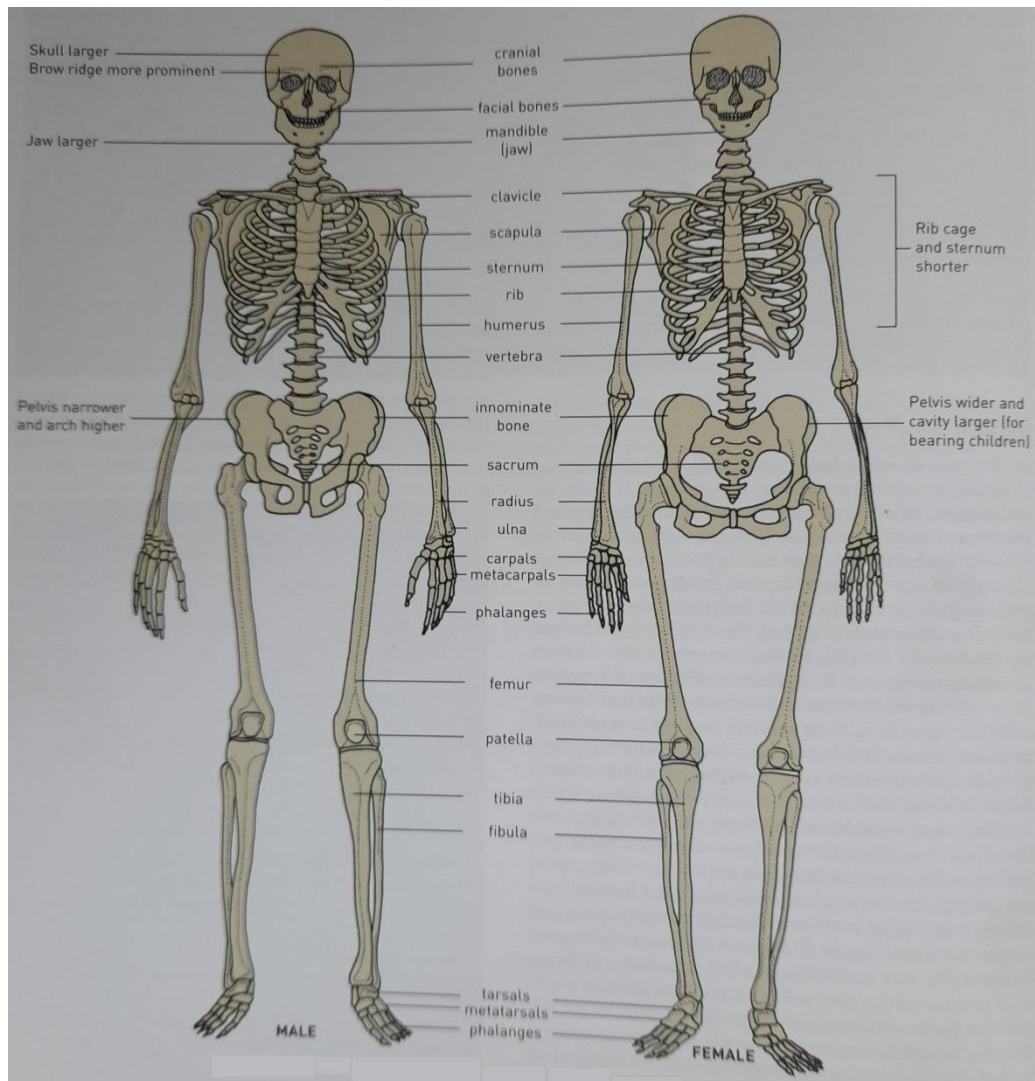


Figure 3.2: Differences between male (left) and female (right) adult skeletons. From Renfrew and Bahn (2017: 436).

Juvenile skeletons cannot be sexed with the same levels of reliability as adult skeletons, because skeletal differences do not occur before the onset of puberty. However, there are some examples in the appendix in which juveniles have been sexed. For example, a sample of the infants discovered at Ashkelon (fourth-sixth century) underwent aDNA (ancient DNA) analysis for sequences specific to X and Y chromosomes.⁴³⁹ ClifA recognises that significant progress

⁴³⁹ Faerman and Smith (2008: 215).

has been made in aDNA techniques and that aDNA does have potential to sex both juvenile and adult individuals,⁴⁴⁰ but the technique is not in common usage at present and is rare in Byzantine archaeology. Most juveniles remain unsexed because morphological and metric traits are unreliable estimators of juvenile sex.⁴⁴¹

Sex estimation, even in adult skeletons, may not always be possible, for example because the skull and pelvis are in poor condition and therefore not considered reliable estimators. An alternative methodology sometimes used in Byzantine archaeology is to estimate sex based on the presence of grave goods. The belief that grave goods can indicate biological sex assumes that gender is binary and that sex equals gender, and has historically been practiced within archaeology widely. This can easily be countered, for example, the study of a Viking warrior's remains using DNA extraction to determine the presence of X and Y chromosomes, published in 2017, determined that the individual buried in the grave had two X chromosomes and was thus biologically female, despite assumptions that the warrior would be male.⁴⁴² The discovery was met with enough controversy that a second article was published two years later to defend the determination of biological sex and consider the possibilities of gender, warrior-status, and emphasise that, until the skeleton was determined

⁴⁴⁰ Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 33).

⁴⁴¹ Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 33).

⁴⁴² Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. (2017). The researchers rightly noted that the determination that the grave belonged to a warrior would not have been questioned if the deceased person had been a man. However, because the deceased person was a woman, questions were raised as to whether the weapons may have been heirlooms, or whether a man was originally interred in the grave and the objects had belonged to him, implying that the woman had been buried with no grave goods at all.

female, no questions had been raised over the status of the grave's occupant as a warrior.⁴⁴³

The same arguments may be applied to Byzantine archaeology. The general lack of 'warrior' graves in the appendix demonstrates the rarity of burials with weapons in our study (Section 5.2), and there is not enough sex determination within these burials to identify similar concepts that weapons are a male grave good. However, this belief certainly exists: for example, the objects in Grave 14 at Chisphin have been discussed in terms of 'male' objects (a scabbard and remains of a possible sword) and 'female' objects (including finger-rings and an earring), with the weapon-finds interpreted as either "the result of an intended male burial beside a woman or ... a disturbance of the rich female tomb".⁴⁴⁴

Unfortunately, the discovery of human remains associated with these objects is not known.⁴⁴⁵ The majority of other weapons in the appendix come from mass graves and are not associated with specific individuals.

In Byzantine archaeology, it is more common to estimate the sex of a skeleton as female based on the presence of 'female' grave goods, especially jewellery, because of the increased frequency of these objects when compared to so-called 'male' grave goods. At Humayma the grave goods in C101 Burial 2 (sixth century) were classed as "appropriate for a female";⁴⁴⁶ in two recent publications on Khirbat Yajuz and Qarara and Kom al-Ahmar, grave goods have

⁴⁴³ Price et al. (2019: 191-192).

⁴⁴⁴ Gogräfe (2018: 71). These tombs are not in the appendix, because neither the tomb types nor an accurate date is known for these tombs, and the grave goods have been kept in a museum collection since they were excavated in 1942.

⁴⁴⁵ Gogräfe (2018: 71).

⁴⁴⁶ Shumka et al. (2013: 385).

been discussed in terms of gender rather than sex, but neither study could say much regarding gender or offer a comparison to sex.⁴⁴⁷ However, inferences on sex should not be made based upon the grave context alone⁴⁴⁸ and can negatively impact future study (see Section 5.2.3).

3.3.3.2 Age

Having covered the most common methodologies for estimating sex used in the Byzantine Near East, I now discuss methodologies for estimating age.

It is not usually possible to establish an exact age at death for adults. Tooth eruption and bone fusion, which are the main and most accurate methods of ageing skeletons, are complete by 18-25 years of age. This means that they cannot be used to provide an age estimate for most adult individuals.⁴⁴⁹

Ageing based on dental development is preferable in individuals whose teeth have not reached maturity and should produce a narrow age range.⁴⁵⁰ Bone fusion (Figure 3.3) is also considered a reliable ageing technique, although ClfA warns against the use of the epiphyseal scars and lines after fusion as an ageing technique as these may remain on the bone for years.⁴⁵¹ While both of these methods are used to age juveniles in the Near East, the measurements of long bone length is also used in some cases (such as Ashkelon, Section 4.3.1). ClfA warns that there is a disparity between dental age and long bone length

⁴⁴⁷ Eger (2018: 159) and Huber (2018b: 212).

⁴⁴⁸ A recent example that demonstrates this point is the discovery of (currently unconfirmed) human female remains on Mount Athos, a male-only monastic community. A study of the bones awaits publication. Smith (2019).

⁴⁴⁹ Renfrew and Bahn (2017: 439); Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 25). The clavicle (collar bone) is one of the final bones to fuse in the human body, at between 20 and 30 years of age.

⁴⁵⁰ Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 30).

⁴⁵¹ Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 30-31).

when comparing archaeological juveniles to modern growth studies (which may be related to a slower growth rate in archaeological samples), that standards may need to be population-specific, and that current formulae for the calculation of age based on bone length require accuracy testing.⁴⁵²

As the remains of infants and young juveniles deteriorate faster than those of adults, the very young may be underrepresented within cemetery populations. This may be due to a combination of factors including tomb type, burial practices, and methods of archaeological recovery.⁴⁵³ It is also possible that juveniles were buried elsewhere, or that excavation practices prevented their discovery, for example through random sampling of burials or small bones not being recognised. The result of this is that skeletal samples may not accurately represent the number of juveniles, particularly young juveniles, who died within a community.

⁴⁵² Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 31).

⁴⁵³ Pinhasi and Bourbou (2008: 33).

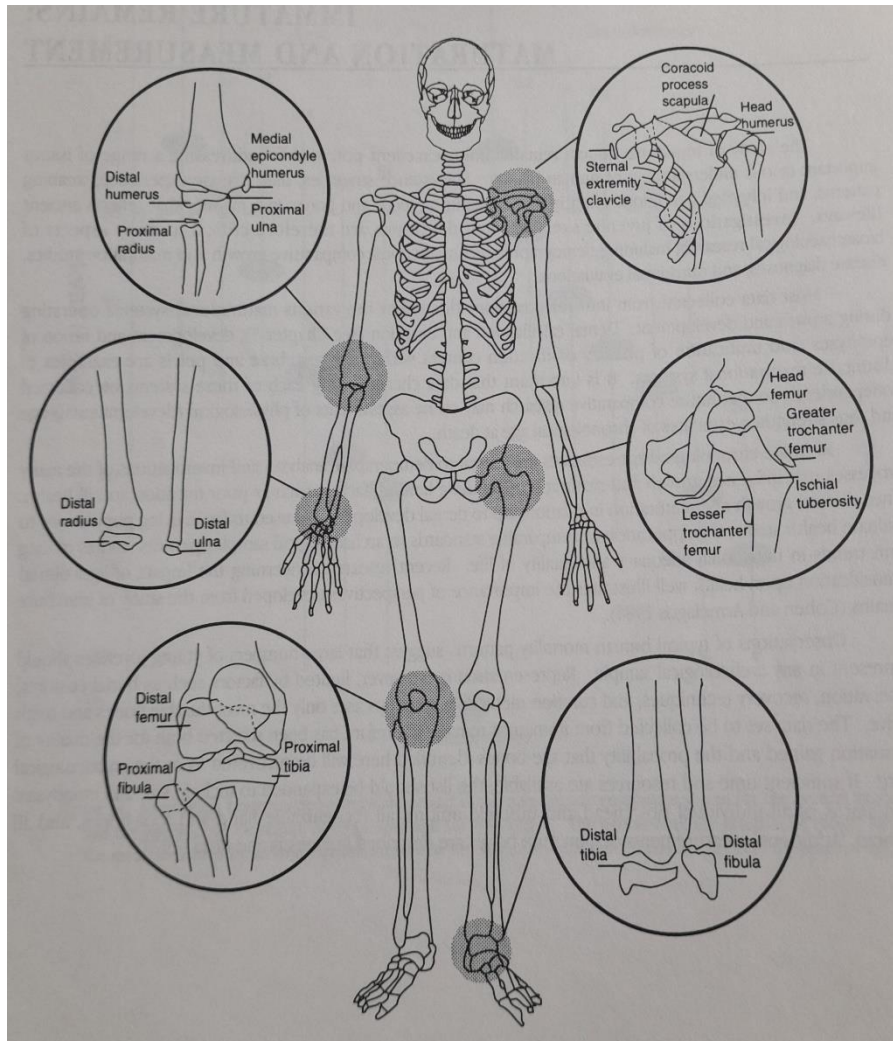


Figure 3.3: The location of the epiphyses used to determine age-at-death. From Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994: 40).

Once all the bones in the body have fused, different criteria are required to age the skeleton. Adult ageing methods in Byzantine archaeology primarily rely on the presence of degenerative changes (used often, for example, at Rehovot-in-the-Negev), but these are known for their poor accuracy, especially in older adults.⁴⁵⁴ Pubic symphysis (used, for example, at Deir 'Ain 'Abata) is considered the most reliable method, with six phases identified for each male and female

⁴⁵⁴ Pinhasi and Bourbou (2008: 38); Buckberry (2015: 323). For Rehovot-in-the-Negev, see Nagar (1999).

age determination.⁴⁵⁵ The other places where degenerative changes are used to determine age in adult skeletons are the auricular surface (on the sacrum) and the ends of the ribs (both used, for example, at Be'er Sheva), but are considered less reliable estimators than pubic symphysis.⁴⁵⁶ Dental wear (used, for example, at Deir Abu Fana) is also used as a way of ageing adults, but this can be impacted by diet and the speed of attrition, which are generally not known.⁴⁵⁷ However, the overarching issue with ageing methods is that they are based on modern reference populations, where the age of the individuals are known, and it is assumed that the ancient population would have expressed similar changes at similar ages.⁴⁵⁸ If the ancient population developed degenerative changes faster or slower than the reference population, then the estimated ages would be incorrect.

3.3.4 Stress and Pathologies

I now address research on the health of individuals and populations. This can be demonstrated through skeletal evidence of stress and pathologies. I use the word “stress” in this thesis to refer to mechanical stress which indicates the general wellbeing of a population, that is, the impact of an external force such as poor nutrition or a disease on the body,⁴⁵⁹ rather than emotional stress, which is not considered.⁴⁶⁰ A pathology is the change produced by an illness or disease process.

⁴⁵⁵ Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 26). For Deir 'Ain 'Abata, see Gruspier (2012: 426, 436).

⁴⁵⁶ Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 26). For Be'er Sheva, see Nagar and Sonntag (2008: 79).

⁴⁵⁷ Mitchell and Brickley (2017: 27). For Deir Abu Fana, see Buschhausen et al. (1996: 42).

⁴⁵⁸ For example, Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994: 16) warns against comparing populations remote from one another in time and space.

⁴⁵⁹ Larsen (2015: 7).

⁴⁶⁰ For use of the word “stress” in bioarchaeology, see Temple and Goodman (2014).

The human skeleton can provide information on a limited number of pathologies. These are chronic long-term infections which do not result in rapid death; for Byzantine studies, one well-studied example is leprosy.⁴⁶¹ However, not all individuals with an infection, a dietary or metabolic disease, or occupational stress damage will exhibit skeletal responses,⁴⁶² meaning that bioarchaeology can only identify a limited amount of the true number of individuals who were victims of the stress or pathology. Acute infection followed by rapid death rarely affects the skeleton.⁴⁶³ One well-studied acute infection is the plague;⁴⁶⁴ although a major cause of death in human populations, plague is largely invisible in the archaeological record (but see below, Section 3.4.10, on identifying plague through DNA evidence).

Therefore, it is usually not possible to tell from skeletal remains how an individual died, and we are unable to see the full picture of disease in ancient populations. While a population may therefore not exhibit evidence of disease, this does not necessarily mean that it was a healthy population: it may have been affected by a rapid disease process which killed before skeletal lesions could appear, or the disease may not have affected the skeleton at all.⁴⁶⁵

Skeletal manifestations of disease include abnormal bone formation and abnormal bone destruction (for example, both can be seen in osteoarthritis, Section 3.4.3). Less frequently, they may manifest as abnormal bone size or

⁴⁶¹ For a recent example on the study of leprosy in Byzantium, see Miller and Nesbitt (2014).

⁴⁶² Ortner (2008: 191-192). Before antibiotics, an estimated 5-20% of individuals showed evidence of the infectious diseases which can affect the skeleton.

⁴⁶³ Ortner (2008: 191); Roberts (2019: 287); Larsen (2015: 66).

⁴⁶⁴ Recently discussed by Mordechai et al. (2019) and Sarris (2021).

⁴⁶⁵ Pinhasi and Bourbou (2008: 37).

shape (for example rickets, Section 3.4.11).⁴⁶⁶ Bone changes may occur both ante-mortem or post-mortem, and a mistaken diagnosis will result in false identification of pathological change.⁴⁶⁷ Furthermore, it can be difficult or even impossible to distinguish between certain skeletal reactions, pathologies, and the infectious and metabolic diseases that cause them.⁴⁶⁸ Incorrect identifications have been known in Byzantine archaeology. For example, four skeletons from the Monastery of Martyrius at Ma'ale Adumim (sixth century and later), who were incorrectly labelled as lepers when they instead suffered from psoriatic arthritis.⁴⁶⁹

Stress may affect a population by decreasing its capacity for production and its fertility, while increasing morbidity and mortality. These can in turn cause social, political, nutritional, and economic disruption, all of which could create additional population stress.⁴⁷⁰ As stress shows the strain on an individual based on environment, nutrition, disease, and other pressures, it is a useful way of understanding health and adaptability in past populations.⁴⁷¹ By knowing how stress, both occupational and social, affects living humans, we can more accurately interpret its impact on human health in the past.⁴⁷²

Although the understanding we can gain is incomplete, evidence of skeletal damage and pathologies are useful for an examination of burial practices

⁴⁶⁶ Ortner (2008: 192).

⁴⁶⁷ For example, two perforations on a female skeleton from a tomb in Ramat Hanadiv (Byzantine) could be mistakenly attributed to ante-mortem trauma. Pinhasi and Bourbou (2008: 34-35).

⁴⁶⁸ Ortner (2008: 192).

⁴⁶⁹ Zias (1991: 149-150).

⁴⁷⁰ Goodman (1991: 32).

⁴⁷¹ Reitsema and McIlvaine, (2014: 181).

⁴⁷² Reitsema and McIlvaine, (2014: 184).

because they allow us to identify differences in the burials of healthy versus unhealthy populations, aspects of community, social interactions and structure, and the treatment of those who died from violent or disastrous events. Stress, infection, and disease allow us to think about the relationship between the health of a population and their approaches to death, dying, and burial rites.

3.3.5 Isotopic Analysis: Diet and Population Movement

The final subject to discuss on methodology within Byzantine archaeology and the study of human remains is isotopic analysis. Examples of this research are rarer than the identification of sex, age, and evidence of stress and pathologies, however their value to Byzantine studies is clear. The value of diet is discussed in a case study (Section 4.3.3), while, owing to the limited research that has been carried out on population movement, examples of studying geographic origin to better understand burials and the selection of burial spaces are provided in Section 3.3.5.2.

3.3.5.1 Diet

Information on the long-term diet of humans can be obtained through the analysis of stable isotopes of carbon and nitrogen.⁴⁷³ Stable carbon and nitrogen isotopes from dental enamel and bone collagen can indicate long-term diet because the chemical signature of food remains in the body and can be

⁴⁷³ And oxygen isotopes, usually examined in studies of weaning. For example, see Dupras (2010: 101-102), where a sample of 49 infant and child bones were analysed for $\delta^{13}\text{C}$, $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ and $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ values, with oxygen showing the change from breastmilk to water. Note that other methods of interpreting diet have been used at some early Byzantine sites in the Near East, including analysis of strontium values which neglected to account for bone diagenesis (in which physical and chemical changes can occur to bone after death). This has been criticised for its application at several sites in Jordan: see Al-Shorman (2010: 213).

passed along the food chain.⁴⁷⁴ It is not possible to recreate the entire diet, but we can recognise sources of protein.⁴⁷⁵

There are two stable carbon isotopes, ^{12}C and ^{13}C , and two of nitrogen, ^{14}N and ^{15}N .⁴⁷⁶ The foods that are represented by each isotope are presented in Table

3.3. Carbon values are expressed as $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ values, while nitrogen values are expressed as $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values.⁴⁷⁷ $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ values help to recreate the consumption of C_3 and C_4 plants and can also indicate consumption of marine resources.⁴⁷⁸

$\delta^{15}\text{N}$ represents trophic levels, that is, the position of an organism on the food chain; plants typically demonstrate lower $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values than herbivores, carnivores higher levels than herbivores, and omnivores a $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ value between herbivores and carnivores. A more complex and varied trophic level system exists in marine ecosystems. Therefore, $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values in contemporary animal bone can provide a baseline against which to compare human values.⁴⁷⁹

Together, $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values can represent the contribution of protein to the diet.

Comparing the nitrogen values in human bone to contemporary animal bone can also assess the importance of animal protein to the diet.⁴⁸⁰ This research has been carried out at a limited number of sites in the appendix, such as Kellis

⁴⁷⁴ Mays (2010: 202); Renfrew and Bahn (2017: 312). Collagen is extracted from bone, purified, and the material this produces is burnt so that the gases produced can be analysed. See Mays (2010: 200-201) for more information on this process and the expression of dietary values.

⁴⁷⁵ See Mays (2010: 202). Nitrogen values are virtually all from protein sources, while carbon is mostly from protein except in low-protein diets.

⁴⁷⁶ The number represents the mass. Mays (2010: 200).

⁴⁷⁷ This expression is in delta units, which measure deviation in isotopic ratio in parts per thousand. See Mays (2010: 201).

⁴⁷⁸ Mays (2010: 201).

⁴⁷⁹ Gregoricka and Sheridan (2013: 65).

⁴⁸⁰ Sandias (2011: 339).

2 (third-fourth century?),⁴⁸¹ Ya'amun (Roman-Byzantine), and Sa'ad (Roman-Byzantine).⁴⁸²

Other methods to examine the quality of nutrition at some sites in the appendix include the examination of dental wear, body size, and stature.⁴⁸³ The latter, where a full skeleton is not available for measurement, is usually calculated from the length of long bones, typically the legs. This involves using a mathematical formula calculated from the measurements of a bone or bones of individuals of known stature which is then applied to the long bones or individuals of unknown stature, within a standard error (rather than being an exact figure).⁴⁸⁴ Measuring stature from the long bones assumes that the body proportions of the modern reference sample used to calculate the formula are the same as the proportions of the skeletal population.⁴⁸⁵ However, height does not merely reflect diet or lifestyle, and is instead connected to genetics, culture, the environment, nutritional quality, and socioeconomic status.⁴⁸⁶

Table 3.3: Stable isotopes and what they indicate about diet.

Isotope	Types of food in diet
$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (C ₃)	Most plants which grow in temperate climates, such as grain cereals like wheat and barley; most fruits and vegetables.
$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (C ₄)	Plants from tropical and sub-tropical areas, such as millet. ⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸¹ Dupras et al. (1999); Dupras (2010).

⁴⁸² Sandias (2011: 341-343).

⁴⁸³ Height and size of the body have, for instance, been associated with poor growth from bad nutrition. Goodman (1991: 33-35).

⁴⁸⁴ For methods of estimating stature from skeletal remains, see Mays (2010:108-112). The standard error in Mays's example on pages 110-111 are typically between three and five centimetres.

⁴⁸⁵ Mays (2010: 130-133). Mays provides samples of adult white, adult black, and juvenile northern European populations.

⁴⁸⁶ Reitsema and McIlvaine (2014: 183).

⁴⁸⁷ Dupras (2010: 90); Mays (2010: 201). $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ values differ based on the main type of plants consumed.

$\delta^{15}\text{N}$	Can indicate the consumption of legumes but are usually discussed as evidence of the consumption of animal proteins, either from meat or animal products. ⁴⁸⁸
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Access to a more varied diet and foods which required more effort to produce, as well as those which were likely more expensive (such as meat and animal products), suggests a higher status or privileged position within society, because other people were unable to access these foods. This may be used to support arguments surrounding the identity of individuals who received ‘special’ burial privileges or show the differences between burials of the poor and the privileged (see Section 4.3.3).

3.3.5.2 Geographic Origin

The origin and movement of people can be identified through oxygen and strontium isotopes in the mineral of bones and teeth. This is underexplored in Byzantine populations, with sites such as Beth She’arim (first-fifth century) relying on other information to indicate the origins of individuals.

Research at Beth She’arim has relied on the presence of inscriptions and texts to suggest that the population buried were transported large distances so that they could be interred in the cemetery. For example, Avigad (1955b) stated that the cemetery was simply too large for the local town and that “Talmudic sources”, as well as inscriptions, demonstrated that the site was a central cemetery for the Jewish population.⁴⁸⁹ Inscriptions in tombs at Beth She’arim

⁴⁸⁸ For example, Bourbou et al. (2011: 575-578), who discussed Greek populations of the sixth to fifteenth centuries.

⁴⁸⁹ Avigad (1955b: 243).

mention cities in Palaestina, Syria, Phoenice, Arabia, and further afield.⁴⁹⁰

However, Peppard (2007) argued that the names of towns and cities from outside of the local area do not demonstrate that the dead were transported to the site for burial. The deceased person and/or the person who carved the name may have had a connection, probably ethnically, to this location, but they may have lived near or in Beth She'arim before they died.⁴⁹¹ The answer may lie in the bone chemistry, but limited information is known about the bones that were excavated and most seem to have been fragmentary or broken.⁴⁹²

Nevertheless, the value of this research is demonstrable at this site and would confirm the nature of the cemetery as one of either local or trans-regional use.

Three strontium isotopes are stable: ⁸⁴Sr, ⁸⁶Sr, and ⁸⁸Sr. A fourth isotope, ⁸⁷Sr, is formed through slow radioactive decay and its value varies between different types of rocks, as well as older and younger rocks. In geological and biological samples, the value is expressed as a ratio of ⁸⁶Sr/⁸⁷Sr.⁴⁹³ Oxygen has three stable isotopes: ¹⁶O, ¹⁷O, and ¹⁸O, and isotope ratios express the amount of ¹⁸O with respect to the amount of ¹⁶O, recorded as a $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ value.⁴⁹⁴ The information provided by these isotopes is shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Isotopes and population movement.

Isotope value	Relationship to food chain	Information isotope can provide
⁸⁶ Sr/ ⁸⁷ Sr	Strontium ratio in soil is related to geology and can be taken up	The ratio reflects the area(s) in which the person's food and drink

⁴⁹⁰ Avigad (1955b: 243).

⁴⁹¹ Peppard (2007: 105).

⁴⁹² For example, see Avigad (1955a: 221), in which the bones are described as fragmentary or dust.

⁴⁹³ Mays (2010: 208). As in carbon and nitrogen (above), the number reflects the mass.

⁴⁹⁴ Mays (2010: 209). The number reflects the mass. Like carbon and nitrogen isotope values, the figure is expressed in delta units.

	by plants, but it is not affected by the food-chain.	came from (and thus where they lived). ⁴⁹⁵
$\delta^{18}\text{O}$	Can be affected by the consumption of food, because different foods can vary in $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ value; however, in humans $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ values are dominated by drinking water. ⁴⁹⁶	$\delta^{18}\text{O}$ values in water can vary by location, and in non-coastal areas are affected by climate. ⁴⁹⁷ The value shows location(s) where the person's drinking water came from.

As oxygen isotopes may be affected by the soil that the bone is buried in, it is preferable to use dental enamel when working on strontium and oxygen isotope ratios to determine geographical origin. Because of the nature of dental enamel, which does not reform once it has developed (Section 3.4.4), it can be used to determine whether an individual had migrated since their childhood. To achieve an accurate baseline for local isotope ratios, the enamel signal should be compared to the signal from contemporary animal bone found near the human remains.⁴⁹⁸

There are a limited number of sites in the appendix where research on geographic origin has been carried out. The number of non-locals identified is very small. Example sites are Phaeno (fourth-seventh century), where research attempted to determine whether miners were locals or slaves transported to the town for work,⁴⁹⁹ and St Stephen's monastery in Jerusalem (fifth-seventh century), where study focused on the migration of people to Palaestina to join the monastery.⁵⁰⁰ Due to the limited number of sites where this research has

⁴⁹⁵ Mays (2010: 208-209).

⁴⁹⁶ The exception is infants who are being breastfed. See Mays (2010: 209-210).

⁴⁹⁷ Mays (2010: 210).

⁴⁹⁸ Mays (2010: 210-211).

⁴⁹⁹ Perry et al. (2009: 437), where the single non-local identified was buried using worked and shaped capping stones, rather than the unworked capping stones on most other graves.

⁵⁰⁰ Sheridan and Gregoricka (2015).

been carried out, there is not sufficient information to consider this as an aspect of burials among the case studies in Chapter 4.

3.4 Skeletal Damage and Pathologies

Following the discussion of methodology, I now present short descriptions and figures of the skeletal damage and pathologies in the appendix. The purpose of this is to ensure that the reader understands what these look like on human bone, is aware of the similarities and differences between the different skeletal lesions, and will have a reference for information on what the lesion means. This is essential for this study, as the information is not necessarily familiar to historians and archaeologists, and only by understanding how pathologies are identified can we successfully incorporate them into other aspects of research. The damage and pathologies are presented in alphabetical order.

3.4.1 Childbearing and Childbirth

A population with a significant number of burials of foetuses, newborns, or young infants may have had issues with childbearing and/or childbirth, while fractures on the end of the ribs and vertebrae in infant remains may indicate birth trauma.⁵⁰¹ High infant mortality further indicates that the youngest members of the population were vulnerable to stressors such as disease and nutritional issues and that many succumbed to these. Issues with childbearing or childbirth and high infant mortality rates have been identified at Kellis 2 (third-fourth century?); due to the large numbers of foetuses, newborns, and infants

⁵⁰¹ For example, evidence of birth trauma at Kellis 2: Dupras, et. al (2019: 114).

discovered in this cemetery, research on the skeletal remains has focused largely on juveniles.⁵⁰²

The burial treatment of individuals who likely died from problems related to childbirth can indicate how a society reacted to miscarriage, stillbirth, sudden infant death, and the simultaneous loss of parent and child. Adolescent and adult female skeletons are sometimes found with foetal or infant remains placed on or found within their pelvis.⁵⁰³ Examples include Tomb J25 at Abila (fourth-seventh century), where foetal bones were found within the pelvic region of an adolescent or young adult female, and Grave ED-W 59-1 at El-Deir (fourth-fifth century), where a baby was found between a woman's legs, not fully birthed.⁵⁰⁴

This identification appears to be more common in archaeological contexts where the woman is an adolescent or young adult and the infant is newborn. For example, a coffin at Horvat Karkur 'Illit (fourth-seventh century), contained an adult female with an infant resting on her pelvis, but they were not considered to be mother and child.⁵⁰⁵ This interpretation was for two reasons:

1. Because the woman's age was estimated to be between 39 and 44 years of age, which was considered to be too old(!) for her to have been the

⁵⁰² For example, Wheeler et al. (2011) and Wheeler (2012).

⁵⁰³ Wheeler (2012: 228).

⁵⁰⁴ Post-mortem delivery can occur in what is termed 'coffin birth'. For an example, see Viva et al. (2020). There is not enough information on the El-Deir case to determine whether the mother and baby died part-way through childbirth or if this was a case of coffin birth, but cases are rare and difficult to identify.

⁵⁰⁵ Zias and Spigelman (2004: 308-309).

biological mother.⁵⁰⁶ This age was based on Bass (1987),⁵⁰⁷ which presents adult ages in five and ten year ranges based on osteophytes (degenerative changes) in the spines of white American men and may not accurately represent ages of women from the Byzantine Near East (Section 3.3.3.2) if the white American reference population and the Byzantine population developed osteophytes at different rates.⁵⁰⁸ Even if we assume that this age range is correct, however, the woman could still have been fertile at this age, and therefore this does not disqualify her from being the mother.

2. Because the infant was estimated to have been nine-twelve months old at the time of death, and therefore lived for up to a year before death. It is harder to argue against this point, as their burial within the same coffin, overlying the previous interments of two other adults, indicates that they likely died at a similar time. We can only be certain individuals are mother and child in cases where women and newborns are found together; nevertheless, adult women have been found buried with infants in other tombs such as a grave at Gadara (fourth century-Byzantine)⁵⁰⁹ and Tomb F.6 at Esbus (Early Roman-Byzantine).⁵¹⁰ While we cannot

⁵⁰⁶ On the contrary, I argue that her age would place more risk on her in the case that she was pregnant. Teenagers and women over 35 are more at risk of complications during pregnancy and labour, which is surely why we find more women of these ages buried with infants on their pelvises. In the case of this tomb, if it does represent mother and child, the woman could have died from labour complications, and the infant could have lived for approximately a year after this, at which point the tomb was reopened and the deceased infant interred with her. Zias and Spigelman (2004: 308-309).

⁵⁰⁷ Note that I use the fourth edition of this text, Bass (1995).

⁵⁰⁸ Bass (1995: 24-25).

⁵⁰⁹ Schick (2018: 172).

⁵¹⁰ Waterhouse (1998: 26).

say that these women and infants were mother and child, the possibility of such a close relationship remains.

The case of the woman and infant buried together at Horvat Karkur 'Illit is interesting because it allows us to explore this type of burial in more detail. If we presume that this woman was the mother of the infant, then either they died very close together in time, or the mother died first and the tomb and coffin of the mother were opened within a year, to inter her deceased child with her. This would align with other burials found in the cemetery at Horvat Karkur 'Illit, as three cases of women interred with infants on their pelvises were discovered at the site.⁵¹¹ However, if the woman was not the infant's mother, then why were they buried together in the same coffin? The implication that they were somehow related remains because the decision was made to inter them together, within the same coffin, rather than to place the infant on top of the coffin in the tomb or in a different tomb entirely.

3.4.2 Cribra Orbitalia and Porotic Hyperostosis

Cribra orbitalia is represented by lesions in the roof of the eye orbits (Figure 3.4). Porotic hyperostosis affects the bones of the cranium, creating spongy or porous bone tissue (Figure 3.5). Both are visible to the naked eye and are commonly found on skeletal remains.⁵¹² Their interpretation is uncertain.⁵¹³ It is unclear how much of the modern population is affected by cribra orbitalia and porotic hyperostosis and they remain under-researched.

⁵¹¹ Figueras (2004: 66). Note that there are no cases in the appendix where an adolescent or adult male was found with an infant on his pelvis: this only occurs with females.

⁵¹² Larsen (2015: 33).

⁵¹³ Walker et al. (2009: 113-116).

Despite uncertainty on the interpretation of cribra orbitalia and porotic hyperostosis, most examples from the appendix attribute them to nutritional deficiency, in particular anaemia, and a lack of them has been used to indicate general nutritional wellness. For example, the absence of porotic hyperostosis at Esbus (Roman-Byzantine) was interpreted as evidence that nutrition was not a major stress factor among the population.⁵¹⁴ However, cribra orbitalia and porotic hyperostosis may also relate to several diseases, including leprosy.⁵¹⁵



Figure 3.4: *cribra orbitalia* in the eye orbits. From Larsen (2015: 34).

⁵¹⁴ Grauer and Armelagos (1998: 125).

⁵¹⁵ Ortner (2008: 201).



Figure 3.5: Porotic hyperostosis on a skull. From Larsen (2015: 32).

While we cannot be certain of their cause, they may indicate non-specific stress which suggests general health- or nutrition-related problems within a population. Their visibility on the skull makes them easily identifiable within an archaeological assemblage, encouraging explanations for their presence.

3.4.3 Degenerative Changes

Arthritis and other degenerative changes are frequently identified within a skeletal population, often related to the spine. Degenerative changes usually affect adults and can indicate repetitive movement such as hard physical labour, often being used to determine working patterns, but they also occur due to old age.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁶ However, the links between degenerative bone changes and physical activity are not always this straightforward, as some labourers seem to have no more significant changes when compared to the whole population. Larsen (2015: 179-180, 212).

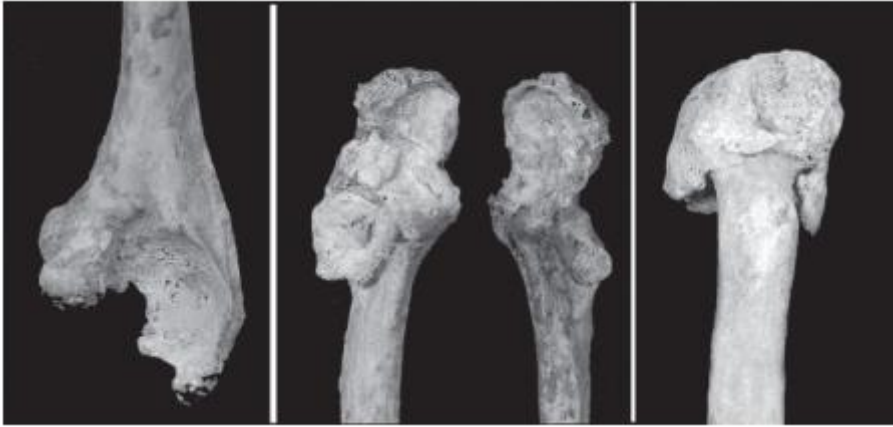


Figure 3.6: Osteophytes and pitting of the wrist. From Larsen (2015: 182).

Various terms can refer to degenerative changes in skeletal populations. The most common is osteoarthritis. Osteophytes or spondylophytes are bony lumps that typically form next to joints affected by arthritis, so these also indicate its presence (Figure 3.6).⁵¹⁷ Diffuse Idiopathic Skeletal Hyperostosis (DISH) is arthritis that affects the tendons and ligaments, usually around the spine, and the spine itself, giving it a melted appearance (Figure 3.7), but its prevalence within modern populations and its causes are both unknown.⁵¹⁸ Osteoporosis is the systemic loss of bone in adults, which increases both bone fragility and the risk of a fracture (Figure 3.8).⁵¹⁹ Schmorl's Nodes are herniations in the bones of the spine.⁵²⁰ These degenerative changes can be identified by the naked eye.

A study of 135 adults from Kellis 2 (third-fourth century?) revealed that males had more osteoarthritis in the lower spine, while females had more osteoarthritis

⁵¹⁷ Larsen (2015: 121, 179).

⁵¹⁸ Mays (2010: 149).

⁵¹⁹ Larsen (2015: 57).

⁵²⁰ Larsen (2015: 181).

in the full spine.⁵²¹ This suggests a division of labour according to biological sex, possibly with males farming and females carrying heavy objects on their heads. While both sexes had similar levels of osteoarthritic changes in the knee joints, males had significantly more than females in the hip joints, suggesting that, while both sexes were squatting or kneeling during their work, they were performing different types of labour.⁵²² At the mining town of Phaeno, (fourth-seventh century), men and women showed similar levels of osteoarthritis, although severe forms were more commonly found in men (33%) than women (23%).⁵²³ It is common in older adults at sites including el-Gamous (first-seventh century)⁵²⁴ and Giv'at Shappira (Roman-Byzantine), where a heavy workload has been suggested.⁵²⁵

⁵²¹ Dupras, et al. (2019: 115).

⁵²² Dupras, et al. (2019: 115).

⁵²³ Findlater et al. (1998: 81).

⁵²⁴ Kirkpatrick (2019: 259, 262), for example.

⁵²⁵ Arensburg and Belfer-Cohen (2007: 199).



Figure 3.7: Changes in the vertebrae characteristic of DISH. From May (2010: 149).



Figure 3.8: Osteophytosis of the vertebrae. From Larsen (2015: 184).

However, osteoarthritis can also indicate other aspects of everyday life, for example stress caused by repetitive religious worship. This has been studied at St. Stephen's (fifth-seventh century),⁵²⁶ where the remains showed a community dominated by males with little evidence of skeletal stress from disease. Many did, however, have arthritic responses in their knees.⁵²⁷ The lack of significant evidence for arthritis in the spine or back suggests that this may not have been related to kneeling or bending during physical labour; instead, it was interpreted as evidence of repetitive kneeling for prayer.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁶ Driscoll and Sheridan (2000: 454).

⁵²⁷ Driscoll and Sheridan (2000: 461).

⁵²⁸ Driscoll and Sheridan (2000: 461-465).

Degenerative changes may help us to distinguish the burials of different groups of people from one another. The burial rites of individuals who apparently worked physically easier lives versus those who worked physically harder lives may indicate differentiation in burial, perhaps based upon socioeconomic status, sexual divisions, or broader aspects of identity.

3.4.4 Dental Diseases

Dental pathologies are perhaps the most frequently identified of all pathologies. This is because teeth can be examined regardless of the condition of other skeletal remains, and there are multiple dental pathologies that can be used to interpret stress, infection, nutrition,⁵²⁹ and labour.⁵³⁰ These include general dental problems such as tooth loss, caries, and dental wear. While many of these are visible to the naked eye, there are some microdefects such as Wilson bands (abnormally structured enamel resulting from periods of stress)⁵³¹ (Figure 3.9), which must be examined under a microscope and have therefore been studied at fewer sites. I highlight two dental pathologies: dental enamel hypoplasia and periodontal disease.

Tooth enamel is very sensitive to an individual's environment and does not remodel. Linear enamel hypoplasia results in an underdevelopment in the thickness or amount of enamel,⁵³² resulting in usually distinct lines on the

⁵²⁹ Larsen (2015: 25).

⁵³⁰ Larsen (2015: 79). Teeth were used as tools at sites including Khirbat Yajuz and Sa'ad. See Al-Shorman (2003: 183) and Albashaireh and Al-Shorman (2010: 211). At both sites tooth loss was ascribed to grasping and stretching materials in practices such as basket making or working leather.

⁵³¹ Larsen (2015: 48). The presence of one or more Wilson bands has been associated with smaller tooth size, indicating that the period of stress which caused the Wilson band also prevented growth to full potential (49).

⁵³² Larsen (2015: 44).

surface of the teeth that can be linked to specific ages during the process of enamel eruption (Figure 3.10).⁵³³ This can be used to study stress during childhood, even in adult skeletons. At Ebus (Roman Byzantine), dental enamel hypoplasia was linked specifically to six-, 12-, and 18-month cycles of nutritional stress, possibly related to the agricultural cycle as food options may have become limited or scarce at certain times of the year.⁵³⁴ If this is true, the community may have experienced a greater number of deaths during these periods of nutritional stress. However, other types of stress may also be related to enamel hypoplasia and Wilson bands, such as severe illness and environmental stress.

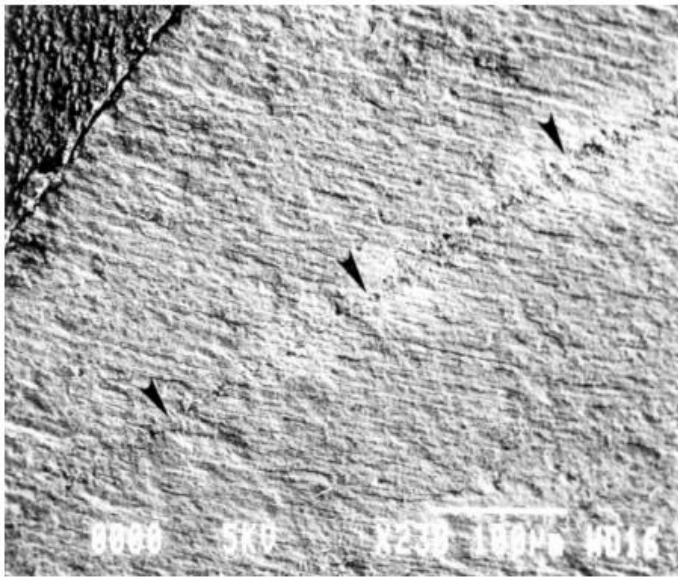


Figure 3.9: A Wilson band (arrows) on a maxillary central incisor. From Larsen (2015: 48).

⁵³³ The age is calculated according to the position of the defect on the tooth, based on a mean population age at the time of enamel eruption. This can vary by population. See the comparison between African and European populations in Larsen (2015: 49).

⁵³⁴ Grauer and Armelagos (1998: 121).

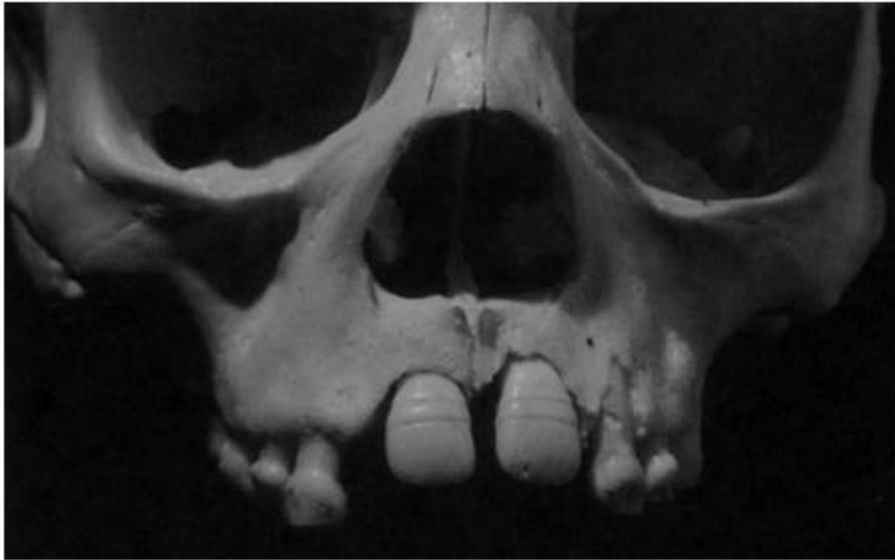


Figure 3.10: Maxillary teeth showing linear enamel hypoplasias. From Larsen (2015: 45).

