CHAPTER TWO

THE TOMB: ARCHITECTURE AND DECORATION

THIS CHAPTER INVESTIGATES A DIFFERENT TYPE OF SPACE, THAT OF THE built tomb. What were the dominant guidelines in designing a final resting place? How were tombs built, organized, and decorated? This chapter is not concerned with in-depth descriptions of the architectural features of the tombs, an effort that would be thwarted in any case by large gaps in the available data. Rather, it aims to identify the overarching patterns in the way people were buried, and how these inform us about funerary rituals. The previous chapter signaled the persistence of older customs in the Roman period, such as the continuous use of pre-Roman cemeteries. As cities expanded, additional burial grounds were created, and it is here that new concepts of cemetery space, related to visibility and spatial connections between the tomb and settlement, started to appear. This chapter takes the theme of continuity and change to the tomb itself.

The first part of the chapter presents an overview of the different architectural types by summarizing the more extensive discussion of tomb types presented in Appendix 2. A discussion about the reliability of the distributions of tomb types precedes this section. The second part investigates the combinations of different types across space and time, and assesses the degrees of diversity and uniformity in Syrian cemeteries. These are then compared to pre-Roman practices and connected to changing concepts of funerary display. The discussion at the end of the chapter problematizes the sample a bit further by focusing on research biases inherent in the data set. It concludes with an investigation of the possible architecture models for the new elements in the
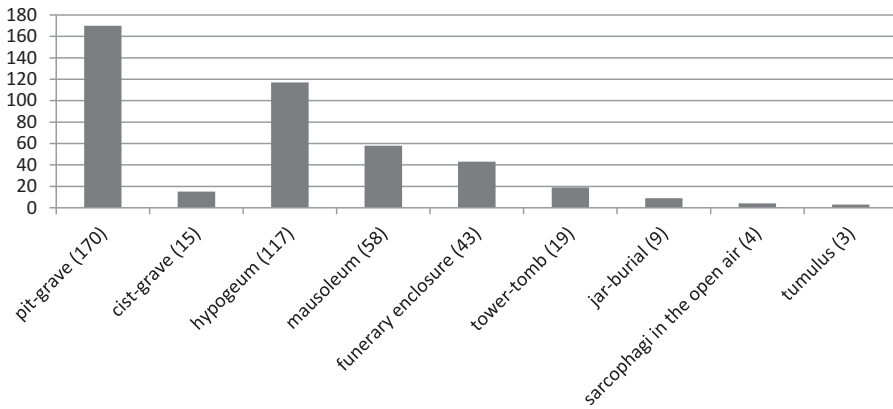
CHART 1. Distribution of tomb types, cat. 1 – known types

tomb architecture, and places Syrian mortuary practices in the cultural milieu of the East Mediterranean, Rome, and the Iranian world.

TOMB TYPES

We can distinguish at least nine distinct architectural types of tomb in the sample from the Roman period. These immediately tell us that Syrians did not choose similar grave forms, or bury the dead in tombs of the same size, outlook, and material. Far from it, in fact. The funerary assemblage is characterized by a great eclecticism in architectural shapes and forms of decoration. In order to give a sense of the range, this section describes each of the architectural types separately. First, however, a few methodological notes are necessary.

In the archaeology of Syria, and archaeology in general, little consensus exists about how to describe funerary architecture and what constitutes distinct tomb types. For the purposes of this book, I have attempted to bring some order to the collection of tombs by dividing them into categories based on three characteristics: shape, construction above or below ground, and single or communal burial, i.e., whether the tomb was designed for one person or more. Here, I have assumed that these features were the result of conscious planning or decision making among the burying community, and thus reveal what it thought was important. Such divisions are to some degree artificial, as they present my emphases rather than those of the people of the past. As we shall see, some overlap and mix forms existed. However, a degree of "boxing in," putting an architectural label on a tomb, is vital in order to get a grip on the thousands of tombs of the Syrian province. The "unboxing" follows in the subsequent sections and chapters.

The types that I distinguish are hypogea, mausolea, funerary enclosures, tower-tombs, tumuli, pit-graves, cist-graves, jar-burials, and sarcophagus groups placed in the open air (Chart 1). Each is described in this section. Three more
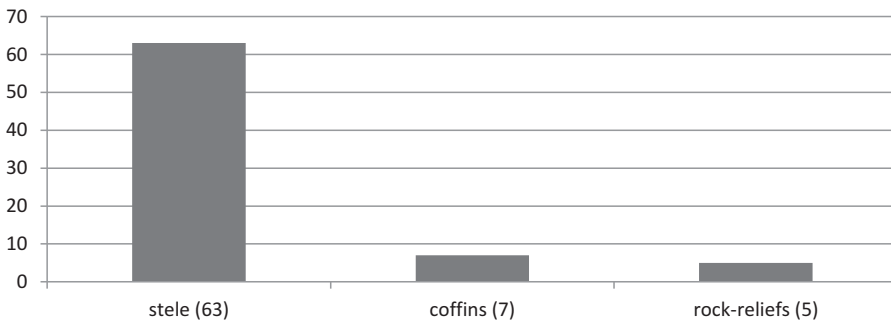
CHART 2. Distribution of tomb types, cat. 1 – unknown types

categories are identified in which the exact tomb shape is unclear (Chart 2). The first two are sarcophagi and stelae, which may have been placed in or on top of a grave, but have long since been removed from their original location. The third type consists of funerary rock-reliefs, where the associated site of burial was not found. The discussion of all tomb types is hindered by the uneven, incomplete, and limited state of publication. Images or drawings often lack, and the descriptions can be rather cursory. In the Introduction, I have outlined the methodology used to incorporate as much of this problematic material as possible into the study, and to add degrees of reliability. The sample on which Chart 1 is based represents those of the highest quality, or cat. 1. Chart 3 shows the distribution of tomb types from the second tier group, the so-called cat. 2 material. This group includes the same types, and adds various fragmentary shapes of which the original placement remains unknown, such as cippi, lintels, or sculpture, as well as a large group of unknown shapes about which the publications did not care to say more than that they were "tombs" (Chart 4).
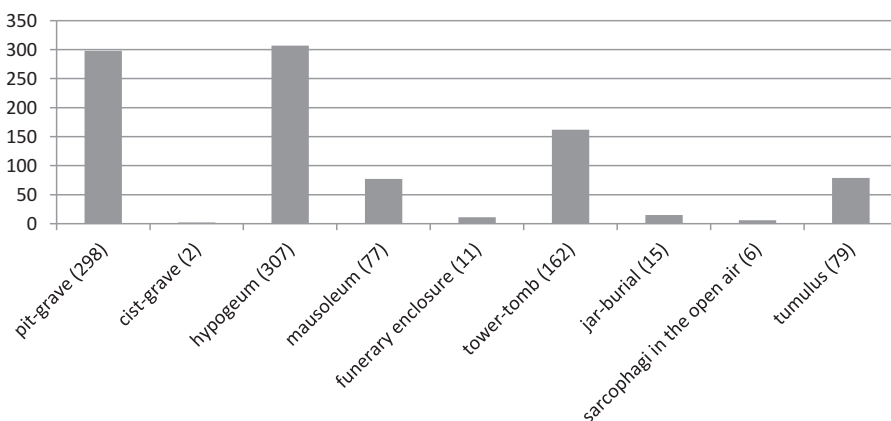