Periodontal disease is inflammation and destruction to the gums, caused by the bacteria which are found in dental plaque.⁵³⁵ It is not only related to dental problems, but has also been connected to other medical problems such as cardiovascular disease⁵³⁶ and low birth weight leading to perinatal morbidity or mortality.⁵³⁷ A study on the dental calculus of four Medieval German skeletons (c. 950-1200) with periodontal disease also revealed many pathogens, including some connected to cardiovascular disease and other infections, as well as low-level antibiotic resistance in the oral microbiome.⁵³⁸ Therefore, dental pathologies may also be indicative of wider stress- or health-related problems, and potentially indicate a time of year when more death and burial might be expected.

⁵³⁵ Li et al. (2000: 548).

⁵³⁶ Li et al. (2000: 549), with further discussion (549-551); Roberts (2019: 286, 308).

⁵³⁷ Li et al. (2000: 553).

⁵³⁸ Warinner et al. (2014: 336-339).

3.4.5 Fractures

Injuries to the skeleton may indicate accidents (for example, caused through strenuous labour or natural disaster) or interpersonal violence. Most often they are found healed or healing, although there are some examples in the appendix of non-healed fractures which would have occurred at or around the time of death. For example, an infant and child from Kellis 2 (third-fourth century?) were both victims of severe trauma. The infant had some healed or part-healed fractures on the left humerus and an unhealed fracture on the collarbone (Figure 3.11), while the child's injuries occurred close to or at the time of death.⁵³⁹



Figure 3.11: The infant from burial 519 at Kellis 2, showing fractures in the humerus and clavicle. From Wheeler (2013).

⁵³⁹ Dupras et al. (2019: 114).

Some fractures may be indicative of attempting to protect the body from an attacker, for example the frequency of broken arms in women from cemeteries of the Kharga Oasis (fourth century BCE-fifth century) may have been the result of raising the hands above the head in defence.⁵⁴⁰ Potential weapons wounds have been noted at el-Gamous (first-seventh century),⁵⁴¹ on an adult skull from Sa'ad (Roman-Byzantine) (an unhealed wound attributed to a sword),⁵⁴² and on an older adult male at Trimithis (fifth-seventh century) (Section 4.3.2).⁵⁴³

Isolated examples such as these may either indicate a involvement in the military or singular incidents of interpersonal violence. A traumatic injury could also have led to the development of myositis ossificans, where bone forms inside the muscle or other soft tissue.⁵⁴⁴

The treatment of individuals who suffered from cases of likely interpersonal violence may reveal whether they were given the same burial rites as the rest of the cemetery population. For example, their burial in a separate area may indicate that they were not welcome within the main cemetery area.

3.4.6 Gout

There is one individual in the appendix with lesions on their feet indicating gout, from the church at Khirbet as-Samra (seventh century).⁵⁴⁵ Gout is most likely to be diagnosed from the metatarsophalangeal joint in the feet, where defined erosion is observed spanning the joint, in combination with bone deformity, but

⁵⁴⁰ Dunand and Lichtenberg (2019b: 34).

⁵⁴¹ Wood (1988).

⁵⁴² Rose et al. (2004: 45-47).

⁵⁴³ Aravecchia et al. (2015: 38).

⁵⁴⁴ Mays (2010: 181).

⁵⁴⁵ Nabulsi et al. (2020: 243).

it can also be determined in other bones such as the hands (Figure 3.12).⁵⁴⁶ Identification of gout is very rare, and in most cases, there is no effect on the bone.



Figure 3.12: A hand phalanx with a large erosive lesion and hook-like overhang, indicative of gout. From Mays (2010: 150).

3.4.7 Harris Lines

Harris lines (or growth arrest/recovery lines) are areas of bone growth that were once connected to rickets (Section 3.4.11) but are now linked to various conditions that result in stress on metabolism during growth, including nutritional

⁵⁴⁶ Waldron (2019: 744).

issues, fractures, and illnesses.⁵⁴⁷ They appear as lines of growth disruption on the bone and are identified through radiography (Figure 3.13). However, the relationship between Harris lines and stress or poor health is not clear and modern research into the presence of Harris lines on the bones of children has raised concerns about their interpretation.⁵⁴⁸



Figure 3.13: Harris lines on a tibia (left) and femur (right).
From Larsen (2015: 42).

3.4.8 Leprosy

Leprosy is a long-lasting but usually not fatal disease caused by a bacterial infection. It primarily affects the skin, nerves, and upper respiratory tract, but

⁵⁴⁷ Larsen (2015: 42).

⁵⁴⁸ Larsen (2015: 43).

can also affect the skeleton and various organs.⁵⁴⁹ Skeletal responses are estimated to affect only 3-5% of untreated people in advanced cases,⁵⁵⁰ and are most associated with bones of the face (Figure 3.14), hands, and feet (Figure 3.15), which become atrophied in changes visible to the naked eye.⁵⁵¹ About 5% of individuals who are exposed to leprosy contract the disease, and the incubation period can last years or even decades.

Leprosy was highlighted by Byzantine authors, especially leading figures in the church who stressed the Christian duty to help lepers. Gregory of Nyssa described this duty:

οὐκοῦν ἐν τῇ περὶ τούτους σπουδῇ τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐπαγγελίαν ἑαυτοῖς κατορθώσωμεν· λέγω δὲ σαφῶς οὕτως περὶ τῶν ἐκ τῆς χαλεπῆς νόσου διαλωβηθέντων· ὅσω γὰρ μείζων ἐπὶ τούτων ἡ ἀρρωστία, τοσοῦτω δῆλον ὅτι πλείων ἢ εὐλογία τοῖς τὸ ἐπίπνον τῆς ἐντολῆς κατορθώσασιν.⁵⁵²

“So, in earnest commitment to these victims, let us perform for ourselves the good commandment (of love). And I speak clearly concerning the people who have been mutilated by this difficult disease (leprosy). As much as this disease is great in those who are sick, so much more is the blessing clearly greater for those who perform the labour of the commandment.”

⁵⁴⁹ Larsen (2015: 108); Roberts and Buikstra (2019: 363).

⁵⁵⁰ Larsen (2015: 108).

⁵⁵¹ Larsen (2015: 109); Roberts and Buikstra (2019: 365). Many other skeletal pathologies, including cribra orbitalia and periostitis on the lower legs, may also be associated with leprosy individuals, but they should not be used to diagnose leprosy on their own: Larsen (2015: 111).

⁵⁵² van Heck (1967: 113-114). For more examples, see Miller and Nesbitt (2014: 28, 30).



Figure 3.14: Rhinomaxillary syndrome, leprosy. From Larsen (2015: 109).

Leper facilities were present in Palaestina in the fifth and sixth centuries.⁵⁵³

Scythopolis, with at least 119 tombs used in the Byzantine period, featured a bathhouse just beyond the city walls where an inscription of the sixth century demonstrates the practice of looking after lepers:

+ Θεόδωρος ὁ ποιμὴν
 λουτρὰ καινουργῶν νέμε[ι]
 τοῖς τὴν ἄκραν νοσοῦσι τῆς
 λώβης νόσον +
 ἐν χρ(όνοις) ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ζ' ἔτους χκβ⁵⁵⁴

“Theodore the shepherd tends to the baths, making them new, for those who are extremely sick with the disease of leprosy. In the time of the seventh indiction in the year 662 (558/559)”.

⁵⁵³ Miller and Nesbitt (2014: 33).

⁵⁵⁴ Avi-Yonah (1963: 325).



Figure 3.15: Atrophy of the feet in leprosy. From Larsen (2015: 110).

Approximately 30 cases of leprosy, tuberculosis, and “other chronic debilitating diseases” were reported from an unmarked mass grave of between 300 and 400 individuals at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist near the Jordan River, supposedly dated to the early seventh century.⁵⁵⁵ It was suggested (based on “anthropological and archaeological evidence”)⁵⁵⁶ that these were likely non-local people who went to the monastery for the curative powers of the Jordan river.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁵ Zias (1991: 150-151). Most of the remains were destroyed before they could be analysed, leaving “30 or so skeletons of men, women and children” to be studied. I not been able to locate any additional information on this excavation, the analysis of the human remains, or the claim that these individuals were victims of the Persian invasion in 614 CE.

⁵⁵⁶ While not openly stated, is likely that this refers to measurements of the skull and objects found in the grave (for example, coins minted in geographically distant areas).

⁵⁵⁷ Zias (1991: 150-151).

However, a more recent study on three monasteries associated with healing found no cases of leprosy among their cemetery populations. These were:

- Mount Nebo, 73 commingled adults from a double-chambered crypt (fourth-eighth century).⁵⁵⁸
- Deir 'Ain 'Abata, one single interment and 26 articulated skeletons buried in a cistern (seventh century and later).⁵⁵⁹
- Khan-el-Ahmar, 117 commingled adult males from a crypt (fifth-thirteenth(?) century).⁵⁶⁰

It is likely that the key difference between these burials and the mass grave at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist is that the former group represents monks, while the latter represents a local population. While the monks at Mount Nebo, Deir 'Ain 'Abata, and Khan-el-Ahmar do not seem to have been drawn to the monasteries due to a serious disease such as leprosy, the population buried at the Monastery of Saint John may come from a hospital at the site, either locals or non-locals who came to receive the supposed curative powers of the Jordan.

Leprosy is occasionally found outside of monasteries, for example at Kellis 2 (3rd-4th century?), where the skeletons of eight young adult males showed evidence of leprosy. Analysis of stable isotopes indicated that some of them may have been non-locals who travelled to the Dakhleh Oasis a short while

⁵⁵⁸ One possible female, the rest male.

⁵⁵⁹ One individual was female, the rest male.

⁵⁶⁰ Judd (2020: 72, 81).

before their deaths.⁵⁶¹ It is not clear why they would have travelled there, as no evidence of a hospital or similar facility has been discovered at the site to date.

3.4.9 Periostosis and Osteomyelitis

Periostosis (also called periostitis) and osteomyelitis show non-specific evidence of infection and disruption.⁵⁶² They can also be general responses to other stimuli, including trauma and cancer.⁵⁶³

In periostosis, lesions visible to the naked eye appear on the outer (periosteal) surface of the bone (Figure 3.16).⁵⁶⁴ The term 'periostitis' is only appropriate when it is likely that the lesion was caused by infection; 'periostosis' is appropriate when there is doubt that infection was the cause, as it is non-specific.⁵⁶⁵ We do not currently have a good basis on which to estimate the percentage of cases of periostosis in an archaeological sample which are due to infection⁵⁶⁶ and it is not usually possible to identify the specific disease that is represented by periosteal lesions, because it is associated with many skeletal infections.⁵⁶⁷ Despite this, most periosteal lesions in the appendix were referred to as periostitis when they were published.

⁵⁶¹ Dupras et al. (2019: 116). For examples of the use of stable isotopes to understand biodistance, see Sheridan (2017: 129-130) and Perry et al. (2011: 562).

⁵⁶² Larsen (2015: 86).

⁵⁶³ Larsen (2015: 86); Roberts (2019: 287).

⁵⁶⁴ Ortner (2008: 196).

⁵⁶⁵ Ortner (2008: 196); Roberts (2019: 288).

⁵⁶⁶ Roberts (2019: 292). The prevalence of periostosis may have increased as the number of stressful conditions faced by a population increased.

⁵⁶⁷ Ortner (2008: 198). An exception is when it is caused by a skin ulcer (199).



Figure 3.16: Periosteal reaction in a tibia. From Larsen (2015: 86).

Osteomyelitis, which is far rarer than periostosis, is usually only noted through radiological observation because it involves the proliferation of periosteal and endosteal bone (which covers the inner surface of the bone) (Figure 3.17).⁵⁶⁸

The specific disease represented may not be clear. While periostitis is not typically fatal, osteomyelitis can result in death if the infection spreads to vital organs via the circulatory system.⁵⁶⁹

Lesions from periostosis and osteomyelitis therefore indicate stress- or health-related issues, including but not limited to infections and tumour/cancer.



Figure 3.17: Osteomyelitis on a tibia. From Larsen (2015: 84).

⁵⁶⁸ Larsen (2015: 87-88).

⁵⁶⁹ Larsen (2015: 88).

3.4.10 Plague

Advances in techniques have allowed researchers to diagnose diseases that leave traces in the soft tissue, but not bones, from skeletal remains.⁵⁷⁰ Plague is one example, thought to have caused many of deaths in the past when virulent forms spread to large numbers of people. aDNA analysis has successfully recognised diseases such as *Yersinia pestis*, the plague pathogen, and has recently brought the impact of the plague on Byzantium into question in a multi-disciplinary study.⁵⁷¹ The assumption that the plague had a significant impact upon the population has previously relied on other forms of evidence, including textual evidence, and there are ongoing debates about how deadly – and significant – the plague was.⁵⁷² Only one inscription from the Eastern Mediterranean directly references the plague as a cause of death, a building inscription in Greek, dated to 542-543, from Ezra in the Hauran.⁵⁷³

The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius (Zuqnin Chronicle) (eighth century), based on a now lost part of the Ecclesiastic History of John of Ephesus (late sixth century), reported on the Justinianic plague. Among other claims, it reported that the bodies of the dead were left to rot in the streets, in houses, and in other public places because there was nobody to bury them.⁵⁷⁴ Within

⁵⁷⁰ Roberts (2019: 287).

⁵⁷¹ Mordechai et al. (2019: 25546-25554).

⁵⁷² Note particularly Mordechai et al. (2019) and Sarris (2021). Sarris is highly, and quite rightly, critical of the methodology that has been used to consider the impact of the plague, particularly the inward focus on evidence from Byzantium as opposed to elsewhere (343-346).

⁵⁷³ Benovitz (2014: 491). There was a rise in the appearance of epitaphs in Palestine and Arabia in the 540s, probably related to the outbreak of plague, and another during an additional wave of plague but no such rise during the other waves (497). It is possible that the increase in epitaphs was a response to the plague, increasing the commemoration of the dead (498).

However, the lack of secure dating for many inscriptions leaves this conclusion in doubt. See Mordechai et al. (2019: 25548-25549), who, unlike Benovitz, did not find any significant increase or decrease in the number of funerary inscriptions produced in response to the plague.

⁵⁷⁴ Witakowski (1996: 74-75).

the archaeological record itself, evidence of plague has been attributed to mass burials, as well as two mid-seventh century burials from the Hippodrome at Gerasa.⁵⁷⁵

Yersinia pestis has been found in human remains of the Justinianic period, for example in Bavaria⁵⁷⁶ and England.⁵⁷⁷ Unlike leprosy and tuberculosis, untreated plague could have killed a significant portion of a population quickly, thus potentially resulting in large numbers of people who would need to be buried within a short time span, and possibly thus multiple burials within the same grave and with limited typical burial practices. As most epidemics, including plague, would not have left skeletal evidence, identification of outliers or abnormal burials within a cemetery population should be cautious when applying such conclusions.

3.4.11 Rickets

Rickets is caused by Vitamin D deficiency and is associated with the bowing of the long bones (especially the legs) (Figure 3.18) and pelvic deformation, but cases are rare.⁵⁷⁸ One possible case was found at Khirbat Yajuz (fifth-eighth century), identified through curvature of the long bones.⁵⁷⁹ Careful consideration should be given to cases which have been identified through other means, such as the presence of Harris lines.

⁵⁷⁵ Hendrix (1995: 561).

⁵⁷⁶ Wagner et al. (2014: 319).

⁵⁷⁷ Keller et al. (2019: 12368-12369).

⁵⁷⁸ Larsen (2015: 21-22).

⁵⁷⁹ Al-Shorman (2003: 182-183).



Figure 3.18: Rickets in adult lower leg bones. From Mays (2010: 148).

3.4.12 Soft Tissue

In rare cases, such as examples of mummified individuals from Egypt, soft tissue may survive which contains evidence of health issues such as kidney stones and parasites. However, the identification of soft tissue containing evidence of disease in cases where the body has been skeletonised is not as clear as in cases where more of the soft tissue has remained.

For example, a calcified object from the pelvic region of an adult in a tomb at Abila (fourth-fifth century), which was originally identified as human soft tissue

preserving a parasite, has also been interpreted as a fossil which was either placed in the tomb as a grave good or ended up there accidentally.⁵⁸⁰

3.4.13 Spina Bifida

Spina bifida is a defect that occurs during pregnancy, when the spine and the spinal cord do not develop properly. It has a genetic component but is also related to poor nutrition during pregnancy.⁵⁸¹ Its presence in 54% of skeletons in a tomb at Khirbat Yajuz (fifth-eighth century) has been used to indicate a genetic connection between the users of the cave.⁵⁸²

Diagnoses are usually of spina bifida occulta, which is a less severe failure of vertebral development with minimal to no clinical significance that is present in an estimated 5-10% of the modern population.⁵⁸³ It is often over-recorded and a diagnosis should not be made unless several of the neural arches are open, because it is possible for neural arches to be open in non-cases of spina bifida.⁵⁸⁴ It is possible that this may be the reason for the large number of identified cases at Khirbat Yajuz.

3.4.14 Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis is a bacterial infection that destroys bone tissue. Bony lesions can appear on many parts of the skeleton, including, in order of decreasing frequency, the spine, tarsals and metatarsals, carpals and metacarpals, ribs, tibia and fibia, radius and ulna, phalanges of the fingers, temporal bone, and

⁵⁸⁰ Perry et al. (2008: 509-516); Cook and Patrick (2014: 123-125).

⁵⁸¹ Mitchell et al. (2004: 1885-1887).

⁵⁸² Al-Shorman (2003: 182).

⁵⁸³ Lewis (2019: 596).

⁵⁸⁴ Lewis (2019: 596).

phalanges of the toes.⁵⁸⁵ In skeletal remains it is mainly identified, with difficulty, from lesions on the internal structures of the ribs.⁵⁸⁶ Bony changes are only visible in an estimated 3-5% of untreated people.⁵⁸⁷

aDNA analysis carried out at Kellis 2 (third-fourth century?) has diagnosed tuberculosis in three adult individuals,⁵⁸⁸ while other sites in the appendix have relied on bony changes. Accurate identification of tuberculosis from skeletal remains is difficult.

3.4.15 Tumours, Cancer, and Cysts

The archaeological evidence of tumours, cancer, and cysts is also represented by skeletal lesions and abnormal bone growth.⁵⁸⁹ They can be diagnosed, using visual and radiographic examination, as distinct from other diseases by the size and number of lesions, the locations of the lesion on the bone, and the morphological features of the lesion.⁵⁹⁰ Diagnosis of a specific type of tumour or cancer is not always possible, because these rely on the current knowledge of clinical oncology.⁵⁹¹ Examples include one case of juvenile cancer and another of cervical cancer at Kellis 2 (third-fourth century?),⁵⁹² and a possible tumour or cyst on a child's skeleton at el-Gamous (first-seventh century).⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁵ Roberts and Buikstra (2019: 323).

⁵⁸⁶ Larsen (2015: 103).

⁵⁸⁷ Roberts and Buikstra (2019: 321, 323). Larsen (2015: 114) says 3-7% of individuals show bony changes.

⁵⁸⁸ Wheeler (2012: 230).

⁵⁸⁹ Brothwell (2008: 258).

⁵⁹⁰ Marques (2019: 640-642).

⁵⁹¹ Marques (2019: 640).

⁵⁹² Dupras, et al. (2019: 114); Molto and Sheldrick (2018: 104).

⁵⁹³ Kirkpatrick (2019: 261).

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the reader to the study of human remains by discussing the history of the research in the Near East and explaining the common methodologies used in Byzantine studies. It is essential to present this information to historians who are not trained to understand the work that is carried out on human remains or evaluate the interpretations of human remains researchers. This is a major flaw currently within Byzantine studies. This chapter has pointed out key methodological issues, with examples from the appendix, and highlighted the damage and pathologies that are mentioned at one or more sites in the appendix.

This information is an essential part of the study of Byzantine burials, and one that ideally would receive extra and careful attention in future excavations. Differences in burial rites based on age, sex, socio-economic status, identity as a local or outsider, occupation, illness or disease, and position within a population are all potential avenues open for exploration if human skeletal analysis is utilised to its full potential. It is important for historians to become familiar with the techniques that are used to study human remains and understand how researchers who work on human remains have come to their conclusions, to determine potential areas of bias, misunderstanding of historical contexts, misunderstanding of ancient sources, and the value of human remains analysis itself.

Chapter 4 will expand upon this chapter by presenting case studies of burial sites from the appendix where research has been carried out on human remains and examine the cemeteries in greater detail.

CHAPTER 4: HUMAN REMAINS: DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Having discussed the techniques used to study human remains in Chapter 3, I now show the application of this information through data analysis and case studies. Chapter 4 discusses the data from the appendix, case studies related to the study of human remains, and what this information can tell us about Byzantine burials of the Near East. I present data on the human remains from the appendix (minimum of 12,803 individuals) and demonstrate the value of this research to Byzantine studies, taking a novel approach to burials in the Byzantine Near East by bringing human remains to the forefront of the discussion.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Section 4.2 discusses the data from the appendix, focused on sex, age, and pathologies. Information on human remains is not available from all sites in the appendix, either due to limited, poorly preserved, or no remains or a lack of funding or a specialist to study them. Therefore, my analysis is limited to sites where information is available and research has been carried out on the human remains. Section 4.3 is dedicated to three case studies, where the use of data on human remains can encourage discussion about how age, pathological information, and diet may have affected burial practices.

The aims of the case studies are to demonstrate how human remains research can be integrated into the study of burials and how previous research on human remains from the Byzantine Near East may be queried. It is intended to show

the value of greater engagement with research on human remains, both for the archaeologist and for the historian. The case studies demonstrate examples of how an individual's burial may have been affected based on the information that can be obtained from their remains. I conclude by reasserting the value of data from human remains on burials in the Near East and to Byzantine studies more generally. For burials, we can consider aspects related to long-term disease, socioeconomic status, identity, sex, age, and biological relationships, and their impact upon burial practices when compared to other people within the same population.

4.2 The Appendix Data

The burials in the appendix represent the remains of an absolute minimum of 12,803 individuals from 91 sites. Tombs where no skeletal remains have been recovered (or recorded) are not included. 3,989 of these individuals are represented by the skulls from the Al-Bass cemetery at Tyre (first-seventh century).⁵⁹⁴ The vast majority of the remains listed in the appendix have not been aged or sexed, or this information was not available.

If estimated cemetery populations were taken into consideration, the number of individuals represented would be significantly higher.⁵⁹⁵ The true number of individuals represented by the appendix should therefore be understood as significantly larger than the absolute minimum number. This is important to note

⁵⁹⁴ The locations (either in a funerary complex or tomb) of 3,979 skulls are available, leaving 10 findspots unaccounted for. Note that De Jong (2010: 610) stated a minimum of 3,955 individuals. The numbers in the appendix are taken from De Jong (2017p).

⁵⁹⁵ For example, the estimated population of the South Cemetery at Phaeno would add between 1,500 and 2,000 individuals to this figure, assuming all tombs at the cemetery contained one individual only. Findlater et al. (1998: 82).

because research must be based on individuals whose remains have survived, but truthfully the cemeteries studied would have contained a greater – in some cases, significantly greater – number of people than are represented in the data.

4.2.1 Age and Sex

Ageing has been carried out at 62 sites in the appendix, sexing at 50 sites. In the cases of small cemeteries, the entire excavated population may have been examined, but commonly only the best preserved individuals have been studied. Ageing and sexing estimates for 4,839 individuals are shown in Table 4.1. The data relies on the methodologies used at each site, and thus should not be used for comparison.

Table 4.1: Age and sex of human remains (n = 4,839) in the appendix. Table does not include biological sex estimates for newborns, infants, or children, due to the difficulties related to sexing juveniles. Juveniles of unclear age category are either cases where the individual's age is expressed as "juvenile", "non-adult", or where the juvenile may either be a child or an adolescent.

	Male	Female	Unknown sex	Total
Foetus or newborn			237	237 (4.9%)
Infant (0-3 years)			717	717 (14.8%)
Child (3-12 years)			560	560 (11.6%)
Adolescent (12-20 years)	9	34	104	147 (3.0%)
Juvenile	2	5	444	451 (9.3%)
Adolescent or young adult	18	25	68	111 (2.3%)
Adult (20+ years)	1,023	637	956	2,616 (54.1%)
Total	1,052 (21.7%)	701 (14.5%)	3,086 (63.8%)	4,839

Different researchers have used different age categories, meaning that the sites covered in this thesis do not always use the same categories to age individuals. This means that, in multiple cases, it has been difficult to assign individuals to an age category, and henceforth some individuals may either be classified as adolescent or adult; some others cannot be defined other than 'juvenile'. The methodology used, or preservation of the remains, may also have made ageing estimates imprecise. To combat these issues inherent within the data, I have limited the age categories used in Table 4.1 to:

- Foetus or newborn.
- Infant, up to the age of three years. Newborns and infants are most commonly found in Egyptian burials: 18.9% of tombs in Egypt which contained human remains included either infant or newborn remains (with or without older individuals), compared to 12.6% of tombs in Arabia, 7.0% in Palaestina, and 3.9% in Phoenice and Syria.
- Child, three to 12 years.
- Adolescent, 12 to 20 years.
- Juvenile, for an individual under 20 years who does not fit into one of the above categories or whose age is unknown.
- Adolescent or adult, for an individual who may fall into either of these categories.
- Adult, 20 years or older.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁶ These are based on the age categories recommended by Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994: 9): foetal (pre-birth), infants (birth to three years), children (three to 12 years), adolescents (12 to 20 years), young adults (20 to 35 years), middle adults (35 to 50 years), and old adults (over 50 years).

While this limits the extent to which adult individuals can be studied by grouping them within a single category, rather than dividing them into 'young', 'middle', and 'older' age categories, it overcomes the issue of researchers trying to establish exact ages or small age ranges (for example, within five years), which may be imprecise due to the difficulty of ageing adults (Section 3.3.3.2). I have also provided the age estimates that were established in the study of these remains in the appendix so that these are not excluded from this study.

Table 4.1 shows that 43.7% of individuals in the appendix died before the age of 20. However, only 3% of individuals were adolescents, so an individual who reached adolescence was more likely to reach adulthood than a newborn, infant, or child. The table also shows a higher percentage of males than females, although notably more adolescent females have been identified than adolescent males. The greater number of males in the adult category may be a result of sexing methodologies: sexing based on the skull and robusticity of bones may have resulted in a greater number of males identified than females. However, in combination with this possible bias is the fact that large numbers of individuals have been found associated with monasteries, where most individuals have been sexed male. An example is the crypt at Khan el-Ahmar (fifth-thirteenth(?) century), where the remains of 117 adults, all male, and 21 children were found. Only 21 individuals in monastic burials have been sexed female (including one juvenile), compared to 251 males. The difference in church burials is similar: 45 females to 79 males, plus an additional 5 females and 182 males in the 1,000 burials in the basilica cemetery at Kom al-Ahmar (Roman-Byzantine).

I identify two possible explanations for the greater number of females than males in the adolescent and juvenile categories:

1. Sexing based on the presence of grave goods. In Section 5.2.3, I discuss the practice of sexing individuals based on the presumption that some grave goods are 'male' and others are 'female', and the inherent issues with this research when attempting to establish information about the deceased individual(s). Furthermore, in Section 5.2.4, I demonstrate that jewellery, which has been considered a 'female' grave good, is more likely to appear in juvenile burials than adult burials, and is more likely in adolescent and child burials than infant burials. Therefore, it is possible that the presence of jewellery in adolescent burials may have influenced the estimation of their sex and resulted in more females than males identified within this age category.
2. Adolescent females were exposed to a key vulnerability that did not affect their male counterparts: pregnancy. The risks associated with childbearing and childbirth in young women may have increased their chances of dying as an adolescent. This argument agrees with cases from the appendix where adolescent females have been identified buried with foetal or infant remains, including cases where death occurred during pregnancy or birth.

4.2.2 Stress and Pathology

Information on skeletal damage and pathology is available from 40 sites in the appendix. The results of these studies are summarised in Table 4.2. The methodologies used to examine stress and pathology vary, and in some cases,

the methodology was not stated at all. The following methods are identified in Table 4.2:

- *In situ* examination, where the remains were examined without being removed from the burial.
- Macroscopic examination, involving the removal of human remains from the burial, and usually the photography of individual bones, so that a more thorough analysis could be completed, but without the use of visual aids.
- Microscopic examination, involving the use of visual aids, such as microscopes, to more closely study the remains.
- Radiographic examination.
- Chemical analysis.
- DNA analysis.

Radiographic, chemical, and DNA analyses, are the most thorough methodologies, because they allow a researcher to see inside of the bones, study their chemical composition, and identify pathologies that are only discoverable (or more easily discoverable) through DNA evidence. However, they are the least common methods used in Table 4.2, owing not only to the rules and limitations surrounding the study of bones in the Near East, but also due to the time, effort, and money required to carry out these methods of investigation.

The focus on *in situ* and macroscopic investigations is notable in Table 4.2. Where a more thorough examination of the human remains has been carried out, more information on pathologies and ways of life are more confidently discovered. In addition, it is notable that the common finds in *in situ* and macroscopic investigations reveal little information on illness and disease themselves; instead, they tend to find general information on conditions that can be expected to affect adult individuals, such as arthritis, or non-specific evidence of stress or disease, such as periostosis. The opportunity to discuss these in more detail is available through other methodologies, as well as to identify a broader range of pathologies.

4.3 Case studies

I now present three case studies to show the practical application of this research, and how it can aid our understanding and interpretation of burial practices, including by challenging assumptions – such as socio-economic status based on tomb typology or location – within burial archaeology.

4.3.1 Infanticide at Ashkelon?

The scholarly history of associating mass burials of infants with infanticide has been linked to concepts of its widespread nature⁵⁹⁷ and its use as a way of disposing of unwanted children (particularly girls).⁵⁹⁸ It has been suggested that the growth of Christianity resulted in a significant reduction of infanticide cases.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁷ Congourdeau (1993: 164).

⁵⁹⁸ See Scott (2001: 17-19) for a counterargument to infanticide being primarily a way of disposing of unwanted female babies.

⁵⁹⁹ Moffatt (1986: 714-715).

At Ashkelon, the bones of approximately 100 infants have been found in a sewer beneath a bathhouse. The bathhouse, dated to the fourth-sixth centuries, was built over earlier Roman villas; when the bathhouse fell out of use, a part of the sewer was built over by the apse of a sixth-seventh century basilica (Figure 4.1).⁶⁰⁰ An inscription on the side of a bathtub which instructed visitors to *ἔισελθε ἀπολαυσσον και ...* (“enter, enjoy and ...”) suggested that the bathhouse was a brothel.⁶⁰¹ This was interpreted as a case of infanticide, with the infant remains deposited in the sewer while the brothel was in use.⁶⁰² The case has been cited by Byzantinists and used to discuss the methodologies of identifying infanticide in Roman Britain.⁶⁰³

The claim that the Ashkelon infants were victims of infanticide was supported by the apparent lack of careful burial and their discovery with a mixture of garbage products – shells, animal bones, potsherds, and coins – which accumulated at some point in the sixth century.⁶⁰⁴ The bones were removed from the sewer and age was estimated according to long bone measurements (involving regression techniques to estimate gestational age), dental development, and neonatal lines on the teeth.⁶⁰⁵ The results indicated very limited variations in bone length, with dental development comparable to the dental development of modern-day neonates, and no neonatal lines on any teeth. Iron oxide was also detected in “relatively high quantities” in stained areas of the teeth, which was interpreted

⁶⁰⁰ Stager (1991: 45-46).

⁶⁰¹ Stager (1991: 45, 47).

⁶⁰² Smith and Kahila (1992: 669).

⁶⁰³ See for example, Dauphin (1996: 62-63), Scott (2001: 11-12) and Millett and Gowland (2015: 173).

⁶⁰⁴ Stager (1991: 47).

⁶⁰⁵ Smith and Kahila (1992: 670-671).

as blood in the mouth at the time of death, possibly from asphyxiation.⁶⁰⁶ The argument for infanticide seemed to be further supported by the burial of another infant in a jar close to the sewer, and others at the Third Mile Estate,⁶⁰⁷ suggesting that the infants in the sewer were disposed of while others were buried locally with much more care.



Figure 4.1: The bathhouse at Ashkelon, showing the bathhouse and the apse of the basilica over part of the sewer where the infant remains were found. From Stager (1991: 46).

However, the methodology of ageing the infants using long bone measurements was questioned in a study focused mainly on Roman-British cases, but which included Ashkelon as an additional example.⁶⁰⁸ The long bone measurements from Ashkelon, several Roman-British sites, and a native American population were compared and a strong majority of the infants at all sites were estimated to

⁶⁰⁶ Smith and Kahila (1992: 673-674).

⁶⁰⁷ Smith and Kahila (1992: 669); Israel and Erickson-Gini (2003: 202).

⁶⁰⁸ Gowland (2002: 678).

be 38-40 weeks gestational age (Figure 4.2), which matched the reference sample used to create the ageing method (Figure 4.3). A strong reference population bias was noted, meaning that the age ranges at Ashkelon and the other sites may be more diverse than long bone measurements have suggested, potentially including both neonates and stillbirths.⁶⁰⁹

Additional analysis of the Ashkelon remains attempted to defend the interpretation of infanticide through sexing and the lack of pathological lesions.⁶¹⁰ The lack of pathologies does not eliminate the possibility of a rapid disease affecting some of the infants, or one which would not have affected the skeleton. Only 19 left femurs were sexed, using aDNA analysis and sequences specific to X and Y chromosomes,⁶¹¹ which revealed 14 males and five females.⁶¹² This does not agree with the original hypothesis that more females than males would have been victims of infanticide, but the authors countered this by suggesting that some girls may have been kept alive to become prostitutes, while the remainder of the infants were killed.⁶¹³ However, Scott (2001) pointed out the problematic nature of associating preferential male infanticide with female prostitution, and thus finding sexual commodification the only value for keeping female babies alive. It should also be asked how many female babies would have been necessary to keep alive for this purpose,

⁶⁰⁹ Gowland (2002: 684).

⁶¹⁰ Faerman and Smith (2008: 214), whose analysis ranged in date from the Natufian period (c. 12,500-9,500 BCE) to the Ottoman period.

⁶¹¹ Faerman and Smith (2008: 215).

⁶¹² Faerman and Smith (2008: 216).

⁶¹³ Faerman and Smith (2008: 216).

because, while the sample sexed was small, there were almost three males to every one female.

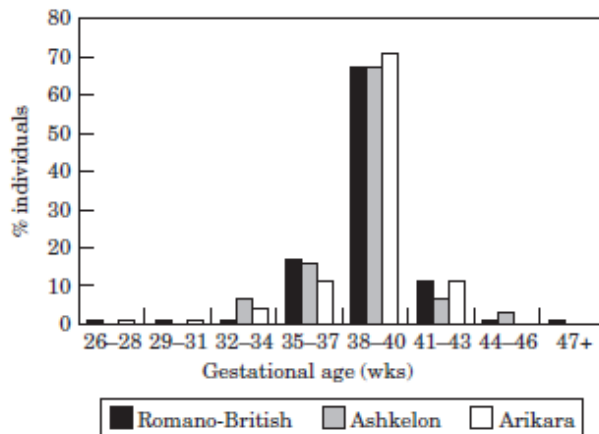


Figure 4.2: Estimates of infant ages based on long-bone measurements at Roman-British sites, Ashkelon, and a native American population at Arikara. From Gowland (2002: 678).

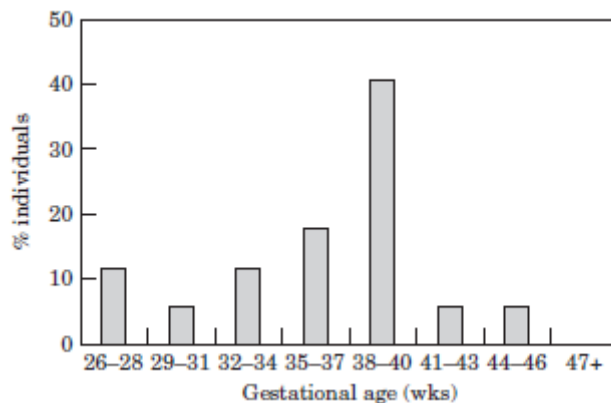


Figure 4.3: The original reference sample used in long bone measurement ageing of infants. From Gowland (2002: 678).

Furthermore, the infants may not have been deposited in the sewer from the bathhouse, but instead from another point of access to the sewer where they accumulated beneath the bathhouse along with the garbage. Millet and Gowland (2015) pointed out that the excavation report does not provide any stratigraphic or contextual evidence to support the discovery of the infants other

than that they were found in the sewer, and that therefore the claim of infanticide relies on the questionable assumption of their position and context.⁶¹⁴ Could the infants therefore belong to either before or after the bathhouse was in use?

If older burials had been discovered during construction, the infants may have been removed from these burials and reinterred in the sewer. This would have resulted in an apparent lack of burial rites, and allowed the build-up of garbage in the sewer, falsely indicating that the infants were contemporary with the bathhouse and material finds. They may have originally been interred in jars, like the nearby jar burial, and some of the potsherds may be the remains of these.⁶¹⁵ Alternatively, Scott (2001) suggested that the amount of bones found in the sewer indicated that it was probably out of use by the time the deposits were made.⁶¹⁶ If this were true, then what might the infant burials be related to? Not the bathhouse, but perhaps the building constructed over it: the basilica. No information is available on the relationship between the basilica and the findspot of the infant bones, however, so no link can be established.

While it is not impossible that the infants at Ashkelon were victims of infanticide, it is a potential reason for the presence of the remains, and not as certain as has been claimed. This case study demonstrates that the biases and

⁶¹⁴ Miller and Gowland (2015: 173).

⁶¹⁵ The original report on the remains argued that condition of the bones was too good for secondary burial to have been likely, and that the infants had probably been placed in the sewer with the soft tissue still intact. See Stager (1991: 47).

⁶¹⁶ Scott (2001: 12).

assumptions of researchers may impact the results of research on human remains, but that alternative conclusions can be suggested.

4.3.2 Injury and Illness at Trimithis

While it is generally believed that burial in a church was reserved for elites or church officials, and the location of these tombs implied elitism (see Section 2.6), research on human remains can offer additional perspectives on the individuals buried within churches.

Archaeologists usually anticipate that individuals buried within a church will have experienced physically easier work than those buried outside of it, as well as being less exposed to stress and disease. If this is true, individuals buried within a church should display fewer degenerative changes and fractures than those buried outside of it. An example is Rehovot-in-the-Negev, where the human remains from burials beneath the floor of the North Church were compared to those from the cemetery north of the village (fifth-eighth century).⁶¹⁷ Although the individuals within the church were expected to have better overall health than those from the cemetery, no significant differences were noted between the two groups.⁶¹⁸ The conclusion was that, either there were no significant social differences between the two groups, or that burial location does not reflect social status and involvement in activities that could cause skeletal trauma, better health, and lower chances of disease.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷ Perry (2007b: 491, 495). Some of the deceased were buried during the years of the Justinianic plague, 541-542.

⁶¹⁸ Perry (2007b: 495, 503).

⁶¹⁹ Perry (2007b: 503, 508).

We should however search for alternative explanations from church burials at other sites. The church burials at Trimithis (fourth century), in the Dakhleh Oasis, provide such an opportunity.

Excavations at Trimithis are still ongoing. At present, there are several known burial areas which have not been excavated/published, including three tombs in a crypt beneath the church⁶²⁰ and the cemetery south of the settlement area, where pyramid-shaped mudbrick tombs of the Roman period have been identified.⁶²¹ However, four pit graves from inside the church have been excavated and the four individuals within them have revealed a range of pathologies (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Burials in the church at Trimithis.

Burial	Date	Sex	Age	Comments
Burial 1	4 th century	M	Adult, 45-50 years	May have died from dental sepsis. ⁶²² Skeletal fractures suggest a likely blow to the shoulder (or possibly dislocation of the shoulder), a direct blow to the arm while it was raised in defence, injuries possibly related to a fall, several healed fractures of the ribs with an active infection over the fracture site, and possible sharp force trauma to the upper back. ⁶²³ These injuries have been interpreted as evidence that he was a soldier. ⁶²⁴

⁶²⁰ Aravecchia et al. (2015: 24-26).

⁶²¹ Davoli (2019: 71-72).

⁶²² Aravecchia et al. (2015: 27).

⁶²³ Aravecchia et al. (2015: 27-31). He also likely had ankylosing spondylitis, a type of arthritis (32).

⁶²⁴ Aravecchia et al. (2015: 38). Note that evidence of soldiers is rare in the appendix, but two cases are identified by lengthy inscriptions: one at Rimet al-Lohf in the Hauran (third-fourth century) and the other in Tomb 7 of the East Cemetery at Pella (sixth-seventh century); neither of these were associated with a church.

Burial 2	4 th century	F	Adolescent, 15-17 years ⁶²⁵	Small blood-stained lesion on one rib, possibly from cancer, either metastatic or chondrosarcoma. Cyst like-lesions on pelvis, probably related to benign tumours that occur in adolescence and affect females more than males. New bone formation on one rib suggested either trauma or disease. ⁶²⁶
Burial 3	4 th century	F	Adult, 30-35 years	Limited pathologies but did have a series of healed fractures on the left ribs, attributed to a single traumatic event. ⁶²⁷
Burial 4	4 th century	M	Adult, 35-40 years ⁶²⁸	Humerus and ulna of the left arm fused together, so arm was at a permanent 90° angle, probably caused by a traumatic event such as a fall directly onto the elbow. ⁶²⁹

It is unknown how common injuries and illnesses such as these were within the local population at Trimithis, due to lack of excavation. However, Burials 1, 2, and 4 allow us to speculate on possible reasons, other than their socioeconomic status, for their burial within a church. The individual in Burial 4 had a physical disability in the angle of his left arm at the elbow, while the individual in Burial 2 likely suffered from cancer at a young age. The individual in Burial 1, meanwhile, appears to have experienced several significant traumas from his possible experience as a soldier, although it is unknown whether they may have affected him after they had healed. It is possible that any one of the adult

⁶²⁵ Aravecchia et al. (2015: 33).

⁶²⁶ Aravecchia et al. (2015: 33-34).

⁶²⁷ Aravecchia et al. (2015: 35).

⁶²⁸ Aravecchia et al. (2015: 35).

⁶²⁹ Aravecchia et al. (2015: 37).

individuals, including the soldier, may have provided funds to construct the church.

These three individuals probably or definitely experienced either a severe disease process or permanent physical injury. While it is not possible to confirm that the individual in Burial 3 also had a disease or deformity, the other three burials indicate that one aspect of their position within the church may have been due to the circumstances of their health. Perhaps this was meant to recognise the traumas and/or suffering they had experienced during their lives, either separate from or in combination with a favourable socioeconomic status.

Another church in the Dakhleh Oasis, the West Church, contained the burials of two individuals. The first was an adult male (estimated 24-30 years of age at the time of death). He had several healed fractures of the ribs, degenerative disease primarily in the spine, and spina bifida.⁶³⁰ The second individual was an infant of estimated age 3-9 months at the time of death, with no evidence of pathology.⁶³¹ Unlike Trimithis, there is no indication that these two individuals were buried in the church due to disease processes or physical disabilities, and furthermore the individuals buried immediately outside of the West Church in its cemetery also suffered fractures, spina bifida, and degenerative diseases, as well as one foetus and one infant estimated to have been 15-21 months of age at time of death.⁶³² The west church burials, therefore, show no evidence of the distinction of burial location based upon health, age (for example, to offer spiritual protection to the infant), or trauma. Here, perhaps, they were members

⁶³⁰ Molto et al. (2003: 347).

⁶³¹ Molto et al. (2003: 347).

⁶³² Molto et al. (2003: 345-346).

of a family in some way related to the church, or wealthy enough to afford burial within it.

This brief exploration of burials within a church indicates multiple decision-makers in the selection of burial location beyond merely socioeconomic status. Something ensured that the individuals at Trimitis stood out among the rest of the community as being worthy of, and probably also wealthy enough to receive, burial within a church.

4.3.3 Diet and Status in Arabia

Much of the work on human diet carried out in the Byzantine Near East has been focused on either monastic communities or juveniles.⁶³³ Monastic communities naturally contained the members of a closed community (with or without the burials of some elites or local people), while weaning limits us to the diets of infants and young children, without information on the adults in the community or possible distinctions between different social groups. However, neither of these categories can provide significant information for the study of the everyday burial practices of the general population.

Research on diet using stable carbon and nitrogen isotopes has been carried out at some of the Roman-Byzantine sites in northern Jordan, which may allow us to look at the population more generally in this region. Diet at Sa'ad, Ya'amun, and Yasileh were compared in one study,⁶³⁴ another compared diet at

⁶³³ For example, Gregoricka and Sheridan (2012) covers weaning practices in a monastic context.

⁶³⁴ Rose et al. (2007: 66-68).

Khirbat Yajuz, Pella, Sa'ad, and Ya'amun.⁶³⁵ By examining and comparing these sites, we may reconsider the assumptions about the connection between socio-economic status and burial type (for example, that the simplest burials represent the poorest members of the community).

The tombs from three of these sites have already been compared in Section 2.3 (Sa'ad, Ya'amun, and Yasileh). Yasileh featured the most professional tombs, while Sa'ad featured the least professional, but the quality of construction between tombs varied at all three sites. Rock-cut tombs were more frequently found at Yasileh, and were least frequent at Sa'ad, where a reliance on shaft tombs dominated. The appendix contains information on a hypogeum containing the loculi burials of individuals from Khirbat Yajuz. The samples from Pella were found in rock-cut tombs.

By examining these sites in a single case study, I will consider the relationship between access to different types of food and tomb type at these sites. This will demonstrate the value of considering diet as an aspect of distinguishing the status of individuals and how this may have affected their burial.

At Sa'ad, Ya'amun, and Yasileh, stable carbon and nitrogen isotopes from teeth were used by Rose et al. (2007) to examine differences in diet. Rose et al. (2007) concluded that diet mainly relied on C₃ plants at all three sites (with wheat proposed as the dietary staple), and little meat was consumed (see Section 3.3.5.1 and Table 3.2 on the types of foods represented by carbon and

⁶³⁵ Sandias (2011: 337-346), who covered diet from the Bronze age to the early Islamic period in Jordan.

nitrogen stable isotopes).⁶³⁶ Additionally, stable carbon isotope ratios from tooth enamel at Sa'ad and Yasileh indicated that the sites shared the same contribution of C₃ and C₄ plants towards diets, indicating a generally similar diet.⁶³⁷

Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show the distributions of ¹³C and ¹⁵N values in 'large' (group rock-cut) and 'small' (group and individual shaft) tombs at the three sites. The distributions in the group rock-cut tombs showed a greater variability of both carbon and nitrogen values when compared to the shaft tombs, at all three sites. While the Sa'ad and Ya'amun distributions were extremely similar among both tomb types, those at Yasileh were slightly different. According to Rose et al. (2007), the results at Yasileh likely represented greater access to protein from animal products.⁶³⁸ The conclusion reached from this information is that the site with the most professional tombs was also the site where animal proteins were more readily accessible, at least to some members of the community.

However, look at the results shown in Figure 4.4. The ¹³C values are lowest at the bottom of the figures and highest at the top; the ¹⁵N values are lowest on the left and highest on the right. The four individuals represented in the bottom left hand corner of Figure 4.4, from Yasileh, have low values of both ¹³C and ¹⁵N. If these individuals consumed high levels of animal products (or marine protein), higher levels of ¹³C would be expected. This suggests a mainly vegetarian diet

⁶³⁶ Rose et al. (2007: 67). While the word 'meat' is used, this perhaps refers to animal products in general.

⁶³⁷ Rose et al. (2007: 67).

⁶³⁸ Rose et al. (2007: 67).

with little meat consumption. The remaining individuals from Yasileh show similar results to those from Sa'ad and Yasileh, suggesting little difference in terms of diet for the majority of individuals and similar amounts of animal protein consumed; indeed, the only individuals who had a higher trophic level and appear to have consumed more animal products (or marine protein) were from Sa'ad and Ya'amun.

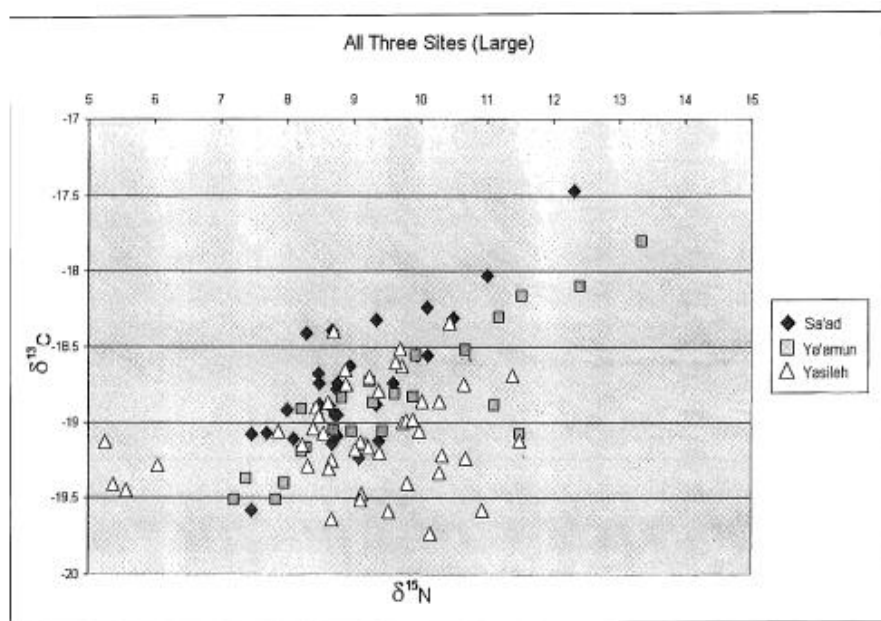


Figure 4.4: Dietary variability in 'large' (group rock-cut) tombs at Sa'ad, Ya'amun, and Yasileh. From Rose et al. (2007: 67).

By comparing Figures 4.4 and 4.5, we can see that the individuals in the group rock-cut tombs had greater variation in their diets when compared to those buried in shaft tombs. This may be because the rock-cut tombs were used over a longer period of time and contained a larger number of people than the shaft tombs, or more likely due to differential access to foods based on socioeconomic status and the rock-cut tombs reflecting a wider range of

statuses within the community.⁶³⁹ The people who were buried in the rock-cut tombs may also have had access to a wider variety of food options compared to those who were interred in the shaft graves. However, when we apply the new conclusions on the interpretation of Figure 4.4 to our results, it is not true that the most professional tombs (found at Yasileh) were connected to more animal protein in the diet. As the sample is small and tightly clustered, it is easy to identify that most individuals at all three sites in the rock-cut and shaft tombs had very similar ^{13}C and ^{15}N values, and it is in the rock-cut tombs at Yasileh that the lowest amount of consumed animal products is found.

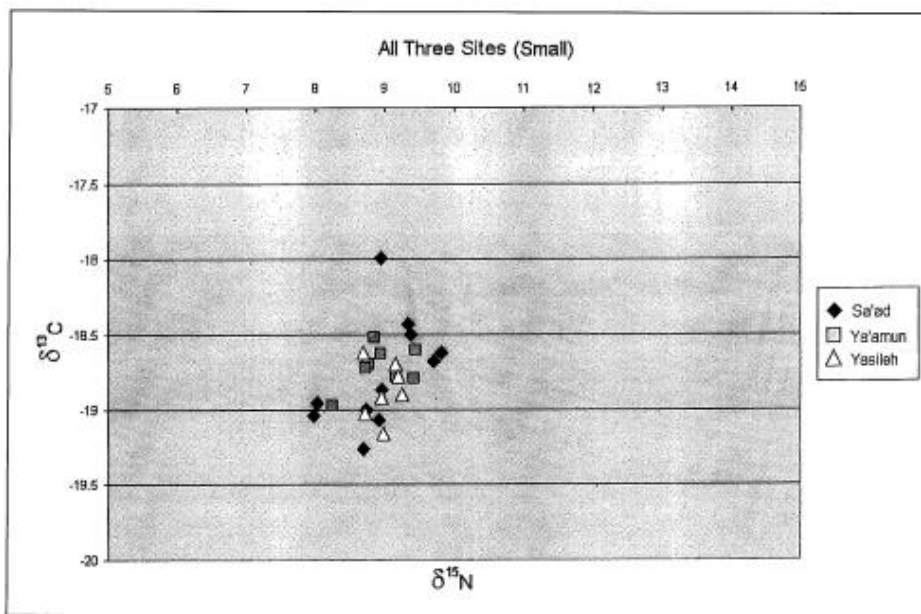


Figure 4.5: Dietary variability in 'small' (shaft) tombs at Sa'ad, Ya'amun, and Yasileh. From Rose et al. (2007: 68).

The people at Sa'ad may have had a more strenuous working life than those from the other sites: while levels of osteoarthritis do not vary greatly from other sites in northern Jordan, individuals at Sa'ad did have a higher frequency of

⁶³⁹ Rose et al. (2007: 67).

healed broken bones compared to those at Yasileh,⁶⁴⁰ suggesting a harder or harsher lifestyle. This does, however, not appear to relate to a diet with less animal or maine protein, based on the Rose et al. (2007) sample.

A stable isotope study on human remains from Khirbat Yajuz, Pella, Sa'ad, and Ya'amun used skeletal remains and compared them to animal remains (from Pella and Ya'amun)⁶⁴¹ to analyse diet at these sites. The focus was on comparing between sites using the mean isotopic values of samples, rather than comparing between tomb types (Figure 4.6).

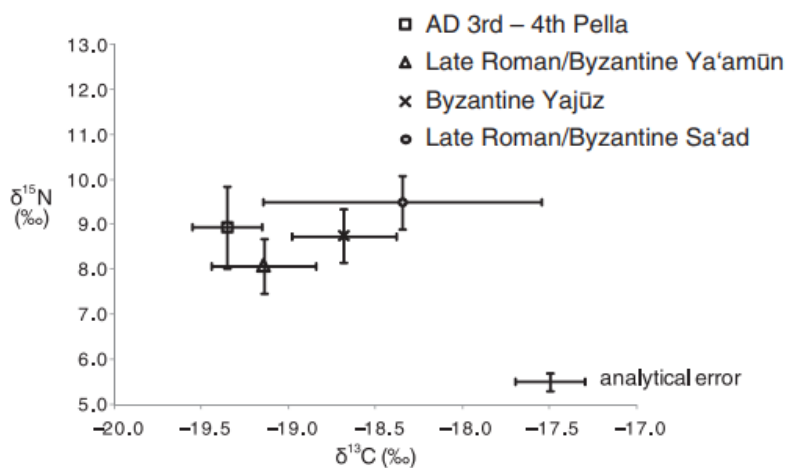


Figure 4.6: Mean isotopic values with ± 1 standard deviation for human diets from Pella, Ya'amun, Khirbat Yajuz, and Sa'ad. Adapted from Sandias (2011: 343). Note that $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ axes are flipped compared to Figures 4.4 and 4.5.

Diet from these samples was primarily concentrated around resources from C_3 plants, and variability between the different sites was low. Sa'ad was identified as an exception to this rule, as more C_4 -based foods were identified at the site, through more positive $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ values. The same may be seen in some of the

⁶⁴⁰ Rose et al. (2007: 66).

⁶⁴¹ The animal bones dated to the middle-late Bronze Age, late Roman-Byzantine, and Umayyad periods. Sandias (2011: 341-342).

examples from Sa'ad in Figures 4.4 and 4.5. However, unlike in Rose et al. (2007), the same level of C₄ plants was not identified in human diet at Ya'amun; in fact, it was animal diet at Ya'amun that was primarily based on C₄ plants. Khirbat Yajuz, Pella, and Ya'amun were identified as fairly homogenous in terms of diet, whereas diet was more varied at Sa'ad.⁶⁴²

Sa'ad featured a small number of rock-cut tombs and many shaft tombs, both types frequently containing multiple individuals buried over a long period of time. At the other sites, the reliance was either split between rock-cut tombs and shaft tombs, or primarily on rock-cut tombs or hypogea.

A relationship between an individual's access to resources and the type of tomb they were buried in at these sites is complicated. It is often assumed that a more limited diet, or a reliance on resources that other communities did not need to consume (for example, foodstuff that was typically fed to animals rather than humans, particularly C₄ plants), is connected to a simpler type of tomb, one which required less energy to construct. We cannot necessarily, however, conclude that the opposite is true for the users of rock-cut tombs, that these individuals were of a higher socioeconomic status than those buried in the shaft tombs, especially considering the re-evaluation of the results of Rose et al. (2007). Presumably, users of rock-cut tombs were of a higher socioeconomic status at the time that the tomb was constructed, owing to the effort and financial burden required to build the tomb. However, the range of diets within the rock-cut tombs at these sites suggests that they may have been used at

⁶⁴² Sandias (2011: 343-344).

various times by members of the community who had different levels of access to resources.

Figures 4.4 and 4.5 in particular indicate that there was more choice in burial options for those who had access to fewer resources, whereas those who had access to more resources appear to have limited themselves to the use of rock-cut tombs. Ultimately, however, at the other sites, where access to foodstuff was more varied, there was limited or no such distinction: people were buried in rock-cut tombs or hypogea, regardless of their diets, and social stratification seems to have played less of a role. This case study shows us that we cannot assume the most impressive tombs in a cemetery belonged exclusively to the wealthiest members of that society, especially in cases where the tombs were in use for a long time.

4.4 Conclusion

Recent years have seen an increase in the amount of research on human remains from burials of the early Byzantine Near East. However, there are still many barriers to this research, which we must be aware of to effectively use it within our own studies. This includes not only political and social aspects of the modern world, but also the methodologies used by researchers. We must be able to understand the flaws in this research if we are to use it within our own.

While much of the data on human remains from the appendix has relied on visual examination of bones, there are examples where more advanced research (such as radiographic analysis) has been carried out to study human remains in greater detail. It is hoped that the examples provided in Table 4.2

indicate the range of possible discoveries that can be made and the benefits of using advanced methodologies to study human remains. Through the information in Chapters 3 and 4, historians should be able to see the value of using human remains in archaeological and historical research and understand how to begin engaging with this research in a meaningful way.

The aim of these case studies was to demonstrate what can be achieved through the study of human remains, the type of questions that can be asked about burials, and how this research can challenge previous conclusions. They show that we may learn much about burial practices from the inclusion of human remains within our datasets. Human remains may offer alternative explanations for burial location, burial style, or tomb type when compared to traditional interpretations of archaeological assemblages. Information on access to resources or workload, indicating socio-economic status, or on injury and illness, suggesting aspects of health, offer additional ways to analyse burials.

CHAPTER 5: GRAVE GOODS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapters 3 and 4, I discussed the human remains from the burials consulted for this thesis. This chapter follows by discussing the objects discovered in the burials I have consulted. These objects are referred to as 'grave goods', although this term is somewhat misleading because it can describe any object, other than human remains, which was deliberately placed in a tomb. This can cover many different items, with various explanations for their presence within the tomb.⁶⁴³

An object may have been deliberately placed in a tomb because:

- It was worn by the deceased person when they were buried.
- It was placed in the grave during the funeral by a mourner.
- It was placed there during a later opening of the tomb, either for commemorative activities or other (now unknown) purposes.

Objects could also enter the tomb accidentally during incidents such as looting, disturbance, or backfilling. These are not considered grave goods. Accidental deposits may include fragments of vessels, coins, or animal bones, as well as objects which do not chronologically belong to the period when the tomb was in use. Some, but not all, archaeologists make efforts to distinguish between objects that were deliberately placed in the tomb and those that entered it accidentally.⁶⁴⁴ It is often difficult to identify whether objects were deliberate

⁶⁴³ Bollók (2013: 227); Härke (2014: 41).

⁶⁴⁴ For example, see Nabulsi et al. (2010: 608), where an eighth century Islamic coin is understood to have accidentally entered a grave.

deposits or accidental deposits, for example in cases where objects were found broken at the time of excavation. How can we tell whether a fragment came from a deliberate deposit or if it accidentally ended up in the tomb during a disturbance of that tomb? Although stratigraphy can provide possible answers, this can only be used in cases where archaeologists have provided precise information on where an object was found in comparison to other objects and human remains, and does not answer the question of how we can identify intrusive or accidental deposits in tombs where objects have been disturbed and are found outside of their original context, or in cases where objects have simply been listed without context.

This chapter focuses on objects that were deliberately placed within a grave (grave goods), either because the deceased person had been buried in them, or because a mourner had placed them in the tomb during a funeral. It is important to note that, in the case of disturbed burials, it can be difficult to tell what may have been a deliberate inclusion and what may have been accidental. Where an archaeologist has identified an object as intrusive, the object has not been included as part of this discussion.

Many objects of the early Byzantine period held in collections around the world are known to, or may have originated from, graves. This includes textiles and jewellery removed from Egyptian cemeteries in the 19th and 20th centuries.⁶⁴⁵

The first section, section 5.2, discusses how frequently different grave goods appear in burials in the appendix. I break this down according to province and

⁶⁴⁵ O'Connell (2012: 95, 97), which discusses the British Museum's collection of late Antique Egyptian artifacts, beginning with papyri and parchments in the 19th century.

the most common tomb types. This establishes a general overview of the contexts in which different grave goods may be expected to be found. I then present the data on grave goods according to the age and sex of the deceased person(s). The range of objects buried in adult-only graves appears to be greater than the range of objects buried in juvenile-only graves. Some objects are more likely to appear in burials of men or women, but almost no objects are conclusively exclusive to either sex.

Section 5.3 then discusses the interpretation of individual objects, with examples taken from the appendix and occasionally from collections. Dress accessories are discussed separately from other grave goods because they were worn by the corpse rather than deposited in the grave with the deceased person.

Finally, Section 5.4 presents case studies in which accurate contextual information is known about the objects in the burial. These demonstrate the importance of combining information on the grave itself, the individual within the grave, and the objects they were interred with. The chapter concludes that the range of grave goods that can be found in Byzantine burials of the Near East is broader than may be expected and that grave goods continued to be placed in graves due to their symbolic or cultural connections to mourning and funerary ritual. The interpretation of grave goods should be based on a detailed study of the context and may not simply be transferred from one tomb to another.

5.2 Most Frequent Objects

I begin this chapter, the first large-scale study of grave goods in the Byzantine Near East, by establishing the most frequent grave goods found in tombs of the appendix.

45.6% of burials in the appendix did not contain grave goods when they were excavated; 34.7% may have contained grave goods, but this is not certain. It is entirely possible that this is because the deceased person was not buried with any objects at all. However, grave goods may have disappeared due to looting, deterioration, or other disturbance, especially in the case of textiles and organic materials.⁶⁴⁶ Unknown numbers of objects have been looted in ancient and/or modern times. One survey of 16 informants from the village of Saffa, Palestine, found that approximately 6,000 objects had been looted from 119 rock-cut burial caves across 22 burial sites.⁶⁴⁷ We may therefore argue that the number of burials which contained grave goods was greater than data suggests; how much greater, however, we cannot say.

The absence of grave goods in Byzantine burials, and their general declining numbers during this period, has been related to the Christianization of the population.⁶⁴⁸ The concept that Christians did not need to be buried with grave goods has been used, for instance, to argue that the Kellis 2 cemetery in the

⁶⁴⁶ Organic materials include plants, charcoal, and foodstuff. For evidence of foodstuff, see Section 5.3.2.1.

⁶⁴⁷ Al-Houdalieh (2014: 224, 226, 230). Concerns over tomb looting are discussed in Section 2.4.

⁶⁴⁸ Schülke (1999: 84-85).

Dakhleh Oasis (third-fourth century?) (Section 2.2.3.1) was a Christian cemetery.⁶⁴⁹

Almost all the burials in the church of Kom al-Ahmar (Roman-Byzantine) lacked grave goods, while at the nearby cemetery at Qarara (fourth-ninth century), grave goods were more common.⁶⁵⁰ It has been interpreted that grave goods were not necessary at Kom al-Ahmar because burial close to a saint offered a privileged form of protection that meant grave goods were irrelevant; meanwhile, at Qarara, where there was no church, they were considered more important.⁶⁵¹ This interpretation limits the meanings that can be ascribed to grave goods to merely protective purposes and overlooks other possible reasons for their inclusion in graves (Section 5.3). The argument also does not hold true for other burials in Christian contexts. The Church-79 tomb at Khirbat as-Samra (seventh century) contained one adult woman who wore a bronze finger ring and had a bronze coin in her mouth.⁶⁵² Jewellery was the most frequent find in other burials at Khirbat as-Samra (fifth-eighth century).⁶⁵³ The practice of providing grave goods – including dress accessories such as jewellery – did not simply disappear following the adoption of Christianity,⁶⁵⁴ and furthermore there are many tombs devoid of grave goods where no clear religious building or identity may be established. While the growth of Christianity and a reduction in the appearance of grave goods did occur simultaneously, the

⁶⁴⁹ Bowen (2022: 355-356).

⁶⁵⁰ Huber (2018b: 223).

⁶⁵¹ Huber (2018b: 223).

⁶⁵² Nabulsi et al. (2020: 257).

⁶⁵³ Pottery and glass vessels, belts, mirrors, and other objects were found with less frequency in these tombs. See the appendix.

⁶⁵⁴ Härke (2014: 44).

argument that Christians elected not to include objects in graves merely due to protective purposes cannot be stated as fact, as there are too many outliers.

The ten most frequent grave goods found in the appendix are shown in Table 5.1. The table shows the number of burials that contain one or more examples of an object. The total number of burials in the appendix is 9,205 and this figure includes individual burials in tombs, such as loculi and arcosolia burials in rock-cut tombs. 1,912 (19.7%) burials contained objects which had been worn by or deliberately deposited with the deceased.

The top two categories – jewellery and clothing or textiles – are usually dress accessories, worn by the corpse in most cases. The material of some jewellery, metal and glass for instance, has likely aided its preservation. The following four categories – pottery and glass vessels, coins, and lamps – are common finds in Mediterranean burial contexts of this period.⁶⁵⁵ Nails are usually interpreted as evidence of the presence of a wooden bier, coffin, or box which has disintegrated since the original burial; the remains of coffins, biers, or mats category includes fittings and other fragmentary evidence.

Table 5.1: Ten most frequent grave goods in the appendix (total burials 9,205).

Object	Number of burials containing one or more	Percentage of all burials containing one or more
Jewellery	716	7.8%
Clothing or textile	657	7.1%
Pottery vessel or fragment	475	5.2%
Glass vessel or fragment	473	5.1%
Coin	294	3.2%
Lamp or fragment	274	3.0%

⁶⁵⁵ For example, found in burials from Argos in Greece (fifth-seventh century): Oikonomou (1988: 481-498), and at Carthage in North Africa (fifth-seventh century): Stevens (2008: 79-103).

Organic material	179	1.9%
Remains of coffins, biers, or mats	172	1.9%
Nail	153	1.7%
Pin, hairpin, or needle	115	1.3%

The other two categories have been given less attention by archaeologists.

Organic material covers a variety of items, from plants to charcoal, food remains, animal bones, eggshells, and seeds. Sometimes leaves or plant matter were placed between layers of textiles in Egyptian burials, but in other cases organic material was found in vessels or the grave itself. I place pins, hairpins, and needles in one category because it is often difficult to distinguish between them; these may have been used as dress accessories or as tools, but could also be related to labour, including textile production. These categories are notably less common than many of the others within the top ten.

Table 5.2 presents information on the less common objects in the appendix. I include this to show the range of other objects found in tombs.

Table 5.2: Less frequent grave goods in burials (total 9,205).

Object	Number of burials containing one or more	Percentage of all burials containing one or more
Shoes	91	1.0%
Bell	66	0.7%
Spatula, kohl stick, or spoon	66	0.7%
Cross (usually a pendant)	61	0.7%
Chain or wire	57	0.6%
Other vessel (not pottery or glass)	54	0.6%
Buckle	51	0.6%
Weapon or tool	51	0.6%
Figurine	47	0.5%

Spindle or spindle whorl	40	0.4%
Writing implement	40	0.4%
Mirror or mirror plaque	35	0.4%
Button	27	0.3%
Gold leaf, foil, or thread	24	0.3%
Brooch or fibula	20	0.2%
Lock and/or key	18	0.2%
Comb	16	0.2%
Musical instrument	16	0.2%
Cylinder	14	0.2%
Hairnet or hairpiece	14	0.2%
Basket	13	0.1%
Disc	12	0.1%
Papyrus	12	0.1%
Plaque	11	0.1%
Box	10	0.1%
Other cosmetic or dress accessory⁶⁵⁶	8	0.1%
Weight	5	0.05%
Gaming piece	4	0.04%
Seal	4	0.04%
Staff or fragment	4	0.04%
Incense shovel	2	0.02%

5.2.1 Frequency by Tomb Type

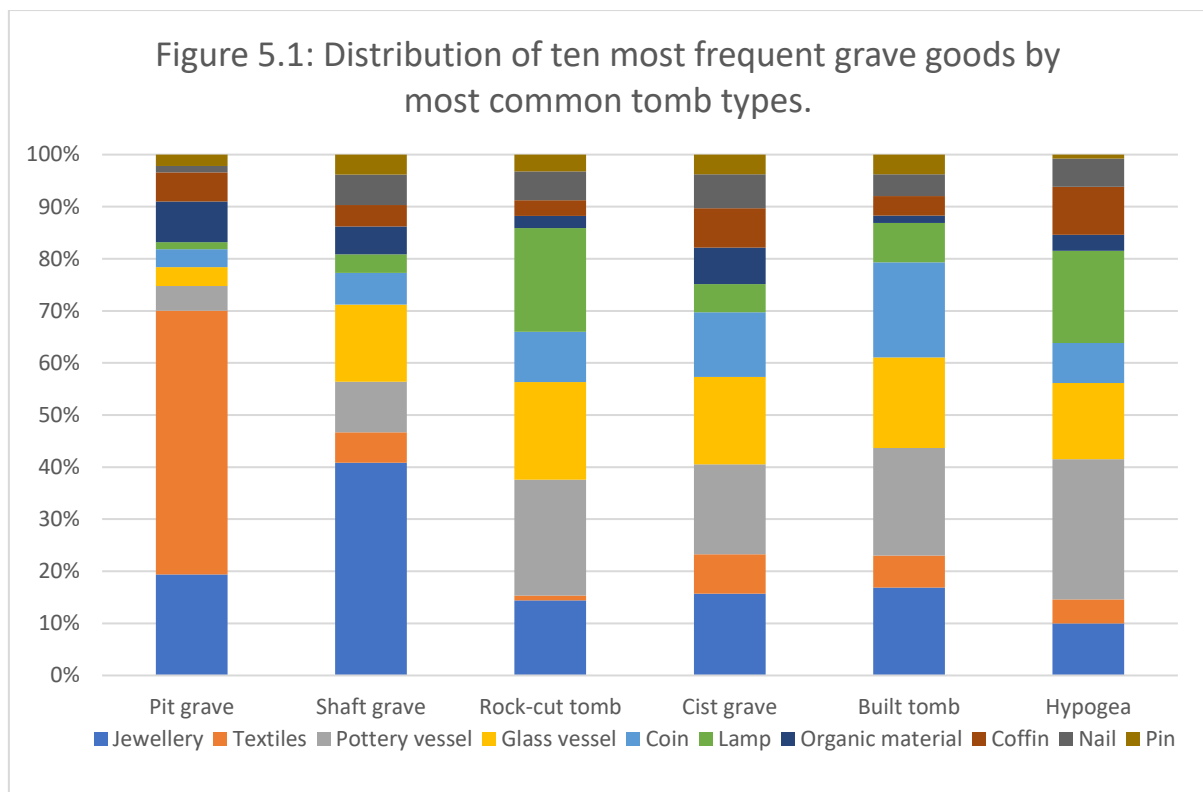
The frequency of objects varies by tomb type. Figure 5.1 shows the distribution of the ten most frequent grave goods according to the most common tomb types. The percentage of tombs which contain grave goods when excavated varies according to the type of tomb. Grave goods were found in:

- 15.6% of pit graves. This figure is certainly lower than the actual percentage of pit graves which contained grave goods, owing to the descriptions of cemeteries rather than individual graves at sites such as Qarara and Matmar.

⁶⁵⁶ Includes cosmetic palettes.

- 30.5% of shaft graves.
- 32.3% of rock-cut tombs.
- 24.2% of cist graves.
- 17.3% of built tombs.
- 24.4% of hypogea.

While some of these differences may be down to tomb visibility and consequentially looting, this cannot entirely explain why some types of tombs contain greater or fewer grave goods than others. For example, while many of the shaft tombs at Sa'ad (Roman-Byzantine) had been looted others, such as Tomb 2 in Cemetery II, were found undisturbed.⁶⁵⁷



⁶⁵⁷ Rose et al. (2004: 61).

Using Figure 5.1, we can make the following observations on tombs that contained grave goods:

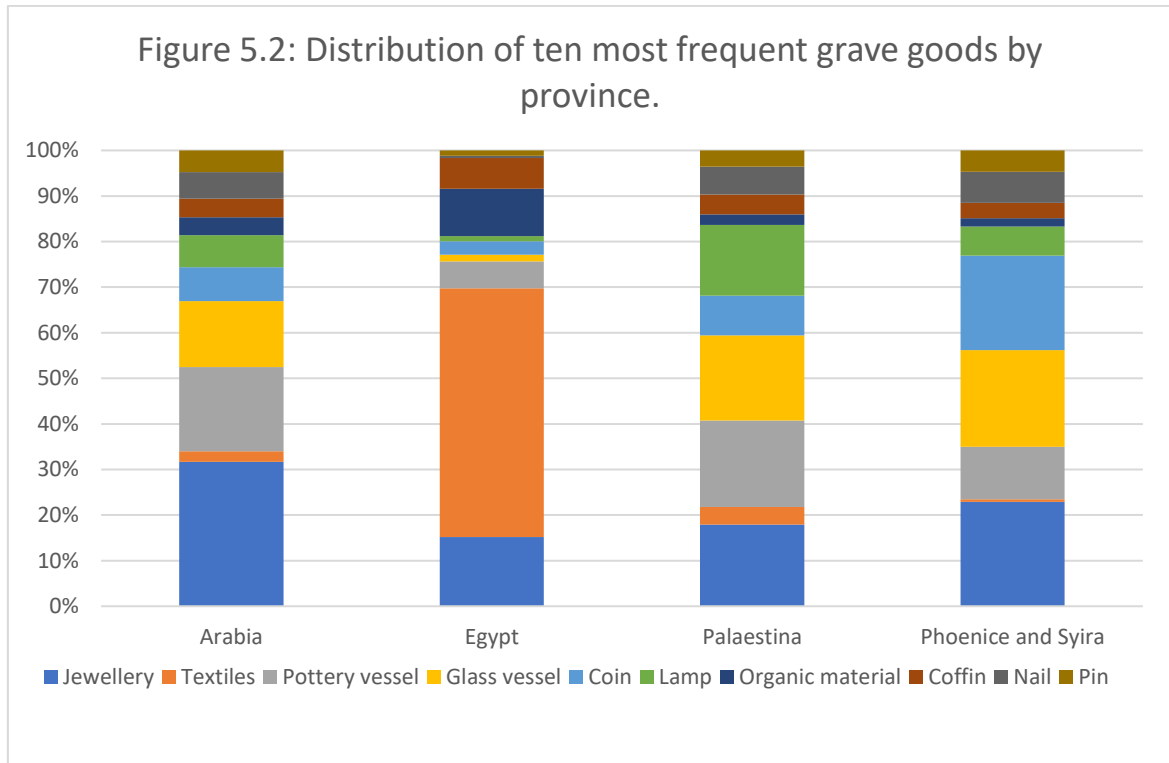
- Jewellery was found in 10.0-20.0% of tombs, except for shaft graves, 41.4% of which contained jewellery. This is related to the frequency of both shaft tombs and jewellery in Arabia (compare to Figure 5.2).
- Textiles are found almost entirely in pit graves, with 50.6% of pit graves containing textiles or their remains. This category includes clothes but also cloaks and wrappings which were placed over the body to cover it. Most examples are from Egypt, owing to preservation in Egypt compared to the provinces (compare to Figure 5.2). This is important to acknowledge because the lack of textiles in other tomb types does not mean that those tombs did not contain textiles, but rather that the textiles used to clothe or wrap the deceased person have not survived. Indeed, textiles do appear in small numbers in the other tomb types but are much rarer.
- Most of the objects discovered in pit graves were dress accessories, rather than objects that were deliberately deposited in the grave by mourners.
- 22.3% of rock-cut tombs contained pottery vessels or fragments, 18.7% contained glass vessels or fragments, and 20.0% contained lamps or fragments. While vessels were also found frequently in other types of tombs, especially hypogea, built tombs, and cists, lamps were only found in a similar frequency in hypogea (17.7%). See Section 5.3.2.2 for an interpretation of these as functional objects to create light.

- Coins are a frequent find in built tombs, with 18.3% of built tombs containing coins. Cist graves (12.4%) and rock-cut tombs (9.6%) are the next two tomb types which most frequently contained coins. It is possible that socioeconomic factors may explain their presence in built tombs and rock-cut tombs, but what about their frequency in cist graves? Of 23 cists that contained coins, 22 were from Arabia or Palaestina and coins were fairly frequent grave goods in these provinces (see Figure 5.2); the frequency of coins in Arabia and Palaestina may explain the coins found in cist graves.

5.2.2 Frequency by Province

I also consider the frequency of grave goods by province.⁶⁵⁸ This is shown in Figure 5.2. From this information, we can observe that:

⁶⁵⁸ For the distribution of the most common tomb types according to province, see Section 2.2.1.



- 35.1% of burials in Arabia contained grave goods. The most frequent objects were jewellery, pottery and glass vessels or fragments, and coins.
- 13.0% of burials in Egypt contained grave goods (but see above, Section 5.2.1, for why this figure is significantly lower than the reality). The most frequent objects were dress accessories (textiles and jewellery), organic materials, and the remains of coffins, biers, or mats.
- 28.5% of burials in Palaestina contained grave goods. The most frequent objects were pottery and glass vessels or fragments, jewellery, and lamps or fragments. These all appeared most often in rock-cut and built tombs.
- 25.0% of burials in Phoenice and Syria contained grave goods. The most frequent objects were glass vessels or fragments, jewellery, coins, and

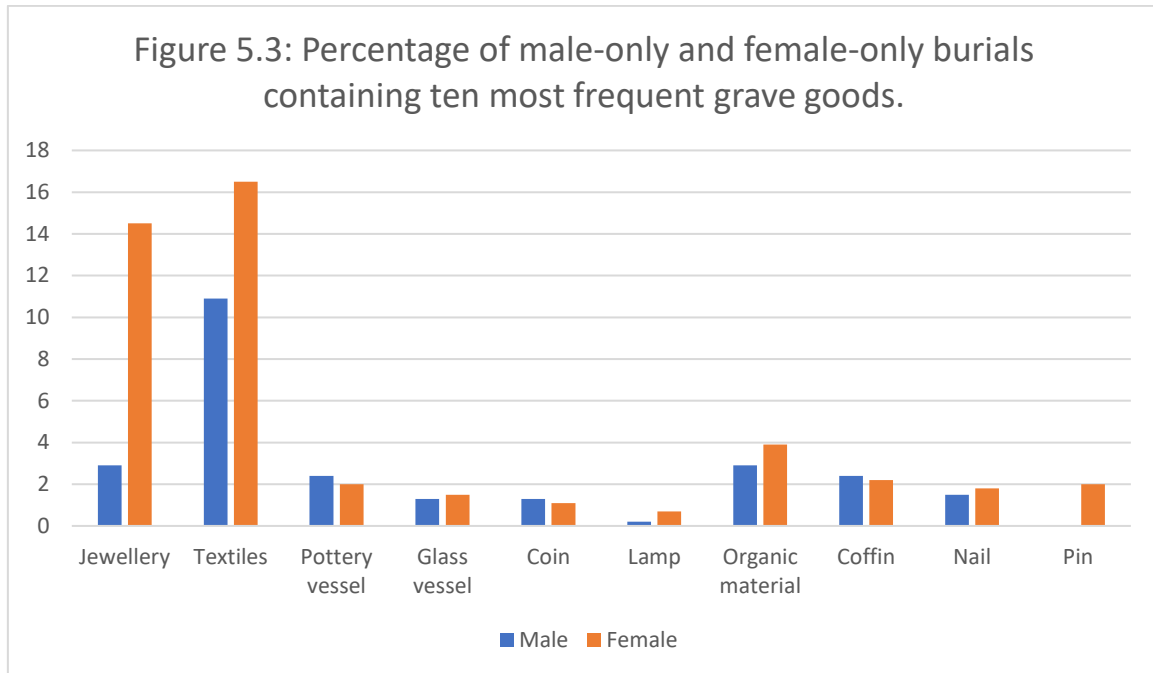
pottery vessels or fragments. Many of these objects were from the Al-Bass cemetery in Tyre (first century BCE-seventh century).

Egyptian and Arabian burials seem to feature grave goods more frequently than those from Palaestina, Phoenice and Syria. However, Egypt and Arabia also had a greater focus on dress accessories. Textiles, organic materials, and the remains of coffins have also survived in Egyptian soil far more frequently than in other provinces; this does not mean that they were not used in burials outside of Egypt to the same extent, but rather that their survival in Egypt (typically in dry, sandy soil) has been much more common.

5.2.3 Frequency by Sex

I now demonstrate the frequency of grave goods according to the sex of the deceased person, where it is possible to do so. This discussion is limited to preliminary conclusions due to the various methods of sexing employed in the appendix. It is difficult to talk about gender, however some ideas are presented on the presence of objects buried with women.

There are 551 burials in the appendix which contained only males and 463 burials which contained only females. These are mostly adults. 18.2% of male-only and 26.8% of female-only burials contained grave goods, indicating a greater likelihood of grave goods in female burials. There are also some differences in the types of grave goods that appear in male-only and female-only burials. The percentages of male-only and female-only burials which contained the ten most frequent grave goods are shown in Figure 5.3.



It is possible from this data to cautiously suggest the following:

- There is little significant difference in the frequency of most objects. Vessels, coins, and organic material appeared in similar frequencies in both male and female burials, with perhaps a slight increase of pottery vessels in male burials and of organic material in female burials. As only four lamps were found in the sample, the frequency cannot be determined.
- Jewellery, most likely as a dress accessory, is noticeably more common in female burials. The types of jewellery that are present in male burials are more limited than in female-only burials: an adult male is found with an iron finger ring in Necropolis II Tomb 59 at Sa'ad (Roman-Byzantine), while an adolescent male in Cave F3 L110 at Kefar Shemaryahu (fourth-sixth century) was found with a metal bracelet. Female-only burials feature a broader representation of bracelets, armlets, earrings,

necklaces, beads, anklets, and other jewellery items which do not usually appear in male-only burials.

- It is difficult to say whether the differences between the appearance of textiles are down to burial rites or the preservation and/or interest in these materials.
- There is one single example where an object is present exclusively in burials of only one sex: pins, hairpins, or needles were only found in female burials.

Grave goods that appear in burials less frequently (Table 5.2) also indicate differences between the sexes. While individually they do not appear significant, together they demonstrate a connection of women to beauty. Spatulas or kohl sticks, combs, chains (likely the remains of jewellery), and hairnets are all more frequently or exclusively found associated with females. Even in mass burials, these objects can be found associated with females, such as the adult female with the imprint of a hairnet on her forehead in Tomb A at Horvat Karkur 'Illit (fourth-seventh century)⁶⁵⁹. Combining this with the significant difference in the presence of jewellery, and the appearance of pins, hairpins, or needles in female graves, it appears that women were more likely than men to be buried with objects related to their physical appearance. This is connected to Dolansky's discussion of dolls as an ideal representation of femininity through defined beauty standards that reinforced external indications of gender and status, in which the expectations of women's appearances were openly

⁶⁵⁹ Zias and Spigelman (2004: 308).

displayed.⁶⁶⁰ The physical dress of deceased women is also related to the concept of ideal femininity.

Another object typically related to female burials is spindle whorls. The presence of spindle whorls in tombs is typically interpreted as an aspect of female identity,⁶⁶¹ but they are very understudied. A recent study on spindle whorls in Romano-British burials considered the relationship between women and spinning, discussing how women's roles and status were represented by the material, decoration, shape, use, and distribution of spindle whorls within a cemetery.⁶⁶² Perhaps the most interesting case for the Byzantine Near East is the burial of an 18-25 year old female at Qarara (seventh-ninth century) who has been identified as a weaver through the inclusion of a spindle, a spindle whorl, a wooden 'pin-beater,' and a weaving needle in her tomb.⁶⁶³

However, labelling objects as 'male' or 'female' creates a binary that does not account for people who do not fit into these pre-determined categories and takes away the agency of those who selected burial objects. A small number of male burials stand out in this discussion and show that the concept of the above objects as 'female' objects is not as straightforward as it appears to be. The first is Coffin C in Tomb 66 at El-Bagawat (second-seventh century), where an adult male was found buried with three bracelets, a bone ointment jar, and a bone

⁶⁶⁰ See Dolansky (2012: 269, 287).

⁶⁶¹ For example, spindle whorls were a part of the collection of grave goods in C101 grave 2 at Hawara in Palaestina Tertia that was used to sex the juvenile buried within as female. See Shumka et al. (2013: 385), where the grave goods were described as "appropriate for a female".

⁶⁶² Alberti (2018: 12-13).

⁶⁶³ Huber (2017a: 86).

ointment stick.⁶⁶⁴ The location of the objects within the burial is unknown; whether the bracelets were worn by the deceased or not cannot be stated. If they had been placed alongside the body, they could be interpreted as a form of offering or gift. There is also one case of an adult male buried with a spindle whorl. He was found through nine of an arcosolium in Tomb GXV at Emathous (third-sixth century). It is not clear how this individual was sexed, but based on the descriptions of individuals who were sexed in other tombs the skull and pelvis were both used to determine sex.⁶⁶⁵ Some objects buried with him are typically associated with females (bracelets, earrings, beads, a spindle whorl), while others are typically associated with males (buckles, a knife).⁶⁶⁶ A viable alternative explanation to gendered material culture is the concept of grave goods as metaphors or gifts, discussed in Section 5.3.

The presence of coffins, biers, or mats is slightly higher in male graves, perhaps because monks have been found buried with mats at some sites in Egypt, such as in graves at the Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes (sixth century-Coptic).⁶⁶⁷ These in themselves are a sub-set of male burials, in that they tend to represent monastic groups and thus are not necessarily applicable to other male burials as they represent a distinct social group. Objects which might typically be associated with males, for instance weapons or tools, also cannot offer information on the matter of male grave goods, because they are typically found in burials of multiple individuals. The only example of a sexed individual buried

⁶⁶⁴ Hauser (1932: 48); *Bracelet* (n.d.c); *Bracelet* (n.d.d); *Bracelet* (n.d.e); *Ointment jar* (n.d.); *Ointment stick fragment* (n.d.).

⁶⁶⁵ Christensen et al. (1986: 77, 79).

⁶⁶⁶ Christensen et al. (1986: 101, 103).

⁶⁶⁷ Winlock (1973: 50).

on their own with a weapon (a spear or dagger) is an adult male in Tomb 135 at Khirbat as-Samra (seventh-eighth century). Buckles appear in one female-only burial and four male-only burials, but again the sample size is so small that nothing can be said for certain from this data.

Some objects were associated with males in the 19th- and 20th-century excavations at Qarara (fourth-ninth century): an ink pot and leather pen case in one tomb, and a reed flute in another.⁶⁶⁸ It is not possible to clarify any further instances of these objects related to sex from the appendix. There were also several inscribed wooden tablets containing contracts and pieces of the Gospels at Qarara,⁶⁶⁹ only one example of a wooden tablet from the appendix can be linked to an individual, a male adult, from el-Gamous tomb NE2 (first-seventh century).⁶⁷⁰

The data suggests the inclusion of grave goods based on distinctions between forms of labour for men and women, as well as between other representations of the deceased person, such as physical appearance and societal role. The reason for these distinctions was not the deceased person themselves, but rather the people who were burying and mourning them: husbands and children chose to place objects representing the beauty of a deceased women in her grave as a reflection of their image of her; fellow monks chose to inter their

⁶⁶⁸ Grenfell and Hunt (1903: 3).

⁶⁶⁹ Grenfell and Hunt (1903: 3).

⁶⁷⁰ South (2012: 42).

dead brother with his sleeping mat as a final act of community and brotherhood.⁶⁷¹

5.2.4 Frequency by Age

The age of the deceased person may also have affected the deposition of grave goods.⁶⁷² 1,125 burials contained only juveniles (under the age of 20). 23.3% juvenile burials contained grave goods, however the bulk of these grave goods were found with children and adolescents:

- 2.5% of burials which contained only newborns also contained grave goods.
- 10.1% of tombs which contained only infants also contained grave goods. The figures for newborns and infants may reflect their burial with other juveniles or adults, or the lack of information on individual infant burials from sites such as Kellis 2.
- 62.4% of tombs which contained only children also contained grave goods.
- 36.6% of tombs which contained only adolescents also contained grave goods.
- 16.3% of tombs which contained combinations of juvenile age categories also contained grave goods.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷¹ In this sense, grave goods are active agents in social relationships, rather than passive indicators of aspects such as social roles. See Parker Pearson (2010: 83-86).