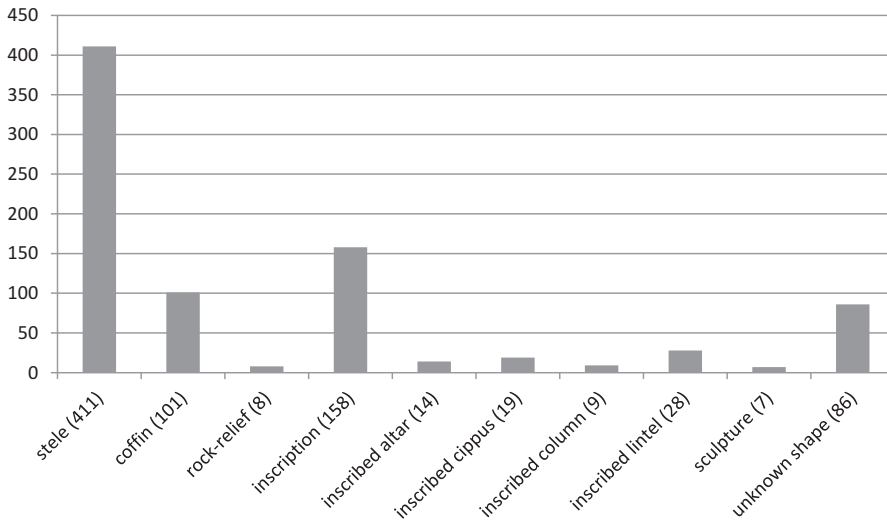CHART 3. Distribution of tomb types, cat. 2 – known types

CHART 4. Distribution of tomb types, cat. 2 – unknown types

A comparison of the types in the cat. 1 and 2 sample (Charts 1 and 3) allows for several observations. Hypogea and pit-graves represent more than half of the assemblage, and various other types make up the rest. The assemblage, therefore, is split between two highly common shapes and a wider collection of less popular types of tomb. The differences between the two charts can, in part, be explained by archaeological recovery. For instance, the greater presence of mausolea and funerary enclosures in the cat. 1 data set is linked to their size and elaborate decoration: they were hard to miss and easier to date by archaeologists. Pit-graves, if not marked by a stele or filled with rich grave goods, were less likely to be noted or published. In general, the sample is skewed toward the larger (communal) and visible tomb types, which are more likely to be discovered and reported than small, single, underground forms such as jar-burials and cist- and pit-graves. Stelae and other inscribed stones are often published without context, with most emphasis on the inscription rather than the shape or material. They are more likely to end up in the cat. 2 assemblage. Compare, for instance, Chart 2 to Chart 4. As discussed later, the inscribed stones originally belonged to pit-graves, hypogea, and perhaps other communal tombs. It thus follows that the total number of these types of tomb was higher. We can also assume that sarcophagus burials were more popular than the sample suggests, because of their portability and their widespread reuse in later times. The high number of tower-tombs in Chart 3 reflects their common occurrence at only one site, Palmyra. In sum, based on the comparison of Charts 1–4, the distribution of tombs types should probably be modified as follows: mausolea, tower-tombs, and funerary enclosures were less common than the charts imply, and regionally constricted. Hypogea, pit-graves, cist-graves, jar-burials, and possibly sarcophagi in the open air were more frequent. It is

good to emphasize, however, that none of these charts can be taken as reflecting a real distribution of types in Roman Syria. Rather, they provide an impression of the range of types that Syrians chose for their tombs, and their relative popularity.

Tomb-Types: Known Shapes (Chart 1)

Before looking at the occurrence of the tomb types across time and space, we first briefly discuss each type, in order of popularity. A fuller description of the chronological development, regional spread, and architectural details can be found in Appendix 2. The simple pit-grave, cut into the bedrock or dug into the earth and consisting of a single burial space, was the most common form of burial and was used throughout the period at hand (Figure 8). Variation mostly occurred in methods of closing, which could be done by stone slabs, terracotta tiles, or heaps of earth and rubble. At Selenkahiye and other sites in the Middle Euphrates region, storage jars covered the pits. Sarcophagus lids more commonly closed the pit-graves of Northwest Syria. Some types of cover, such as sarcophagus lids and earthen heaps, were visible above the ground. Possibly more pit-graves had markers, for instance, in the form of funerary stelae (see discussion of stelae, p. 48). Yet, few examples have remained in situ. Pit-graves generally contained a single individual, who was placed directly on the floor or in a coffin made of terracotta, wood, stone, or lead. A variation of the pit-grave type was the cist-grave, with a burial pit aligned with stones or bricks forming a cist, covered by tiles, slabs, or earth. This type was uncommon and largely disappeared after the 2nd c. CE.