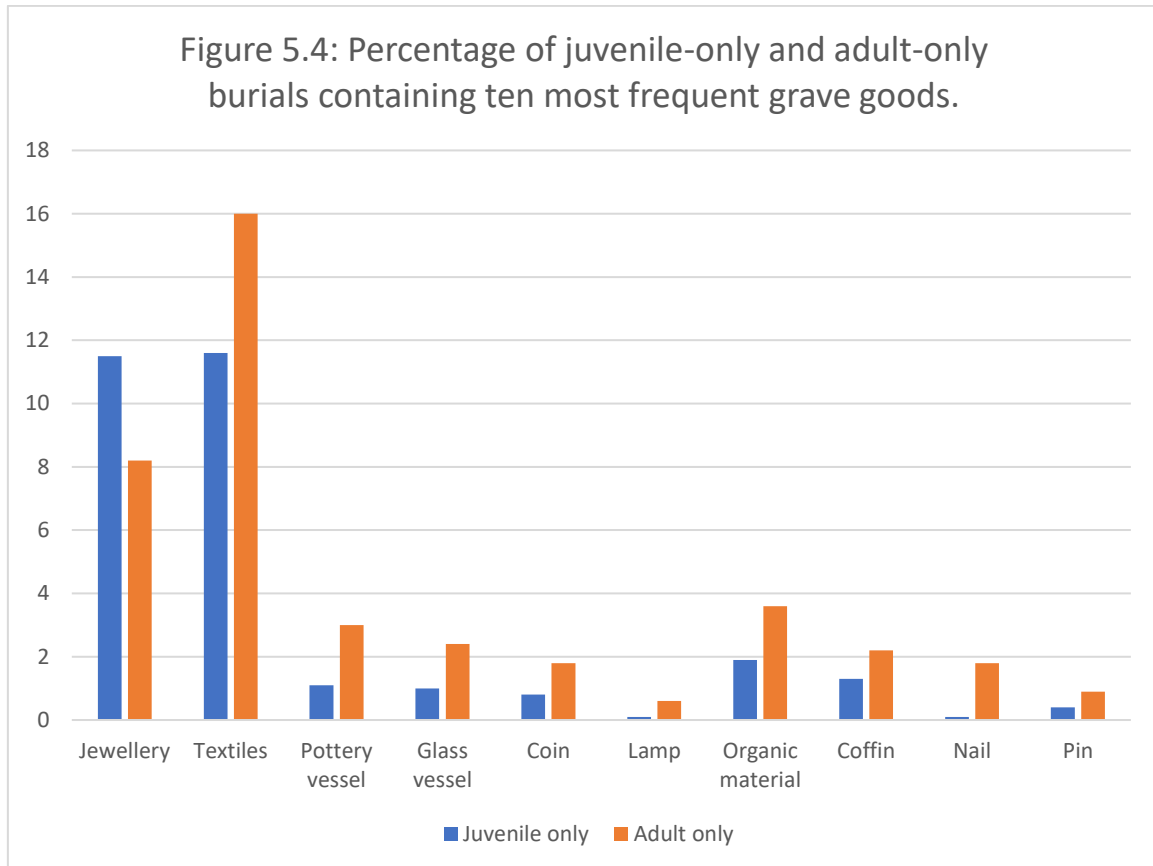
⁶⁷² See Section 4.2.1 for information on ageing and age categories.

⁶⁷³ 161 tombs contain only newborns. 444 tombs contain only infants. 242 tombs contain only children. 70 tombs contain only adolescents. 203 tombs contain juveniles of an unclear age category. Four tombs contain combinations of juvenile age categories.

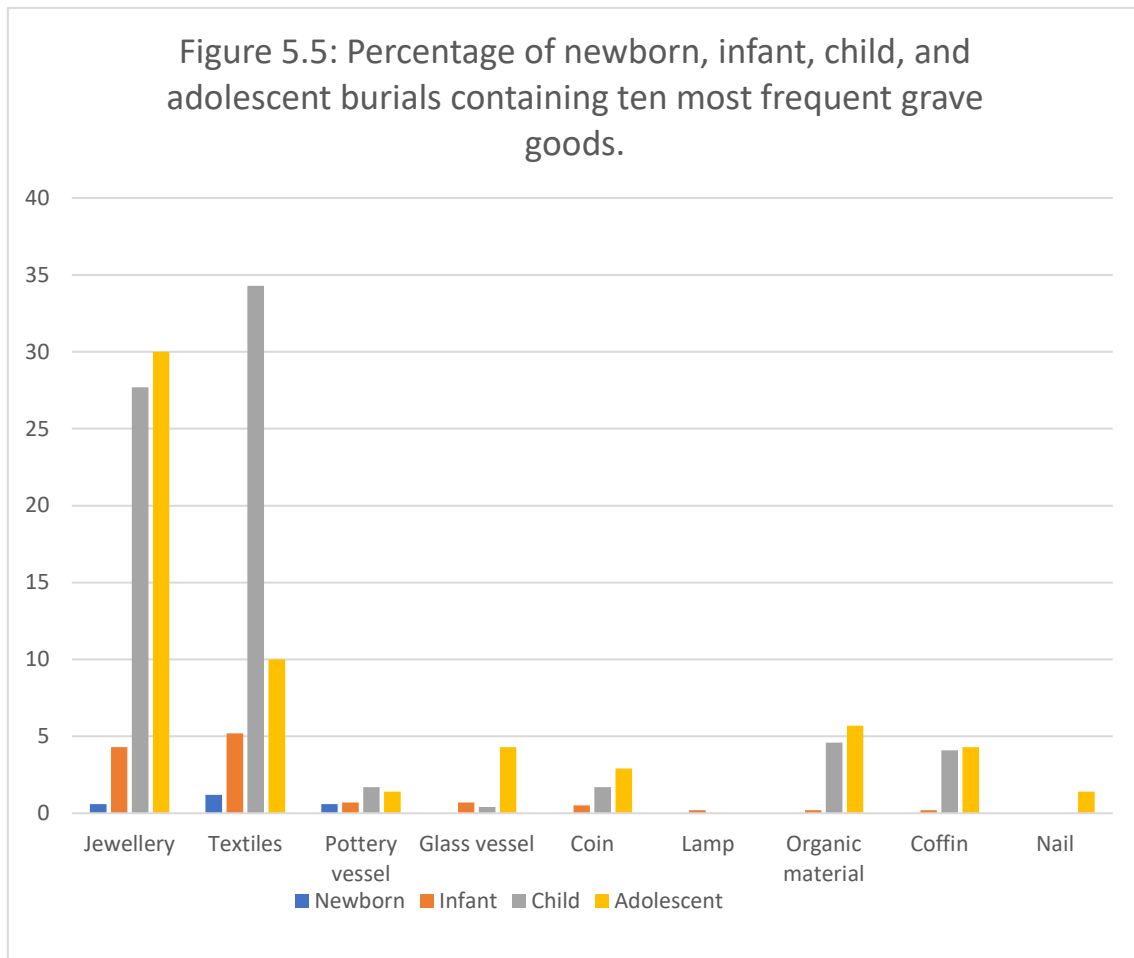
These figures can be compared to the 1,231 adult-only burials, 26.4% of which contained grave goods. Tombs which contained both adults and juveniles were not included in these figures. The differences between the ten most frequent grave goods in adult-only and juvenile-only burials is shown in Figure 5.4.

The difference between the percentages of adult and juvenile burials containing grave goods is minor, when juveniles are grouped together in a single category. However, by returning to the different juvenile age categories in the list above we can see that children (and, to a lesser extent, adolescents) were much more likely than adults to be buried with grave goods (children: 62.4%, adolescents: 36.6%, adults: 26.4%). It is possible that, if adults were split into young, middle, and older adults, a trend between adult age and the presence of grave goods may similarly be notable.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷⁴ Unfortunately, it was not possible to explore adult ages for this thesis. The age categories used for adults vary widely in the excavation reports and determining age categories for adults proved difficult. In some cases, adult age was grouped in 5- or 10-year categories, while others used young adult – middle adult – older adult (age categories for which were not always stated or could vary), and still others attempted to be more precise with age-at-death. It was not possible to create the categories of young – middle – older adult without a significant number of adults who would have been classed as young/middle, middle/older, young/middle/older, or simply adult (in cases where adult age had not been estimated). I have provided known age estimates in the Appendix, as these will no doubt be useful for future analysis.



I also show the frequency of the most common grave goods by juvenile age category, to demonstrate possible differences between these age groups. This is in Figure 5.5 with the caveat that the number of adolescent-only burials is low (70). Pins do not appear in any of the burials in Figure 5.5, so are excluded. In both Figures 5.4 and 5.5, we can see that, with a few exceptions, grave goods became more common as the deceased person became older.



The significant difference between the percentage of juvenile and adult graves containing jewellery⁶⁷⁵ is typically given a simple explanation. Jewellery was discussed as a form of protection by the mourning parents at Qarara (fourth-ninth century), where 10% of adult and 40% of juvenile burials contained grave goods, with juveniles wearing most of the jewellery that was found.⁶⁷⁶ Another object which is less common in burials has also been related to the protection of juveniles. Plaques appear in four burials of children and one burial of a juvenile,

⁶⁷⁵ Jewellery also appeared more frequently in juvenile graves than in adult graves in later Byzantine burials. See, for example, Cleymans and Talloen (2018: 292). The eleven pectoral crosses dated to the 11th-13th centuries have been connected explicitly with young children of weaning age, when it is expected they were at their most vulnerable (293-294).

⁶⁷⁶ Huber (2018b: 212).

but no examples can be exclusively connected with adolescents or adults. Three of the plaques with children are found at Mostagedda (Tombs 1440, 1441, and 11,755, fourth-ninth century) and the fourth at Matmar (Tomb 879, fourth-seventh century) in Middle Egypt.⁶⁷⁷ The juvenile with a plaque was found at Hawara (sixth century) (see Section 5.3.4).⁶⁷⁸

Vessels and organic materials are more likely to appear in the graves of adults than those of juveniles, with older juveniles more likely to be interred with them than younger juveniles. This suggests that older juveniles and adults received more rituals at the graveside, such as funeral feasting (Section 5.3.2.1).

Adolescents and children were buried with a broader range of grave goods than infants and newborns, and adults with a broader range than either adolescents or children. There are no examples of juvenile-only burials containing brooches or fibulae, baskets, a staff, or other cosmetic goods, yet these are all found (rarely) in adult graves; meanwhile, figurines are more commonly found with juveniles, particularly children, than adults. It is likely that these reflect personal belongings or represented elements of the deceased person's life such as a social role or life stage.⁶⁷⁹

5.3 Interpretations

Interpreting grave goods is not a simple task and requires careful consideration.⁶⁸⁰ In the case of some objects, such as coins and objects given

⁶⁷⁷ Both cemeteries were excavated by Brunton for the British Museum's expedition to Middle Egypt.

⁶⁷⁸ Shumka et al. (2013: 395-396).

⁶⁷⁹ For example, see the discussion on dolls as aspects of gender and status ideals that girls would face as they grew into adulthood in Dolansky (2012: 268-270).

⁶⁸⁰ Parker Pearson (2010: 11).

apotropaic status by excavators (Sections 5.3.3 and 5.3.4 respectively), interpretations often rely on the discovery of previous similar objects. However, we should not take meaning from one burial and apply it to another without considering the context carefully. Approaches that consider interpersonal relationships, displayed through personal experiences, to understand the meaning behind object deposition require interdisciplinary approaches to grave goods.⁶⁸¹ This method reflects the reality of burial as a complex human experience in which there may be multiple reasons behind ritual mourning practices.

The person who deposited the grave good(s) gave them reason. For example, grieving parents may have felt inclined to offer their deceased child protection in death, especially if they believed that they had failed to do so in life. A mourning adult might have wished to remember their spouse in a specific way, and therefore placed objects in their tomb that were reminiscent of certain values. These examples demonstrate that there were various reasons, including emotional reasons, for the deposition of grave goods. Multiple persons could have made this decision:

- The deceased person, who would have made the decision before their death and informed a responsible party of their wishes. We have little extant evidence of this. The eighth century will of a woman from Jeme requests that she be given burial clothes,⁶⁸² but the dead person may also have requested that other objects were buried with them as well.

⁶⁸¹ Härke (2014: 42).

⁶⁸² Wilfong (2002: 60).

- The immediate family and/or close friends of the deceased person. These would have been responsible for practices including dressing the corpse but could also have placed other objects in the grave. Living decision-makers could override the will of the deceased person.
- Anyone who interacted with the tomb following the funeral, such as for commemorative activities (Section 1.5) and reburial. These objects may not have been placed in the grave at the time of burial, but they were still placed there with meaning or intent.⁶⁸³

These categories show how grave goods can provide more information on the living, their society, and ideas on status or influence than on the dead person themselves. The living made the ultimate decision on the inclusion of, or lack of, grave goods.

Traditional interpretations of grave goods have focused on religion, law, and social structure. However, literature, anthropological evidence, and sociological theory can expand the possible explanations for the inclusion of objects in graves.⁶⁸⁴ Using these arguments, grave goods may be interpreted variously, as shown in the possible interpretations listed in Table 5.3.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸³ We should also include the makers of objects, who were likely influenced by the needs of their consumers: Cooper and Al-Saad (2015: 82). Some objects may have been made specifically for funerary purposes, but for many objects such as dress accessories and personal or inherited property which may have been owned for a long period of time, the ultimate decision still rested with either the owner or mourners.

⁶⁸⁴ For a discussion on theory and grave goods, see Härke (2014: 41).

⁶⁸⁵ These interpretations are primarily, but not exclusively, taken from Härke (2014: 45-52), who summarised them very effectively, with additional reading material in my footnotes. The full list of possible interpretations is quite extensive. The exception to this list is function, which I add myself.

Some of these categories are more difficult to interpret than others. For example, it may be difficult to distinguish between an identity marker, a metaphor, and a gift. Grave goods can fit into multiple categories; a vessel could contain food, disperse perfume, or be destroyed ritualistically.

Table 5.3: Interpretations of grave goods.

Interpretation	Explanation	Example
Related to afterlife	An object meant to be used in the afterlife, or on the journey to the afterlife. This is the oldest interpretation, usually requiring polytheistic beliefs. ⁶⁸⁶	Charon's Obol (Section 5.3.3).
Identity of deceased person	A method of demonstrating the rank, status, or another aspect of the deceased person's identity.	Coptic monks at the monastic cemeteries of Thebes, buried wearing leather aprons and girdles, and sometimes with their sleeping mats. ⁶⁸⁷
Metaphor	A metaphor for the life of, or events in the life of, the deceased person. ⁶⁸⁸	Objects related to the deceased person's trade, or which were used to tell a story about their life and position in society. ⁶⁸⁹
Gift	A gift to the deceased person. Mourners may have placed gifts in the tomb as a representation of the deceased person, the mourner, or both. This concept implies that grave goods cannot be relied upon	The five pairs of shoes and five shoes of different sizes placed next to the deceased in

⁶⁸⁶ Härke (2014: 45). Discussed in relation to hunter-gatherer societies and Stone Age people in Kellehear (2007: 36). However, even in a society where people may have been expected to believe that they required certain objects to enter the afterlife, such as a coin for Charon's Obol, not all dead were buried with these objects, thus calling into question this interpretation as the main or sole reason for their inclusion in burials.

⁶⁸⁷ Winlock (1973: 14, 49).

⁶⁸⁸ Härke (2014: 48).

⁶⁸⁹ Solberg (2004: 205-209), who used the example of communal drinking and the deposition of drinking vessels as a metaphor for a deceased person's role in political and social events, based on vessels from Norwegian graves.

	to indicate the deceased person's wealth or social status, as the objects placed in their grave would have belonged to mourners who attended their funeral rather than the deceased person themselves.	tomb 1006 at Matmar? ⁶⁹⁰
Apotropaic	A method of protecting the living and/or the dead.	Can be broadly classed as apotropaic objects (Section 5.3.4).
Display of wealth ⁶⁹¹	A form of social competition, where burial rites and grave goods represent social aspirations. Wealth may be physically destroyed (e.g., through ritual smashing) or given up, demonstrating that this was an option for the family.	The fake gold and silver jewellery from Arabia (Section 5.3.1.2).
Property	Property of the deceased person which was not going to be passed on or sold. Many objects would have been used for generations before being placed in a grave. Perhaps these objects were already broken, had been replaced, or there was nobody to inherit them.	Jewellery, textiles, and weapons.
Pollution	An object considered polluted by contact or association with a corpse (Section 1.2.1), and thus abandoned in the grave. Not all populations believed the corpse was polluting, but it still may not have been desirable to reuse an object that had been involved in a funerary ritual.	This concept is expressed in Beth She'arim, where three ritual baths (<i>miqwa'ot</i>) have been identified for the cleansing of visitors to the cemetery. ⁶⁹² It may therefore also apply to grave goods in the cemetery.
Feasting	Remains of a funerary or commemorative feast (Section 1.4.3). The deceased person may or may not have been thought to	Foodstuff and vessels (see Section 5.3.2.1).

⁶⁹⁰ Pleša (2017: 25).

⁶⁹¹ Note that Härke (2014: 46) refers to this as 'potlatch/potlach', but this term typically refers to Native American practices.

⁶⁹² Amit and Adler (2010: 85-86), where other examples of *miqwa'ot* are also mentioned.

	partake. For Christians, this could include the eucharist.	
Functional objects	Objects left in the tomb for practical purposes, such as lighting a dark chamber. These may not have been left behind because they were considered polluted or unusable, but rather because their presence in the tomb was convenient upon re-entry.	See below, Section 5.3.2.2.

Many grave goods found in early Byzantine burials are interpreted as apotropaic objects (Section 5.3.4). An obvious explanation for their presence is not apparent, their iconography may indicate that they can be interpreted as magical or protective objects, and it may be “safer” to consider them apotropaic rather than to offer alternative explanations for their inclusion and/or connection to the deceased person. If we consider other possible reasons for their presence, however, we see that grave goods are more complicated objects that can have multiple interpretations simultaneously,⁶⁹³ and the use of apotropaic meanings may be applied to grave goods too broadly.

Interpretation can be aided by a more careful consideration of the context. How frequently were objects placed in burials? Where were they located in relation to the body, or in the case of chamber tombs or hypogea, in relation to the individual burials? Instead of merely talking about the appearance, continuation, or disappearance of grave goods, this instead allows discussions about the

⁶⁹³ Härke (2014: 41, 52-53).

evolution of grave goods practices over time.⁶⁹⁴ Any gradual change in practices could be more effectively understood.

In the following sections, I go through the top ten most frequent grave goods and their interpretations. I also discuss objects which appear less frequently, with focus on the interpretations presented above.

5.3.1 Dressing the Dead

Textiles and jewellery (as well as some other grave goods) were often dress accessories, rather than deliberate depositions in the burial, as they are typically found on the body or in a location that indicates they were worn during burial.

Dress accessories may decorate or completely cover the corpse. They may have belonged to the deceased person and been worn during their lifetime, or they may have been specifically for burial. For example, at el-Gamous (first-seventh century), later burials featured more elaborate clothing made specifically for burial.⁶⁹⁵ Some cemeteries, such as Kellis 2 (third-fourth century?), Matmar (fourth-seventh century), and Mostagedda (fourth-ninth century) followed simple burial styles, although they continued to wrap their dead with bandages or other textiles and used varying amounts of jewellery.

The prevalence of dress accessories in tombs of the appendix indicates that adorning and covering the corpse were priorities over interring the deceased person with other objects.

⁶⁹⁴ Pearce (2015: 239).

⁶⁹⁵ Fischhaber (1997: 37).

5.3.1.1 Textiles

Many examples of textiles are known from Egyptian sites such as Antinoopolis and cemeteries in the Kharga Oasis.⁶⁹⁶ Some are very intricate. For example, one infant burial from el-Gamous (first-seventh century) contained a textile featuring a woven pomegranate, an image which might have symbolised life, death, prosperity, or the hope of an afterlife.⁶⁹⁷ Other textiles from the site include imitation purples that were created in various hues through the addition of blue and red dyes.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁶ Fluck (2013: 85-104); Letellier-Willemin (2012: 491-499).

⁶⁹⁷ Whitchurch and Griggs (2010: 220-230).

⁶⁹⁸ Jensen et al. (2019: 207-209, 247).

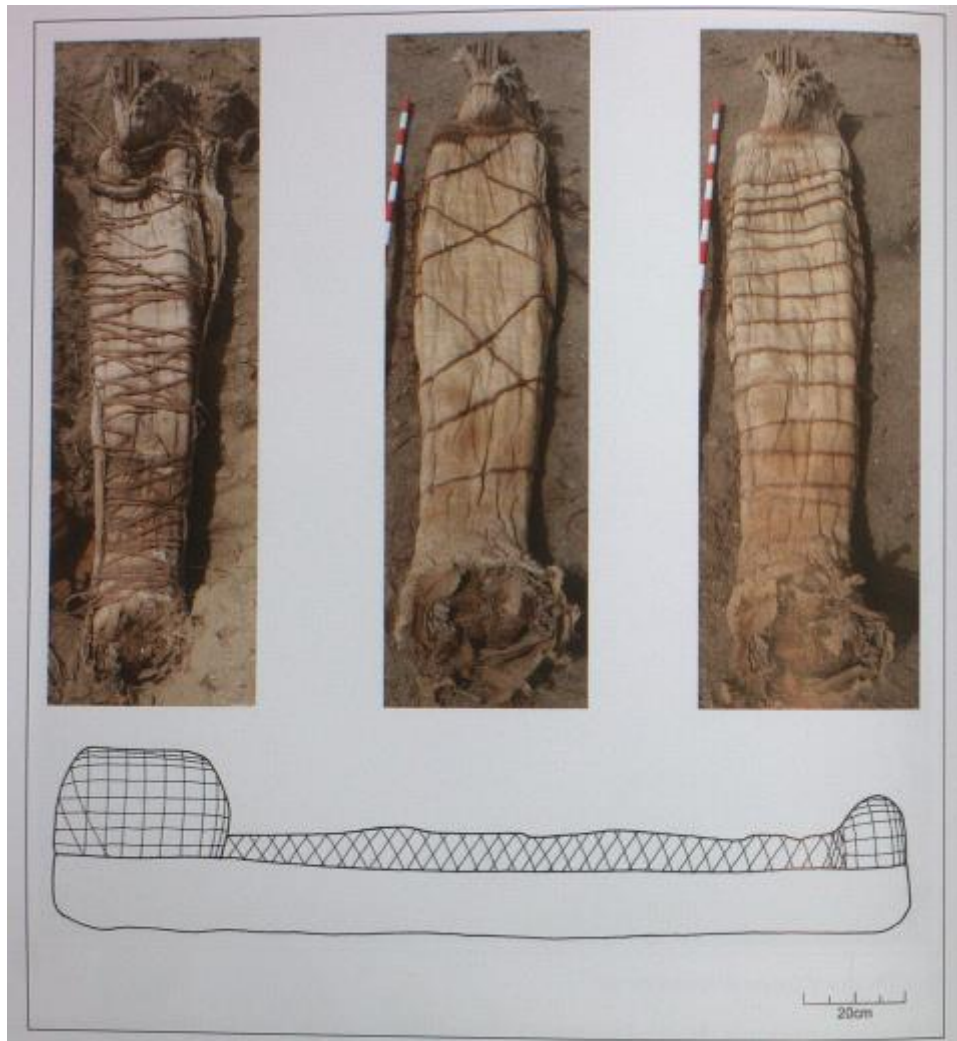


Figure 5.6: Standard wrapping process at Qarara. From Huber (2018b: 210).

However, el-Gamous is also an example of a cemetery where, in many cases, a common method of wrapping bodies was practiced. Many corpses were wrapped in similar ways, with ties or bandages and one or multiple sheets covering the body. This practice may have been carried out by a local funerary workshop or a less organised group responsible for preparing the bodies of the dead. A standard style of wrapping for most individuals has also been identified at Qarara (fourth-ninth century) (Figure 5.6). The selection of rich or symbolically meaningful textiles was, however, still an option for the users of these cemeteries.

Textiles appear in rare examples in graves outside of Egypt, very probably due to deterioration rather than lack of practice (see Introduction). A small number of the pit graves at Phaeno (fourth-seventh century) contained fragments of textiles,⁶⁹⁹ and scattered other examples are found in the appendix at sites including Khirbat as-Samra (fifth-eighth century)⁷⁰⁰ and Hawara (Roman-Byzantine).⁷⁰¹ Other examples of dress accessories, such as buckles, also indicate the presence of textiles (Section 5.3.1.3).

5.3.1.2 Jewellery

Another dress accessory, Jewellery is the most frequent grave good in the appendix. It is much more likely to have survived than textiles, presuming the grave was not discovered and/or looted. The remains of chains may also be fragments of jewellery items such as necklaces. The most frequent jewellery item found is beads (291 burials), which may be from necklaces where the chain or wire has not survived, followed by bracelets (267 burials), earrings (235 burials), rings (218 burials), and necklaces (118 burials).

Jewellery may either be a dress accessory or a deliberate deposit in the grave. We can only be confident that the jewellery was worn by the deceased person when it is found on the body, or in a place in relation to the corpse where it may be assumed that the jewellery was worn (earrings by the sides of the head, beads or necklaces close to the neck, etc.). In disturbed burial contexts, or

⁶⁹⁹ For example, Findlater et al. (1998: 74), where a metal buckle with textile attached was recovered from grave 10.

⁷⁰⁰ Nabulsi et al. (2020: 240).

⁷⁰¹ Shumka et al. (2013: 381).

where multiple burials occurred within the same grave, it may not be possible to tell whether the item was worn or placed in the grave alongside the corpse.

The association between juveniles and apotropaic jewellery, and possible explanations for this, was suggested above (Section 5.2.4). Iconography may also indicate magical or apotropaic status, for example the rider-saint amulet from Scythopolis (see Section 5.4.3). Another possible interpretation for jewellery is as a form of representation for the socio-economic status – or desired socioeconomic status⁷⁰² – of the family of the deceased person. In cases of both actual and desired status, the jewellery would necessarily be visible to mourners who could see the accessories before and/or during the funeral service, so that the family's status (or aspiration) could be witnessed.

Metal jewellery from Roman-Byzantine burials in Yasileh, Ya'amun, and Sa'ad has been used to demonstrate concepts of socioeconomic status and status aspirations.⁷⁰³ The study focused on the colour of the copper alloys that were chosen by producers and consumers of metals to represent more expensive metals and thus economic prosperity.⁷⁰⁴ 32 copper artifacts were analysed. 25 of these were dress accessories in the form of either jewellery, buckles, or hairpins.⁷⁰⁵

13 of the copper artifacts were composed of more than 6% lead, probably a method of creating a metal that looked like silver from cheaper materials.⁷⁰⁶ The

⁷⁰² Cooper and Al-Saad (2015: 82).

⁷⁰³ Cooper and Al-Saad (2015: 81-99).

⁷⁰⁴ Cooper and Al-Saad (2015: 82).

⁷⁰⁵ Cooper and Al-Saad (2015: 87, 92-93). The other items were two keys, two cosmetic implements, a bell, a coin, and a piece of coffin hardware.

⁷⁰⁶ Cooper and Al-Saad (2015: 88). An item containing more than 3% lead is considered leaded. Other metals that could be used to similarly imitate either silver or gold include tin and zinc (90).

imitation of gold objects was created by wrapping a thin sheet of gold foil around a carved stone to create earrings, suggesting to an observer that the item was made entirely of gold.⁷⁰⁷ Whether these items were manufactured to be worn during life and worn as imitation jewellery or intended solely for burial purposes is unknown, but they were meant to be seen on the corpse.

It is possible that some of the gold foil found in other tombs may be the remains of similar practices, such as the ivory beads found in Tomb 7 at Jerash (first-seventh century), two of which were found with the remains of gold foil. Gold leaf, sheet, or foil is rare, but is found for example in several tombs at Al-Bass in Tyre (first century BCE-seventh century) alongside other jewellery items of bronze, silver, and gold.⁷⁰⁸

The use of jewellery was therefore not limited to the wealthy, but instead could have been a method of participating in a social arena where prosperity could be imitated and individuals or their families made to look wealthier than they were.⁷⁰⁹ The physical abandonment of rich or apparently rich jewellery items by sealing them in a tomb with a deceased family member was a statement to those who saw the body and/or attended the funeral, presenting or attempting to create status in a similar way that the placement and visibility of tombs could generate notions of elitism (Section 2.5). The same argument may be applied to other grave goods, such as textiles.

⁷⁰⁷ Cooper and Al-Saad (2015: 86).

⁷⁰⁸ For example, Tomb 18 S 1173-1174, which contained a gold earring, a silver earring, glass jewellery, and a gold sheet. De Jong (2017p). Silver jewellery was less common than copper, bronze, and iron jewellery items.

⁷⁰⁹ Cooper and Al-Saad (2015: 92).

The key difference between expressing status through grave goods and through tomb visibility or location is that grave goods would only be visible for a limited time. The tomb itself, tombstones, or inscriptions would however be visible for longer and to more people, including travellers (see Chapter 2 on the significance of tomb visibility). Status is therefore represented in a different way through the inclusion of rich or apparently rich objects. It is for a community or on a small scale, where the local people are meant to see the family's prosperity, and perhaps where there is social competition between families or other groups. The visibility and location of tombs is, meanwhile, meant to express status and elitism for much longer, to more people, and to be remembered and witnessed for far longer than the more intimate inclusion of rich grave goods such as jewellery.

5.3.1.3 Other Dress Accessories

Other evidence of dress is less common but covers a range of grave goods. The most frequent of these are pins or hairpins, but we should also include shoes, buckles (usually from belts, but also from bags or other clothing), brooches or fibulae, buttons, and hairnets or other hair ornaments.

Like jewellery, other dress accessories may be found on the body, presumably worn by the deceased person. Shoes may, where the material has not survived, be represented by clusters of small nails or metal fastenings around the feet.⁷¹⁰ They could also have been placed beside the body, such as the five pairs of sandals and shoes of different sizes that were found beside the body of an adult

⁷¹⁰ Stirling (2008: 2265-2266, 2268).

female in Tomb 1006 at Matmar (fourth-seventh century). The woman also wore a pair of purple leather shoes.⁷¹¹ Perhaps additional shoes in different sizes had also belonged to her and had not been passed on or taken apart for the material to be reused after she had grown out of them. Perhaps they were gifts from different people, who had placed their own shoes beside her in the grave.⁷¹² Perhaps she had been involved in the making of shoes. I suggest that the rarity of gifted shoes in early Byzantine burials indicates that their presence is likely to be a specific marker of the deceased person.

Buckles and brooches can represent the dress sense of the period to which they belong; crossbow brooches have been found in Jordan dated to the fourth and fifth centuries,⁷¹³ while sixth-eighth century examples from Khirbet as-Samra indicate they were objects of male personal adornment.⁷¹⁴ Buckles and belts appear sporadically at sites including Phaeno (fourth-seventh century), Kabul (fourth-fifth century), and Naqlun (sixth-seventh century).⁷¹⁵ The only example of a fibula with a single sexed person in the appendix is the adult female burial in Cave 1 Sarcophagus 2 at Gerasa (third-fourth century), which also featured shoes and jewellery (earrings, bracelets, beads, and rings).⁷¹⁶ Fibulae almost always appear with jewellery and other dress accessories, including pins, hairpins, or needles, shoes, and buckles.

⁷¹¹ Brunton (1948: 93).

⁷¹² Stirling (2008: 2272) suggested that the gift of shoes in Roman graves of North Africa may have aided the dead person on their journey to the afterlife or protected them from harm.

⁷¹³ Eger (2003: 175). A catalogue of Byzantine dress accessories from Jordan (176-177), with additional images and descriptions (165-174).

⁷¹⁴ Nabulsi et al. (2011: 29).

⁷¹⁵ For Phaeno, see Findlater et al. (1998: 74). For Kabul, see Vitto (2011: 122). For Naqlun, see Zych (2008: 239).

⁷¹⁶ Naghawi (1989: 203). Sexing methodology was not provided.

Pins, hairpins, or needles indicate further methods of securing clothing or styling hair. Although there is minimal evidence, several burials are indicative of the preparation of women's hair before their burial. The adult female in the Tomb of Tg'ol at Antinoopolis (third-seventh century), for example, was discovered with styled hair, holding a hairnet, and interred with a wooden comb,⁷¹⁷ objects specifically related to brushing and styling hair. In Tomb 3203 at Matmar (fourth-seventh century), an adult female was found wearing a hairnet with a bone hairpin attached to it.⁷¹⁸ Twisted gold threads found in Catacomb 3 at Beth She'arim (first-fifth century) were potentially braided into hair,⁷¹⁹ while a hair ornament was found among other metal dress accessories and jewellery in the southern trough of Tomb F.4 at Esbus (Roman-Byzantine).⁷²⁰ Pieces of metal in the area of the head may also represent items that were originally in the hair or on the head.

Dress accessories and objects of personal adornment cover a variety of objects which can all indicate the presence of textiles or other methods of decorating the body. The decisions made by the living on how to dress the dead suggests their attitudes towards the deceased person themselves – wanting to protect or beautify, for example – but also those towards the living and society – wrapping and covering all bodies in a similar way, or noticeably decorating individual people to make statements on wealth or aspiration. The importance of these choices lies in who would witness them: mourners and attendants of the funeral,

⁷¹⁷ Fluck (2013: 85-104).

⁷¹⁸ A wooden mirror was also found lying on her chest. Brunton (1948: 94).

⁷¹⁹ Mazar (1973: 167).

⁷²⁰ Waterhouse (1998: 83).

who could see the deceased person as one of themselves, as an elite, as loved, as protected, and so on.

5.3.2 Vessels, Lamps, and Functional Objects

Vessels and lamps are found complete, incomplete, or fragmentary.

Due to the variety of vessels and the situations in which they are found, there are many ways that their presence in burials may be interpreted. The high prevalence of pottery vessels, glass vessels, and lamps in tombs reveals a dominance of domestic and everyday items within funerary contexts. Their variety of uses naturally made them useful objects, which could be functional, represent an aspect of identity, or contain something. They appear in all types of tombs and in high frequency across all provinces, demonstrating their versatility and usefulness within burial contexts. They are best understood when viewed in combination with the other contents of a tomb, particularly those which are found immediately next to or inside of them.

The most common pottery vessels in the appendix are bowls and jars (both 52 burials), jugs (40 burials), cooking pots (33 burials), and amphora and juglets (both 27 burials). The most common glass vessels are bottles (117 burials), bowls and vases (34 burials), and unguentaria and jars (both 28 burials). The most common vessels represented by other materials (not made of pottery or glass) are bowls (10 burials).

5.3.2.1 *Funeral Feasting*

The act of feasting at the graveside is a long-attested practice.⁷²¹ It could also have been practiced as a commemorative activity (see Section 1.5). For the Christian practice of the eucharist, see Section 1.4.3.

The frequency of vessels used in the preparation or serving of food in the appendix indicates that feasting took place, but this is in no way conclusive of the practice in every instance. Vessels may have been a symbolic inclusion, including the deceased person in a meal that took place either by the side of the grave or elsewhere, but they could also have been gifted or included in the tomb for other reasons. Identifying evidence of funeral feasting therefore requires more than simply the presence of the right equipment.

In rare cases, cooking pots have been discovered with evidence of burning or charring, such as the cooking pot with a charred outer surface found at Khirbat as-Samra (fifth-eighth century).⁷²² While this indicates the use of the vessels, it does not conclusively demonstrate the consumption of food at the graveside.

Evidence of foodstuff is vessels in rare, but not unheard of. The female adolescent from Tomb 292, also at Khirbat as-Samra, was buried with 50 items, one an alabaster pot containing a mammalian bone fragment.⁷²³ Five additional ceramic vessels from the same cemetery contained evidence of an organic substance, although no additional information is known.⁷²⁴

⁷²¹ Mitchell (1990: 32).

⁷²² The basalt cooking pot was found in Tomb 345, cemetery A1. Nabulsi et al. (2007: 278).

⁷²³ Nabulsi et al. (2009: 170).

⁷²⁴ Nabulsi (1998: 274). Nabulsi stated that the substance was not necessarily milk but did not elaborate further.

The remains of unspecified foodstuff have also been found in storage jars and other vessels, for example at tombs at Apollonia (Byzantine).⁷²⁵ The physical act of bringing and serving food at the graveside may, in certain cases, having included interring some of that food with the deceased person, perhaps another method of the symbolic demonstration of their partaking.

Funeral feasting as a practice has been studied in areas of North Africa; in the Roman period, the focus was on the sacrifice to the dead, but Rebillard (2018) suggested that the focus shifted to the banquet itself around the third century, with no indication that this was a direct result of Christianisation.⁷²⁶ During the funeral feast, food may have been deposited in the grave or the shaft, but commemorative meals would have occurred after the sealing of the tomb (or, in the case of chamber tombs, after the sealing of the burial), meaning that foodstuff from commemorative feasts should be found on or beside the burial.⁷²⁷ Alongside the evidence provided by vessels, architectural features including tables and benches demonstrate both small-scale and large-scale meals could be held either following the funeral or during commemorative events. An example of a building designed for feasts is Building 180 at el-Bagawat (fourth-fifth century), a building located in the centre of the cemetery that was equipped with tables and seats for many participants.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁵ Tal et al. (2014: 167).

⁷²⁶ See Rebillard (2015: 269-279), who discussed dining with the dead between the second and fifth centuries in Algeria and Tunisia. See also Stirling (2004), who looked at funerary feasting in Roman North Africa with a focus on a cemetery in Tunisia.

⁷²⁷ Stirling (2004: 427-428).

⁷²⁸ Grossman (2002: 318). The building was enlarged during a second phase of construction (318-319).

5.3.2.2 Light and Smell

In addition to their use in a feast, vessels and lamps were also used for other functions. Here, I refer to the creation of light and smell.

Figure 5.1 shows that lamps are more common in certain tomb types, in particular rock-cut tombs and hypogea. An explanation for this is simple: rock-cut tombs and hypogea would have featured far less natural light than other tomb types. This helps to explain the notably higher percentage of lamps among grave goods in tombs in Palaestina, where rock-cut tombs are more common. Lamps used to light the tomb may have been left behind rather than removed and reused. This may have been because they were meant to be lit when the tomb was reopened for reinterment or commemoration, because they were considered polluted, because they doubled as a gift, or simply because there was no reason to remove them.

Most lamps do not show clear evidence of their use, and some may not have been lit. However, they are sometimes discovered with evidence of burning. A rock-cut tomb at 'En Ya'al (first-seventh century) contained candlestick lamps, some with evidence of burning on their nozzles.⁷²⁹ Similarly, burning on lamps was noted in a rock-cut tomb at Nahal Refa'im (fourth-eighth century).⁷³⁰ These

⁷²⁹ de Vincenz (2013: 123).

⁷³⁰ de Vincenz (2020: 109). The lamps and juglets from this tomb were discussed in relation to the Miracle of Holy Fire, in which candles at the location of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher were reportedly lit without oil. This interpretation comes from the presence of Christian symbols and Greek inscriptions on the lamps, with the most common inscription stating: *φως Χριστου φαινει πασιν* ("The light of Christ shines for all"). See Magness (1993: 176), where this phrase was said to come from a liturgy practiced at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. This inscription is also found on lamps in other tombs in Palaestina Prima, at En Ya'al (de Vincenz (2013: 127)), Horvat Gores (Solimany et al. (2006: 90)), and Netiv Ha-Lamed He (Barag (1974: 13)). The miracle was reported by Eusebius (1955: 6.9.2-3). *κατὰ τὴν μεγάλην ποτὲ τοῦ πάσχα διανυκτέρευσιν τοῦ λαιῶν φασιν τοῖς διακόνοις ἐπιλιπεῖν· ἐφ' ᾧ τὸ πᾶν πλῆθος δεινῆς ἀθυμίας διαλαβούσης, τὸν Νάρκισσον τοῖς τὰ φῶτα παρασκευάζουσιν ἐπιτάξαι ὕδωρ ἀνιμήσαντας ὡς*

lamps may have been lit to simply light the tomb, or the lighting itself may have had a form of ritual meaning associated with the dead, such as a way of remembering the deceased person, either during the funeral service or afterwards.⁷³¹

Another possible use of lamps, which extends also to vessels, is to create a pleasant smell as part of either practical or ritual function. Like domestic pottery, these vessels are frequent finds. Smell seems to have been a particularly important sense in relation to the corpse, and especially the bodies of saints.⁷³²

At the tomb of St Menas at Marea, a large vessel, covered by a marble slab with a hole in it, was buried in the floor beneath the altar of the church and

αὐτὸν κομιεῖσθαι. τούτου δὲ ἅμα λόγῳ πραχθέντος, ἐπευξάμενον τῷ ὕδατι, ἐγγέαι κατὰ τῶν λύχνων πίστει τῇ εἰς τὸν κύριον γνησίᾳ παρακελεύσασθαι· ποιησάντων δὲ καὶ τοῦτο, παρὰ πάντα λόγον δυνάμει παραδόξῳ καὶ θεῖα μεταβαλεῖν ἐξ ὕδατος εἰς ἐλαίου ποιότητα τὴν φύσιν, παρὰ τε πλείστοις τῶν αὐτόθι ἀδελφῶν ἐπὶ μήκιστον ἐξ ἐκείνου καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς βραχὺ τι δεῖγμα τοῦ τότε θαύματος φυλαχθῆναι. “They say that one time the oil of the deacons failed during the great Easter night vigil. At this, the whole multitude was divided into the fearful and the disheartened, Narcissus ordered those who prepared the lights to draw water and bring it to him. This instruction being carried out, he prayed over the water, and commanded them to pour it into the lamps with true faith in the Lord. This being done, against all understanding by a wonderful and divine power, the nature of the water was changed into that of oil. A small portion of it has been preserved as a memento of the wonder to our day by many of the brothers and sisters who were there.”

⁷³¹ A selection of interpretations for lamps in burials is available in Şöforoğlu and Summerer (2016: 263-265). Lamps may have had utilitarian function, been luxury goods, possibly female burial objects, lit the houses of the dead, been objects of vigils, containers for perfumed oil, parting gifts, and votive or protective objects. Not all of these may be applied to early Byzantine burials in the Near East, and many are based on polytheistic belief systems.

⁷³² In the fourth century hagiography of Saint Hilarion, the saint's body was reportedly sweet-smelling when he was removed from his grave after a year: *Quod postquam sanctus vir audivit Hesychius, perrexit ad Cyprum, et simulans se velle habitare in eodem hortulo, ut diligentis custodiae suspicionem accolis tolleret, cum ingenti vitae suae periculo, post decem fere menses corpus ejus furatus est. Quod Majumam deferens, totis monachorum et oppidorum turbis prosequentibus, in antiquo monasterio condidit; illaesa tunica, cuculla, et palliolo, et toto corpore, quasi adhuc viveret, integro, tantisque fragrante odoribus, ut delibutum unguentis putares.* “When the holy man Hesychius heard [of the saint's death], he went to Cyprus, and, to remove the suspicions of the natives who were carefully guarding it, he pretended that he wished to live in the same garden, and after about ten months, at great peril to his life, he stole the body. He carried it to Majuma, and all the monks and crowds of townspeople escorting it buried it in the ancient monastery; his tunic, cowl, and cloak were unharmed, and the whole body was renewed as if still alive and smelt so fragrant that it was thought it was anointed with oil.” Migne (1845: column 52, lines 36-46); Jerome (1952a: 279-280).

directly above the tomb. The hole was probably a libation hole for pouring oil into the vessel, which was found full of coins covered in a chemical residue. The oil was likely fragrant and allowed the suspended incense to permeate the tomb.⁷³³ This would have created a sensory experience when pilgrims visited the tomb that associated the tomb of the saint with sweet smells. In less privileged tombs, incense burners or pots have been found, including two with examples of burning at Luzit (fifth-eighth century).⁷³⁴

Explanations for the use of scents in burials often refer to masking the smell of the decaying corpse. However, perfumes were a part of older burial practices used by both Jewish and Christian communities to prepare the body (Section 1.4.1), during the funeral procession, and on subsequent visits to the tomb.⁷³⁵ Excavators at Khirbat as-Samra claimed that, when the burial in Church-95 (seventh century) was opened, the bodies “smelt strongly perfumed”, while the individual in the Church-79 (seventh century) burial from the same site smelt “slightly perfumed”.⁷³⁶

Beyond a select few examples, smell is usually limited to the inclusion of vessels, lamps, incense burners, and incense shovels in tombs, which are rarely found with evidence of use such as residue or burning. Some vessels may have been designed specifically for the release of aromatic substances. For example, some of the glass vessels found in Roman-Byzantine tombs at

⁷³³ Hunter-Crawley (2017: 193).

⁷³⁴ Avni and Dahari (1990: 309).

⁷³⁵ Green (2008: 163, 168).

⁷³⁶ Nabulsi et al. (2020: 239-240) for Room 94; (257) for Church 79. The tombs were excavated in 1986 and 1993 respectively. The authors also claimed that frequent anointing using perfumed liquids turned the bones a red-brown colour in Room 94 and a brown colour in Church 79.

Scythopolis had long necks to slow down the speed of evaporation.⁷³⁷ Large vessels, especially incense burners, were likely more effective than smaller vessels at masking the scent of death, and therefore essential when reopening the tomb for commemorative activities or additional burials.

We must also consider the smell of food. The funerary feast and commemorative meals may have created a smell from the preparation, service, and storage of food (see Section 5.3.2.1). Vessels used during the funerary feast could be left behind so that their smell dispersed into the rest of the tomb. The smells of perfume and food offerings in tombs or cemeteries would have created an additional aspect of the sensory experience of visiting tombs and burying the dead, one that was perhaps connected to these places where the worlds of the living and the dead collided.

An example will allow us to consider the importance of smell in greater depth. Finds from the Roman-Byzantine tombs at Scythopolis, including vessels and lamps, have been analysed to study the senses in the funeral and funerary commemoration. Smell was considered more important than sight in the study of grave goods from 11 chamber tombs, with the main sources of smell being aromatic smells from unguentaria and smells related to eating and drinking.⁷³⁸ Unguentaria were small glass or ceramic vessels that contained perfume or other aromatic substances; these were found in ten of the eleven tombs.⁷³⁹ One unguentarium of the fourth century from Tomb 206 contained residues of either

⁷³⁷ Avery (2013a: 273-275).

⁷³⁸ Avery (2013a: 267-268).

⁷³⁹ Avery (2013a: 273).

wine or scented oil.⁷⁴⁰ Further smells would have been created from feasting in the tombs, either during the funeral or as a commemorative activity.⁷⁴¹

The ceramic oil lamps that were recovered from the tombs were considered insufficient in lighting the tombs fully, and, combined with the small size of the central chambers, would have created shadows in easily crowded tombs in which visibility would have been limited by other people.⁷⁴² The users of the tombs did not consider their ability to see the bodies or the interior of the tombs as important as other aspects of their practices. Although the mirror plaques found in either Tomb 208a or 208b were considered possible alternative means of lighting the space, their small size suggests this was not their intended use.⁷⁴³ However we understand these objects, there is a notable difference between the need for light in a dark space and the desire for a well-lit tomb, where the former takes precedence and the latter is not necessarily required.

5.3.2.3 Other Interpretations

I highlight two other possible interpretations for vessels here.

A common type of vessel found in the appendix is the kohl bottle, a small cosmetic bottle which held eye-makeup. These bottles have often been found in combination with other beauty products, such as the spatula found with a make-up bottle in burial Z.3 at Umm al-Jimal (Roman-Byzantine),⁷⁴⁴ and another

⁷⁴⁰ Avery (2013a: 273).

⁷⁴¹ Unfortunately, the substance inside a third or fourth century glass vessel from Tomb 1 was removed without testing: Avery (2013a: 275).

⁷⁴² Avery (2013a: 270-271).

⁷⁴³ Avery (2013a: 270-272). The inclusion of small mirrors at other sites, such as Phaeno, in graves which would not have been reopened and so would not have required lighting, clearly does not fit this interpretation. See Findlater et al. (1998: 74-78).

⁷⁴⁴ Brashler (1995: 465-466).

spatula with a double kohl tube in a tomb at Beit Fajjar (fourth century).⁷⁴⁵

These may have been gifts to the deceased, items which belonged to them and were buried with them, or related to the connection of women to beauty and femininity (Section 5.2.3).

Finally, miniature vessels, such as the miniature lead and glass vessels found in T2200 on Şallah ed-Din Street, Jerusalem (second-fourth century)⁷⁴⁶ and the miniature glass vessels in a tomb at Khirbat Yajuz (fifth-eighth century),⁷⁴⁷ are occasionally discovered. These are usually interpreted either as protective amulets (Section 5.3.4), perfume containers, or religious items (Section 5.3.5).⁷⁴⁸

5.3.3 Coins

Coins in Byzantine graves are often interpreted through the lens of Greco-Roman coins: as a continuation (either conscious or unconscious) of the practice of Charon's Obol, the fee paid to the ferryman to cross the river Styx.⁷⁴⁹ Furthermore, archaeologists have often relied on the presence or absence of Christian symbols or contexts to determine whether coins should be interpreted using polytheistic or monotheistic belief systems, as well as the placement of the coin itself. If there are no obvious signs of Christian practice, then the coin is interpreted through the practice of Charon's Obol; if there are Christian signs or imagery, the placement of a coin in a tomb is something that Christians

⁷⁴⁵ Hussein and Iliffe (1935: 176).

⁷⁴⁶ Winter (2015: 89-90).

⁷⁴⁷ Khalil (2001a: 136).

⁷⁴⁸ Khalil (2001a: 136); Winter (2015: 98-99).

⁷⁴⁹ Stevens (1991: 215).

continued to practice as a part of tradition.⁷⁵⁰ This interpretation of coins continues for the medieval period in both the east and the west,⁷⁵¹ but even within ancient contexts it has been questioned.⁷⁵² It is too strict a definition to explain the fluctuating appearance of coins in burial contexts, including, but not limited to, Christian contexts.

Other explanations for the presence of coins in graves have seen them as:

- Gifts from the living to the dead (including, for Christians, a form of alms).
- Gifts for the dead to use in the afterlife (including to give to deities).
- Symbolic dowries, allowing living people to take the belongings of the deceased person without offering a substantial number of gifts.
- Ways to avoid malicious spirits.⁷⁵³
- Ways to remember the dead. For example, coins found associated with the tomb of a saint were likely either offerings or tokens of remembrance.⁷⁵⁴

With these additional interpretations, we may consider coins found in Byzantine graves in different ways. Why, for example, was a bronze coin placed in the mouth of an elderly adult woman in the Church-79 tomb at Khirbat as-Samra (seventh century)?⁷⁵⁵ The tomb was in a side-room of the church, near the

⁷⁵⁰ For example, in Vitto et al. (2008: 113), it was stated that Christians may have continued to place coins in burials without the conception of Charon's Obol. The tomb also contained a cross and a dolphin or fish pendant, both symbols of Christian beliefs. However, in Vitto (2008: 124), the presence of coins in tombs was interpreted as a sign that the deceased and their family were polytheists, because no Christian context could be found.

⁷⁵¹ Travaini (2004: 159-160).

⁷⁵² Stevens (1991: 227-229).

⁷⁵³ Travaini (2004: 160).

⁷⁵⁴ Travaini (2004: 164-165).

⁷⁵⁵ Nabulsi et al. (2020: 257).

entrance, demonstrating that the deceased woman's status, wealth, or actions had granted her a privileged burial location. She wore a bronze ring on one finger, and leather fragments were found around her pelvis, but apart from these there were no additional grave goods.

Given the burial context, within a church, perhaps the inclusion of the coin in the tomb was some form of alms, placed in the tomb of a person who had some connection with the institution, or a way of acknowledging the contributions she had made to the church itself. The latter theory would make sense within the context of a privileged church burial, in which the woman may have been buried in the church due to donations she made to it (see the will of Flavius Phoibammon in Section 1.2.2.1). There seems to have been a special relationship between the deceased woman, the coin, and the person who placed it in her mouth.

Coins are found in many types of graves, from simple pit graves to tombs associated with saints or martyrs. This includes burials within churches and monasteries, where a Christian context is obvious. Most of the other examples come from built or hewn chamber tombs or hypogea. Many tombs containing coins are from large urban centers, for example they were common grave goods at Al-Bass (first century BCE-seventh century)⁷⁵⁶ and frequent in tombs from Cemetery F at Esbus (Roman-Byzantine).⁷⁵⁷ There are however some examples that come from rural and agricultural areas, including Sa'ad and Umm al-Jimal.

⁷⁵⁶ De Jong (2017p).

⁷⁵⁷ See appendix B in Waterhouse (1998) for a list of tombs and grave goods.

Most are common bronze coins.⁷⁵⁸ Examples include the *nummus* of Leo I in rock-cut Tomb J1 at Abila (Roman-Byzantine)⁷⁵⁹ and the four coins found in Tomb 3, a cist grave, at Apamea (fourth century).⁷⁶⁰ These low-value coins were more readily available to people, and therefore could be placed in more graves, than high-value coins. They are also more likely to have been considered expendable.

Coins were sometimes pierced and worn as jewellery and may have been understood as protective amulets (Section 5.3.4). Examples of pierced coins have been found at Giv'at Sharet (fourth-fifth century), where one was associated with an adult female,⁷⁶¹ and Moza 'Illit (first-fifth century), where a pierced coin of Julian was found in a tomb with a collection of other items, including a copper talisman case,⁷⁶² implying apotropaic practices were followed by the users of the tomb.

5.3.4 Apotropaic Objects

The term 'apotropaic' is frequent in discussions of grave goods and will often be used to explain the presence of objects that are considered strange or unusual. An apotropaic object is one which was deliberately placed in the grave to provide a form of protection, such as to avoid or avert evil things.⁷⁶³ This can include religious objects, such as pendant crosses.

⁷⁵⁸ Travaini (2004: 168).

⁷⁵⁹ Mare (1984: 43).

⁷⁶⁰ De Jong (2017a).

⁷⁶¹ Seligman et al. (1996: 48).

⁷⁶² Gudovitch (1996: 112).

⁷⁶³ Examples include amulets protecting children against child-killing demons. See Björklund (2017: 41-54) on the iconography of these amulets.

Many objects, including dress accessories, vessels, lamps, and coins, can fall into this category. Their iconography may be interpreted as apotropaic, as may the wearing of pierced coins. For example, the placement of a ceramic pot near the head of an adult male burial in Tomb 1415 and over the pelvic area in Tomb 1421 at Mostagedda (fourth-ninth century) has been interpreted as a method of protection against the evil eye.⁷⁶⁴ While possible apotropaic reasons for the placement of objects such as vessels should not be discounted, neither can we assume that the placement is not down to ideas such as space or aesthetic reasons. The danger of interpreting objects as apotropaic is that anything, in any situation, may be ascribed such a meaning.

In some cases, apotropaic objects are easy to identify. Amulets and amulet cases are not uncommon finds in the appendix: 36 burials contained amulets, 60 contained pendants (not crosses), and 61 contained crosses, usually pendants.

Opinions on the wearing of amulets seem to have been largely based on their use as authentic medical or protective objects versus idolatrous ones. The sixth century medical writer Alexander of Tralles recommended wearing amulet cases as a way of protecting against or recovering from diseases (for example, one containing wolf feces to heal colic):

*Περίαπτα φυσικά πρὸς τοὺς κωλικὴν ἔχοντας διάθεσιν.
Περίαπτον ἀδιάπτωτον, οὗ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἔσχομεν πείραν καὶ πάντες δὲ
ὀλίγου δεῖν ἄριστοι τῶν ἰατρῶν εὐδοκίμησαν. λαβὼν ἀφόδευμα λύκου, εἰ
δυνατὸν, ἔχον ὀστάρια κατάκλεισον εἰς σωληνάριον καὶ δὸς φορεῖν περὶ τὸν*

⁷⁶⁴ Pleşa (2017: 31).

*δεξιὸν βραχίονα ἢ μηρὸν ἢ ὀσφὺν ἐν τῷ παροξυσμῷ κατὰ τοῦ ἀλγοῦντος
μέρους φυλαττόμενος, ὡς μήτε τῆς γῆς μήτε λουτροῦ θίγειν.⁷⁶⁵*

“Natural amulets for those who have the colic.

“An infallible amulet, which we have attempted and which almost all good physicians regard highly. Take the feces of a wolf, which has a little bone if possible, and enclose it in a tube and give it (to the patient) to wear around the right arm or the thigh or the waist during the illness, and protect the part which is in pain so that it does not touch the earth nor a bath.”

However, John Chrysostom expressed a different view, opposing the use of amulets and accusing those who used them of being idolators. He described a mother who opted to allow her child to die rather than wear an amulet:

*Πάλιν ἐνόσησεν· οὐκ ἐποίησε περίαπτα;
Μαρτύριον αὐτῇ λογίζεται· κατέθυσε γὰρ τὸν υἱὸν
τῇ γνώμῃ. Τί γὰρ, εἰ καὶ μηδὲν ὠφελεῖ ἐκεῖνα, ἀλλ’
ἀπάτης ἐστὶ καὶ χλεύης; ἀλλ’ ὁμως ἦσαν οἱ πείθοντες
ὅτι ὠφελεῖ· καὶ εἴλετο μᾶλλον νεκρὸν τὸ παιδίον
ἰδεῖν, ἢ εἰδωλολατρείας ἀνασχέσθαι.⁷⁶⁶*

“Again, was (her child) sick? She did not make amulets. This is determined as her martyrdom, for she sacrificed her son in her resolve. For what, even though those things have no benefit, but are a deception and mockery, nevertheless there were those who persuaded her that they are helpful. And she chose rather to see her child dead, than to put up with idolatry.”

Amulets could take many shapes and were hung around the neck of the deceased person or placed in the grave. It is unfortunate that, due to the nature of human bone preservation and the lack of sexing carried out (Section 4.2.1),

⁷⁶⁵ Bollók (2013: 234); Puschmann (1879: 375, lines 20-25).

⁷⁶⁶ Migne (1860: column 358, lines 53-58). Chrysostom also disapproved of bells as apotropaic objects: *Τί ἂν τις εἴποι τὰ περίαπτα καὶ τοὺς κώδωνας τοὺς τῆς χειρὸς ἐξηρητημένους καὶ τὸν κόκκινον στήμονα, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα τὰ πολλῆς ἀνοίας γέμοντα, δεόν μηδὲν ἕτερον τῷ παιδί περιπιθέναι, ἀλλ’ ἢ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ φυλακὴν;* “What shall we say about those who hang amulets and bells from the hand, and the scarlet cloth, and those other things full of great folly, when they should apply nothing else to a child but the protection of the cross?” Migne (1862b: column 105, lines 55-59).

little can be said about the sex of those who were buried with amulets other than a reminder that jewellery is more commonly associated with women (but see Sections 3.3.3.1 and 5.2.3 for the issues on sexing and grave goods).

These objects include amulets and amulet cases (which could hold a piece of inscribed parchment or folded metal), but also plaques, bells, and cymbals.



Figure 5.7: The Rider-Saint Amulet from Scythopolis, with Rider-Saint and Greek text on obverse and evil eye on reverse. From Rider Saint Amulet (n.d.).

A bronze fist amulet was found in Tomb 30 at Scythopolis (fourth century),⁷⁶⁷ a glass amulet with Greek inscription in Cave I at Şallaḥ ed-Din Street (third-fourth century),⁷⁶⁸ and two pierced stone scarabs at Khirbat as-Samra (fifth-

⁷⁶⁷ Fleck (n.d.: 7).

⁷⁶⁸ Winter (2015: 90).

eighth century).⁷⁶⁹ Other examples in the appendix were made from materials such as wood, lead, and bone. Some examples may have been popular enough to be mass-produced, particularly the image of the Holy Rider.⁷⁷⁰

Examples of rider-saint amulets are known throughout the early Byzantine period, including examples from Syria and Palaestina.⁷⁷¹ An example in the appendix is found in Tomb 30 at Scythopolis (fourth century). It is a bronze rider saint amulet with suspension loop featuring the image of a rider spearing a female demon (the demon is usually Abyzou). The image is accompanied by the Greek *εις θεος ο νικ(ων) κα(κα)* (“One God, the one defeating evil”), and on the reverse of the amulet an evil eye is depicted being attacked by animals and weapons (Figure 5.7).⁷⁷²

Other Christian imagery may also have had apotropaic intention. At Mostagedda (fourth-ninth century), Tomb 1440 contained a child buried with five lead crosses and a metal plaque depicting a human figure, possibly a saint.⁷⁷³ The child in Tomb 1441 of the same cemetery was buried with a metal plaque incised with a cross, which was strung with five iron rings and five crosses on a torque necklace worn by the child; bracelets were found on the child’s arms.⁷⁷⁴ The plaque with the child in Tomb 11,755, also at Mostagedda, was made of

⁷⁶⁹ Nabulsi et al. (2007: 278); Nabulsi et al. (2008: 205).

⁷⁷⁰ Bohak (2017: 171).

⁷⁷¹ Ross (1962: 17), where a sixth century example was shown. For more information on rider-saint amulets in Byzantium, see Spier (1993: 33-44) and for their iconography, see Björklund (2017: 49-50).

⁷⁷² Fleck (n.d.: 8); *Rider saint amulet* (n.d.). Fleck used the translation “The one conquering evil through God”; in either translation, God is ultimately the defeater of evil. Other examples of rider-saint amulets have been found more widely throughout the early Byzantine world, such as the sixth century examples from Anemurium, which depict King Solomon as the rider, again featuring the evil eye on the reverse: Russell (1995: 40-41).

⁷⁷³ Brunton (1937: 141).

⁷⁷⁴ Brunton (1937: 141).

mother-of-pearl and found with jewellery,⁷⁷⁵ while Tomb 879 at Matmar (fourth-seventh century) contained a five-year-old child with jewellery, bronze pendants (including a cross pendant), and three pierced plaques, two of ivory and one of bone, on leather thongs.⁷⁷⁶ The relationship of all four plaques with jewellery and/or crosses, and in two cases depicting Christian imagery, indicates a spiritual relationship between the child and the object which was perhaps intended to have protective purposes.

Plaques from at tomb a Kfar Dikhrin (fourth-sixth century), meanwhile, displayed evident magical symbolism including circles and swirls, depicted on a mirror plaque and a bronze cross respectively, while a third plaque in the same tomb was shaped like a fish.⁷⁷⁷ This combination of Christian imagery and magical symbolism shows older concepts of magical protection being applied to Christian ideas of the same.

Mirror plaques may be found with frames, handles, and/or suspension loops, and are usually considered too small to have been of practical use to the owner. At Kfar Dikhrin and Cave 2 at Horvat Sugar (fourth-sixth century), mirror plaques were found with space for a mirror of 3.5cm or less in diameter.⁷⁷⁸ Their interpretation as apotropaic objects has been supported by the idea that their reflective quality and size would not have made them effective as mirrors, and they have therefore been viewed as tools to reflect the evil eye, to keep malicious spirits away, or as objects with symbolic Christian meaning.⁷⁷⁹ Mirrors

⁷⁷⁵ Brunton (1937: 142).

⁷⁷⁶ Brunton (1948: 93).

⁷⁷⁷ Rahmani (1964: 54-55).

⁷⁷⁸ Rahmani (1964: 59); Aviam and Stern (1997: 99).

⁷⁷⁹ Findlater et al. (1998: 79).

are, however, functional devices used to see oneself during the application of makeup, brushing of hair, and other beauty regimes. I see no reason why these small mirrors could not have had a practical purpose – strung around the neck like a necklace, they could have permitted the easy checking or adjustment of make-up or hair whenever required. Their size would have made them perfect tools to check or apply make-up (for example, consider the application of eye make-up), while the question of their reflective quality is not as significant as it may seem – those who wore and applied make-up on a regular basis could have easily adapted to using these small mirrors. I therefore consider the identification of mirror plaques as apotropaic to ignore the very real possibility that these objects may simply have been used and understood as mirrors.

Mirror plaques are often found alongside jewellery and in some cases with other objects related to beauty, such as pins or hairpins, spatulas, and combs. In combination with other objects these small mirrors may have been related to the concept of beauty or personal decoration after death (see Section 5.2.3). For example, a mirror plaque was found alongside a kohl bottle and cosmetic applicators in Chamber A of Tomb 1 at Kabul (fourth-fifth century),⁷⁸⁰ while Grave 107 at Phaeno (fourth-seventh century) contained a mirror plaque, spatula, and comb (Section 5.4.2).⁷⁸¹

I do not assume that plaques and mirrors were placed in burials for apotropaic purposes. The ivory plaque from Tomb L10 at Abila (fourth-seventh century) depicting a human head, which was found in the same tomb as a broken lamp

⁷⁸⁰ Vitto (2011: 115, 123).

⁷⁸¹ Findlater et al. (1998: 78).

incised with two crosses,⁷⁸² shows no clear indications that it may have been understood as an apotropaic object. Who it was meant to depict is unknown, as is its purpose. Some of these items may have been personal objects or gifts, not necessarily imbued with apotropaic intent, while mirrors in particular have often been overinterpreted – because the idea that they were simply mirrors has been, in my opinion, incorrectly rejected.

Other objects that have been interpreted as apotropaic include objects that are broken, incomplete, or which seem to be out of place.⁷⁸³ Breaking vessels, for example, may have been performed as a method of chasing evil spirits away,⁷⁸⁴ but a broken vessel may also have been damaged accidentally, during a disturbance of the tomb, or was placed in the tomb because it was broken and therefore no longer useable. More mundane objects, such as nails (when they are found singularly), have also been ascribed apotropaic meaning,⁷⁸⁵ but this is a claim that should be made cautiously, as it is very probable that the nail could have been used as a tool or may have entered the tomb accidentally.

Identification of the deliberate apotropaic placement of an item such as a nail or pot should be carefully considered alongside other grave goods, the human remains, and other aspects of the tomb to avoid ascribing inappropriate meaning to finds.

⁷⁸² *Abila – tomb L-10* (n.d.).

⁷⁸³ Härke (2014: 51).

⁷⁸⁴ Alexiou (2002: 27).

⁷⁸⁵ Tal et al. (2014: 164).

5.3.5 Religious Objects and Iconography

Archaeologists frequently look for objects of religious significance or items featuring religious symbols (crosses, menorahs, biblical figures, references to God, etc.) to ascribe religious affiliation to the users of a tomb.⁷⁸⁶ This may include tombstones, inscriptions, or paintings, where these are available (see Chapter 6), as well as location or association with a religious building (Section 2.6), with grave goods providing another opportunity to identify religious beliefs. While the presence of an object, gravestone, or other element of the grave depicting a religious symbol is highly unlikely to represent the first instance of the belief within a cemetery population, it can provide us with a *terminus ante quem* for the burial and presence of believers at the site.

Small pendant crosses became increasingly popular finds in tombs during the early Byzantine period. The popularity of the cross as an apotropaic device among Christians surely contributed to its growing appearance from the fifth century onwards,⁷⁸⁷ although burials continued to contain other items considered apotropaic, such as the combined presence of both crosses and a bell in Cave III at Luzit (fifth-seventh/eighth century).⁷⁸⁸ Despite claims by some church leaders that the cross was the only effective protective device acceptable to Christians, people continued to use older objects traditionally ascribed apotropaic status. John Chrysostom claimed:

Πιστὴ εἶ;

σφράγισον, εἶπέ. Τοῦτο ἔχω τὸ ὄπλον μόνον, τοῦτο τὸ

⁷⁸⁶ Härke (2014: 41-42).

⁷⁸⁷ Bollók (2013: 232).

⁷⁸⁸ Avni and Dahari (1990: 304).

*φάρμακον· ἄλλο δὲ οὐκ οἶδα. Εἰπέ μοι, ἐὰν προσελ-
θῶν ἰατρὸς, καὶ τὰ τῆς ἰατρικῆς φάρμακα ἀφείς, ἐπάδῃ,
τοῦτον ἰατρὸν ἐροῦμεν; Οὐδαμῶς· τὰ γὰρ τῆς ἰατρι-
κῆς οὐχ ὁρῶμεν φάρμακα. Οὕτως οὐδὲ ἐνταῦθα τὰ
τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ.⁷⁸⁹*

“Are you faithful? Sign the cross, say: I have this as my only weapon, this is the cure, and I know no other. Tell me, if a physician comes and, neglecting the remedies of medicine, uses incantation, should we call him a physician? By no means: for we do not see medicines of the healing art, so neither does this show those of Christianity.”

A cross could also have been included in burials as a mark of identification, or as a personal piece of jewellery.

Cross pendants have been discovered, for example, at el-Gamous (first-seventh century),⁷⁹⁰ Khirbat as-Samra (fourth-eighth century),⁷⁹¹ and al-Bass (first century BCE-seventh century).⁷⁹² A necklace found in the Tomb of Thais in Antinoopolis (fourth-fifth century) was described as a rosary.⁷⁹³ Cross designs also appear more widely on other types of dress accessories, such as buckles found in the Catacombs at Emesa (third-seventh century),⁷⁹⁴ and on domestic objects. Other symbols that can identify Christian beliefs include fish or dolphins, such as a fish-shaped vessel from Khirbat Yajuz (fifth-eighth century).⁷⁹⁵ Inscriptions may also provide evidence of religious identity, such as

⁷⁸⁹ Migne (1860: column 358, lines 8-14).

⁷⁹⁰ Whitchurch and Griggs (2010: 217).

⁷⁹¹ Nabulsi (2010: 218).

⁷⁹² De Jong (2010: 620).

⁷⁹³ Gayet (1902a: 46-47).

⁷⁹⁴ Saliby (1993: 271).

⁷⁹⁵ Khalil (2001a: 127).

a Greek version of the Lord's Prayer on a tablet in tomb J17, 1 at Qarara (fourth-ninth century).⁷⁹⁶

Religious symbols were not strictly limited to one religious group or another, and the boundaries between different religious groups (especially in places where they lived together) could have been fluid.⁷⁹⁷ In some places, manufacture and access to objects may have limited the possibility of expressing religion in burial (as well as elsewhere in life): if the only available lamps bore a cross, then they were likely used by local people regardless of religious affiliation and may have been so commonly used that the presence of the cross became inconsequential to the user.

The combination of items belonging to different belief systems is rare but not unheard of in burial contexts. A bronze incense shovel of the fifth-sixth centuries (Figure 5.8),⁷⁹⁸ a Jewish item, was found in a loculus of Tomb 239 at Scythopolis (Roman-Byzantine), along with a bronze sistrum, an Egyptian instrument originally related to the worship of Isis.⁷⁹⁹ If both the shovel and the sistrum were used for their intended religious purposes, then individuals of different faiths must have been buried there not only in the same tomb, but the same loculus.⁸⁰⁰ Perhaps the instrument's purpose was nothing more than to be an instrument, belonging to or gifted to one of the deceased; perhaps the

⁷⁹⁶ Ranke (1926: 40).

⁷⁹⁷ Talloen (2011: 577).

⁷⁹⁸ *Incense shovel* (n.d.) The Penn Museum dated the shovel more generally to the "Roman Period": *Shovel* (n.d.).

⁷⁹⁹ Fleck (n.d.: 9).

⁸⁰⁰ Fleck (n.d.: 15).

sistrum held importance as a sistrum; or perhaps it was adapted to be used in Jewish ritual by the users of the tomb.



Figure 5.8: Bronze incense shovel from Scythopolis. From Fleck (n.d.: 10).

5.3.6 Other Finds

The remaining grave goods from Table 5.2 which have not been discussed above are found only occasionally. Many may be examples of personal property, gifts, or a profession, but they could also have been symbolic of an aspect of the person's identity or life.

The largest undiscussed category is weapons or tools. This is a broad category that includes a small number of swords, daggers, and arrowheads, but also tools which may have been used in everyday life. Weapons and tools may have belonged to the deceased or been offered to them by mourners; tools may also have been left behind in the tomb accidentally, such as the paint brush found with red paint in Tomb Chapel 66 at El-Bagawat (second-seventh century).⁸⁰¹ Most depositions of weapons or tools are irregular.

⁸⁰¹ Hauser and Wilkinson (1907-1908).

A leather sheath in the Tomb of Sarapion at Antinoopolis (fourth-fifth century) indicates a weapon.⁸⁰² Three spearheads, a knife, an axe, and fragments of two arrowheads were found “mixed with the skeletal remains”⁸⁰³ in the tombs at the Monastery at Kursi (sixth-seventh century); these were connected by the excavators to the Persian invasion in 614,⁸⁰⁴ although the weapons may simply have belonged to or been offered to the deceased. Groups of weapons such as this imply that a population had thoughts focused on aspects of war or military strength, whether for a brief or longer time; their deposition implies that they were either no longer needed or unusable.

Objects such as figurines, cymbals, instruments, and seals may have belonged to the deceased person or been placed in the tomb as a symbolic representation of the deceased person or a mourner. A steatite seal from Tomb 7 M 653-654 at Tyre (third-sixth century) engraved with an animal likely belonged to the person it was buried with; the small bronze prisms, one with an inscription, in Tomb 18 M 1175-1176 (second-sixth century) at the same site are more difficult to interpret, especially with the nature of the inscription unknown.⁸⁰⁵ A collection of bronze surgical tools in Tomb F.18 Loculus 11 from Ebus (Roman-Byzantine) were also likely property of the deceased, and very probably representative of their career.⁸⁰⁶

⁸⁰² Gayet (1902b: 40).

⁸⁰³ Tzaferis and Bijovsky (2014: 187).

⁸⁰⁴ Tzaferis and Bijovsky (2014: 196).

⁸⁰⁵ De Jong (2017p).

⁸⁰⁶ Waterhouse (1998: 31-35).

5.4 Case Studies

I now build on the above interpretations with specific examples of burials where grave goods and their contexts may be analysed in detail. The burial, the tomb, the cemetery, the deceased person, and objects buried with them all play a role in an analysis of the tomb and its grave goods.⁸⁰⁷ This is the approach that Byzantine archaeology should adapt in the study of grave goods, particularly from large cemeteries, to avoid and overcome the generalisations that have been made about grave goods and their meanings to date. The importance of this approach is that it grants an exploration of local practices, symbolism and meaning, and agency in burial.

5.4.1 Tomb 200 at Giv'at Sharet

Tomb 200 is one of three rock-cut tombs excavated at Giv'at Sharet, following their discovery in December 1990; they are part of a larger cemetery dated between the Hellenistic/Roman and Byzantine periods.⁸⁰⁸ Tomb 200 was found undisturbed and is dated, based on grave goods, to the fourth-fifth century.⁸⁰⁹ The 25 individuals buried in the tomb were aged and sexed.

The burial chamber of the tomb is roughly square in shape and features six arcosolia, containing various numbers of individuals (Figure 5.9). Access to the tomb was via a square entrance blocked by a stone on the wall between arcosolia 3 and 4. A seventh arcosolium breached the wall of the earlier Tomb 100 (Hellenistic/Roman), which was then sealed, and the arcosolium was never

⁸⁰⁷ Schülke (1999: 98).

⁸⁰⁸ Seligman et al. (1996: 43).

⁸⁰⁹ Seligman et al. (1996: 43, 59). The authors limited the period of use of the tomb to the final quarter of the fourth century and the first quarter of the fifth century, a period of roughly 50 years.

used.⁸¹⁰ Arcosolium 4 was a different shape to the others, with a smaller opening and rounder shape, while the remainder were rectangular.

Tomb 200 was undisturbed. As such, excavators were able to describe the *in-situ* contents of the tomb. We can use this information to understand the burial practices of the users of the tomb as a small-scale example. The contents of each arcosolium are presented in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4: Contents of the arcosolia in Tomb 200 at Giv'at Sharef.

Arcosolium	Contents
Arcosolium 1	Six individuals, the articulated skeletons laid on their backs with heads to the east. Closest to the chamber, one adult male wearing sandals, according to the small rivets (nails) found at his feet. There were also two oil lamps by his feet, positioned at the edge of the arcosolium. The middle skeleton was an adolescent female with a foetus lying in her pelvic area. They were presumably mother and child, and died either during childbirth or shortly following it, at the same time or within a short period of one another. The carbonised material found on the adolescent's pelvis contained <i>cannabis sativa</i> , common reed, and unidentified seeds, likely used during childbirth. ⁸¹¹ The placement of this material would have been a very deliberate decision and symbolises the deaths of both mother and child. The adolescent wore a bracelet on each arm and a ring on one of her fingers. The skeleton of an older adult woman lay in the innermost part of the arcosolium; the remains of an infant and a child were found disarticulated and had apparently been pushed aside. ⁸¹² No finds were associated with these three skeletons.
Arcosolium 2	Four individuals, articulated with heads to the west. Two infants or young children in the innermost part of the arcosolium. An adult male lay beside them, in the middle of the arcosolium, with the remains of a pair of sandals at his feet. The skeleton closest to the chamber was an adult female, associated with a faience bead, an iron ring, a pierced coin (of Gratian, 378-383), ⁸¹³ and two bracelets found on the right arm. Next to her, on the edge of the arcosolium, seven glass vessels (four jars, one containing cannabis, two flasks, and a cosmetic bottle containing a spatula and traces of galena, used in the

⁸¹⁰ Seligman et al. (1996: 44-45).

⁸¹¹ Seligman et al. (1996: 47).

⁸¹² Seligman et al. (1996: 47).

⁸¹³ Seligman et al. (1996: 57).

	manufacture of kohl) and a lamp were found. ⁸¹⁴ The vessels were close to the woman's feet, with the lamp on the western side of the entrance to the arcosolium. Other finds in the arcosolium, found sifting through its contents, could not be attributed to an individual: six rings, a glass bead, and three clothing eyelets. ⁸¹⁵
Arcosolium 3	Three adult individuals, articulated with heads to the north. The skeleton closest to the chamber was female, while the other two were males. The middle male was associated with sandals at the feet. ⁸¹⁶ There were no other finds.
Arcosolium 4	One adult female, articulated with head to the north. The only object was a large sherd of a jar beneath the pelvis. ⁸¹⁷ The shape of the arcosolium indicates that it may not have been large enough for subsequent burials. Perhaps the position of the entrance, between arcosolia 3 and 4, or the limestone that the tomb was dug into prevented the expansion of the arcosolia, and thus it was disregarded in favour of another.
Arcosolium 5	Eight individuals, six articulated with heads to the southeast. This is the only arcosolium in which the heads face the chamber. Two adult skeletons were associated with grave goods. An adult male was associated with sandals and two glass vessels at the feet (a jar containing two coins and a glass bead, and a double-tubed cosmetic flask containing a spatula and galena). ⁸¹⁸ An adult female was found with three bracelets (two on the right arm and one on the left), chain links (possibly from an earring) and a bone hairpin beneath the skull. A glass vessel was by her right arm and two lamps were found, one on either side of her head. Additional hairpins, a ring, and a glass bead were found in the contents of the arcosolium but could not be associated with a specific skeleton. ⁸¹⁹ The other skeletons were of two infants or children, an adolescent, an adult man, an adult woman, and an adult of unknown sex. ⁸²⁰
Arcosolium 6	Three individuals, articulated with heads to the east. Two adult males both associated with the remains of sandals; one wore a gilded bronze ring. The other skeleton was an infant or young child. Six beads were found while sifting through the arcosolium, but it was unclear which skeleton they were associated with. ⁸²¹

⁸¹⁴ Seligman et al. (1996: 56).

⁸¹⁵ Seligman et al. (1996: 47-48).

⁸¹⁶ Seligman et al. (1996: 48).

⁸¹⁷ Seligman et al. (1996: 48).

⁸¹⁸ The coins were of Licinius, 315-316, and Arcadius, 383-392. Seligman et al. (1996: 58-59).

⁸¹⁹ Seligman et al. (1996: 48-49).

⁸²⁰ Seligman et al. (1996: 46).

⁸²¹ Seligman et al. (1996: 49).

Several aspects related to the grave goods are immediately obvious: the remains of sandals were only associated with adult males and were either worn by them or placed at their feet; jewellery was almost exclusively associated with female adolescent and adult skeletons, with the exception of one finger ring; none of the remains of infants or children could be associated with any grave goods.⁸²² Lamps were exclusively placed at the entrance of arcosolia, although only found in half of them. Two of these arcosolia also contained glass vessels, although there was no similar pattern for these: while most were placed at the foot end of the arcosolium, one in arcosolium 5 was found by the arm of an adult female. The fragment of the jar found with the adult female in arcosolium 4 is more uncertain: was it placed there accidentally, left behind when a jar was smashed, or was it deliberately placed there, for example as a form of apotropaic protection? The only other potentially apotropaic find in the tomb is the pierced coin worn as a pendant by the adult female in arcosolium 2.

⁸²² Seligman et al. (1996: 60).

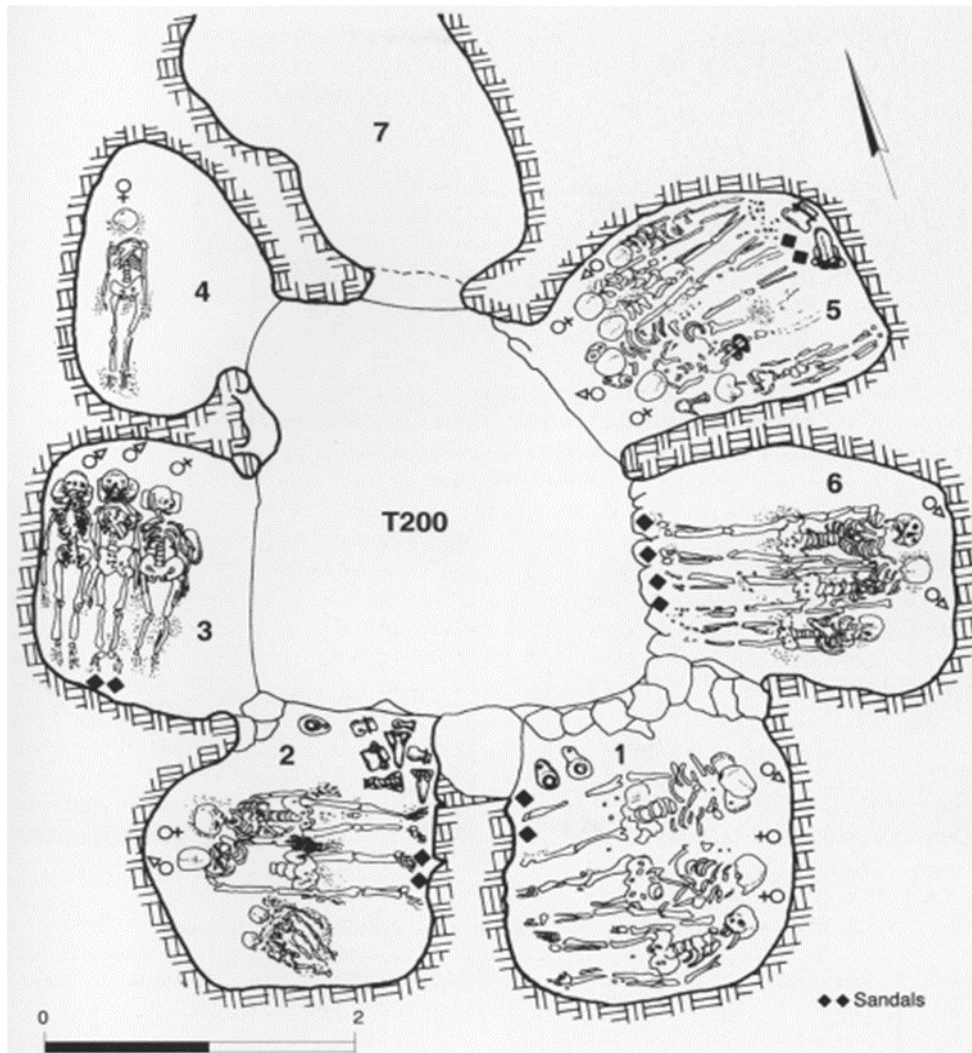


Figure 5.9: Tomb 200 at Giv'at Sharet. From Seligman et al. (1996: 45).

The similarities between the grave goods found in each arcosolia are representative of shared burial practices. While the division of individuals in each arcosolium is not equal, some of the arcosolia may represent family groups: for example, arcosolium 1 contains an adult male, an adult female, and four juveniles (including the adolescent and foetus); arcosolia 2, an adult male, an adult female, and two infants or young children. The two arcosolia which do not contain juveniles, arcosolium 3 and 4, are also the two with the smallest number of grave goods; while no objects can be associated directly with infants or

children, the diversity of the group in each arcosolium seems to have some impact on the number of finds.

If the arcosolia were divided according to some form of kinship, then perhaps the glass vessels in arcosolia 2 and 5, and their contents, can be associated with more than one specific individual. They may be intended for the group, and objects may have been placed in the vessel either at the same time or separately, as gifts or offerings to one or more of the deceased within the arcosolium.

While there are differences, therefore, between the arcosolia in Tomb 200, we find similarities in burial styles and grave goods. However the users of this tomb were divided, they shared similar burial rites, having more in common than merely the same burial space. What this example demonstrates is the variety within a family (or group) form of grave good deposition, where individual stories, relationships, desires, or memories could be expressed through burial rites and objects.

5.4.2 Graves 105 and 107 in the South Cemetery at Phaeno

The South Cemetery at Phaeno (fourth-seventh century) presents the burial practices, including the deposition of grave goods, of a much larger community.

The cemetery was excavated in 1995-1996 and has an estimated 1,500-2,000 burials. 700 of these had been looted before the excavations and only 51 graves (45 undisturbed) were excavated.⁸²³ All of the excavated burials were single inhumations covered with capping stones; some minor differences in the

⁸²³ Findlater et al. (1998: 71-72, 82).

positioning of arms and legs and the use of ledges for capping stones was noted. Nine or ten superstructures were visible in the cemetery, but all of these had been robbed.⁸²⁴ One grave contained a wooden coffin, and another, a casing of some kind around the skeleton.⁸²⁵ However, in all cases the tombs were pit graves oriented east-west, and many had headstones including a large number featuring crosses.⁸²⁶

Grave goods showed further similarities between graves, indicating a standard form of burial rites practiced within the cemetery. Over half of the graves contained the remains of a shroud, and 16 graves contained fragmentary pieces of shoes or sandals. Other artifacts were uncovered in less than half of the excavated graves, mainly dress accessories or personal adornments including a buckle, small metal discs (buttons?), and jewellery.⁸²⁷ Graves 105 and 107, however, contained additional objects, as shown in Table 5.5.

Graves 105 and 107 were both undisturbed and close to Grave 62, which featured a superstructure and had several other graves clustered around it. Graves 105 and 107 also cut into earlier graves, a rare discovery in the otherwise organised cemetery. The clustering around the superstructure implies that Grave 62 and the area surrounding it were considered desirable places for burial,⁸²⁸ in a similar way to the desire to be buried close to a saint or in a church. Both graves were of the standard pit type.

⁸²⁴ Findlater et al. (1998: 72).

⁸²⁵ Findlater et al. (1998: 74).

⁸²⁶ Findlater et al. (1998: 80).

⁸²⁷ Findlater et al. (1998: 72, 74).

⁸²⁸ Findlater et al. (1998: 78).

Table 5.5: Contents of Graves 105 and 107 at the South Cemetery at Phaeno.

Grave	Contents
105	Approximately 10-year-old child. Dress accessories were leather shoes or sandals at the feet, a copper earring on each side of the skull, a wooden ring at the left hand, a string of beads found under the ribs and upper right arm, and a bracelet on each arm, one of copper alloy and the other of iron. The other grave goods were a glass flask found in the pelvic area, a wooden kohl tube above the right pelvis, a circular plaster mirror between the lower right arm and lower back, and a small iron rod on the side of the skull (spatula?).
107	Adult female. Dress accessories were pieces of a shroud or other textile, a leather thong around the neck, a wooden bracelet near the pelvis, where the hands were resting (either worn or placed on the corpse), a copper bracelet on the left arm, an earring on the left side of the neck, and a string around the neck associated with glass beads that were found beneath the sternum. The other grave goods were: a glass flask held in the left hand, a second glass flask on the pelvis, an ivory kohl tube in the right hand, a circular plaster mirror found in fragments at the pelvis, lower back, and lower left arm, a copper alloy spatula on the left of the skull, a wooden comb above the middle of the spine, a wooden spindle at the right shoulder, and a copper alloy object and carved ivory object beneath the lower right arm and back, which may have been attached together (a key?).

The number and position of jewellery items in other graves from the cemetery has not been published, so it is not possible to tell how much the range of dress accessories differed from those in other tombs. We may however comment on the other grave goods that were found in Graves 105 and 107, as they are unique among the excavated graves of the cemetery. They indicate that certain objects or concepts may have been associated with special or privileged burials in the cemetery.

It is likely that the glass flasks were, as the original report suggests, filled with an aromatic substance at the time of burial.⁸²⁹ The kohl tubes may be

⁸²⁹ Findlater et al. (1998: 79).

associated with the spatula in Grave 107 and the iron rod in Grave 105. These were found in a location associated with their use, with the kohl tubes held in the hand or placed near them, and the spatula and rod by the side of the head.

The wooden spindle in Grave 107 may be associated with domestic duties and indicate involvement in textile production. The meaning of the key-shaped object is less clear, but the additional selection of items buried with the adult woman compared to the child may symbolise aspects of her adult life that the juvenile had not yet encountered at the time of their death.

Finally, plaster mirror plaques with a space of less than 4cm for mirrors were found near the lower arm and back in both graves. As the placement of the other objects appears to have been deliberately chosen, we must assume that the placement of these mirrors was also deliberate. They were most likely meant to be held. It is possible that they may have been associated with the kohl tubes and spatula/iron rod, as a third component of the application of eye makeup. However, their size would have made them impractical for use by the living.

I suggest that, without excluding other possible explanations for their inclusion (for example, apotropaic design), the careful construction of the placement of corpse and objects in these graves presents a case for their symbolic use along with the other cosmetic products in the burials. The same combination of kohl tube, applicator and small mirror (frame) was also found in Tomb 1 at Kabul (fourth-fifth century), where they were found among other items in the southeastern corner of a central pit, separate from the human bones in the

southwestern corner.⁸³⁰ The lack of any other objects which may be interpreted as apotropaic from the rest of the burials at Phaeno further suggests that a non-apotropaic interpretation is required.