Hypogea, or underground chamber-tombs, form the other most common type of burial. They were dug wherever the landscape allowed: in rocky outcrops and hills, and, in the case of Palmyra, into the hard clay surface. Many variations existed in the form and execution of the hypogeum, but the basic type consisted of an entrance corridor (dromos) leading to a small vestibule that opened to a central chamber (Figure 9). Burial usually took place in rectangular burial niches (loculi) cut in the three walls of the chamber, but it also occurred in free-standing stone sarcophagi and in pit-graves dug in the chamber floor. On average, six places were available for burial in the hypogea, but this number varied considerably. The large Palmyrene examples could accommodate hundreds of loculi. As in the case of the pit-graves, hypogea were located below the surface and could be marked above the ground. At least a third of all hypogea in the sample incorporated aboveground portions in various shapes: double columns, stelae, stone platforms, earthen tumuli, and decorated façades. With the exception of the earthen mounds, the aboveground features were introduced in the 2nd c. CE. In the same period, the hypogea became increasingly ornate. Reliefs of cornices, engaged columns, and other architectural features
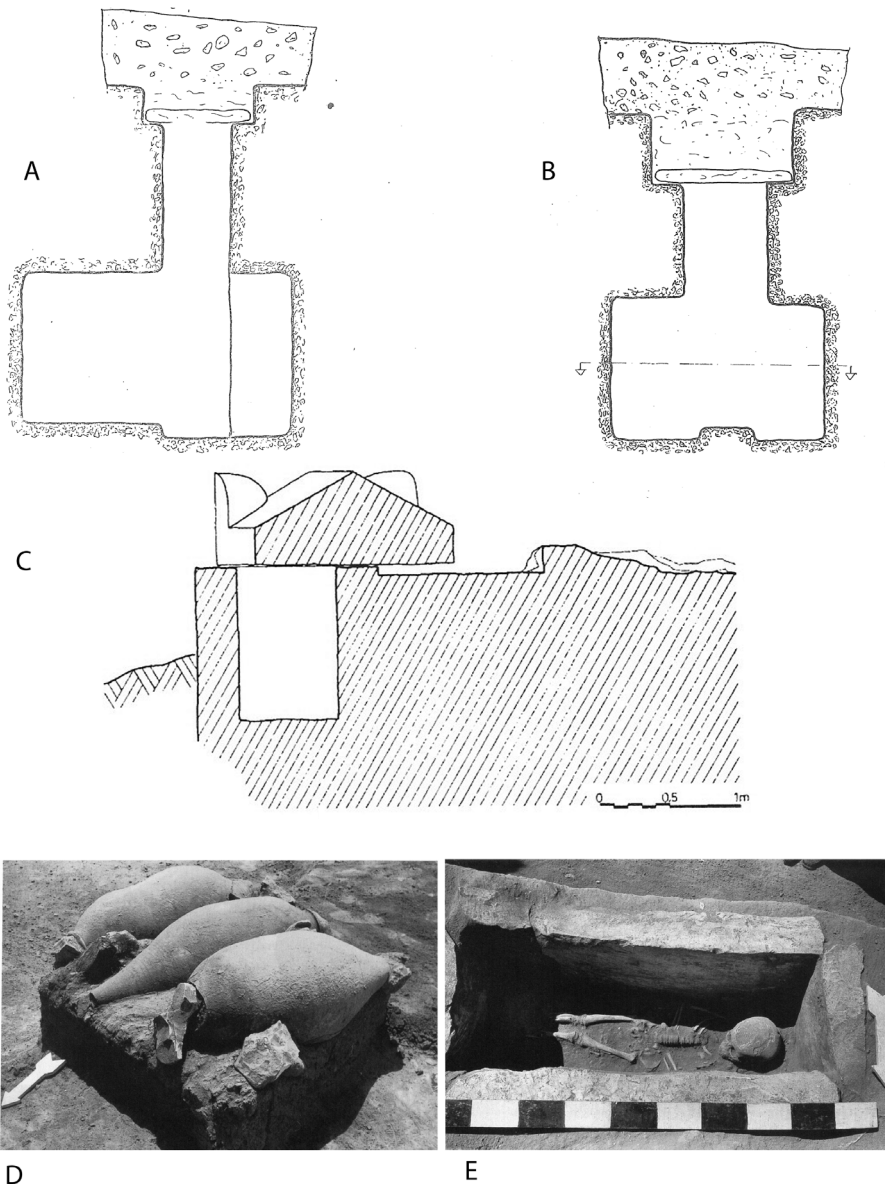
8. Pit- and cist-graves. A: Nawa-tell Umm el-Hauran, Tomb 139. B: Nawa-tell Umm el-Hauran, Tomb 156. C: Herbet Kalil, Tomb 1. D: Selenkahiye, Tomb X 23.3. E: Selenkahiye, Tomb T. 06.9

were added to the exterior façade; while inside, (figural) reliefs and plastered or painted walls could be found.

Mausolea, the next type, are built, aboveground tombs. They came in several forms: circular and rectangular, in the shape of temples and towers, relatively solid stone squares with flat roofs, and open structures with columns support-ing a pyramid-shaped roof (Figures 10, 44). Mausolea contained multiple buri-als, usually placed in loculi or coffins. Hybrid forms also existed, whereby a
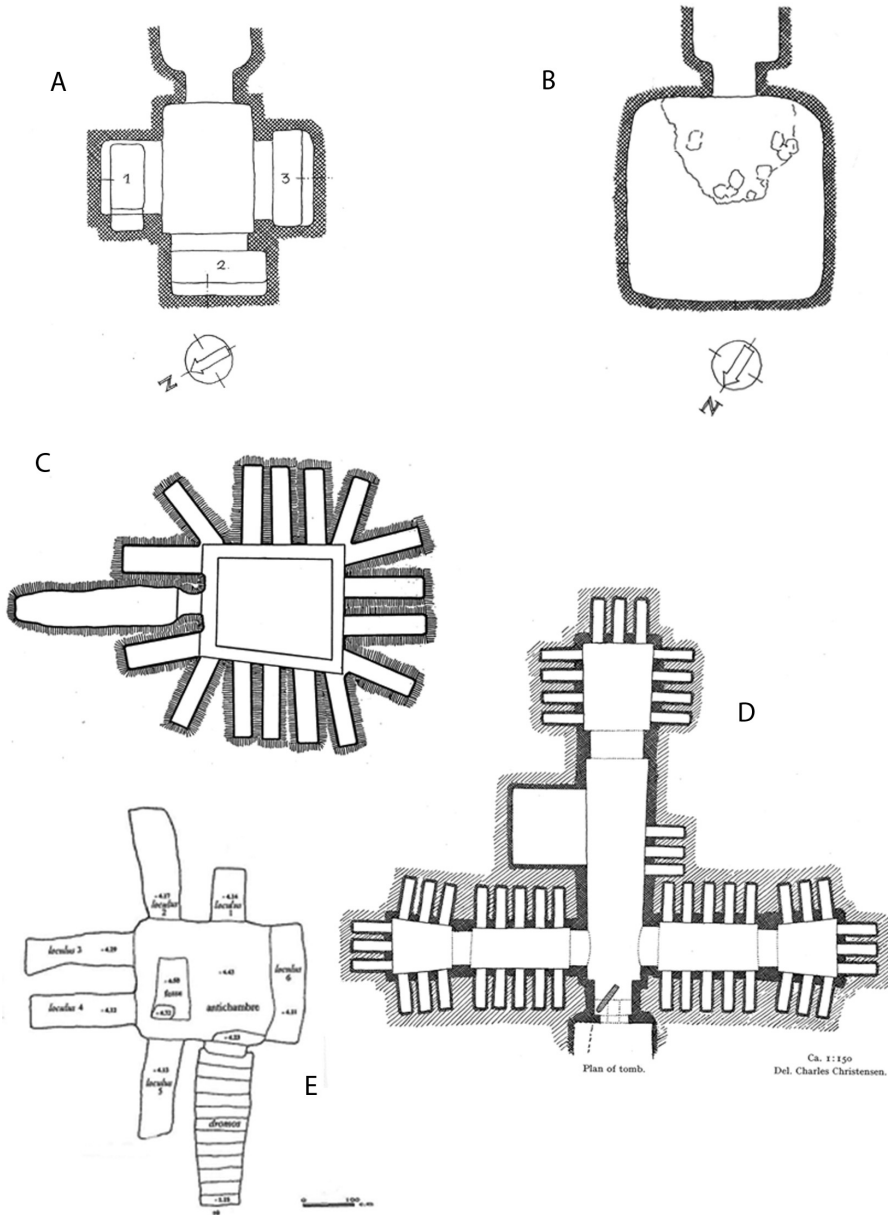
9. Hypogea. A: Hama, Tomb G XXVII (central chamber: 2.40 × 1.63 m). B: Hama, Tomb G XXVII (3.57 × 3.45 × 2.15/1.60 m). C: Dura Europos, Tomb 3 (central chamber: 3.10 × 2.70 × 3.5 m). D: Palmyra, Tomb of 'Abd'astor (central chamber: ca. 17.25 × 2.25–3 m). E: Jebleh, Tomb D (central chamber: 1.22 × 0.63 × 0.15 m)