Finally, we should return to the location of Graves 105 and 107 in relation to other burials in the South Cemetery. The clustering of both burials around the superstructure of Grave 62 and their cutting into older burials suggests veneration or a desire to be buried in this part of the cemetery. It is not clear if this veneration was in relation to a religious figure, but given the presence of cross symbols on many headstones from the cemetery, it is very possible. The individuals buried in Graves 105 and 107 may have been connected to the individual buried in Grave 62, whether this was a personal connection, a form of devotion, or a way of identifying status. Both the placement of their graves and the selection of their grave goods allowed them to be distinguished from most other people interred in the same cemetery. They were members of a group – socioeconomic, religious, or other – distinct from the “ordinary” people buried in the less furnished graves.

5.5 Conclusion

Grave goods are any objects, other than human remains, which were deliberately deposited in a tomb. They may be divided broadly into two categories: objects worn by the deceased person, and objects placed in the tomb. By examining undisturbed burial contexts, we can more clearly understand aspects of burial rites on local levels and, more generally, the

⁸³⁰ Vitto (2011: 113).

importance of certain objects in burials in much broader regional, cultural, religious, and socio-economic contexts. We can also understand aspects of how people interacted with burials outside of funerary contexts.

I argue that the number of burials which originally contained grave goods was greater than the data suggests; how much greater cannot be known (Section 5.2). The funerary affiliation of certain objects or their meaning in funerary contexts remained significant in the early Byzantine period, perhaps in some communities more than others; for example, amulets, pendants, and other protective elements of burials remained important to many, but could take on new forms such as crosses or other Christian iconography.

Instead of simple change, what occurred to grave goods during the fourth-seventh centuries may be understood as a slow evolution of practices and ideologies. This included the steady introduction of some objects and symbols, such as the cross, which took on the role that other objects had previously held, but which did not yet make them obsolete (the presence of the cross among apotropaic objects, Section 5.3.4). It also included developments in the ideology surrounding grave goods, for example mourning practices which may once have been elements of polytheistic beliefs such as Charon's Obol continuing in monotheistic contexts. We should view this as a long-term trend in burial styles, not necessarily always related to religion but perhaps cultural or socio-economic as well. A community may have put more emphasis on showing wealth at funerals, for instance, than showing religious identity.

By examining grave goods in their context, we can create a greater understanding of the processes a community used to mark the end of life. This is why an object does not inherently, of itself, provide an explanation for its inclusion in a burial – in one context, it may have one interpretation, but in another the meaning may be entirely different. The case studies section shows this in detail, by presenting an approach that Byzantine archaeology should adopt that focuses on the burial context in its entirety and the possible interpretations of grave goods. The examples in the case studies section demonstrate the advantages of looking at the burial and grave goods therein not as individual examples, but as a whole both within the context of the remainder of the cemetery and the context of the action which was performed: that is, of deliberately and consciously placing an object into a grave.

CHAPTER 6: INSCRIPTION AND ICONOGRAPHY

This chapter considers the final aspects of early Byzantine burials discussed in this thesis: inscriptions and iconography. Inscriptions and iconography can provide additional context on burials and how people viewed or dealt with death. By considering all the previous chapters (death belief, tomb typology, human remains, and grave goods) in combination with this final chapter, this chapter will complete our overview of tombs, going from their creation, through their use, their function as burial spaces, and areas for gathering or remembrance. By bringing these elements together, we will be able to understand burials more comprehensively within their contexts, and to identify aspects of the relationship between mourners and the dead.

Inscription and iconography can appear together or separately. Some tombs may have neither, some inscription, some iconography, and some both.

Inscription and iconography may have been designed as separate elements, or they may have complemented one another. Because both elements need to be given attention as individual aspects of a tomb, this chapter is divided into part a (inscriptions) and part b (iconography). The case studies are at the end of part b, followed by a general conclusion for both parts.

This chapter concludes that, although the funerary inscriptions and iconography of tombs may appear to focus on certain common phrases or symbols, the opportunity to express identity, belief, and memory within early Christian burials granted more individualistic elements within burial, and especially those associated with elites. While this is a continuation from antiquity, ancient

symbols could be granted new interpretations within Christian contexts. Yet the simplicity of being able to mark a tomb with a symbol such as the cross, which could immediately be connected to the resurrection and Christian afterlife, increasingly dominated over other symbols and complicated inscriptions by the sixth century.

6a.1 Introduction: Inscriptions

There are a limited number of epitaphs associated with burials of the Byzantine Near East. 398 burials in the appendix featured one or more inscriptions (Table 6a.1). This discussion is therefore enhanced by the inclusion of studies of stelae from specific cemeteries or geographic areas. I use the stelae from the cemetery of Zoora in Palaestina Tertia,⁸³¹ collections of Egyptian funerary monuments,⁸³² the relevant stelae in De Jong's study of Syrian tombs,⁸³³ and the searchable Greek Inscriptions from the Packard Humanities Institute, which derive from a range of corpuses, collections, and other published inscriptions.⁸³⁴ The additional sources cover the geographic area and time of this thesis, thus granting a larger selection of funerary inscriptions to study and a more in-depth understanding of the significance of epitaphs during this period.

Stelae did not always feature inscriptions (or iconography). Some were blank, such as the undecorated upright slabs found in the excavations near the Civic

⁸³¹ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005); Meimaris and K. I. Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2008); Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2016).

⁸³² Thomas (2000); Tudor (2011).

⁸³³ De Jong (2017a-q). De Jong only provided the English translations of the inscriptions. The inscriptions, in their original languages, are from Rey-Coquais (1977).

⁸³⁴ *Searchable Greek Inscriptions* (2020).

Center at Be'er Sheva (Byzantine).⁸³⁵ The choice to include text, imagery, a combination, or neither would have been for one or multiple reasons, including:

- Expense of the raw material and/or carving or painted decoration.
- Availability of the raw material and/or craftsman.
- Local practices.
- Literacy⁸³⁶ or preferred ways of expressing aspects of death belief.
- The type and context of the tomb.
- The individual(s) buried in the tomb.

Table 6a.1: Inscriptions according to burial type, from the appendix. The total number of burials with inscriptions in the appendix is 398.

Burial Type	Number with one or more inscription	Percentage of inscriptions
Sarcophagus	121	30.4%
Built tomb	100	25.1%
Hypogeum	85	21.4%
Pit grave	32	8.0%
Rock-cut tomb	31	7.8%
Unknown burial type	12	3.0%
Funerary enclosure	8	2.0%
Cist grave	3	0.8%
Shaft grave	3	0.8%
Arcosolium ⁸³⁷	2	0.5%
Tumulus	2	0.5%
Niche	1	0.3%

⁸³⁵ Peretz (2014).

⁸³⁶ Inscriptions of the early Byzantine period have in some cases been compared to those of earlier periods, such as the Roman period, to argue that the Byzantine population was less literate. For example, see Gawlikowski (1993: 51), where third century tombstones at Palmyra were compared to those of the fifth-sixth centuries and the Greek in the latter group is of poorer quality.

⁸³⁷ Note that some of the inscriptions in built tombs, hypogea, and rock-cut tombs may have been associated with arcosolia, loculi, or niches, but the location has not always been recorded.

Chapter 6a is divided into three sections. The first part, Section 6a.2, discusses the methodology and data from the appendix, including data and language issues. The second, Section 6a.3, focuses on the content of funerary inscriptions, from common expressions to more unusual examples which were likely made on a one-off basis. Finally, Section 6a.4 concerns examples of curse inscriptions and graffiti in funerary contexts.

6a.2 Methodology and Data Issues

As stated above, the data on funerary inscriptions from the appendix is not substantial enough to permit an in-depth study of this subject, and therefore it is necessary to supplement this research with additional examples from the Byzantine Near East. By taking this methodological approach, it is possible to overcome the issues with this limited dataset and discuss the use of funerary inscriptions in greater depth.

It is necessary to take this approach because the extant evidence for funerary inscriptions is incomplete. This section discusses the issues of preservation, survival, excavation, collections, and language to show why it is necessary to include examples outside of the dataset and how these examples help to overcome the issues in this data.

6a.2.1 Preservation

The preservation of funerary inscriptions is impacted by multiple factors: the natural environment may have worn away the inscription, disturbance of the burial may have damaged it, reuse of a stela or other part of a tomb as spolia may have moved it from its original location, or other forms of accidental or

deliberate damage may have occurred. Partial preservation of inscriptions is found at sites such as the cemetery at Jerusalem's YMCA site (fifth-eighth century).⁸³⁸

Another factor related to preservation is the material that the inscription was made on. Most of the funerary inscriptions in this study were carved and/or painted on worked or unworked stone. However, stelae may have been constructed out of material which has not survived, for example wood.

Examples of wooden stelae come from the cemetery of the Monastery of St Paul at Thebes (sixth-tenth century), where 13 stones with central holes were found related to burials, two of the depressions containing the remains of wood which had been inserted into them vertically. Fragments of a large wooden cross were also found in the cemetery. The conclusion was that the holes had originally held wooden crosses, which may or may not have been inscribed.⁸³⁹ Carved wood of the sixth century is known in other contexts, such as the beam reliefs in the church of St Catherine on Mount Sinai,⁸⁴⁰ and there is no reason to believe that the same material was not used in burial contexts. This means that some burials – perhaps even entire cemeteries – may have had stelae which did not survive at the time of their excavation.

The reuse of stelae by ancient peoples has further affected the discovery of *in situ* funerary inscriptions related to tombs such as pit and cist graves. Examples of reused stelae are attested at sites such as Umm al-Jimal (Roman-Byzantine), where hundreds of stelae featuring funerary inscriptions were not found *in situ*,

⁸³⁸ Tchekhanovets (2017: 2020).

⁸³⁹ Eichner (2018: 237).

⁸⁴⁰ Drewer (1971: 9).

but instead had been removed from their original positions for use as *spolia*.⁸⁴¹ Their discovery in secondary use means that their original context has unfortunately been lost.

Another example of the reuse of stelae comes from Cemetery One at Wadi Sarga (Byzantine), where only fragments of stelae were discovered. Coptic limestone stelae (and ostraca), commonly with inscribed messages of commemoration, were taken from the cemetery and reused in a church, houses, and caves.⁸⁴² For example, number 41 follows the formula of these commemorative inscriptions, calling upon God and other Christian figures to remember a dead person, who was then named:

+ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ
ΠΑΚΑΘΩΣ
ΑΠΑ ΘΩΜΑΣ ΑΠΑ
ΠΕΤΡΕ ΑΠΑ ΙΟΥΣΗΦ
ΑΠΑ ΑΝΟΥΠ ΑΠΑ ΠΑ
ΜΟΥΝ ΑΠΙ Π(Μ)ΕΕΥΕ ΠΑΠΝ
ΟΥΤΕ⁸⁴³

“Good God; Apa Thomas, Apa Peter, Apa Joseph, Apa Anoup, Apa Pamoun, have mind of Papnoute.”

In some cases, the date of death was also given after the deceased person’s name.⁸⁴⁴

⁸⁴¹ de Vries (2011: 203). This article focused on stelae of the first-fourth centuries. Most of the inscriptions at Umm al-Jimal were in Greek, but some of them were in Nabatean (204).

⁸⁴² Crum and Bell (1922: 58). See Smart (2018) for the possible purposes of their reuse. As the nature of their placement following their reuse is unknown, a definitive conclusion cannot be reached.

⁸⁴³ Crum and Bell (1922: 67). Translation by Crum and Bell.

⁸⁴⁴ For example, inscription 35. See Crum and Bell (1922: 63-64).

As the stelae were discovered in reuse, it is not possible to determine their original locations other than to identify them with the fragments from the cemetery. This removes them from their original context, which can only be partially reconstructed based on available evidence. However, the theme of commemoration is notable, indicating a common shared practice for inscriptions at Wadi Sarga.

6a.2.2 Collections

A further issue which removes stelae from their original location is their displacement by modern peoples, which may include looting but is most prevalent in the form of museum and private collections. Many inscribed and decorated stelae from Egypt in particular, some of which remain unstudied, are held in collections. Their dates and provenances are frequently unknown or uncertain.⁸⁴⁵ The lack of clear information about them is often due to the early recording habits of archaeologists which, similar to issues with human remains (Section 3.2) and grave goods (Section 5.1), could inaccurately record or completely fail to record findspots and other relevant details.

For example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art holds a collection of Egyptian funerary stelae dated or possibly dated to our period, labelled with “Attributed to Egypt”, “Probably from (a location in) Egypt”, or similar.⁸⁴⁶ This is also a result of the removal of stelae from their original findspots and illicit sale by dealers.

⁸⁴⁵ For example, see the appendix in Tudor (2011), where many of the provenances were uncertain or stelae had previously been assigned incorrect provenances. Tudor stated that the main criteria for establishing provenance and date relied on cases where tombstones have been found *in situ* that provide information on (among other elements) textual formulas, style, decoration, and grave goods.

⁸⁴⁶ For example, *Inscribed stele: 6th-7th century?* (n.d.), which is dated to the sixth-seventh century(?) and was purchased from the Government of Egypt in 1910; *Funerary stele with cross*

The result of either displacement or disappearance is that burials which may have featured a grave marker, possibly featuring an inscription and/or decoration, are often discovered without one. This helps to explain why Table 6a.1 shows a greater number of inscriptions associated with tombs such as sarcophagi and built tombs, where the inscription is made of a part of the tomb itself. We therefore cannot be certain how many burials were originally associated with a stela, inscription, or other type of grave marker. However, by using the examples that have been discovered *in situ*, or where provenance is known or highly likely to be correct, as well as collections of stelae, we are able to understand the significance of these inscriptions to the people who commissioned them, the importance of the commemoration to the dead, and the messages they were intended to convey.

6a.2.3 Language

The final issue which must be considered when studying early Byzantine funerary inscriptions is language. This is important because the overlooking of uncommon languages or those which scholars have not been trained in means that the groups who used those languages are excluded.

Greek is by far the most common language of the inscriptions detailed in the appendix. It is usually found as the sole language used, but in some cases can be found in combination with one or more other languages. 332 of the inscriptions from the appendix were either completely or partially written in Greek. The next most common language of inscriptions in the appendix is

medallion: 6th-7th century (n.d.), which was “Probably from Egypt, Hermonthis (now Armant)”, dated to the sixth-seventh centuries, and purchased from the Berlin State Museums in 1908. Other examples were purchased from private sellers.

Arabic, in 42 examples, most of which were seventh-century or later; the other languages are Coptic (35), Hebrew (22), Semitic (two), and Latin, Georgian, and Nabatean (one of each).

The fact that Greek is the most common language is not surprising. A general shift to Greek had already occurred by the fourth century, when Greek had replaced Latin as the most dominant language, and the use of Greek in inscriptions remained popular until at least the early seventh century.⁸⁴⁷

However, it is worth noting that Greek and Latin inscriptions have received more scholarly attention than other languages, scholars (often classicists) more likely to be trained in these languages. This has led to other languages being overlooked, and consequently, a significant minority of inscriptions – largely in languages other than Greek – remain unknown, untranslated, or both.

The choice of language used in an epitaph may represent distinctions between cultural, religious, or socio-economic groups, and thus the favouring of Greek may exclude some communities. A clear example of this is the distinction between Greek Christian inscriptions and Aramaic Jewish inscriptions at Zoora (Byzantine). The inscribed stelae from Zoora are an excellent case study because a clear distinction can be seen between the Christian and Jewish stelae in terms not only of language, but also in the expressions and symbols used by each community.

⁸⁴⁷ This was not necessarily the result of the Arab conquests. Epigraphic shifts were already occurring by the middle of the sixth century. See Di Segni (2017: 298-299).

The vast majority of the inscribed stelae at Zoora were in Greek (384) and, based on text and iconography, represented the Christian population.⁸⁴⁸

However, 71 inscriptions were in Aramaic, and the text and iconography of these stelae indicated that they instead marked Jewish graves (see Section 6b.3.1.2).⁸⁴⁹ However, these languages do not identify Christian and Jewish populations at other cemeteries; for example, a Jewish cemetery at Jaffa featured mainly Greek inscriptions of the third-fifth centuries, with some words written in Hebrew or Aramaic.⁸⁵⁰

It is possible that the difference between Zoora and Jaffa may have been that the Jewish population at Zoora were a minority within the cemetery, whereas the inscriptions found at Jaffa were from a cemetery mainly used by the Jewish community.⁸⁵¹ Meanwhile, the Jewish cemetery at Beth She'arim (first-fifth century) presents a much wider use of different languages. While Greek and Aramaic were the dominant languages used in inscriptions and graffiti at the site, other languages including Hebrew, Palmyrene, and Himyarite have been noted.⁸⁵² As Palmyrene and Himyarite inscriptions have not been identified at any other site in the appendix or elsewhere in the wider studies used in this chapter, it is probable that they, like Latin, were out of common use in the early Byzantine Near East.

⁸⁴⁸ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2008) also included one Greek inscription from Khirbat Qazone and 14 from Phaeno, both also in Palaestina Tertia.

⁸⁴⁹ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2016: 11). See Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005) and (2008) for the Greek inscriptions.

⁸⁵⁰ Price (2003: 217) for a stela in Greek featuring a menorah, (226) for a stela in Greek, with the final word in Hebrew, featuring a Jewish name and wishing *ἰρήνη τῷ Ἰσραήλ* ("peace on Israel"). The inscriptions presented by Price were dated between the third and fifth centuries, based on the style of the letters.

⁸⁵¹ Price (2003: 217).

⁸⁵² Longenecker (2000, 258).

A further example comes from Tomb 7 in the East Cemetery at Pella (sixth-seventh century), where a Greek inscription on its lintel stated that the deceased were *στρατιώταις* (“soldiers”) who came from *τοῦ ἀράβων ἔθνους* (“the Arab nation”).⁸⁵³ The selection of language was therefore not merely a way to identify someone’s beliefs or other elements of their identity: geographic location, locally spoken and written languages, the cemetery itself, and language trends all appear to have played a part in this decision. If local workshops only worked in Greek, then Greek was the language of choice for professional epitaphs by default.

Language trends have been given the most attention in Egypt. The favoured language of Christian stelae in Egypt in the fourth century was Greek, and Christian stelae in Greek have been found at sites such as Alexandria and the Faiyum with use until the ninth century.⁸⁵⁴ However, Coptic Christian examples began to emerge in the sixth-seventh centuries, and these lasted longer than the Greek stelae, until the 14th century.⁸⁵⁵

At present, it is not possible to say whether a similar language change may have occurred among the Jewish population of Palaestina, owing to the lack of accurate dating among the known inscriptions. The clear dominance of Greek over other languages indicates that it was either the preferred choice or the most available option during the early Byzantine period. What we can identify is a trend, in some locations, towards simpler inscriptions. For example, stelae of

⁸⁵³ Smith (1973: 188).

⁸⁵⁴ Tudor (2011: 221-222).

⁸⁵⁵ Tudor (2011: 222). Coptic examples from the Metropolitan Museum tend to start from the sixth and seventh centuries.

the fourth and fifth centuries at Palmyra (Figure 6a.1) often included short phrases, but by the sixth century they become shorter, typically featuring the name of the deceased person and/or a member of their family, along with the year of death.⁸⁵⁶ Later inscriptions also appeared to be less clearly structured, the carving of the letters less neat than earlier inscriptions, possibly indicating a change in artisan skills (but notice how the cross was carved more deeply and became the central element of focus in the second stela in Figure 6a.1, with the text surrounding it).

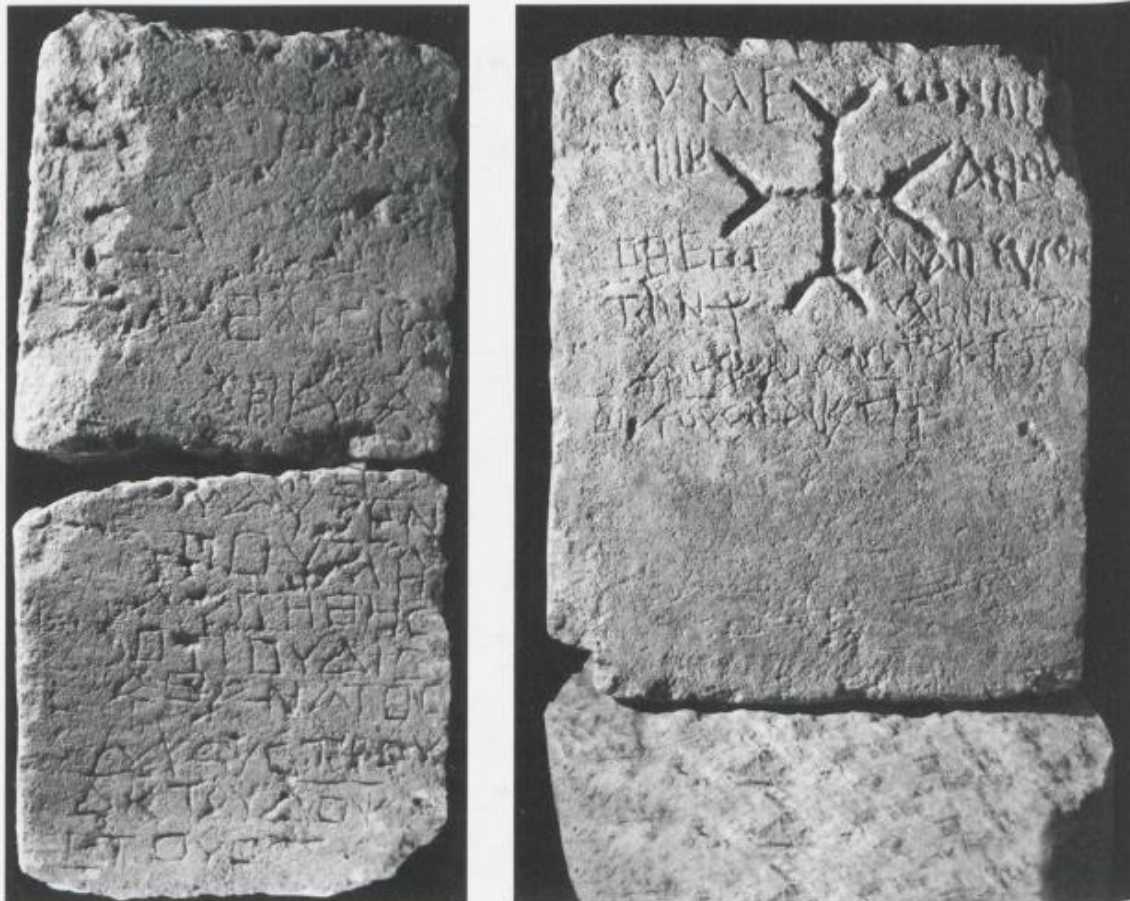


Figure 6a.1: Two gravestones from Palmyra. Gravestone of Kyra, dated to 463 (left). Gravestone of Simeon, dated to 535 (right). From Gawlikowski (1993: 152).

⁸⁵⁶ Gawlikowski (1993: 151). The family member is typically the father. Gawlikowski called the tombstones of the sixth century “äußerst banal” due to these changes.

6a.3 Information given in Funerary Inscriptions

Inscriptions were usually either carved, painted,⁸⁵⁷ or both techniques were used within a single decorative programme. For example, 142 painted epitaphs come from the cemetery of the Monastery of the Theotokos in Choziba (sixth-seventh century),⁸⁵⁸ and inscriptions at both Zoora (Byzantine) and Khirbet Qazone (Byzantine) were painted in red.⁸⁵⁹ Rarer are examples such as the inscriptions from Ashkelon's Newe Yam Dalet (sixth-seventh century), which were part of a mosaic (see Section 2.6.1).⁸⁶⁰

Most of the inscriptions provided basic information. Table 6a.2 shows that the most common piece of identifying information provided in these epitaphs is the name of the deceased person, followed by a description of the burial spot itself, and the occupation of the deceased person. Occupation is usually limited to either a role in the church or presumably wealthy positions. *Ιωάννης ἀρχιατρός* ("John the court physician") and *Χρυσοχὸς Αἰάνης* ("Aianes the goldsmith") from Luzit (fifth-seventh/eighth century)⁸⁶¹ were either wealthy enough or respected enough to be identified, while a significant number of inscriptions at Al-Bass in Tyre (first century BCE-seventh century) identified the deceased person's occupation, including *τραπεζίτη* ("banker") and *μεταξαρίου* ("silk merchant").⁸⁶²

⁸⁵⁷ Detail beyond the colour, such as chemical, is usually not available.

⁸⁵⁸ Meimaris (1992: 43-44).

⁸⁵⁹ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2008: 23).

⁸⁶⁰ Ustinova and Seriy (2018: 151-155).

⁸⁶¹ Di Segni (1990a: 315-316).

⁸⁶² For example, S 921: + Τόπος Πιστῶν· Μηνᾶ τραπεζίτη ("Tomb of the faithful. Menas, banker") and S 418: + Μνήμα διαφέρ(ον) Θεωδώτου μεταξαρίου + ("Memorial belonging to Theodotos, silk merchant"). Rey-Coquais (1977: Inscriptions 134 and 22 respectively).

Christian formulae (referencing for example, God, Christ, saints, or the bible) were also common.

It should be noted that a small number of epitaphs were in secondary use and may have been taken from other burial contexts; others were created before the fourth century but were left in the tomb during its continued use or reuse throughout the early Byzantine period. The importance of acknowledging this is that, where they were visible, the inscriptions would still have been a part of the funerary sphere that they occupied, and thus an element of how the burial was understood and experienced by people who used or visited it. In this sense, they were still significant aspects of the space in which funerals, burials, and memorials could have taken place.

The other information in Table 6a.2 appears less frequently on tomb inscriptions from this sample. The deceased person was described in various ways, the date of death was fairly common, and the family was sometimes mentioned. The name of the individual or family may relate to the ownership of the tomb, such as inscriptions on the catacombs at Beth She'arim (first-fifth century)⁸⁶³ and chamber tombs in Syria.⁸⁶⁴ However, tombs may also have been owned by institutions, as demonstrated by a now lost inscription from the south cemetery of Jerusalem. An image of the inscription does not survive but, assuming that the two parts were divided by a cross, it read: *Μνήμα διάφορον νοσοκομίου* ("Tomb belonging to the hospital") on one side, and *Φλαου[ία] Θυγάτ(ηρ) τοῦ πατρὸς Ἄγο(υ)σ(τ)ου* ("Flavia, daughter of father Augustus") on the other.⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶³ Weiss (1992: 358, 361).

⁸⁶⁴ Griesheimer (1997: 169).

⁸⁶⁵ Leclercq (1925: 2759).

The relationship between the hospital and Flavia is unclear, but the association of the two texts with the same tomb implies a connection.

Table 6a.2: Details of inscriptions from the appendix, most to least frequent information. The total number of burials with inscriptions is 398.

Information		Number of examples		Percentage of inscriptions	
Name of deceased person		225		56.5%	
Word(s) used to describe burial spot	Sarcophagus (Σορὸς) ⁸⁶⁶	99	42	25.0%	10.8%
	Tomb (Τόπος)		19		4.8%
	Memorial (Μνήμα)		18		4.5%
	Here lies (Ἐνθα κῆται/ Ὡδε κῆντε)		7		1.8%
	Grave (Θεσίδιον/ Ταφος)		5		1.3%
	Tomb (Θήκη)		5		1.3%
	Loculi (Μάκρια)		1		0.3%
	Tomb (Σήμα)		1		0.3%
	Tomb (unknown)		1		0.3%
Occupation of deceased person	Non-religious	83	56	20.9%	14.1%
	Deacon/subdeacon		9		2.3%
	Rabbi		9		2.3%
	Priest/priestess		8		2.0%
	Bishop		1		0.3%
Christian context	God	70	15	17.6%	3.8%
	Lord ((remember) your servant)		12		3.0%
	Jesus Christ		10		2.5%
	Unknown Christian		8		2.0%
	Alpha and omega		7		1.8%
	Biblical figures, saints		6		1.5%
	Mentions monastery or church		3		0.8%
	Biblical quote		3		0.8%
	Father, Son, Holy Spirit		2		0.5%
	Jesus Christ son of God Saviour		2		0.5%

⁸⁶⁶ Only found at Al-Bass in Tyre.

	Catechumen		2		0.5%
Word(s) used to describe deceased person	Of the faithful (Πιστῶν) ⁸⁶⁷	56	24	14.1%	6.0%
	Blessed (μακαρία)		12		3.0%
	Rests/resting		10		2.5%
	Pious		4		1.0%
	Buried here		1		0.3%
	Dead		1		0.3%
	Lying here		1		0.3%
	Sleeping		1		0.3%
	Unmarried		1		0.3%
	Virgin		1		0.3%
Date of death	Year	50	15	12.6%	3.8%
	Month		15		3.8%
	Day		12		3.0%
	Indiction year		7		1.8%
	Unknown elements		1		0.3%
Family of deceased person		48		12.1%	
Common expressions	Good cheer (Θάρσι)	43	15	10.8%	3.8%
	No one is immortal		14		3.5%
	Good fortune (Εὐμύρι)		6		1.5%
	Good cheer (Εὐψυχ)		4		1.0%
	Good luck (Εὐτυχῶς)		3		0.8%
	Good cheer (unknown)		1		0.3%
Place where deceased person lived, worked, or was from		38		9.6%	
Jewish context	Peace (<i>shalom</i>)	15	10	3.8%	2.5%
	Resurrection		2		0.5%
	Jewish		1		0.3%
	God		1		0.3%
	Lord, remember your servant		1		0.3%
Age at death		7		1.8%	
"Pagan" concepts or deities		6		1.5%	
Curse inscription		5		1.3%	

⁸⁶⁷ Only found at Al-Bass in Tyre.

Expression of mourning from parents of deceased child ⁸⁶⁸	4	1.0%
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The final categories in Table 6a.2 are other aspects of identity (age and origin) and other expressions. One expression is notable for its repeated use (“be of good cheer”), while others do not seem to have been used as widely (Section 6a.3.2). A small number of inscriptions within a Jewish context are identified, mainly from Beth She’arim. The age of death is interesting, but there are too few examples for a detailed study: the ages mentioned are nine-and-a-half, 17, either 18 or 38, 22 (three times), 24, 28, and 65.⁸⁶⁹ In most cases, the deceased person was either an older adolescent or a young adult.

I now discuss three main categories of words or phrases found in early Byzantine funerary inscriptions, including examples from the appendix. These are: opening formulae, common expressions, and religious identification.

6a.3.1 Opening Formulae

The simplest funerary inscriptions provided a name. Slightly more complicated versions gave the name and an opening word or words, creating an epitaph which could be expanded upon to include additional information on the deceased person, well-wishes, or expressions of death belief. These opening

⁸⁶⁸ An example comes from Al-Bass, Tomb 28 S 4086-4086, which contained two inscriptions in Greek dedicated to Chryses: *Πᾶσαν ὀμηλικίην παίδων ἀπεκαίνυτο Χρύσης Ζωὸς ἐὼν Μουσαῖς ἤδε περιφροσύνη· Νῦν δὲ πολύζηλον τοκέων ἄπο ἐλπίδ’ ἀμέρσας. Οἴχεται ἐκ βιότου δάκρυα πατρὶ λιπῶν* (“Chryses surpassed all the children of his generation. While he was alive, he applied himself to singing the Muses. And now, having removed from his parents their ambitious hope, he has left life, leaving tears to his father.”) and *Οἴχετε, εὐμαθίη, Χρύσης θάνεν, αἰ δὲ νυ Μουσαῖ Ἄχ νῦν τε κραδίην Οἶα τε φίλω ἐπὶ παιδί* (“It is done, his dedication to his studies. Chryses is dead, and therefore the Muses also leave. Ah! Now, poor heart, poor boy, how much loved.”). See Rey-Coquais (1977: Inscription 149).

⁸⁶⁹ There are two cases where two ages were mentioned in the same inscription: Abila Tomb L24 and Beth She’arim Catacomb 20.

formulae usually varied between a small number of words and depended upon location or common practice. I consider opening formulae in Greek, as well as the Aramaic stelae at Zoora (Byzantine).

The most common opening word used in the Greek stelae at Zoora was *μνημεῖον* (“memorial”, but also denoting that the monument marked the location of the tomb).⁸⁷⁰ The same word also began epitaphs on stelae from Oxyrhynchos (fourth-sixth century), Hermonthis (sixth-seventh century), and Latopolis (sixth-eighth century) in Egypt, as well as in Tyre and Beth She’arim in Phoenice and Palaestina respectively.⁸⁷¹ Other textual formulae which were frequently used to begin Greek inscriptions are *τόπος* or *θήκη* (both meaning “tomb”), *στηλη* (“stela”), *υπερ μνημης* (“for the memory”), *τάφος* (“grave”), and *ἐνθάδε κεῖται* (“here lies”).⁸⁷² The most common of these formulae in the appendix are *μνημεῖον* and *τόπος*. The former appears in Egypt, Palaestina, Phoenice, and Syria, while the latter is concentrated at the Al-Bass cemetery and Palaestina. At Tyre, the word *σορός* (“sarcophagus”) was used.⁸⁷³ It was unique to this site. The formulae are typically followed by the name of the deceased, but can appear on their own, for example the opening of a burial hall

⁸⁷⁰ The most common spelling was *μνημῖον*: Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005: 24). See page 91 for the dual meaning of the word.

⁸⁷¹ Tudor (2011: 247-248). For Tyre, see Rey-Coquais (1977). For Beth She’arim, see Schwabe and Lifshitz (1974).

⁸⁷² See Tudor (2011: 246-249) and Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005: 24, 29-31). These formulae were all used before the fourth century and originated from Classical expressions. The formula *ἐνθάδε κεῖται* eventually became more popular than *μνημῖον* at Zoora. It is also found on stelae at Umm al-Jimal: de Vries (2011: 206, 208). These opening words are typically followed by *του/της* (“of”) and the name of the deceased.

⁸⁷³ Frequently found beginning the inscriptions in Rey-Coquais (1977).

at Khan el-Ahmar (fifth-seventh century) was marked with a monogram of the word *τάφος*.⁸⁷⁴

Similar formulae occur in other languages, with slightly different meanings. Most of the Aramaic tombstones at Zoora begin with *hdh npšh* (“this is the tombstone”), but *ttnyh npšh* (“rested be the soul”) became more popular in later inscriptions; other variations on these were found in small numbers.⁸⁷⁵ Similar to *μνημῖον*, *npšh* referred to the stela itself, but also indicated that this memorial marked the burial location.⁸⁷⁶

The simplicity of these opening formulae allowed them to be adapted and used to express greater information on the deceased person or the ideology of the person who commissioned the inscription. For example, Figure 6a.2 is an inscription from Tomb 46 at Oxyrhynchos (Byzantine), which begins with *μνημῖον* then identifies the deceased person in more detail:



Figure 6a.2: Inscription from Tomb 46 at Oxyrhynchos. From Petrie (1925: Pl. XLVII).

“Memorial of Theodoros servant of God, son of Demetrios of Kynopolis, unmarried, (who died on the) sixth of the indiction, Pachon 17 (aged) 22. Be of good cheer.”

⁸⁷⁴ Another burial covering at the site merely featured the name *Πετρος*. Hirschfeld (1993: 370).

⁸⁷⁵ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2016: 95-101).

⁸⁷⁶ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2016: 24).

6a.3.2 Common Expressions

Common expressions or formulae imply the existence of workshops at the local level, where inscriptions followed a standard formula that could be personalised according to the wishes of the patron (for example, with the addition of a name). These personalised stelae may have been purchased before death, with additional information added to them once the person had died. Those that were selected after death may have come from pre-made models from these workshops, on which names and other desired details could be added.⁸⁷⁷

The most common expression in the appendix is “be of good cheer”.

Expressions of “good fortune” and “good luck” are less common (Table 6a.2), with six of the nine examples coming from Beth She’arim (first-fifth century).⁸⁷⁸

A common form of the “be of good cheer” expression is *Θάρσι ούδις άθάνατος* (“be of good cheer, no one is immortal”). It is an ancient formula, for example popular among the first-fourth century stelae at Umm el-Jimal.⁸⁷⁹

“Be of good cheer” could be adapted by people of various cultures and beliefs, in the same way that opening formulae (Section 6a.3.1) could be followed by the name of the deceased person or other desired information. Christian

⁸⁷⁷ Tudor (2011: 225). In the fourth century, Gregory of Nazianzus described a tombstone that was laid for an elderly couple before their death, showing that purchasing and creating a tombstone before death was certainly an option for some. Unfortunately, their son died before them, and thus the tomb became his: *Ωριοι εις τάφον ήμεν, ότ' ένθάδε τουτον έθηκαν λααν έφ' ήμετέρω γήραϊ λαστόμοι· άλλ' ήμϊν μέν έθηκαν, έχει δε μιν ού κατὰ κόσμον Καισάριος, τεκέων ήμετέρων πύματος. έτλημεν πανάποτμα, τέκος, τέκος· αλλά τάχιστα δέξαι ές ήμέτερον τύμβον έπειγομένους.* (“We were ripe for the tomb, when the stone-cutters placed this stone here for our old age. But they laid it for us, and Caesarius himself, the last of our children, occupies it instead. We have suffered ill fortune, child, child; but as soon as you were received in the tomb we hasten (to join you).”) Beckby (1965: epigram 87). Epigrams 87-90 were on the woe of Caesarius’ parents.

⁸⁷⁸ For example, *Εύμύρι* (“good fortune”) was written multiple times in Catacomb 1 Hall A. See Schwabe and Lifshitz (1974: 2-5).

⁸⁷⁹ de Vries (2011: 208-209, 212). Most stelae from Umm al-Jimal were found in secondary use as spolia, although two chamber tombs still featured *in situ* stelae near their entrances (203).

versions of “be of good cheer”, often accompanied by a name and/or cross, were common in Palaestina and Arabia.⁸⁸⁰ There were also Jewish versions, again with evidence coming from Beth She’arim.⁸⁸¹

A smaller number of examples of this phrase are known from Phoenice, Syria⁸⁸² and Egypt, indicating that the expression was less common in these areas. For example, a stela dated to 463 at Palmyra bids the deceased person, Kyra daughter of Mauxentions, *θαρσι* and reminds her of her own mortality, *ουδις αθανατος* (Figure 6a.1).⁸⁸³ However, the Christian inscription from Tomb 46 at Oxyrhynchos (6th century?) bids the deceased person, Theodoros, *εΰψυχ* (“be of good cheer”) (Figure 6a.2),⁸⁸⁴ a formula much more common in Egypt which is sometimes associated with *ουδις αθανατος*.⁸⁸⁵ *Εΰψυχ* has also been found on Egyptian mummy labels and wrappings, which could be inscribed with funerary messages.⁸⁸⁶ Examples of *εΰψυχ* from Phoenice and Syria are more frequent than *θαρσι* (although the latter is found in six cases at Tyre), while Palaestina and Arabia each feature very few examples of *εΰψυχ*.

⁸⁸⁰ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005: 27); Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2008: 55-124). A search for “*θαρσι*” or “*ουδις αθανατος*” in *Searchable Greek inscriptions* (2020) provides additional examples.

⁸⁸¹ For example, *Θαρσι* (“good cheer”) was written multiple times in Catacomb 3 Hall E. See Schwabe and Lifshitz (1974: 62-65).

⁸⁸² *Searchable Greek inscriptions* (2020) provides a small number of examples containing either “*θαρσι*” or “*ουδις αθανατος*” from Syria/Phoenice and Egypt.

⁸⁸³ Gawlikowski (1993: 151).

⁸⁸⁴ Petrie (1925: 18). The potential sixth century date is from a reading of the inscription, in which the numeral 800 may be understood instead of an age of 22 for Theodoros.

⁸⁸⁵ Examples can again be found in *Searchable Greek inscriptions* (2020). Among some examples are several Byzantine-period inscriptions from Bardawil, on the north coast of Sinai, which included the phrase *ουδις αθανατος* and sometimes featured Christian motifs (the cross and/or chi rho).

⁸⁸⁶ Luijendijk (2012: 403). For example, a linen held in a collection of the University of Amsterdam featured the word *εΰψύχει* (“be of good cheer”).

This phrase has sometimes been interpreted as a representation of 'simple' or 'folk' beliefs. For example, de Vries claimed that "unsophisticated, rural people like those at Umm el-Jimal probably had no theology of death beyond these sayings; even those who did ... still used such traditional expressions for the consoling comfort they had given since time immemorial".⁸⁸⁷ However, as discussed in Chapter 1, Christian death belief was developed through exposure to and experience of the liturgy and other services which likely granted widespread general knowledge of theology; to believe that people were unable to understand complex ideas about death and the afterlife (regardless of their faith) is to present them as ignorant. In fact, through their deliberate choices to include certain phrases, iconography, and other components in burials, these people demonstrated the careful selection of specific ways to express their death beliefs.

Privileged burial spaces were not devoid of simple, formulaic types of inscriptions, especially where large numbers of inscriptions were produced. Although privileged spaces also contained complex inscriptions, these were the exception, usually reserved for one special person or tomb. For example, at the monastic site at Naqlun, stelae mainly dated to the sixth-seventh centuries followed the same formula, executed in very similar styles, suggesting either that the monastery used a certain formula for all burials, thus removing any

⁸⁸⁷ de Vries (2011: 212). de Vries interpreted this phrase as representative of folk beliefs rather than having a religious connotation, and it is certainly the case that the phrase was used by different religious groups (210-212). However, to think that this means the people of Umm al-Jimal did not have complex thoughts about death, burial, and the afterlife is to ignore the multiple groups who could adopt this phrase and apply it to their own beliefs, and that it could mean different things to different people. It is not merely a 'simple' phrase of 'unsophisticated' people; instead, it is a versatile phrase that welcomed its adoption by groups with ideologies of varying complexities.

sense of social status from the burials, or that they had all been produced from a workshop following a single formula.⁸⁸⁸ The formula read: + *Κυριε αναπαυσον την ψυχην του δουλου σου* [name] *εκοιμηθησαν εν ειρηνη/Κυριω* [date] + (“+ Lord, give rest to the soul of this Your servant [name], who fell asleep in peace/the Lord [date] +”).⁸⁸⁹

6a.3.3. Religion

Religious beliefs, and thus death beliefs, could be expressed by direct references to belief systems, ranks, figures, biblical quotes, and invocations. Table 6a.1 shows that 17.6% of inscriptions in the appendix featured blatant Christian messages. However, symbols were probably a simpler and more popular, way to express religious belief (Section 6b.3.1).

In some cases, an inscription, symbol, or both, was added to older tombs which were in secondary use by Christians, or in cases where the users had converted to Christianity.⁸⁹⁰ An example is the Christian reuse of the older Roman tombs at Alexandria (second/first century BCE-Byzantine). Two example inscriptions from the tombs in Alexandria are: *Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτήρ* (“Jesus Christ Son of God Saviour”), in a tomb also decorated with a painted cross and symbols of the eucharist (fish and bread), and *θεὸς βοηθεῖ* (“God aids”), in a hypogeum.⁸⁹¹

⁸⁸⁸ Godlewski and Łatjar (2006: 45-46).

⁸⁸⁹ For examples, see Lefebvre, IGChrEg 76, 81, 85 in *Searchable Greek Inscriptions* (2020).

⁸⁹⁰ The addition of Christian inscriptions or symbols is unlikely to have been immediate in these cases, as older inscriptions and images may have sufficed for the users of the tomb. There is no reason to believe that Christian symbols were added in every case of conversion, yet they are sometimes the only indicator that the tomb continued to be used after large-scale conversion of the population. This is the case, for example, in the tombs at Alexandria in Venit (2002).

⁸⁹¹ Venit (2002: 183).

The more complicated and unique inscriptions in this dataset tend to come from church and monastic contexts, where ideas surrounding death and the fate of the soul were given more expression.⁸⁹² As these were new social venues that provided visibility in death (Section 2.6), they offered an opportunity to express wealth or social status, but were also connected to concepts of memory and salvation, because the deceased person would be remembered and gain a spiritual benefit whenever the inscription was read (Section 1.2.2.1). These inscriptions will often reference figures who were important to the church or monastery and the promise of resurrection. For example, an inscription above an underground burial cave (sixth century or later) at the Monastery of Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim⁸⁹³ included the names of some of the priests who were buried there, in the hopes that they would not be forgotten on Judgement Day:

*Μνή[σθητι Κ(ύρι)ε ἐν] τῇ βασιλείᾳ σου
Ἐλ[πιδίου Ἰωάννου Γεωργίου
τῶ[ν πρεσβ(υτέρων) καὶ τ]ῶν λοιπῶν πρ(εσβυτέρ)ων
τῶ[ν ἐνθαῦ]τα κειμένων
ᾧ[ν γινώσκεις τὰ ὀνόματα].⁸⁹⁴*

“Lord, remember in your Kingdom the priests Elpidus, John, George, and the other priests resting here, whose names you know.”

Another monastery in the Judean desert, Khirbat ed-Deir, featured a similar inscription on the mosaic floor of a chapel connected to a burial cave (fifth-seventh century):

⁸⁹² Exceptions to this exist, such as some long inscriptions from Wadi Sarga that invoke figures including the Father, Son, Holy Ghost, archangels, and saints. See the stelae in Crum and Bell (1922: 59-84).

⁸⁹³ Magen and Talgam (1990: 99).

⁸⁹⁴ Di Segni (1990b: 157).

*Ἅγιοι πρεσβύτεροι) πρεσβε(ύετε) τὴν
εἰρήνην τῷ τόπῳ τοῦ-
τω κ(αι) τ(αῖς) ψυχαῖς ἡμῶν.⁸⁹⁵*

“Holy priests (fathers), intercede for peace for this place and our souls.”

A second inscription at the same site, a free rendering of Corinthians 15:52-53, is associated with a burial recess in the church (sixth century). Considering its location, the tomb may have belonged to the founder,⁸⁹⁶ and the individuality of the inscription supports the argument that it was associated with an elite figure.

*Δεῖ τὸ φθαρτὸν
τοῦτο ἐνδύσασ-
θαι ἀφθαρσίαν
καὶ τὸ θνητὸν
τοῦτο ἐνδύσασ-
θαι ἀθανασίαν.
σαλπίζει γὰρ
καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ
ἀναστήσονται.⁸⁹⁷*

“The corruptible must put on incorruption, and the mortal must put on immortality. For the trumpet call (will sound), and the dead will be raised.”

The reference to this passage was intended to remind the reader (or visitor to the grave) of the Day of Judgement and their other death beliefs in a more explicit way than the epitaphs encountered outside of church and/or monastic contexts, yet it still fits within the understanding of a regular observer who may have picked up much of their death theology from the liturgy. The salvation of

⁸⁹⁵ Di Segni (1999: 101).

⁸⁹⁶ Hirschfeld (1999: 53).

⁸⁹⁷ Di Segni (1999: 100).

the soul was expressed in a different way by elite communities when compared to laypeople, usually being completely focused on the Christian belief without heavy reliance on more traditional expressions of mourning, but this does not mean that laypeople could not understand them. These inscriptions were often more unique than their lay counterparts, in part because wealthy individuals and institutions were more likely to be able to afford them, but also because of the greater emphasis placed upon Christian beliefs within these institutions.

6a.4 Rare and Less-Studied Inscriptions: Curses and Graffiti

While the simplest explanation for funerary inscriptions is to commemorate the dead and identify the burial space, there are other possible reasons for their association with tombs. Here, I discuss two of the more unique possible motivators for the inclusion of funerary inscriptions from examples in the appendix: firstly, curse inscriptions, and secondly, graffiti.

6a.4.1 Curse Inscriptions

Curse inscriptions were one method used to protect the tomb from looters or other forms of desecration (Section 2.4). They are known to have been used in Palaestina from around the 11th century BCE to the fourth century, at which time they appear to have largely fallen out of use.

Curse inscriptions were associated with polytheists, Jewish people, and Christians alike.⁸⁹⁸ Some examples dated to the third and fourth centuries in Greek and Aramaic were discovered in tombs at Beth She'arim.⁸⁹⁹ There is only one example of a curse inscription which dated to after the fourth century in the

⁸⁹⁸ Hachlili (2007: 243).

⁸⁹⁹ Hachlili (2007: 251-252).

appendix, and this too is from Palaestina. It is, like Beth She'arim, an elite example, indicating that curse inscriptions may only have been used in certain elite circles.

The inscription was found within the tomb chapel at the Monastery of Scythopolis (sixth-seventh century). Three inscriptions were associated with the chapel, and their length and the associated iconography attest to the wealth of the monastery. One, outside the door of the chapel, identifies it as the tomb of Mary, the monastery's founder.⁹⁰⁰ The other two inscriptions are on floor slabs, covering the two graves beneath the chapel floor.⁹⁰¹ One of these bears the curse, which reads:

+ ὅπου ἐστὶν τὸ στεφαν(ο)σταυρί(ο)ν
 ἐκ(ε)ῖ κείτ(αι) τὸ πελλαικὸν τοῦ
 στόματος τοῦ μνημ(ε)ίου
 ἔκον κρικ<ε>ία. Ἐνθα κατέθ(η)κα
 τὴν φιλόχ(ριστό)ν μου ἀδελφὴν
 Γεωργίαν ἐγὼ Ἥλ(ε)ίας ἐλάχιστ[ος]
 ἐλέει Θεοῦ ἐ(γ)κλ(ει)στός· ἀν(ε)πά-
 (η) δὲ μην(ι), Μαιω
 τετάρτη, Ἰνδικτι(ῶ)νος
 πεντε[καιδ]εκάτης,
 ἡμέρα δὲ ἦν [τῆς Μ]εσ(ο)-
 πεντηκοστῆς.⁹⁰²

⁹⁰⁰ Fitzgerald (1939: 14). Χ(ριστ)ὲ ὁ Θε(ο)ς Σωτῆρ τοῦ κόσμου, ἐλέησον τὴν φιλόχ(ριστο)ν κυρ(ι)αν Μαρίαν κ(αι) τὸν ταύτης υἱὸν Μάξι(ι)μον, κ(αι) ἀναπαῦσον τοὺς αὐτῶν γ(ο)νεῖς, εὐχαῖς πάντων τῶν Ἁγίων. Ἀμ(ή)ν. "O Christ, God, Saviour of the world, have mercy on the Christ-loving Lady Mary and her son Maximus, and (give) rest to their forefathers, (through the) prayers of all the Saints. Amen."

⁹⁰¹ Fitzgerald (1939: 14-15).

⁹⁰² Fitzgerald (1939: 15). Fitzgerald was unsure how to translate πελλαικὸν; I translate it as "stone", with the implication of "tombstone", as it appears on the inscriptions above both of the tombs in the chapel. According to the epitaph, the burial space and tombstone were selected before Mary's death. The other inscription read: +ὅπου ἐστὶν τὸ στεφαν(ο)σταυρί(ο)ν ἐκ(ε)ῖ κείτ(αι) τὸ πελλαικὸν τοῦ στόματος τοῦ μνημ(ε)ίου ἔκον κρικ<ε>ία. Ἐνθα κατέθ(η)κα τὴν

“+ This is the wreath-cross, here lies the stone mouth of the tomb, having rings; and the one who wishes to lift up the wreath-cross discovers the stone and buries (the dead) here. If the Lady Mary, being the founder of this church, wishes to be buried in this tomb, or (if) someone from her family (wishes to be buried here) at any time, I, Elias, by the mercy of God a hermit, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, curse and condemn anyone who prevents her or them, or who lifts up this inscription of mine.”

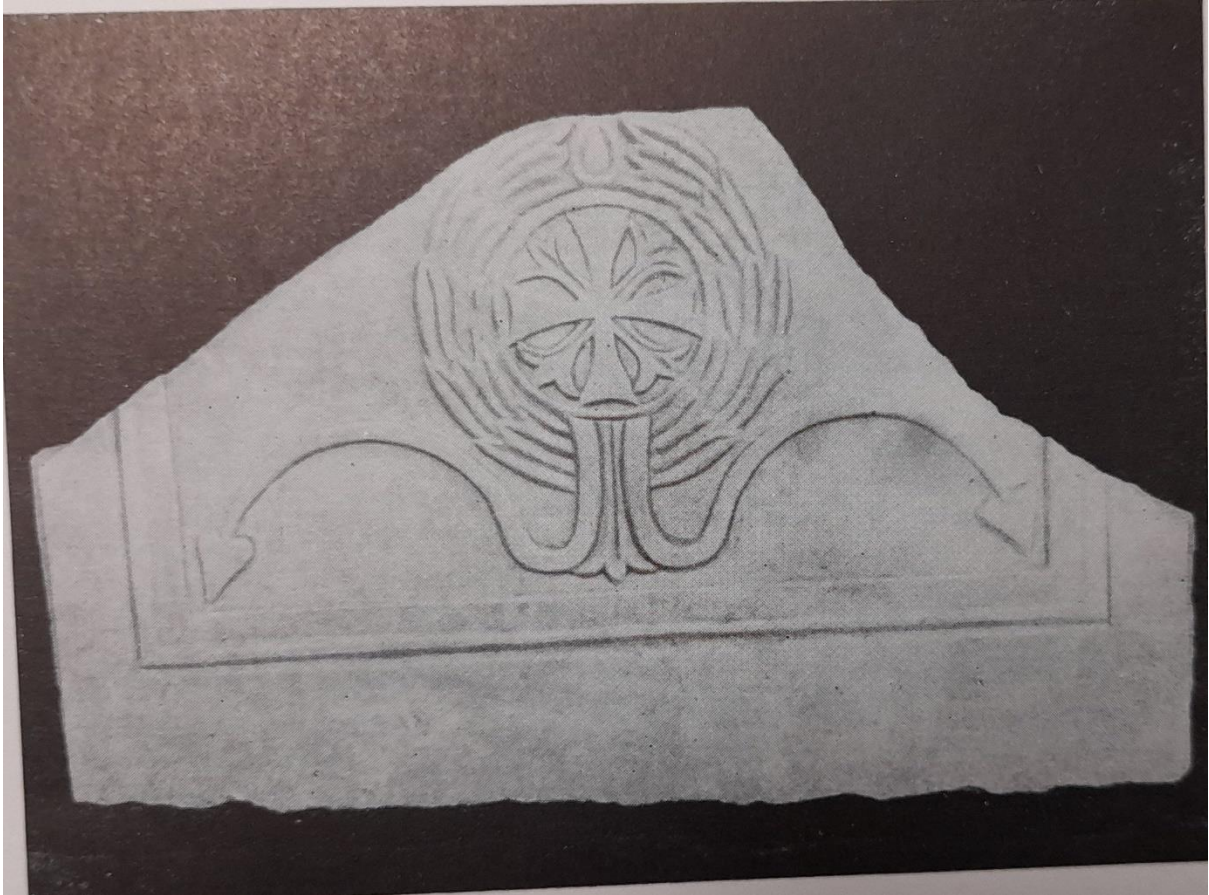


Figure 6a.3: Slab with the wreath cross from the monastery at Scythopolis. From Fitzgerald (1939: Plate III).

A marble slab featuring a carved cross within a wreath was discovered during excavations (Figure 6a.3); presumably, either this or a similar slab originally occupied the empty space beneath the inscription. This is the wreath-cross (with rings) which is referred to in the inscription. The tombstone not only curses

φιλόχ(ριστό)ν μου ἀδελφὴν Γεωργίαν ἐγὼ Ἥλ(ε)ίας ἐλάχιστ[ος] ἐλέει Θε(ο)ῦ ἐ(γ)κλ(ει)στός·
 ἀν(ε)πά(η) δὲ μην(ι), Μαιῶ τετάρτῃ, Ἰνδικτι(ῶ)νος πεντε[και]δεκάτης, ἡμέρα δὲ ἦν [τῆς
 Μ]εσο(ο)πεντηκοστῆς “+This is the wreath-cross, here lies the stone mouth of the tomb, having
 rings. There I, Elias, a lowly recluse by the mercy of God, have laid down my Christ-loving
 sister, Georgia. She died on the fourth (day) of the month of May in the fifteenth indiction, and it
 was the day of the Meso-Pentecost.”.

anyone who disturbs the tomb by lifting the inscription, but also anyone who tries to prevent the founder and her family from being buried there.

The curse is unique among our examples. We can compare it to an inscription at Al-Bass, once again an elite context:

Ἐνθάδε κεῖται Δρόμων οἰκ[ε]ῖος Ἀρελλίου Κάρου τοῦ κρατίστης μνήμης ἐπιτροπεύσαντος τῆς Φοινίκης. Ὅς ἂν τις τολμῇ ἐναντ[ί]ον(?) τὴν σορὸν μάλιστα --- ΣΑΙ ἐκ τῶν νόμων κεκώλυται οὐδὲν δὲ ἦπτον εἴσοισι τῷ ἱερωτάτῳ ταμίῳ (δηνάρια) μυρία.⁹⁰³

“Here lies Dromon, servant of Arellius Carus, of distinguished memory, who was procurator of Phoenice. Whoever dares to do something hostile(?) to this sarcophagus, finds himself prevented by virtue of law(?) and will not pay less than 10,000 dinars to the imperial treasury”.

The date of the Al-Bass inscription is unclear, but it bore a similar message to the curse inscription with a different, in this case material, consequence. The curse and the fine functioned as a way of restricting access to the tomb and/or defining those who had the right to use it. Similar examples of both curses and fines, dated to before the fourth century, have been identified in burial spaces throughout the Near East, and connected to aspects of ownership, keeping the tomb within the family, and protecting the bodies of the dead.⁹⁰⁴ While these inscriptions were infrequent following the fourth century, this does not mean that these concepts were no longer important. The inscription on Tomb 190 at El-Bagawat (second-seventh century) related to the purchase of a tomb and the witness of the purchase, which could have provided a sense of protection:

*ἀναλώμα(τα) τὸ μνημῖον τοῦτο μ', γί(νεται) ἀρταβασ τεσσαρακοντα τῖς ὁ μαρτυς;
Ἄσκη...* (“The cost of this memorial (is) 40 art, total, forty artabs. Who is the

⁹⁰³ Rey-Coquais (1977: Inscription 100).

⁹⁰⁴ For example, De Jong (2017r: 143-144) discussed some examples from Phoenice and Syria.

witness? Ascr ...”).⁹⁰⁵ Names, occupations, family members, and other details may have also served similar purposes of ownership.

6a.4.2 Graffiti

Professional epitaphs, even in their simplest forms, were likely not available to everyone or in every situation, for example due to expense or death during travel. However, non-professional forms of funerary inscription, memorial, or other element of death belief could be added to funerary places in the form of graffiti, as either an alternative or addition to professional inscriptions. The graffiti could be carved during a funeral service, or on a later visit to the tomb, by mourners, pilgrims, or other visitors.⁹⁰⁶

There are two cemeteries in the appendix where large amounts of graffiti have been identified and studied to some extent. The first of these is Beth She’arim (first-fifth century), where graffiti in Greek and Aramaic has been found in some of the highest known concentrations related to a Jewish funerary site in the Mediterranean.⁹⁰⁷ The graffiti appears to have been added in carefully selected locations: concentrated around the entrances to caves, catacombs, and the doors of inner burial rooms. The epitaphs often addressed the dead, but some

⁹⁰⁵ Evelyn-White (n.d.b).

⁹⁰⁶ For a non-funerary example, Tomb Chapel 20 at el-Bagawat contained a collection of Coptic graffiti carved by Panare and Psate, who recorded that they hid in the tomb for a day after intervening in a robbery. Cruz-Uribe et al. (2004: 42, 46). One example read: ΔΝΟΚ ΠΑΝΑΡΕ ΜΝ ΥΑΤΕ ΤΑΝ ΘΑΛΕΙ ΕΞΟΥΝ Ε Π?ΜΑ ΕΝΠΗΤ ΕΤΒΕ ΔΠΟΡΡΕ ΧΕ Ψ†ΩΚΕ ΝCΟΝ ΕΤΒΕ ΠΑΛΑCΡΑΚ ΝΝ ΤΙΜΕ ΧΕ ΤΑΝΤΕΣΔΨ ΕΨΧΙΟΥΕ ΔΠΘΟΜ ΔΝ† ΕΠΟΨ ΔΝΠΟΤ ΔΝΡΟΥΞΟΟΥΞΜ ΠΙ<Δ>ΜΔ. “I, Panare, together with Psate: We visited this(?) place, fleeing on account of Aporre, since he is pursuing us on account of this hostility of (in) the towns(?), since we caught him stealing from the garden. We beat him and we fled. We spent a day in this place.” Translation by Cruz-Uribe et al.

⁹⁰⁷ Stern (2017: 101-102). Stern dated the cemetery to the second-sixth centuries, unlike the original excavations which claimed that the cemetery was used between the first/second and fourth centuries.

seem to have targeted the living.⁹⁰⁸ Examples from Catacomb 20 include the phrases *εὐτυχῶς τῇ ὑμῶν ἀναστάσις* (“good luck on your resurrection”) and *θάρασιτε πατέρες ὅσοι οὐδὲς ἀθάνατος* (“be of good cheer, pious parents, no one is immortal”). Similar beliefs were conveyed in other epitaphs at the site.⁹⁰⁹ The locations and the contents of the graffiti were therefore very similar to the locations and contents of funerary inscriptions found elsewhere, in visible locations where they conveyed similar messages of hope, mourning, and death belief. Such formulaic messages would have been expected in a funerary context, given their appearance in both professional inscriptions and graffiti.

The graffiti was not limited to inscriptions, but also included images of animals, birds, people, and objects related to funerary contexts (Section 6b.2).⁹¹⁰ These images are discussed in Chapter 6b. The act of carving graffiti, in the form of either epitaphs or images, on tombs may have been a function of mourning that identified the dead, or a form of religious and/or cultural identification.⁹¹¹

The other cemetery where significant amounts of graffiti have been found is el-Bagawat (second-seventh century). Greek, Coptic, and Arabic graffiti have been discovered in tombs at the site.⁹¹² So far, only a small number of these (all Coptic) have been studied. The Coptic graffiti from three tomb chapels (20, 25, and 80) was examined in a preliminary study, but publication of the graffiti has

⁹⁰⁸ Stern (2017: 102). The more elaborate graffiti would likely have taken longer to carve than was permitted during the burial and funeral service, and so would have been carved on a later visit to the cemetery (106).

⁹⁰⁹ Stern (2017: 102).

⁹¹⁰ Stern (2017: 103).

⁹¹¹ Stern (2017: 105-106).

⁹¹² Lythgoe (1908b: 207).

been limited.⁹¹³ Tomb Chapels 25 and 80 both contained painted decoration featuring Christian figures and Coptic graffiti identifying the name of a visitor, including some detail of pilgrim journeys in Tomb Chapel 80. The most frequent inscriptions said *ANOK* (“I am”), followed by the name of the visitor.⁹¹⁴

The personalised graffiti at el-Bagawat is very different from the anonymous graffiti at Beth She’arim. At Beth She’arim, either the living or the dead were general recipients of the message. Meanwhile, at el-Bagawat, graffiti seems to have been a way for a living person to be remembered and/or protected by God or the revered person(s). This kind of relationship between the living and the dead has also been identified in graffiti in funerary locations in Rome, where it has been analysed in greater detail. For example, the connection between the living and the ordinary dead has been noted in graffiti of third-fifth centuries, while a connection between living people and the revered dead seems to have developed a little later.⁹¹⁵ It is not possible to tell whether a similar trend may have occurred in Egypt, due to the lack of published graffiti available for study, but the examples at el-Bagawat indicate that a connection between ordinary and venerated individuals was established.

6b.1 Introduction: Iconography

Part b follows the discussion in part a by introducing the visual vocabulary of death in the early Byzantine Near East. The decoration of tombs and stelae in this thesis covers a variety of images and motifs. These include explicit religious

⁹¹³ Cruz-Urbe et al. (2004: 41).

⁹¹⁴ Cruz-Urbe et al. (2004: 41-42, 45). For the graffiti in Tomb Chapel 20, see footnote 75.

⁹¹⁵ Felle (2021: 72-73).

symbols, such as the cross and the menorah, but also more versatile imagery, such as symbols used in traditional funerary contexts which could be adapted to suit different faiths or different cultures.⁹¹⁶

Christian tomb decoration has typically received less attention in the Near East than in other locations, such as Rome, where forms of Christian funerary decoration began in the second and third centuries. Some examples from this study have been compared to their Roman counterparts and have in the past been criticised, for example, as “crude and provincial”.⁹¹⁷ Similar arguments have criticised the abilities of the artisans of our period, with Christians supposedly borrowing from classical motifs without creating their own distinct style, while the ability of the artisans simultaneously decreased.⁹¹⁸ The connection between the treatment of iconography and the treatment of certain elements of funerary inscriptions, in particular graffiti and less common languages, is clear: the material has been overlooked and overshadowed by the study of elements that researchers have considered more important.

Section 6b.2 discusses the frequency of motifs in the appendix. Section 6b.3 follows with the interpretation of imagery in the context of death and burial.

Examples usually come from chamber tombs or elaborate individual burials in

⁹¹⁶ This is similar to the use of imagery and cultural identity in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, where certain styles were not exclusive to certain cultures. Egyptian iconography and style could be used by those who were not ‘Egyptian’; Greek iconography and style by those who were not ‘Greek’; Roman iconography and style by those who were not ‘Roman’, and furthermore, an individual could belong to one or more of these identities. See Boozer (2019: 362-363, 373).

⁹¹⁷ Beckwith (1970: 8-9) for Rome, (31) for Egypt. Compare the discussion of the selection of subjects from the Old and New Testaments, as well as classical motifs, depicted in the Roman catacombs to the scenes from one tomb at el-Bagawat, which were “chosen rather casually and sited at random in a tangle of vine-scrolls [and] ... thrown in”.

⁹¹⁸ Beckwith (1970: 10).

sarcophagi, although examples from stelae and simpler burial styles are attested. Iconography is typically designed to be seen, either from the outside of the tomb or by visitors to the tomb, although there are examples where the imagery would not have been seen following the sealing of the tomb (or even before, at the funeral – see Section 6b.4.2). Finally, Section 6b.4 presents a set of case studies focused on inscription and iconography. These provide additional understanding of burials by examining them using the information that has been discussed throughout this thesis (Chapters 1-5) and combining this with the discussion and data from Chapter 6.

6b.2 Data

While the number of decorated tombs is small, it is greater than the number associated with a funerary inscription. Therefore, I use the data from the appendix to lead this discussion.

Table 6b.1: Decoration according to burial type, from the appendix. The total number of burials with decoration in the appendix is 552.

Burial Type	Number with decoration	Percentage of decorated burials
Built tomb	230	41.7%
Hypogeum	102	18.5%
Rock-cut tomb	84	15.2%
Sarcophagus	66	12.0%
Pit grave	29	5.3%
Cist grave	13	2.4%
Shaft grave	13	2.4%
Unknown burial type	7	1.3%
Funerary enclosure	4	0.7%
Arcosolium	3	0.5%
Coffin	2	0.4%
Natural cave	1	0.2%
Niche	1	0.2%

Many of the decorated tombs in the appendix feature simple designs such as crosses. Decoration is concentrated in large, elaborate group tombs and sarcophagi (Table 6b.1). In some cases, decoration may have been removed and/or destroyed, by either natural or manmade agents. An example is the cemetery at Jerusalem's YMCA site (fifth-eighth century), where fragments of marble and other stone were discovered, including a relief featuring a human left arm;⁹¹⁹ due to a lack of evidence, the original image cannot be recovered. We must also consider the unknown numbers of dug graves, such as pits and cists, which may have originally had stelae (Section 6a.2.1), such as those at Phaeno (fourth-seventh century).

Of the 552 burials with decoration in the appendix, the cross is the dominant symbol (Table 6b.2). All other Christian symbols each appear in 1% or fewer cases. In total, 238 (43.1%) of decorated burials in the appendix feature explicitly Christian symbols in Christian contexts. This agrees with data from studies of early Byzantine stelae, where Christian symbols typically dominate over other symbols, including the symbols of other religions.⁹²⁰ It is important to distinguish Christian symbols found in Christian contexts, because Table 6b.3 identifies images and symbols found in Jewish contexts as a separate category, some of which overlap with images found in Christian contexts.⁹²¹ I have given images in a Jewish context a separate table to show similarities and differences

⁹¹⁹ Tchekhanovets (2017: 220).

⁹²⁰ For example, the research at Zoora by Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005, 2008).

⁹²¹ The Jewish contexts are 72 tombs featuring decoration from Beth She'arim, two tombs from Eleutheropolis and one from Tefen.

between the Jewish and Christian contexts, and especially to show iconography which is solely found within Jewish contexts.

Table 6b.2: Tomb decoration from the appendix. The total number of tombs with decoration is 552. Tombs may contain more than one type of symbol, meaning figures may not add up to 100%.

Symbol/image depicted	Number of examples	Percentage of decorated burials
Cross ⁹²²	201	36.4%
Decorated façade	185	33.5%
Floral decoration	43	7.8%
Circles or disks	40	7.3%
Rosette	40	7.3%
Geometric shapes	39	7.1%
Imitation wooden door	39	7.1%
Humans or humanoid figures (not biblical scenes, saints, apostles, or priests)	36	6.5%
Birds	35	6.3%
Columns or pillars	29	5.3%
Menorah	26	4.7%
Wreath	25	4.5%
Lines	22	4.0%
Vines	19	3.4%
Vessel	16	2.9%
Palm tree or palm leaves	15	2.7%
Other or unknown animals	14	2.5%
Arches	13	2.4%
Garland	13	2.4%
Busts	12	2.2%
Grapes	12	2.2%
Lion	12	2.2%
Candelabra	10	1.8%
<i>Tabula ansata</i>	8	1.5%
Bull's head/bucrania	7	1.3%
Ship	7	1.3%
Cloth	6	1.1%
Leaves	6	1.1%
Mosaic	6	1.1%
Pelta Shield	6	1.1%

⁹²² Including one graffito, from Beth Guvrin Tomb II.2 (fourth-eighth century) and two crosses from Beth She'arim. The category of crosses includes ankhs and chi-rhos.

Shell	6	1.1%
Figure in orans pose	5	1.0%
Fish/dolphin	5	1.0%
Ribbons	5	1.0%
Snake	5	1.0%
Axes	4	0.7%
Daniel and the lions	4	0.7%
“Pagan” deities	4	0.7%
Scroll	4	0.7%
Tree	4	0.7%
Wheel	4	0.7%
Abraham and Isaac	3	0.5%
Altar	3	0.5%
Angels	3	0.5%
Ark	3	0.5%
Citron	3	0.5%
Eucharist	3	0.5%
Frescos	3	0.5%
Fruit	3	0.5%
Gate	3	0.5%
Pharaonic scenes	3	0.5%
Ram’s horn	3	0.5%
Rope	3	0.5%
Saints	3	0.5%
Sun	3	0.5%
Unknown biblical scene	3	0.5%
Victory	3	0.5%
Adam and Eve	2	0.4%
Branch	2	0.4%
Hunting scene	2	0.4%
Incense shovel	2	0.4%
Jesus Christ	2	0.4%
Noah’s ark	2	0.4%
Paul and Thekla	2	0.4%
Pomegranate	2	0.4%
Sphinx	2	0.4%
Sun rays/rays of light	2	0.4%
Synagogue	2	0.4%
Unknown Christian image	2	0.4%
Urn	2	0.4%
Apostles	1	0.2%
Bread	1	0.2%
Butterflies	1	0.2%
Chariot	1	0.2%

Club(?)	1	0.2%
Crown	1	0.2%
Cupid	1	0.2%
The exodus	1	0.2%
Feather	1	0.2%
The fiery furnace	1	0.2%
The good shepherd	1	0.2%
Gorgon	1	0.2%
Hammer	1	0.2%
Incense burner	1	0.2%
Jonah and the whale	1	0.2%
Medusa	1	0.2%
Nefesh	1	0.2%
Nymphs	1	0.2%
Priests	1	0.2%
Stamps of vases	1	0.2%
Virgin Mary	1	0.2%
Winged figures	1	0.2%

Examples of imagery which may be interpreted as religious includes pomegranates, palm branches, animals, plants, and other objects.⁹²³ For example, there were Christian and Jewish stelae featuring images of birds, fish, and palm branches at Zoora (Byzantine).⁹²⁴ A wide range of funerary-related motifs would have been understood by ordinary Byzantine people, although different communities or faiths may have interpreted their meaning in different ways.

⁹²³ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005: 10-23).

⁹²⁴ See Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005: 13-15) for the Christian examples, which range in date from the late fourth-fifth century. See Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2016: 23) for the Jewish examples, which are from the fifth century (however the *festive* palm branch, the *lulav*, is depicted from the middle of the fourth to the early sixth century, but chiefly in the fifth and sixth centuries). The Christian (Greek) stelae had more variety in terms of motifs than the Jewish (Aramaic) stelae, but they also significantly outnumbered them.

Table 6b.3: Tomb decoration in Jewish contexts from the appendix. The total number of tombs with decoration is 75. Tombs may contain more than one type of symbol, meaning figures may not add up to 100%.

Symbol/image depicted	Number of examples	Percentage of decorated burials
Imitation wooden door	37	49.3%
Menorah	26	34.7%
Rosettes	19	25.3%
Circles or discs	14	18.7%
Geometric shapes	14	18.7%
Columns or pillars	9	12.0%
Garland	9	12.0%
Humanoid figure	9	12.0%
Vessel	8	10.7%
Lion	7	9.3%
Other or unknown animal	7	9.3%
Palm tree or palm leaves	7	9.3%
Ship	6	8.0%
<i>Tabula ansata</i>	6	8.0%
Candelabra	5	6.7%
Floral decoration	5	6.7%
Shell	5	6.7%
Wreath	5	6.7%
Bird	4	5.3%
Decorated façade	4	5.3%
Ram's horn	4	5.3%
Wheel	4	5.3%
Ark	3	4.0%
Citron	3	4.0%
Gate	3	4.0%
Branch	2	2.7%
Bull's head	2	2.7%
Cross (added when tomb was no longer in use)	2	2.7%
Dolphin	2	2.7%
Fruit	2	2.7%
Incense shovel	2	2.7%
Leaves	2	2.7%
Lines	2	2.7%
Ribbons	2	2.7%
Scroll	2	2.7%
Synagogue	2	2.7%
Arches	1	1.3%
Butterflies	1	1.3%

Daniel and the lions	1	1.3%
Figure in orans pose	1	1.3%
Grapes	1	1.3%
Rays of light	1	1.3%
Victory	1	1.3%
Vines	1	1.3%
Winged figure	1	1.3%

6b.3 Interpreting Imagery

Much of the iconography seen in early Byzantine tombs continued to be used until the 15th century, including classical motifs.⁹²⁵ A variety of skill levels can be seen in the funerary iconography of our period, from the more simplistic red painted lines, human figures, and fish at Tomb II.37 at Eleutheropolis (fourth-eighth century) (Figures 6b.1-6b.4), to the images of the enthroned Christ with angels and woman in orans pose with saints at the Chapel of Theodosia in Antinoopolis (fifth-sixth century) (Figures 6b.5-6b.6).

The popularity of Christian symbols may be contrasted with the lower frequency of overtly Jewish symbols. The latter are largely concentrated in specific cemetery areas within Palaestina, such as Beth She'arim (first-fifth century) and are not as widespread even within Palaestina itself as the Christian counterparts. Scenes depicting traditional "pagan" figures, meanwhile, are found more widespread than the limited geographical area covered by Jewish symbols but are few. "Pagan" imagery is usually found in tombs which were in long-term continuous use, or which experienced Christian reuse. An example is North Tomb 1 from the Dakhleh Oasis (Roman-fourth century?), which was

⁹²⁵ Brooks (2010).

decorated with traditional pharaonic scenes but also featured a Christian ankh, added later.⁹²⁶

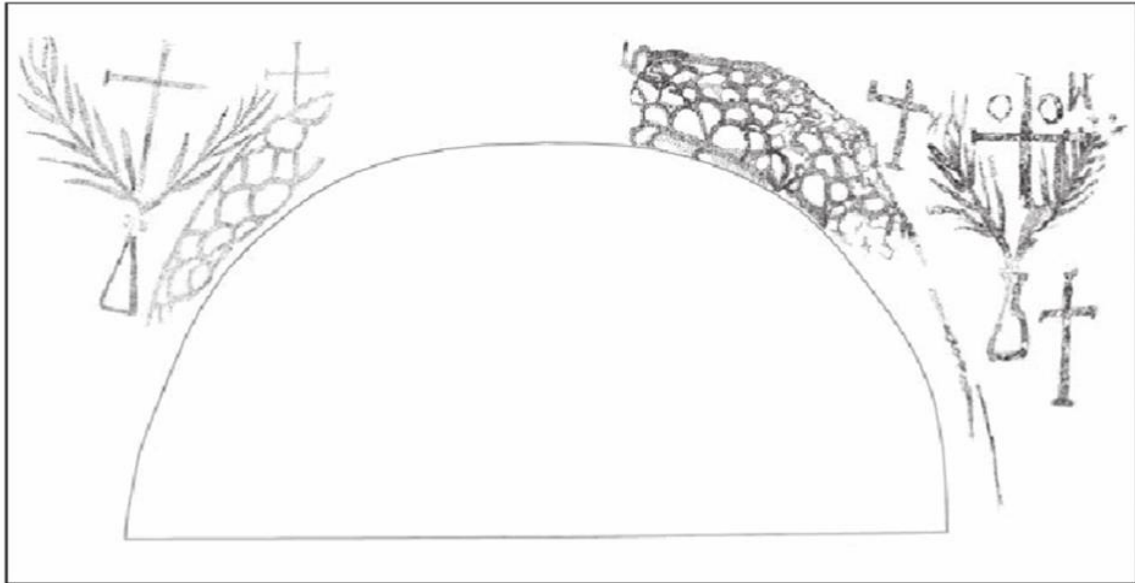


Figure 6b.1: Eastern wall of Tomb II.37 at Eleutheropolis. From Michaeli (2008: 188).

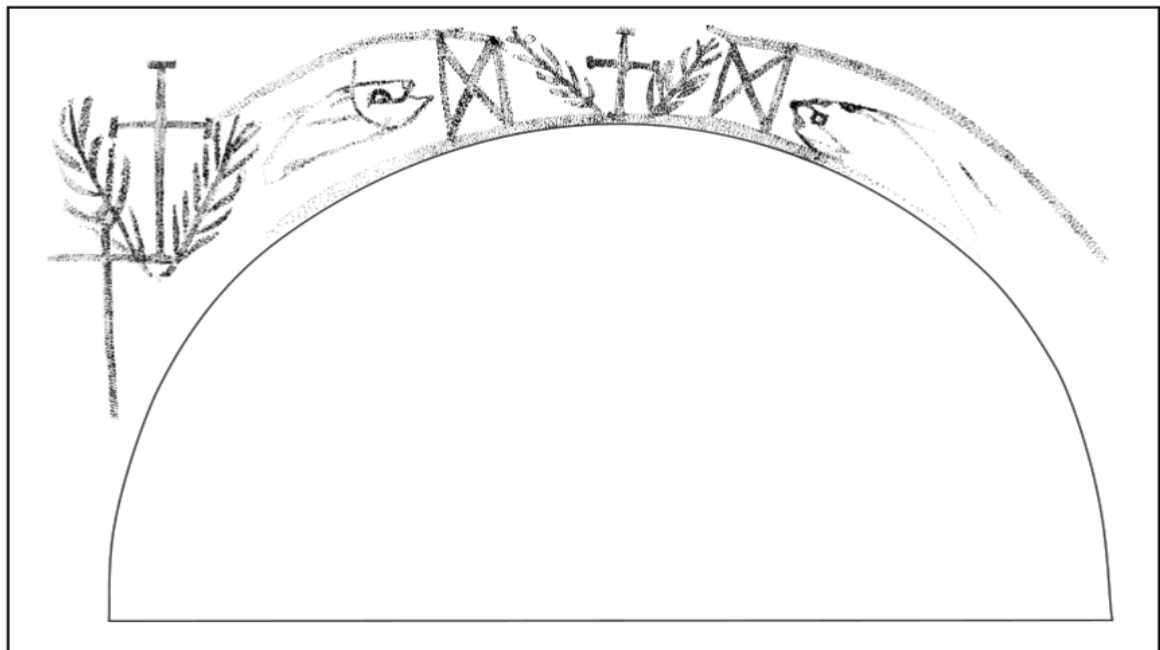


Figure 6b.2: Western wall of Tomb II.37 at Eleutheropolis. From Michaeli (2008: 189).

⁹²⁶ Kaper (2003: 325-330).

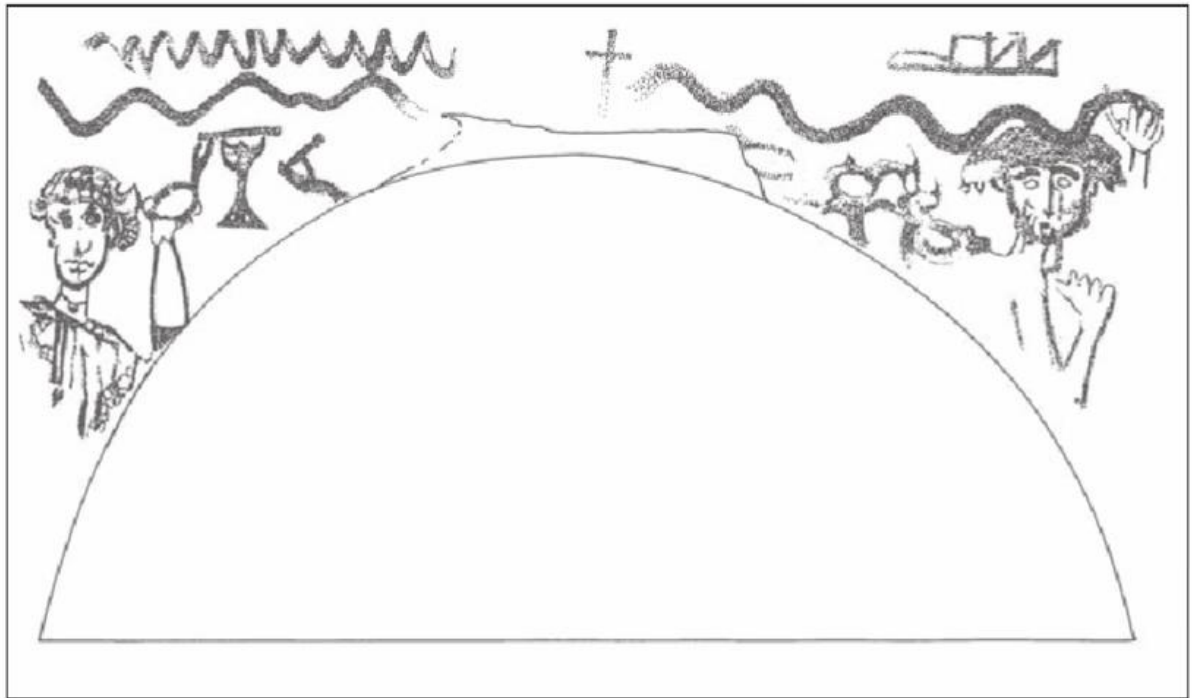


Figure 6b.3: Southern wall of Tomb II.37 at Eleutheropolis. From Michaeli (2008: p. 187).



Figure 6b.4: Photograph of southern wall of Tomb II.37 at Eleutheropolis. From Michaeli (2008: 190).

The dominance of Christian imagery – especially symbols such as the cross – over other imagery in this sample may be explained in much the same way as the dominance of the Greek language in inscriptions (Section 6a.2.3). Christian symbols were more common than those of other belief systems because Christianity represented the largest belief system of this period, owing in no small part to the church's increased involvement in everyday life, worship, and the funeral service (see Section 1.4.2.2). However, the continued representation of other beliefs shows that people of other faiths still desired and were able to present their own theologies in relation to death.

I now discuss common imagery and its interpretation.



Figure 6b.5: Image of enthroned Christ and angels from Antinoopolis. From Salmi (1945: Fig. 3).

6b.3.1 Religious Iconography

The simplistic designs of religious symbols (for example, the cross, the menorah) made them suitable not only as intricate decoration, but also as

graffiti.⁹²⁷ They could easily express an ideology without the need for complicated motifs or words and could be added to older tombs to adapt them to a new or changing ideology.⁹²⁸

However, the symbol may have been more than a literal representation of the faith of the deceased person and/or users of the tomb. It may also have had an apotropaic meaning, for example protecting the deceased person(s) or the tomb.⁹²⁹ The placement of an engraved cross at the head end of a grave in front of the threshold of the main church of the Jeremias Monastery at Saqqara (fifth-ninth century) was interpreted as having an apotropaic function, rather than being an identity marker.⁹³⁰ Religious symbols may also have had a more complicated meaning, for example the cross on the Peacock Coffin at Qarara (sixth-eighth century) represented the tree of life.

A simplistic form of religious iconography does not necessarily indicate the socioeconomic status of the tomb's owner or their family. Local trends, workshops, or burial practices may have played a role in the depiction.⁹³¹

⁹²⁷ Avni et al. (2008: 82).

⁹²⁸ Examples can be found at various sites, such as the first-seventh century cemetery of Al-Bass in Tyre and tombs in Alexandria. In some cemeteries, such as the cemeteries at Beth Guvrin, tombs depicting Christian symbols were found alongside tombs depicting Jewish symbols. See Avni et al. (2008: 15) for the Cave of the Menorahs, (46) for Tomb I.33, (57) for Tomb I.52, (58) for Tomb I.53.

⁹²⁹ Michaeli (2008: 189). Consider, for example, the church tombs at Umm al-Rasas, where their context within a Christian building makes religious identity evident, and yet a cross had been carved into the wall of the northern tomb of the Church of St. Stephen. The symbolic meaning of the cross may have included apotropaic purposes, but also ideas of salvation within Christian thought: Piccirillo and Alliata (1994).

⁹³⁰ Grossman (2002: 130).

⁹³¹ For example, crosses were commonly depicted on grave stelae at the South Cemetery at Phaeno. See Findlater et al. (1998: 69).



Figure 6b.6: Image of Theodosia in orans pose with Saint Colluthus and Virgin Mary. From Salmi (1945: Fig. 4).

6b.3.1.1 Christian Iconography

The cross is the main Christian symbol in the appendix. Other symbols, including $A\Omega$ and alternative versions of the cross such as the chi-rho, also appear in Christian burial contexts such as tombs from Alexandria.⁹³²

Christian images often involved complex aspects of Christian death belief, which likely would have been understood by their observers. This includes the concept of victory over death, biblical scenes, the importance of the eucharist, the promise of the resurrection, and paradise. Apocryphal scenes were depicted in chapels at el-Bagawat (second-seventh century).⁹³³ The choice of imagery

⁹³² Venit (2002: 182).

⁹³³ Beckwith (1970: 71). The style was described as “utterly crude and provincial”, but western styles were generally treated as more favourable within the book. The apocryphal scenes were the martyrdoms of Thecla and Isiah.

could have reflected aspects of local beliefs, the cult of the saints, or the desires of the patron.

The combination of Christian symbols and inscriptions could be used to create a commemorative piece for the deceased person that identified them and expressed their hope or the hope of their loved ones on the next life. A funerary stela (sixth-seventh century) held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchased in Thebes and supposedly from Armant, provides one example (Figure 6b.7).⁹³⁴ It was carved and painted. An inscription in Coptic reads:

VΠEPMNH
 THC ANAΓA
 YCAMENH
 TA EIAMTO
 NBT ONKAT
 AAYCACHC
 MHNI XOI AK
 IHTHCZINA
 ENXPWIKOI
 MHEZ CA⁹³⁵

“To the memory of the deceased, Taeiam, who departed from this life on the 18th of Choiak (December) of the seventh indiction. She sleeps in Christ”.

Above the inscription, an arch containing vine scrolls and geometric patterns surrounded a central rosette. The inscription was beneath the rosette in a box.

⁹³⁴ *Funerary stela with architectural frame: 6th-7th century (n.d.).*

⁹³⁵ *Funerary stela with architectural frame: 6th-7th century (n.d.).* Translation from Metropolitan Museum of Art.

On either side of the inscription were two columns, standing on a fish. The composition combined Christian symbols (the fish) with more traditional imagery to create the image of the place that Taeiam aspired to reach: the Kingdom of Heaven.⁹³⁶

6b.3.1.2 Jewish Iconography

The primary Jewish symbol is the *menorah*, but the *lulav*, *shofar* (Ram's horn), incense shovel, *etrog* (citron), and Ark of the Covenant are all found in Jewish contexts, such as on the stelae at Zoora (Byzantine).⁹³⁷

The appendix lists some examples of candelabrum which may be *menorahs*. I have been cautious of classifying them as menorahs in cases where the excavators have not described them as menorahs. An example demonstrates my reasoning. One stela from Zoora, dated to the sixth century, featured an inscription with three symbols beneath it (from left to right: a *lulav*, a nine branched *menorah*, and a third object, which has been described as either a five-branched *menorah* or a candelabrum).⁹³⁸ Figure 6b.8 is a photograph of the stela, while Figure 6b.9 is a drawing based on the photograph. In the photograph, it is unclear whether there is a straight line across the top of the second candelabrum, connecting the five branches in the *menorah* style, or

⁹³⁶ *Funerary stele with architectural frame: 6th-7th century* (n.d.).

⁹³⁷ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2016: 23). The *nefesh* pillar symbol, representing a monument or stela, could also be given a Jewish meaning, but was originally a Nabatean symbol: see Michaeli (2017: 240). Michaeli considered whether the Nefesh on the entrance wall may have had Jewish meaning but concluded that the lack of other obviously Jewish imagery suggested a non-Jewish interpretation was more likely to be correct. *Nefesh* symbols were more commonly found in the form of a carved stone near or within older Graeco-Roman tombs, such as in examples from the Bekaa Valley: Newson (2015: 363-364).

⁹³⁸ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2016: 73); Sussman (1983: 232).

whether the design is closer to the drawing in Figure 6b.10, representing instead a bronze candelabrum.



Figure 6b.7: Stele of Taeiam. From Funerary Stele with Architectural Frame: 6th-7th century (n.d.).

If the final image is a candelabrum, there are two possible interpretations of the object. It may have been a ritual object, which would match the theme presented by the *lulav* and the *menorah*. Alternatively, the candelabrum may

have a symbolic meaning which developed from the significance of the lamp in the Christian funerary cult. However, as Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou only identified one Greek-language funerary stela depicting a lampstand at Zoorá (dated to the fourth century),⁹³⁹ and the only other symbol related to light on the Christian stelae from this site is the sun (which is not depicted on any of the Jewish stelae),⁹⁴⁰ the former interpretation seems more likely.