mausoleum stood on top of a hypogeum, for instance, at Palmyra and Qanawat. The great diversity in size, shape, and finish of the mausolea highlights strong regional trends of this tomb type. Circular mausolea were characteristic of the Hauran and date to the 1st c. BCE–1st c. CE. They were sparsely decorated. By the 2nd c. CE, rectangular and square mausolea had replaced the
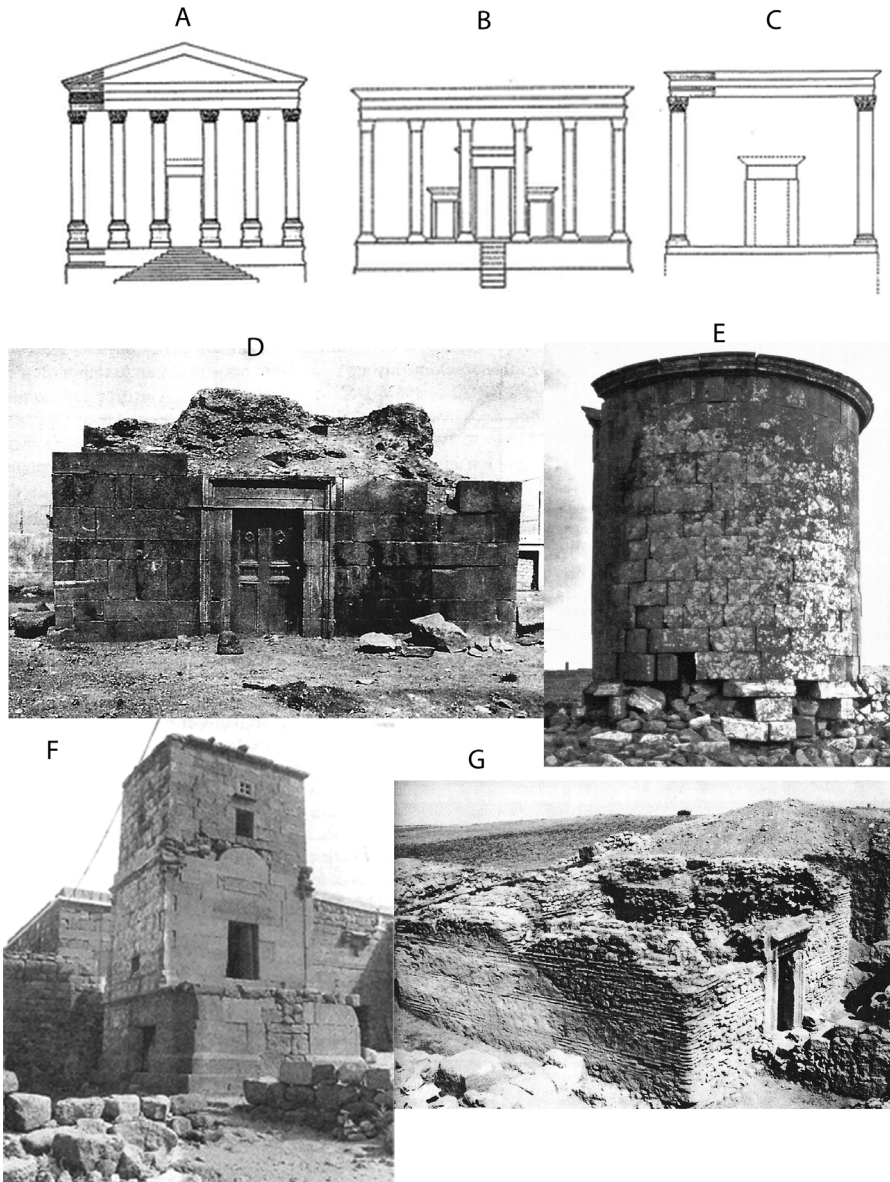
10. Mausolea. A: Tomb 86 (Palmyra). B: Tomb 85b (Palmyra). C: Tomb 150 (Palmyra). D: Tomb 8 (Bosra). E: Tomb 7 (Bosra). F: Tomb 1 (Rīmet al-Lohf). G: Mausoleum 1 (Apamea)

circular types in the Hauran and spread to other parts of Syria. Tetrastyle tombs, consisting of four columns or pillars supporting a roof that was often pyramid-shaped, appeared on the Limestone Plateau, and those in Palmyra included an elaborately sculpted front reminiscent of temple and theater architecture. Like hypogea, mausolea were increasingly decorated in the 2nd c. CE. Thus far, no mausolea appear to have been reported from the Lebanese coast or in the steppe interior of Syria.
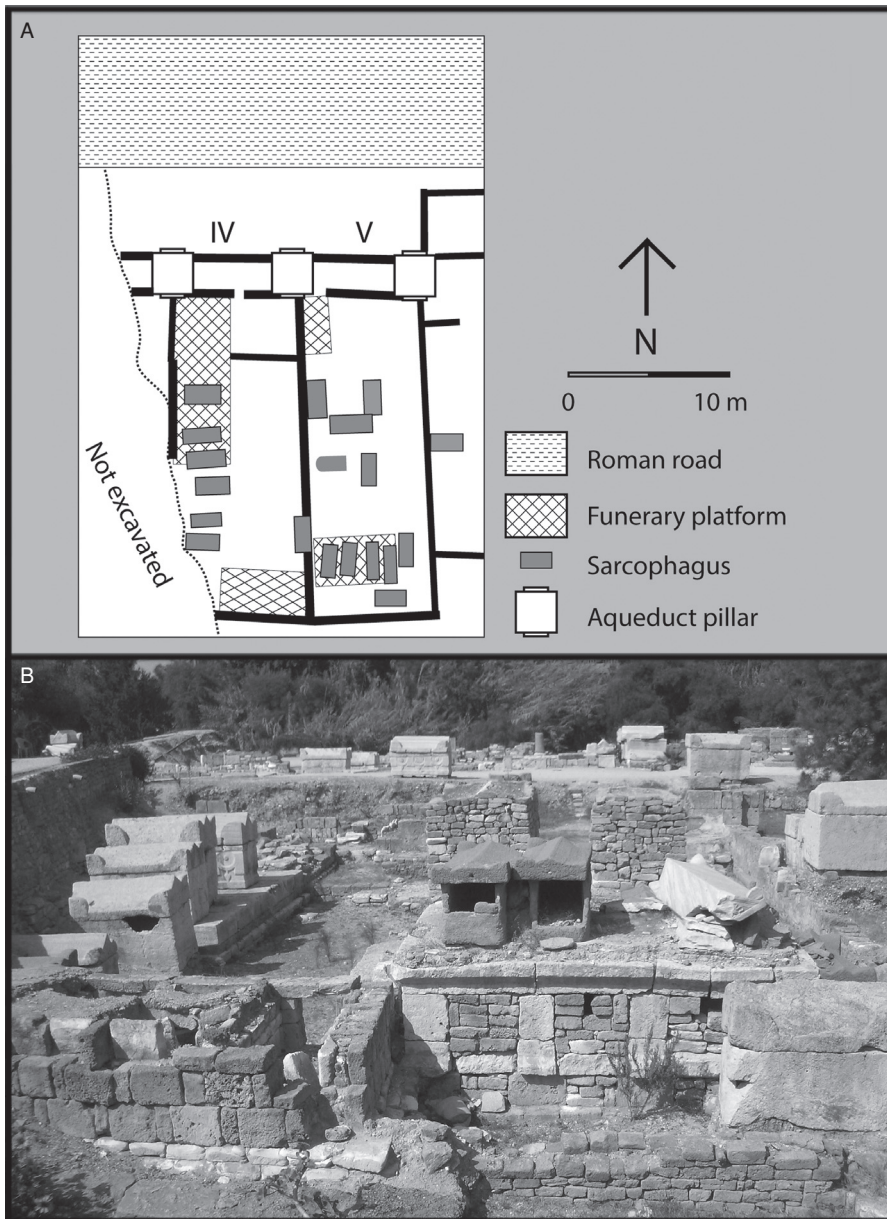
11. Funerary enclosures (al-Bass Cemetery, Tyre). A: Complex 4 and 5. B: Complex 4 (left) and Complex 5 (right)

A type related to the mausoleum is the funerary enclosure. We have already seen the type in the al-Bass Cemetery of Tyre described in Chapter 1. It was only found on the Lebanese coast. It consists of a large, enclosed, but open–air space divided into several rooms or sections (Figure 11). Inside, multiple forms of burial took place: in rock-cut pits, sarcophagi, and loculi stacked in built platforms. The enclosures were decorated with relief, plaster, and paint, and

some Tyrian examples included mosaic floors. On average, they held 22 burial spots, but the overall dimensions and number of spots varied considerably. Some included benches constructed against the interior walls, and rooms that appear not to have been used for burial. Gardens were sometimes incorporated in the structures. The earliest funerary enclosure arose late in the 1st c. CE, and the type dies out after the 4th c. CE.

Tower-tombs are relatively well studied compared to the rest of the assemblage. The term is used fairly indiscriminately across the architectural types of Roman Syria. It is applied to tall, aboveground buildings of various shapes, such as the Palmyrene towers, the Tomb of Samsigeramos at Homs, and the Hermel building. This book makes a distinction between mausolea, such as those at Homs and Hermel, and tower-tombs proper. The latter are square buildings that were higher than wide and had several stories, which could be reached by a winding interior staircase (Figure 12). They are mostly known from Palmyra, but were also erected along the Euphrates north and east of Palmyra (see Appendix 2, p. 322). The earliest Palmyrene examples date to the second half of the 1st c. BCE. This type had loculi that were accessible from the exterior façade. Over time, burial moved inside, to tiers with stacked loculi and, starting in the mid-2nd c. CE, also to sarcophagi. The towers grew in size and the number of burial spots could reach several hundreds. Their construction continued until the early 2nd c. CE. Plastered walls were common in the oldest tower-tombs, whereas those of the late 1st and 2nd c. CE were decorated with reliefs, pilasters, moldings, and coffered ceilings. Combined with figural sculpture and great size, these Palmyrene tower-tombs became some of the most lavish funerary monuments of the Syrian province.

A different type is represented by jar-burials: large to medium-sized jars placed in pits (Figure 13). Only a small number is included in the cat. 1 sample from Roman Syria, and the type appears more frequently beyond the eastern edges of the Roman province. Jar-burials were used for both cremation and inhumation burials. In the case of inhumations, the jars contained or covered the remains of infants and small children. The practice of cremation was unusual, and perhaps tied to the Roman military, as discussed in Chapter 4 (p. 110).

Roman Syria has yielded large quantities of sarcophagi, mostly without context. They feature more extensively in the next section. A small group, however, forms a separate type, labeled "sarcophagi in the open air." The type consists of groups of two or three stone sarcophagi raised on a pedestal (Figure 14). Often, the coffins formed a triclinium shape. At least four examples come from the database, and the ten additional groups in the cat. 2 sample suggest a modest popularity on the Limestone Plateau in the 2nd and 3rd c. CE.

Tumuli form the final category. As in the case of the tower-tombs, the definition of "tumulus" varies, and the term is applied in the scholarship to different
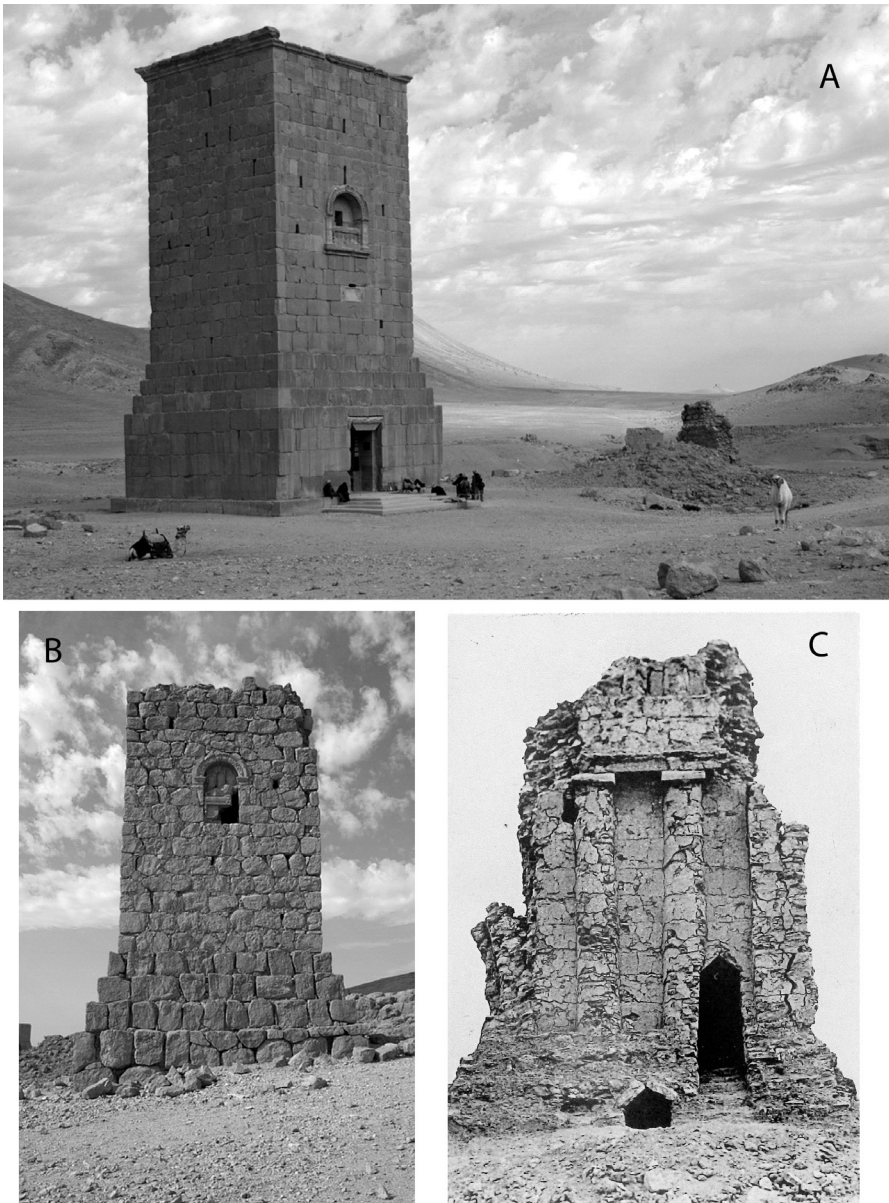
12. Tower-tombs. A: Tomb of Elahbel (Palmyra). B: Tomb of Kithot (Palmyra). C: Tower-tomb at Baghuz