Figure 6b.8: Photograph of the sixth century stelae from Zoorá. From Sussman (1983: Plate 29).



Figure 6b.9: Drawing of the sixth century stelae from Zoorá. From Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2016: Plate XVIII).

⁹³⁹ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005: 15, 145-146).

⁹⁴⁰ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005: 15). There were 34 stelae depicting the sun from this cemetery, dated to the fourth and fifth centuries. 27 were in the 2005 volume and the other seven in the 2008 volume. Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2008: 27).



Figure 6b.10: Drawing of the candelabrum depicted on the 6th century stelae at Zoora. From Sussman (1983: 232)

6b.3.2 Flora

One of the most common inclusions in tomb decoration is flora. Like many of the other design elements that appear in tombs – shapes, patterns, animals, religious symbols, humanoid figures, etc. – flora is intersectional with other locations, such as churches. Flora could have represented the concept of the afterlife but could have been related to ideas such as nature or victory over death. Commonly depicted flora includes trees, flowers, wreaths, and vines.

The palm was an ancient symbol of victory, depicted in tombs to symbolise victory over death.⁹⁴¹ Although it did not have a specific funerary meaning in Judaism, it was nonetheless depicted in Jewish tombs,⁹⁴² where it likely retained this ancient symbolism. It was also found associated with Christian burials, as decoration⁹⁴³ and as an alternative form of a grave marker. The latter is a frequent find associated with the pit graves at Qarara (fourth-ninth century), where palm ribs were found protruding from the head end of mummy

⁹⁴¹ Michaeli (2017: 238).

⁹⁴² Avigad (1957a: 74).

⁹⁴³ For example, palm leaves depicted with a cross beneath an inscription related to the Tomb of Paul at Ma'ale Adumim. Di Segni (1990b: 153).

wrappings. Objects or offerings may have been hung on them.⁹⁴⁴ Their symbolical inclusion as objects rather than images demonstrates the variability of the inclusion of these symbols within a burial context.

The same symbolic meaning of victory over death can be applied to other floral imagery, particularly the wreath.⁹⁴⁵ Although not floral, ribbons were considered an extension of the wreath and thus embodied the same meaning.⁹⁴⁶

Depictions of vines in tombs were also ancient and were adapted by Christian and Jewish tomb users alike. Examples of the vine in the early Christian catacombs of Rome have been used to discuss the inclusion of classical art within a Christian style during the first few centuries of Christianity.⁹⁴⁷ However, the vine was not merely a continuation of the older style of tomb decoration within Christian thought, because it could also be associated with Christ through John 15:5.⁹⁴⁸

6b.3.3 Animals and Mythical Creatures

Animals and birds were commonly depicted within funerary settings.

The peacock was especially prominent among birds.⁹⁴⁹ In ancient contexts, they were another symbol of victory over death.⁹⁵⁰ However, in Christian contexts

⁹⁴⁴ Huber (2008: 67-69); Huber and Nauerth (2018: 439).

⁹⁴⁵ For example, the palm and wreath are both discussed as symbols of victory in Sabottka (1985: 284).

⁹⁴⁶ Michaeli (2008: 194).

⁹⁴⁷ Beckwith (1970: 8).

⁹⁴⁸ "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing".

⁹⁴⁹ It was depicted in many locations outside of funerary contexts, for example, on mosaic floors, on plaques, and in manuscripts. See for example, *Mosaic with a peacock and flowers: 3rd-4th century* (n.d.) and Evans et al. (2001: 22, 62). The manuscript is a later example, but the plaques date to the period discussed in this thesis.

⁹⁵⁰ Anđelković et al. (2010: 233-234, 239-240).

peacocks specifically represented the concepts of paradise and resurrection, and they were regularly found depicted alongside saints, Christ, or the cross. The Peacock Coffin at Qarara (sixth-eighth century) (Section 6b.4.2) is one example. Other depicted birds include the dove, which represented peace, love, new life, and the Holy Spirit in Christian funerary contexts,⁹⁵¹ and may have represented new life or the human soul in Judaism (although the latter interpretation may come from a later Kabbalistic text).⁹⁵²



Figure 6b.11: Carved lions and sphinxes from Tomb H60 at Abila. From Smith and Mare (1997: 310).

⁹⁵¹ Saliby (1993: 267). Matthew 3:16: “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightaway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him”.

⁹⁵² The concept of the dove as new life was from the story of Noah’s Ark. The concept of the dove as representation of the human soul apparently came from an early Kabbalistic text, where souls were described with the ability to fly. However, its accreditation to Jewish scholars of the first-sixth centuries is doubtful, and the earliest known version dates to the 12th century: *Sefer ha-bahir: Jewish text* (2013).



Figure 6b.12: Lochamei HaGetaot. The eastern arcosolium and wall, with Daniel and the lions beneath the arcosolium. From Maayan-Fanar (2010: 76).

A range of other animals were depicted in funerary contexts but among the most common were lions, bulls, snakes, and occasionally mythical creatures such as griffins and sphinxes. Examples from the appendix include the sarcophagus decorated with lion heads in Tomb 2 at Berytus (fourth century), the bull heads(?) in relief on arcosolia in Cave I.69 at Eleutheropolis (fifth-seventh century), a tomb at Ashkelon (fourth century) depicting fish, birds, nymphs, and a gorgon's mask,⁹⁵³ and the snake depicted in two caves at Horvat Burgin (Roman-Byzantine). In the latter example, they were interpreted

⁹⁵³ Ory (1939: 40-41). These were in the context of an idyllic natural scene with fruits, flowers, and a brook. In the center of the tomb vault either an eagle or a vase with curved leaves was depicted. If an eagle, it represented the souls of the deceased being carried away.

as symbols of protection in ancient beliefs;⁹⁵⁴ whether the Byzantine users of the tomb continued to view them in the same way is unknown.



Figure 6b.13: Lochamei HeGetoot. The entrance wall, with palm trees. From Maayan-Fanar (2010: 76).

Tomb H60 at Abila (Roman-Byzantine) features carved lions, sphinxes, flowers, and ribbons on the entrance from the main burial chamber into the antechamber (Figure 6b.11). In the painted arcosolia of the tomb there were sphinxes, peacocks, and a winged victory.⁹⁵⁵ The sphinxes carved at the entrance have been interpreted as guardians of the tomb,⁹⁵⁶ originally carved perhaps in the third century but remaining a part of the visual style of the tomb throughout its period of use.

⁹⁵⁴ Zissu et al. (2013: 46).

⁹⁵⁵ Smith and Mare (1997: 311-312).

⁹⁵⁶ Smith and Mare (1997: 311).

Animals were also depicted within a biblical context. One example is a depiction of Daniel and the lions in a tomb at Lohamei HaGeta'ot (fourth-fifth century).⁹⁵⁷ In this tomb, Daniel was depicted in red paint beneath the eastern arcosolium; on either side of him stood a lion and, on the other side of the lion, a lamp, while the rest of the wall was covered by vines, peacocks, fish, amphorae, and crosses (Figure 6b.12). Daniel and the lions, while not the only way that beliefs about the resurrection were represented within a funerary context, was the most popular depiction of any scene from the bible and the only one which appears in both Christian and Jewish contexts in the appendix. The scene represented a person being saved due to their beliefs and the promise of the resurrection.⁹⁵⁸

The tomb at Lohamei HaGeta'ot also featured images depicting victory over death and resurrection on each of the walls. Palm trees flanked the entrance (Figure 6b.13), the southern arcosolium featured a pomegranate tree (Figure 6b.14), and the northern wall depicted a wreathed cross, flowers, and $A\Omega$, with a bench running along the wall covered with pomegranates, a bird, and a lizard (Figure 6b.15).

6b.3.4 Food and Drink

Food and drink were depicted less frequently than either flora or fauna. One key element of their appearance in tombs was in relation to the eucharist, sometimes depicted as loaves of bread.

⁹⁵⁷ Hachlili (1988: 295); Maayan-Fanar (2010: 71).

⁹⁵⁸ Maayan-Fanar (2010: 72); Daniel 12:2: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."



Figure 6b.14: Lochamei HeGetaot. Southern arcosolium, with pomegranate tree. From Maayan-Fanar (2010: 77).

Fish were often depicted in Christian contexts. Human figures were depicted partaking in the eucharist or offering praise to God.⁹⁵⁹ For example, one reused tomb at Alexandria (Hellenistic-Byzantine) was redecorated by its Christian users in the Byzantine period. Three fishes, two loaves of bread, and a human arm and hand were added to the tomb; other tombs at Alexandria similarly depicted symbols of the eucharist.⁹⁶⁰ The eucharist was also depicted at Eleutheropolis (fourth-eighth century), where images of vessels may have been related to wine or holy bread. However, these symbols may also have referred to other concepts, including water, and thus be connected to baptism and rebirth.⁹⁶¹

⁹⁵⁹ For example, in a Roman tomb at Alexandria which was reused and redecorated by Christians in the Byzantine period: Venit (2002: 183), where three fishes, two loaves of bread, and a human arm and hand were depicted together; other tombs at Alexandria also contained symbols of the eucharist.

⁹⁶⁰ Venit (2002: 183)

⁹⁶¹ Michaeli (2008: 195).

The other main food item depicted in tombs was the pomegranate. The example from Lohamei HaGeta'ot (fourth-fifth century) is a Christian example (Figure 6b.14). The excavator of this tomb considered the pomegranate more common in polytheist and Jewish funerary contexts, but rarer in Christian ones.⁹⁶² The pomegranate has, however, been found in other Christian funerary contexts of our period, including on stelae⁹⁶³ and textiles.⁹⁶⁴ Its depiction may represent aspects of life, death, and the afterlife.⁹⁶⁵

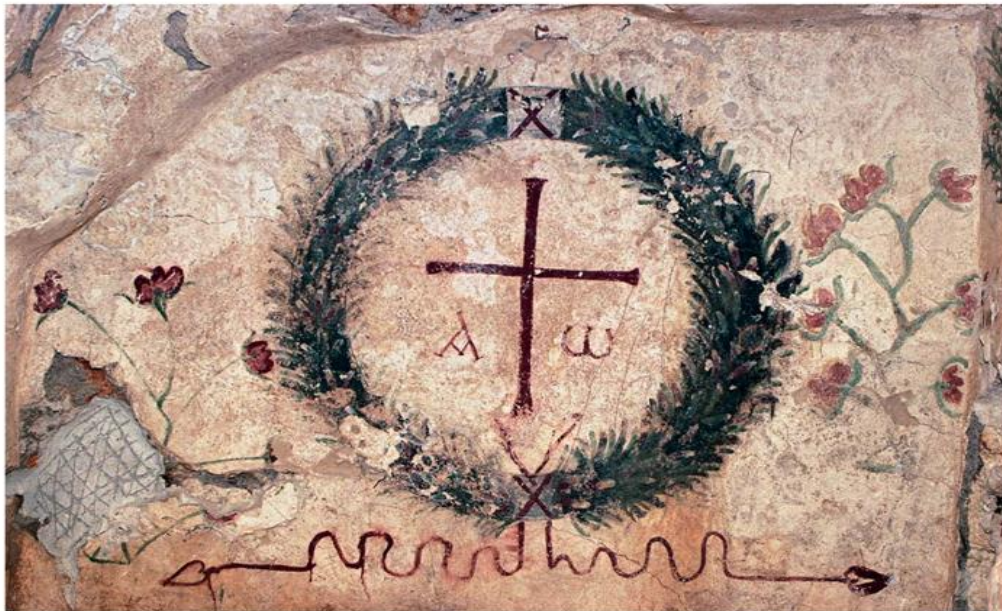


Figure 6b.15: Lochamei HeGetaot. Northern arcosolium with wreathed cross. From Maayan-Fanar (2010: 77).

6b.3.5 Humans and Humanlike Figures

Humans and humanlike figures include representations of the deceased and/or the patrons, but also religious figures such as saints and angels. The deceased person could be represented within a medallion, as a bust, or as a complete

⁹⁶² Maayan-Fanar (2010: 72).

⁹⁶³ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005: 14).

⁹⁶⁴ Whitchurch and Griggs (2010: 220-230). The depiction of the pomegranate was found on a textile wrapping an infant.

⁹⁶⁵ Whitchurch and Griggs (2010: 230).

figure. Christian iconography tends to focus more on veneration than on domestic scenes; indeed, the domestic scenes in the appendix generally date to the earlier part of our period.

Examples of human figures include the mosaic of three priests from Hypogeum 22 at Emesa (third-seventh century),⁹⁶⁶ and portraits of women in medallions and a man offering a bouquet of flowers to a woman from Tomb H60 at Abila (Roman-Byzantine).⁹⁶⁷

An elaborate scene was depicted in a tomb at the pilgrim site of the White Monastery (from fifth century, decorations added sixth/seventh century). A funerary chapel sat above a double-chambered subterranean tomb accessed from a staircase in the nave, with the burial chamber directly beneath the chapel's altar.⁹⁶⁸ The iconography of the burial chamber was focused on depicting paradise through geometric, floral, and faunal images (Figure 6b.16). A single scene of standing figures depicted Apa Shenoute, the third and most well-known leader of the monastery, flanked by two other unknown figures (Figure 6b.17). Shenoute was identified via an inscription and stood in *orans* pose, indicating prayer.⁹⁶⁹

⁹⁶⁶ Unfortunately, the frescoes of the catacombs were faded and had been the victims of environmental damage. Saliby (1993: 267, 271).

⁹⁶⁷ Smith and Mare (1997: 311-312).

⁹⁶⁸ The altar was not present during the excavation. Blanke (2017: 214).

⁹⁶⁹ Shenoute's remains may have been removed from their original burial place and moved to this tomb. Blanke (2017: 214). A group of tombs, perhaps deliberately constructed close to the saint, were discovered north of the church. Bolman et al. (2010: 458). The *orans* pose was found associated with the tombs of other saints, such as the no longer extant image of Saint Menas standing between two camels at Abu Mena, also a barrel-vaulted crypt: Perkins (1949: 46).



Figure 6b.16: The White Monastery crypt, looking into the barrel-vaulted burial chamber from the east. From Bolman et al. (2010: Fig. 5).

The journey through this tomb constructed meaning and narrative through the experience and the movement of visitors, which was common at pilgrim sites of the early Byzantine period.⁹⁷⁰ The tomb and/or relics of the saint presented visitors with images that evoked Christian concepts of the afterlife, which they may in turn have chosen to adopt when considering the iconography of their own or their family's tomb.

6b.3.6 Other Imagery

A small number of other symbols are found in tomb decoration of the appendix. These are usually unique to a limited number of tombs or a certain area. For

⁹⁷⁰ Hunter-Crawley (2017: 189).

example, all the shields were from sarcophagi at Heliopolis (second-fourth century). Two of the axes were from sarcophagi at Gerasa (first-fifth century), and the third from Tomb H6 at Abila (second-fourth century). Notably, all these examples are early in date, and the addition of the decoration is likely from before our period or at the latest the fourth century. They may be examples of local practice or these images were selected by groups of individuals to distinguish themselves and their burials from the tombs of others.



Figure 6b.17: Shenoute and two figures (angels?), north wall of the White Monastery barrel-vaulted crypt. From Bolman et al. (2010: Fig. 9).

In some cases, the designs fit within local trends, such as the stone doors of fourth century northern Syria which were designed to imitate wooden doors and often featured images of stone leaf decoration, panels, crosspieces, and nails.

However, in the early fifth century, these designs diversified to include a range of more elaborate geometric designs, floral imagery, and Christian symbols or figures, including Daniel and the lions and the *orans* pose.⁹⁷¹ Imitation wooden doors were also popular at Beth She'arim (first-fifth century), where most of the appendix examples come from.

6b.3.7 Chronology

Finally, it is important to discuss the significance of chronology on the iconography from the appendix. The limitation of imagery such as shields, mythical creatures, and domestic scenes to the beginning of our period at the latest, and their generally small numbers, attests to their early use. While other imagery which appeared in ancient contexts, such as the pomegranate and vines, continued to be used in later centuries, their interpretation within a Christian context is evident.

The earliest Christian symbols that appear on stelae in Palaestina date to the middle of the fourth century. These are the cross and the chi-rho, with most of the other symbols (for example, cross-chi, cross-rho, iota-chi, $A\Omega$, etc.) appearing in the latter half of the fourth century.⁹⁷² By the sixth century, the cross had become the dominant symbol, outlasting the others which had largely disappeared.⁹⁷³ The favouring of the cross also occurred across other provinces, although lack of precise dating makes it difficult to establish a chronology; for example, it is not known at which point during the second-

⁹⁷¹ Griesheimer (1997: 168-169).

⁹⁷² This occurred, for example, at Zoora. See Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005: 10-12).

⁹⁷³ Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (2005: 15).

seventh centuries crosses and other Christian images were added to tombs at el-Bagawat. Regardless, the favouring of the cross over other symbols is evident within the data and the appendix, and attested across the provinces, evidencing its popularity and availability in the Byzantine Near East.

While Christian imagery could replace the categories that were no longer in popular use following the fourth century, this does not adequately explain the change. For example, the cross could act as an apotropaic symbol in much the same way that mythical creatures (and other animals) could be apotropaic. Images of Christ, saints, and other humanlike Christian figures could have been used in place of domestic scenes and “pagan” figures. However, the distinction between imagery that survived and imagery that did not survive into the Christian period is not as simple as the replacement of some symbols for others that had similar or the same meanings. Many symbols came to be representations of the Christian concept of victory over death and experienced continued use within Christian thought.

Instead, considering the new social venues for elites in the form of churches and monasteries (Section 2.6), the growth of funerary inscriptions expressing Christian religious sentiments (Section 6a.3.3), and the role of the church as a funeral provider (Section 1.4.2.2), what is occurring during this period was a greater demonstration of faith through multiple avenues of expression. One of these avenues was the display of overtly Christian symbols, such as the cross, which could not be misinterpreted. As imagery in churches and monasteries naturally focused on Christian theology and figures, so too did iconography within the funerary sphere. While sphinxes, axes, and other imagery that was

present in older tombs were not favoured in this context, their meaning was not necessarily problematic, and therefore they could remain a part of a Christian burial space; however, symbols such as the pomegranate and wreath came to represent aspects of paradise, resurrection, and victory, in a way that maintained their use for longer within Christian tombs.

6b.4 Case Studies

I have limited the below case studies to examples where information is available on tomb type, human remains, grave goods, and inscription/iconography. This is important and necessary at this final section of the thesis, because it demonstrates how the discussion within this chapter and each of the previous chapters can be brought together to understand the burial context in greater detail. There are a very small number of examples from the appendix which fit this selection criteria.

6b.4.1 Emathous G XXIX (Habbasi Tomb)

The cemetery at Karm el-Haurani at Emathous was used from the Roman period, and some of the tombs remained in use until the beginning of the fifth century or possibly later.⁹⁷⁴ Excavations uncovered pit graves containing a range of grave goods, including jewellery, glass vessels, mirrors, and other objects. They also found hypogea, containing burials in loculi and wooden coffins, frequently containing grave goods. The Habbasi Tomb (second century-

⁹⁷⁴ De Jong (2017j). One pit grave was broadly dated to 200-600 CE, but the remains of only one individual were found within, which means it was not in continuous use and a more accurate date is simply not possible. The other tombs in the cemetery were dated no later than 400 CE.

Byzantine), located on the road between Emesa and Emathous, can provide us with additional insight on burial rites during the early Byzantine period.

This hypogeum was in use from at least 101, known from the Greek inscription below the bust of a woman: “Menophilia daughter of Diodoros, she died in the year 413, 23 October (101)”.⁹⁷⁵ Objects in several loculi and sarcophagi within the hypogeum date to the fourth and fifth centuries, attesting to its later (and continued) use, while crosses and inscriptions carved into the sarcophagi and around the niches show a reimagining of the burial space, probably at the same time.

The tomb was entered by a short corridor leading to a large limestone door. Two steps led down into the barrel-vaulted central chamber. There were fifteen loculi on the lower walls, with four each on the right (1-4) and back (5-8) walls and seven on the left (9-15). Most of these contained the remains of wooden coffins, while three loculi (11, 15, and 16) also contained animal bones.⁹⁷⁶

Three sarcophagi (A-C) stood together in a triclinium formation on the chamber floor; they part-blocked access to some of the loculi. Two (A and C) contained the remains of wooden coffins and animal bones.⁹⁷⁷ Sarcophagus A was the only one of the three that featured carved decoration, in the form of a gabled lid with acroteria. Crosses had been carved in the lid.⁹⁷⁸

⁹⁷⁵ De Jong (2017j).

⁹⁷⁶ De Jong (2017j). The bones of sheep, horses, and oxen were also found in unspecified locations within the tomb.

⁹⁷⁷ De Jong (2017j). In A, unidentified animal bones; in C, the bones of a cockerel.

⁹⁷⁸ De Jong (2017j).

The upper walls of this chamber contained short, vaulted niches carved in rows. There were fifteen of these niches above the loculi, as well as four in a section of the right wall that did not contain loculi, and one additional niche on the back wall. Some of these niches contained funerary sculpture, notably the busts of women (including that of Menophilia) and men (one with an inscription of the Byzantine period), statues of a boy and a woman (Isis?), and plaster casts which may be death masks.⁹⁷⁹ The sculpture above the loculi did not correlate to the remains of the individuals in the loculi; for example, one niche featuring a male bust was above a loculus containing the remains of an adult man and an adult woman.⁹⁸⁰ Was the man the same one who was featured in the bust, and the woman buried in the loculus later?

A second chamber, also with a barrel-vaulted ceiling, contained three loculi on each the left (16-18) and back (19-21) walls, and one loculus (22) on the right wall. This chamber contained an altar.⁹⁸¹

The sculpture in the niches dates to the second century, which likely explains why the busts do not match the human remains in the loculi beneath them.

Painted decoration was added later, and included crosses, hanging cloths, and inscriptions.⁹⁸²

Information on the burials in this tomb is shown in Table 6b.4.

⁹⁷⁹ De Jong (2017j).

⁹⁸⁰ De Jong (2017r: 117). De Jong suggested this may be due to later reuse of the tomb but acknowledged that it could also have been a part of the burial customs.

⁹⁸¹ De Jong (2017j).

⁹⁸² De Jong (2017j).

Table 6b.4: Information on the burials in Emathous tomb G XXIX. From De Jong (2017j).

Burial	Human remains	Grave goods
Loculus 1	Two adults, one male and one female.	A glass flask (third-fourth century).
Loculus 5	A child, three to four years old. An adult of unknown sex.	A mussel shell.
Loculus 6.	An adolescent of 15-16 years of age. Two adults, one male and one female.	A mussel shell.
Loculus 8.	One individual of unknown age and sex.	
Loculus 11.	Two children and three adults. One of the adults was female; another was estimated at 50-60 years of age.	A glass flask (third-fourth century) and a bronze bucket handle. Animal bones.
Loculus 15.	An infant, two years old. A child, four years old. An adult of unknown sex.	Animal bones.
Loculus 16.	A child, a juvenile, and two adults of unknown sex.	A shell pendant, a mussel shell, an iron nail, and animal bones.
Loculus 17.	Two children and one adult male.	
Sarcophagus A.	One juvenile and five adults (two male, three female).	Remains of a wooden coffin. A necklace of glass beads, the golden leaves of a wreath, remains of shoes, a glass bottle (fourth-fifth century), a coin (fourth-fifth century), an iron knife, bronze fragments, pieces of incised bone, animal bones, and mussel shell fragments.
Sarcophagus C.	One child and five adults (one male).	Remains of a wooden coffin. A bronze bracelet, nine glass bracelets, remains of a pair of shoes, a glass bottle (fourth-fifth century), fragments of a mussel shell, an iron nail, and the bones of a cockerel.

The inclusion of mussel shells in the loculi and sarcophagi has not been noted in other tombs at Emathous. Perhaps they were originally strung on strings and worn as jewellery. In all cases, they were found with a combination of

children/adolescents and adults, which does not allow us to speculate on the individuals they may have been associated with. The presence of animal bones is also unclear; perhaps the hypogeum was used as an animal shelter after its use as a tomb had ended, however the bones of a cockerel in sarcophagus C and the presence of the altar in the hypogeum suggest that funerary or commemorative feasting may also have taken place, possibly during the fourth-fifth centuries when the sarcophagus was still in use.

Other objects found in the Habbasi Tomb were typical finds in other tombs at Emathous. Coins, glass vessels, iron knives, and jewellery have been found in hypogea and pit graves from the Karm el-Haurani cemetery.⁹⁸³ Glass vessels and coins dating to the early Byzantine period show the prevalence of these objects in burials at Emathous.

Considering the Habbasi Tomb as a whole, it is possible to see a change in the needs of its users throughout the period of its use. This is visible in all aspects of the tomb. The busts and statuettes, which may have originally corresponded to those who were buried in the loculi beneath them during the earlier use of the tomb, could not represent the later interments. Yet they remained within the tomb, perhaps (if we assume this was a family tomb) images of the ancestors of the early Byzantine tomb users. However, the attention which these busts may have originally drawn was replaced by new decoration, with crosses and new inscriptions representing a change in death beliefs at some point following the adoption of Christianity.

⁹⁸³ De Jong (2017j).

While we cannot be certain when this change took place, the date of the glass bottles and coins in the sarcophagi compared to the loculi implies that these were used in what may have been the final period of the tomb's use. The sarcophagi also contained more individuals than any of the loculi, where this information is known (six in both A and C, while the loculi varied between one and five individuals). The addition of the crosses on Sarcophagus A, and not on the other sarcophagi, evidently does not indicate that it was the only one in use during the later period. Neither does the lack of crosses on Sarcophagi B and C imply that the users of these sarcophagi did not hold Christian beliefs. Ultimately, these additional pieces of inscription and iconography may coincide with the later use of these sarcophagi, in the fourth and fifth centuries.

6b.4.2 Hidden from View: Coffins and Wreaths at Qarara

Most of the funerary inscriptions and iconography that receive scholarly attention come from contexts where these aspects would have been visible, either during the funeral, commemorative activities, or by those who passed by the tomb. However, other types of tombs, which would not necessarily have been visible again once the tomb had been sealed, could receive decoration. These include sarcophagi buried in pit graves, which would not have been uncovered again once they had been installed.

The Peacock Coffin (sixth-eighth century) at Qarara (Figure 6b.18) was one of several coffins discovered in pit graves in the cemetery. Although the other coffins were similar in shape and size, the Peacock Coffin was the only one with decoration. The coffin was formed of an elongated box with a triangular structure at the head end and was entirely decorated with painted floral designs

(including vines and flowers) and medallions. The front of the structure featured an adorned cross, which was the central focus of the design representing the tree of life and promise of resurrection. Two peacocks, one on either side of the head structure, each carried a string of beads to decorate the cross.⁹⁸⁴

Despite this intricate decoration, the coffin was wrapped in cloths, tied with a cord, and two mats were placed upon it in the east-west oriented pit.⁹⁸⁵ Unlike the decoration within chamber tombs, which would have been visible during the burial of the body and subsequent visits to the tomb, the Peacock Coffin's iconography would have been covered by wrappings at the time of burial, although the coffin was likely displayed at some point before the burial took place. The wrapping of this coffin is an aspect of Egyptian burial preparation that is not seen elsewhere in the sites examined in this thesis – in fact, both the decorated coffin and the way that it was wrapped are exclusive to Qarara.

The coffin contained the remains of one adult male, described wearing a linen sleeve robe, his feet and head wrapped in cloth. A short scarf was found on the chest, and the remains of a wreath around the neck. Finally, the body had been tied with palm ropes.⁹⁸⁶ The corpses in the other, undecorated coffins, were similar, in linen (or knit) cloths and tied with bandages, then stuffed with palm leaves. They occasionally wore additional items of clothing, such as caps and leather aprons.⁹⁸⁷ Furthermore, many of the other corpses wore jewellery

⁹⁸⁴ Huber and Nauerth (2018: 441). For the adornment of the cross and its depiction as the tree of life, see page 449.

⁹⁸⁵ Huber and Nauerth (2018: 438).

⁹⁸⁶ Ranke (1926: 4).

⁹⁸⁷ Ranke (1926: 4).

(mainly necklaces and rings), and were interred with objects including hair pins, spindles, combs, shoes, and fragments of glass vessels.⁹⁸⁸

The difference in interment between the individual within the Peacock Coffin and others in the cemetery is notable: this was an individual who was selected for a different kind of treatment, which included the addition of certain elements denied to others, notably the painted decoration of the coffin and the wreath around the neck. A small number of other corpses from the same cemetery have been found with wreaths around their head or neck, although none of these were found in a painted coffin; in all cases, they were wrapped in cloths and sometimes stuffed or with pillows under their heads, but no additional grave goods were noted.⁹⁸⁹

⁹⁸⁸ Ranke (1926: 4-5).

⁹⁸⁹ Nauerth (1996: 191, 200); Huber (2018a: 522).



Figure 6b.18: Qarara. The Peacock Coffin. From Huber and Nauerth (2018: 442).

The wreath was connected to the concept of victory over death (Section 6b.3.2). The privilege of being interred with such a symbolic object seems to have been reserved for a select group of individuals in the cemetery, who were not interred with other objects; at least two of them have been sexed as male (while none have been sexed as female).⁹⁹⁰ This distinctive form of burial, while being unnoticeable when the corpse was wrapped, placed in a coffin, and buried, identifies these people as figures of some significance within the local Christian community, especially the individual in the Peacock Coffin. If this grave had originally been marked at the surface for any special veneration or to identify the deceased person from among the others in the cemetery, we cannot say.

⁹⁹⁰ The individual in the Peacock Coffin and the 25-year-old male from Huber (2018a: 522).

However, it seems that these individuals were selected for burial with wreaths and without other objects, implying that they belonged to a group who received somewhat distinct burial rites.

The Peacock Coffin is not the only example of a burial where the inside was decorated and the tomb sealed, permanently hiding the decoration from later visitors. The inner walls of two cist tombs in the cemetery at Anthedon (third-fifth century) were plastered and decorated with images of plants and crosses in red paint.⁹⁹¹ Remains of plaster, sometimes painted, were also found in four additional tombs from the same cemetery.⁹⁹² These burials, featuring both a simple tomb type and a simple decorative style, indicate the decoration of tombs by non-elites, who still chose to represent their death beliefs in a visual way. As the cemetery contained mainly individual burials, it seems unlikely that these tombs were intended to be reopened and the decoration was thus designed to be viewed for only a limited time, during the burial itself.

Another example of decoration that appears on the inside of tombs is the carved cross on the inside of the stone covering of one of the tombs at Khirbet el- Kiliya (Byzantine),⁹⁹³ where the cross may either have had protective purposes or merely designated a Christian tomb. The decoration may not necessarily have been for someone on the outside of the tomb to observe; instead, it may have been for those within the tomb, either to protect them, identify them, or otherwise commemorate them.

⁹⁹¹ Nabulsi et al. (2010: 603-604).

⁹⁹² Nabulsi et al. (2010: 605).

⁹⁹³ Magen (1990: 326).

6b.5 Conclusion

Funerary inscriptions and iconography are found associated with a limited number of tombs within the scope of this study. At first glance, it seems that the latter in particular may be associated chiefly with tombs of elite individuals, wealthy families, or others whose status would allow them to be provided with elaborate iconography. However, we have seen that there are some examples, such as those sealed within the cist tombs at Anthedon (third-fifth century), where the explanation for the iconography is less clear, as well as simple designs and inscriptions which would have been readily available for some non-elites. Graffiti was also a non-elite option. By acknowledging the options available to non-elite people, we can see how the expressions and concepts that appear in elite burial spaces were also understood and represented by non-elite people.

Funerary inscriptions of our period were chiefly in Greek, but they were also in other languages which may be reflective of location, belief system, or other elements of the identity of an individual or community. In some cases, classical funerary vocabulary was used, where their ambiguity allowed them to be interpreted in different ways depending on the observer's beliefs. However, certain aspects of traditional inscriptions, such as curses, became much rarer than they had previously been, and many of the lengthy inscriptions were reserved for monastic or church contexts, where they could be shown within a new social sphere that highlighted the elite Christian nature of the occupants of a tomb and their families or social groups.

Many of the images used to represent aspects of death belief were repeated throughout our period, but none of them were as popular as the cross had become by the seventh century. The use of more traditional imagery, such as the vine and wreath, is not as simple as a continuation, but it is more of an adaption of imagery that was associated with death. Symbols could receive new meanings, but notably none of these meanings could convey the same message that was transmitted by the presence of an explicitly religious symbol. While some concepts transcended belief systems and cultural groups, they do not seem to have carried the weight of symbols such as the cross, especially as this could be interpreted as protective as well as symbolic.

Inscription and iconography are important elements of burials because, as well as reflecting religious beliefs, death theology, and trends in funerary imagery, they allow us to clearly see the ability of early Christians to understand complex ideas about death and the afterlife (Chapter 1). This is an essential aspect of our period that is often overlooked due to the simplified burial style attributed to Christianity (Section 2.2.3.1). Understanding this awareness and the various ways in which Christians could express themselves, their beliefs, and their identities gives a more nuanced understanding of burials of our period, demonstrated by the case studies section (Section 6b.4), which explored aspects of burials covered throughout this thesis.

CONCLUSION

Through this thesis, I have achieved and shown the first large-scale study of early Byzantine burials in the Near East, by examining burial data so that burial trends and the development of death beliefs could be observed during a key period of the expansion of Christianity. Each of the chapters has considered a different aspect of burials and presented alternative ways of study and interpretation, for the purpose of demonstrating the value of engaging with wider research on burials. The thesis has presented the results of the application of these methods of interpretation in a series of case studies. The case studies have demonstrated the value of applying the discussions throughout the thesis to Byzantine burials in the Near East. From the data-gathering and analysis that I have performed in this project, it is possible to discuss societal trends and uncover a general sense of what it was like to experience death and burial in the early Byzantine Near East.

I first considered the main belief system in which these burials were occurring (Christianity), from the positions of figures such as elites and monks and that of the 'ordinary' Christian who attended services at church (Chapter 1). The role that the church had in funeral and commemorative services, while by no means exclusive, especially in the earlier part of our period, was a key component in spreading Christian beliefs about death, ways to approach death, and burial practices.

Through church services such as funerals, combined with popular stories such as the lives of the saints and the evidence from wills, we saw that the ordinary

Christian would have been regularly reminded of key aspects of Christian death, including the performance of the eucharist, the importance of the baptism and good deeds, and the value of intercessory prayers and actions. This level of understanding among Christians is not appreciated by many archaeologists, who observe the 'simplicity' of Christian burials without acknowledging that the burial rites attributed to these people were complex and imbued with meaning. Burial rites existed within a space that was neither fully traditional nor fully new, but where official death beliefs and older practices could be held and performed simultaneously.

As I have discussed, this is the context in which archaeologists and researchers should examine burial data of the Byzantine Near East, and the starting point of the research in this thesis. By gathering data on published burials of the Byzantine Near East, this thesis has shown how a large-scale study of burials can help us to overcome the assumptions inherent in studies of Byzantine burials such as 'simple' Christian burials, apotropaic objects, and the representation of gender. It has also shown the importance of looking at broader trends within burial, rather than relying on isolated case studies.

An analysis of the archaeological data on tombs of this period (Chapter 2) indicated that these death beliefs are complexly intertwined with other burial concerns. The primary concerns which determined burial location, type, and orientation were environmental, related to the landscape and available resources, socio-economic, related to cultural concerns, tradition, and affordability, and based on desirability, related to visibility and security. It was widely acceptable for Christians to continue to use the cemeteries and tombs

that had been used by their non-Christian ancestors or which gave them the visibility and location that they desired. Burial practices did not suddenly begin to deviate from the established burial practices, but instead seem to have gradually adapted to practices such as east-west orientation with head to the west (where this had not previously been practiced) and a more universal burial style (with reduced or more Christian grave goods). The essential conclusion to be highlighted here is that the view of burial practices of this period as Christian versus pagan is an outdated and fundamentally flawed approach.

However, the additional concerns of Christians were also important or could even overrule these areas of focus. New, previously unused burial locations associated with churches and monasteries granted people – in particular, but by no means limited to, elite individuals and the clergy – the opportunity to display many of these primary concerns in a new way. This new location highlighted their death beliefs and placed them in a location where they could take full advantage of the commemorative offerings that were meant to benefit them as they awaited the final resurrection. While the concept of visibility within burial remained, and these tombs could be used to demonstrate wealth, elitism, and actions performed in life, they added to these aspects of religious identity and remembrance of the deceased person within a Christian context, whether through visibility, inscription, or prayer.

The deliberate decision to move from an older cemetery space to a new one as a clear-cut separation of a converted Christian community from their ancestors was rare, and mostly occurred within church and monastic spaces. Examples have been suggested or identified (for example, Kellis 2 and the West Cemetery

at el-Deir). However, there is also evidence of the importance of turning a burial space into a Christian space, for example through the construction of churches or the addition of crosses and other Christian symbolism or inscription (an example is the church built over the cemetery at Kom al-Ahmar. By considering the adoption of Christianity not as the sole or leading cause of burial change, but as a new way to express one's position within a group or social status within the field of more traditional burial practices, we begin to accept the agency of people performing burial rights, within the scope of what was available to them.

To further explore elements of agency in burials, I turned to the people, objects, inscriptions, and decoration associated with burials, starting with the human remains themselves. Research on human remains from the Byzantine Near East has historically been overlooked (Chapter 3) but is becoming a more prominent discipline that remains underutilised by historians of Byzantium. Archaeologists themselves sometimes fail to incorporate the work of the human remains researcher into their discussions of tombs. Nevertheless, students of Byzantine studies should use the data gathered from research on human remains and be trained to understand the methodologies used to study human remains so that they can become familiar with the benefits and flaws of techniques and incorporate this data into their own research. This training will create the first generation of Byzantinists with a background in the study, application, and significance of human remains which would not only benefit the study of people and society but also provide the opportunity to branch out into other uses of science in the study of history, such as climate and environmental studies.

Chapter 4 expanded upon the discussion on human remains in Chapter 3 by exploring the data in the appendix and case studies. This highlighted that, while there are still barriers to the research on human remains within the Byzantine Near East, the development of historians' skillsets to work with the current research that has been carried out is essential. This includes not only political and social aspects of the modern world, but also the methodologies that are used, or have previously been used, by researchers. Through a combination of the information provided in Chapters 3 and 4, historians can see the value of using human remains in archaeological and historical research and understand how to begin engaging with this research in a meaningful way that can encourage future discussion on information including access to resources or workload, socio-economic status, injury and illness, and aspects of health. These chapters demonstrated the importance of expert analysis on human remains to research on burials by challenging previous assumptions and offering interpretations that could not have been posited without the study of human remains.

It is important here to restate the value of the data gathered in this thesis, which is presented in the appendix. The appendix has significant potential for future research, because the volume of information is a valuable collection that could be used on its own or in combination with additional evidence. This thesis therefore provides a baseline on which future study can take place. Future research on human remains will expand our current knowledge and understanding of early Byzantine people in the Near East, as well as their burial practices. Chapter 4 provides some examples from the appendix of the direction

in which this research could go: examination of diet and status, burial in and outside of churches and health or status, and the study of atypical burials.

Further to the discussion on human remains, this thesis considered the interpretation of grave goods (Chapter 5) by expanding upon the standard interpretations presented by archaeologists and excavators working on early Byzantine tombs of the Near East. Firstly, while grave goods appear in the minority of graves of the early Byzantine period, those that do contain grave goods contain a broader variety of objects than is usually considered. While some of these objects, such as textiles, pottery and glass vessels, and jewellery, have been the focus of past research, others have been overlooked, either because they were small and simple objects such as pins or spindles, or through their categorisation as 'apotropaic', a label which is likely to have been applied too broadly.

Early Byzantine grave goods of the Near East included the steady introduction of some objects and symbols, such as the cross, which took on a protective role that other objects had previously held, but which did not yet make them obsolete. It also included developments in the ideology surrounding grave goods, for example mourning practices which may once have been elements of polytheistic beliefs such as Charon's Obol continuing in monotheistic contexts. Furthermore, the type of object alone does not explain its presence in a burial – in one context, it may have one interpretation, but in another the meaning may be entirely different.

The final aspects of Byzantine burials of the Near East examined in this thesis were inscriptions and iconography (Chapters 6a and 6b respectively). These

were associated with small numbers of tombs, although originally far more may have featured an inscription, decoration, or a grave marker. While funerary inscriptions of our period are chiefly in Greek, this is also the most studied language and, therefore, the most widely understood. Certain aspects of traditional inscriptions, such as curses, became much rarer in this period, and many of the lengthy inscriptions were reserved for monastic or church contexts, where they could be shown within a new social sphere that highlighted the elite Christian nature of the occupants of a tomb and their families or social groups.

While initially it may seem as though decoration was associated with tombs of the wealthy and elites, examples of tombs with iconography which would only be visible during or even before a funeral have also been examined in this thesis. These, in combination with the simpler designs and inscriptions in tombs, show that decorative expression was available to non-elites and people whose intentions appear to have been to create a visual experience with a limited period of visibility. This presents the same argument as inscriptions: that while the wealthy and elites could use decoration as a form of social display, the reasons for their inclusion were more complicated and less wealthy individuals or families may have had other reasons for their use.

Combining these arguments, practices related to funeral and burial were slow to change in the early Byzantine period. This is a significant point that should not be overlooked, because in some current research, such as the Kellis 1 and Kellis 2 cemeteries, a shift in burial rites from non-Christian to Christian is presented as though it occurred quickly and to an entire community of people. However, when the data gathered for this thesis leads the discussion, a shift in

burial rites related to religious change does not appear to be so dramatic. While long-term burial trends demonstrate the widespread adoption of Christianity and its impact upon elements such as the dominance of the cross in iconography, the data points to other concerns that were also important to burials of the early Byzantine period. These include cultural and socio-economic issues, the desire for a tomb visible in both religious and non-religious settings, identity and personal relationships, and aspects of mourning such as commemoration of the dead. Broadly, society was concerned with religious and spiritual notions but also with physical aspects and the impact that burial could have on the living.

Christians understood complex ideas about death and the afterlife and explored these through various aspects of their burials, but they also held other factors in importance and were not driven solely, by religious beliefs. This demonstrates the complexity of the culture and experience of ordinary people, who were not simply 'Christians' but also embodied aspects of 'Egyptian', 'Roman', 'Jewish', 'Greek', 'Syrian' (etc.) cultures. Doubtlessly these aspects of their identity were integral elements of the burial rites they provided to their dead.

Implications and Further Research

As this thesis presents the first large-scale study of Byzantine burials in this area, the value of the data in the appendix is significant. The data could be used in the future both to study small-scale areas in greater detail, such as individual provinces, but also could be expanded to examine fourth-seventh century practices within the entire Byzantine empire or beyond its borders. The conclusions of this thesis should be tested using smaller datasets, for example within a single province or even group of sites, and also using larger datasets,

such as by looking at the early Byzantine empire as a whole. As the latter was the original scope for this thesis, it would be both extremely interesting and important to investigate how the conclusions reached here may compare to Byzantine Greece, Asia Minor, North Africa, and other areas.

Chapters 3 and 4 should be considered as a starting point for a topic which Byzantine studies is unfortunately lacking: the integration of studies on human remains with research on texts, inscriptions, material culture, archaeology, and other elements of Byzantine studies. It is to the detriment of Byzantine studies that students are not trained in scientific methods that would encourage greater integration between historical and archaeological methodologies and emphasise the value of interdisciplinary research. Chapters 3 and 4 have demonstrated the possibilities that can be produced from appropriate training. The integration of a more multidisciplinary approach will benefit Byzantine studies through the generation of evidence that can support or challenge previous assumptions and teach us a great deal about the world in which people lived.

In addition to this, one area of human remains research that should receive greater attention is the movement of people, established through stable isotopic analysis, because the lack of research in this area means that the topic could not be discussed within the scope of this thesis. Identifying locals or non-locals would present another aspect of burials (and, more generally, life in the early Byzantine period) that could help to support arguments about the identification of potential non-locals in cemetery spaces. While the movement of populations has been studied at several sites in the appendix (see Phaeno, Kellis 2,

Barsinia, St Stephen's, and Mount Nebo), very little can currently be said about the burials of non-locals other than that they were very similar to the burials of locals. It may simply be the case that burial style largely did not change depending on a person's geographic origins, but more research, especially isotopic analysis, is needed on this subject before any conclusions can be reached.

Another major area which future research could explore is through the re-examination of grave goods. Chapter 5 has laid out a broad range of possible interpretations for grave goods beyond what is commonly used in Byzantine studies and demonstrated the value of keeping up to date with theories on the interpretation of burial objects. This is a very significant area in which the active decisions of ordinary people burying their loved ones could be explored further, to identify aspects of culture and life experience in Byzantine burials. It also highlights the most important aspect of this thesis, which has been discussed throughout: that through the assumptions that have been made about burials (for example, that women were buried with certain objects, or that Christians were buried in a certain way), alternative explanations and areas of discussion have been excluded. Those who were burying their dead did so for very personal, emotional, and genuine reasons that were not merely single-minded observations of a religious belief or a cultural tradition. When we narrow these people down to one aspect of identify, they lose their agency and are forgotten – and, as historians, this is something that we should never allow to happen.

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