types, such as round mausolea and hypogea under an earthen mound. In this book, tumuli are communal tombs consisting of a circular mound of earth and rubble in which pit-graves were dug, or which covered a built grave chamber (Figure 15). They are distinct from hypogea covered by a mound and from circular, built tombs. The cat. 1 database contains only three tumulus-tombs, but the type was more widespread both during and before the Roman period.
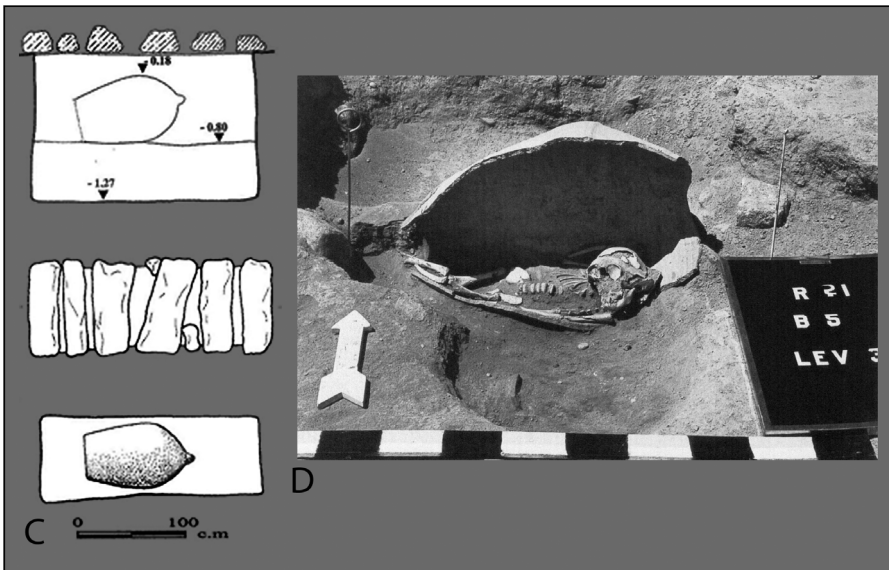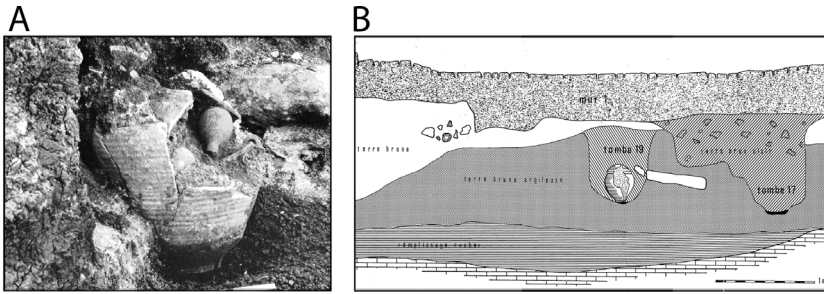
13. Jar-burials. A: Tomb 19 (Apamea). B: Section with Tomb 19 (Apamea). C: Section (top) and plan (middle, bottom) of Tomb B (Jebleh). D: Tomb R21.5 (Selenkahiye)

Several regional traditions in tumulus construction appear to have existed. Those in the Hauran consisted of a rubble mound covering a small burial chamber with a central support pillar. Their construction was perhaps limited to the 1st c. BCE and the 1st c. CE. In the Syrian Upper Euphrates area around the Taqba dam, tumulus-tombs were larger than the examples from the Hauran, and possibly of 3rd c. CE or later date.

Unknown Shapes: Stelae (Chart 2)

A significant portion of the funerary material from Roman Syria comes in fragmentary form. Here, the appearance of the original tomb is not known or certain. Funerary stelae form the largest group, and were common through–out the Roman province, except in East Syria (Figure 16). The majority date
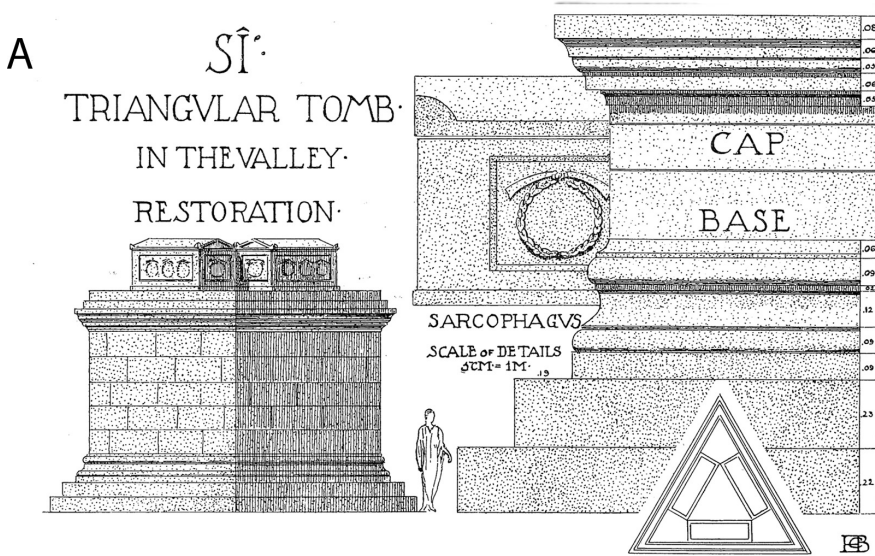
14. Sarcophagi in the open air. A: Tomb 7 (Si', three sarcophagi on triangular pedestal). B: Pedestal of Sarcophagus Tomb 1 (Apamea)

to the 2nd and 3rd c. CE, after which their number declined. A major question concerning the stelae is their original placement. According to a short report published in the 1930s, stelae still stood atop pit-graves at the Northeast Cemetery of Palmyra. Unfortunately, photos or drawings lack. On the Limestone Plateau, stelae sometimes marked hypogea and pit-graves (T. 12–14), and at Umm el-Jimal in North Jordan, twenty-three examples stood in rows against an exterior wall of a partly sunken mausoleum. According to Butler, these stelae
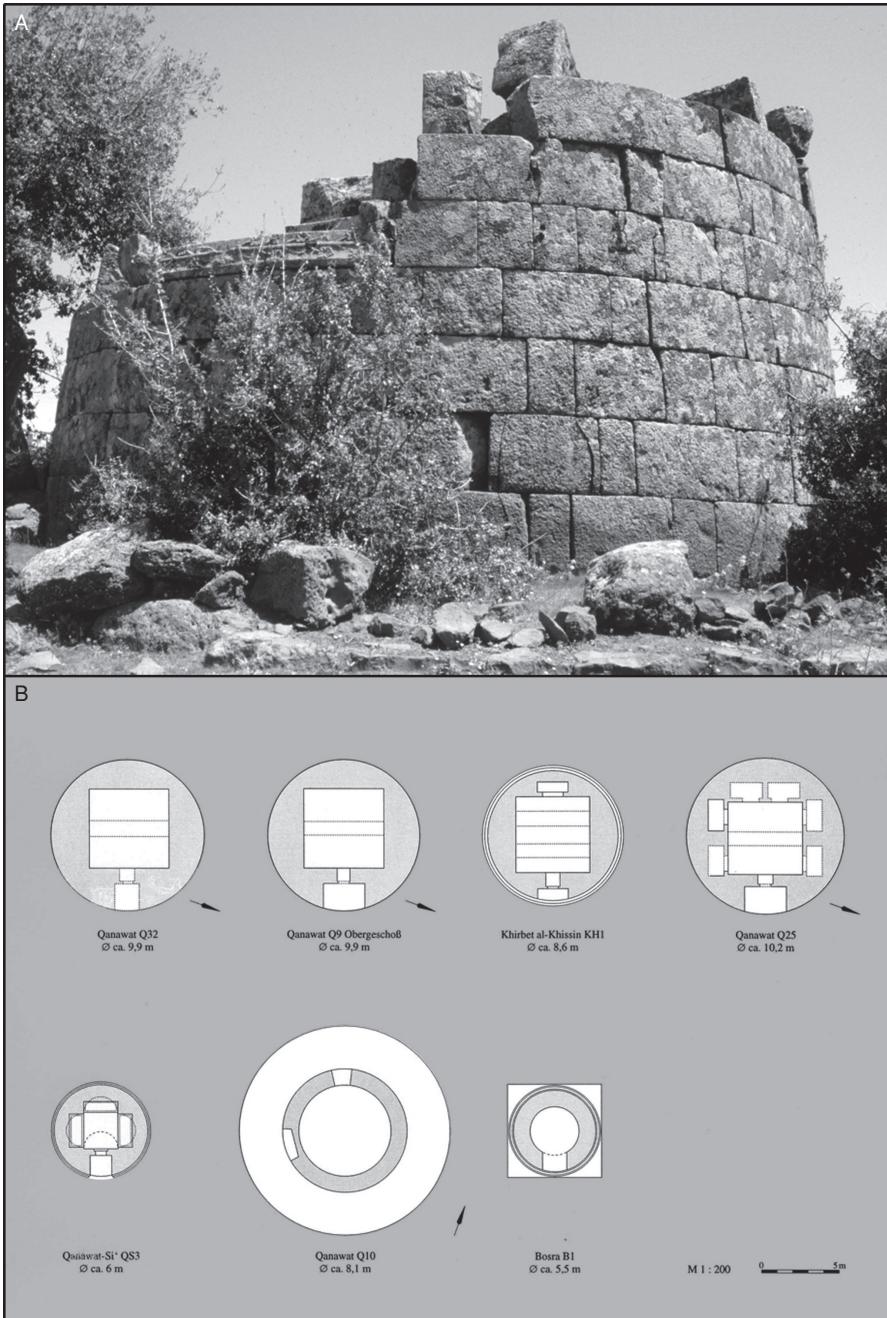
15. Tumuli. A: Tumulus Q10 in Qanawat. B: Plans of tumuli in the Hauran

stood in their original location.[1] Stelae, thus, could be placed outside different types of tombs. At least in one case, a stele was found inside a hypogeum (T. 15). The shape of the stele could also indicate the original placement. The pointed

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[1]   Butler 1920, 209–210.
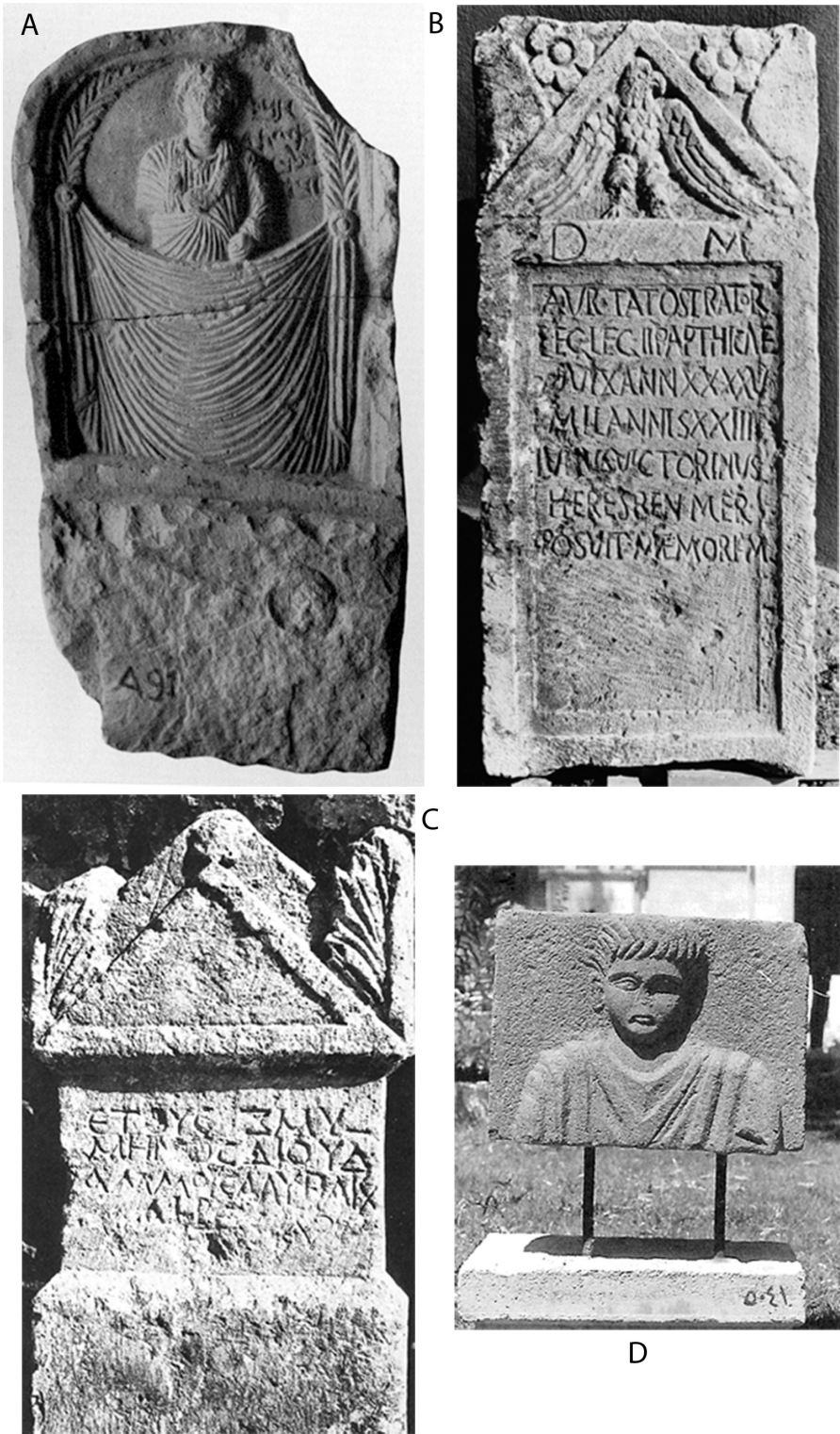
16. Funerary stelae. A: Stele 51 (Palmyra). B: Stele 3 (Apamea). C: Stele 44 (Apamea). D: Stele 32 (Si', cat. 2)

base of Palmyrene stelae and the undecorated lower third portion of the stelae at Apamea suggest that they were inserted into the ground or into rock cuttings. It remains uncertain, nevertheless, whether all stelae physically belonged to a grave or whether they were set up in non-funerary settings, where they served as cenotaphs or other types of memorials. We return to this question in Chapter 5.

The published funerary stelae usually had an inscription, sometimes in combination with an image in relief. Often, the deceased are depicted, in bust form or as standing, seated, or reclining full-length figures. Additional relief decoration comes in the form of floral and geometric motifs. The stelae varied considerably in shape, decoration, and inscription, often forming distinct regional groups. Examples from Palmyra, for instance, depicted hanging curtains and palm leaves coupled with Palmyrene-Aramaic texts (Figure 16). Stylized figural representations are common on the porous basalt stelae from the Hauran. Soldiers of the Roman army were commemorated in stelae, often depicting military attributes (Figure 34).

Unknown Shapes: Coffins (Chart 2)

Almost 600 coffins were counted in the sample of cat. 1 tombs from Syria. Some formed their own category, such as the sarcophagi groups placed in the open air described earlier. Others stood inside tombs. The seven cases listed as a separate category in Chart 2 are published without any information of their original location. Because coffins were an important feature of Roman tombs, this section discusses the main patterns of the entire assemblage, divided by material of construction.

Wooden coffins were likely the most widespread type, but are rarely preserved. Their presence is usually deduced from finds of metal coffin fittings and multiple iron nails, some with pieces of wood still attached. Such coffin fragments are reported from all tomb types. Excavation reports state that each loculus in the hypogea of Dura Europos contained a wooden sarcophagus. Pit-graves at Homs yielded elaborately constructed examples with lead, silver, iron, and gold fittings and ornaments, and an example from a hypogeum in Hama was covered with stucco decoration.

Terracotta coffins were also popular throughout the Roman period, and are found in cist- and pit-graves, funerary enclosures, and hypogea. Few studies exist of these containers, yet they appear to follow two regional stylistic trends. Rectangular shapes with lids of terracotta tiles were common on the Mediterranean coast. Analysis of terracotta coffins from Beirut has identified eastern Cilicia as a place of production. The second type adhered to Mesopotamian-Parthian traditions. Rectangular examples with rounded edges,

or a trough shape, came from Dura Europos. Eastern Syria has also yielded tub-shaped coffins, but none could be securely dated to the Roman period. This shape was common in Mesopotamia and, for instance, discovered in the Hellenistic cemeteries of Uruk.[2] Gawlikowski notes that the pit-graves of the Northeast Cemetery at Palmyra contained so-called "slipper-shaped coffins," another characteristically Parthian-Mesopotamian type. No images are known, but if this is correct, they may represent the westernmost attestation of such coffins.[3]

Stone coffins, or sarcophagi, were popular across Syria (Figure 17). They are found in all types of tomb, with the exception of tumuli and cist-graves. A significant portion in the sample, more than 350, originated from the funerary enclosures of the al-Bass Cemetery at Tyre. Sarcophagi arose as popular burial containers late in the 1st c. CE, a trend that accelerated after the mid-2nd c. CE. By this date, the collection of locally produced coffins made of limestone, basalt, and sandstone was augmented by imports. Marble sarcophagi originated from Proconnesos in Turkey and Attica in Greece. Several came from Egypt, made in pink granite and gray porphyrite, and one group of gray-purple coffins may have been imported from Assos in Turkey.[4] Imports are usually restricted to Syrian coastal sites with easy access to the sea. Some travelled further inland, such as the Pentelic (Attic) marble sarcophagus at Bosra (T. 16) or a Proconnesian sarcophagus at Restan, near Homs.[5] Popular decoration of imported sarcophagi consisted of moldings, garlands, animal heads, floral motifs, fruit, gorgon faces (gorgoneion), and framed spaces for epitaphs (tabellae ansatae). Occasionally, reclining figures carved in the round were placed on the lid. Elaborate reliefs with depictions from Greek mythology, such as the life of Achilles and Bacchic scenes, adorned a small number of imported coffins in Tyre (cf., Figure 40). Many of the locally produced sarcophagi were plain; others followed the decoration schemes of the imported coffins or developed different styles. This latter group displayed strong regional preferences, with depictions of lion heads in Bosra, and disks and pelta-shaped shields at Douris and Baalbek. Group reclining scenes come from Palmyra, as do busts, camels, and other features typical of life in this desert city.

Lead coffins represent a late addition to the assemblage. They appear in the mid–late 2nd c. CE, and retained their popularity well into the Byzantine period. Their production centers presumably stood along the Levantine coast, which explains their popularity in the western parts of the province. Lead coffins were found in hypogea, pit-graves, and funerary enclosures. Several examples from the Deb'aal Tomb close to Tyre were placed inside a stone

[2] East Syria: Geyer & Monchambert 2003, 164; Novák 2000. Uruk: Boehmer et al. 1995.
[3] Gawlikowski 1970, 34.   [4] De Jong 2010, 607.   [5] Restan: Gatier 1997–1998.

A

B

C

17. Sarcophagi. A: S. 1133 (Tyre, al–Bass, Complex 16). B: Lower sarcophagus from Pit 2 (Baalbek, Douris). C: S. 2 in Hypogeum 1 (Apamea)
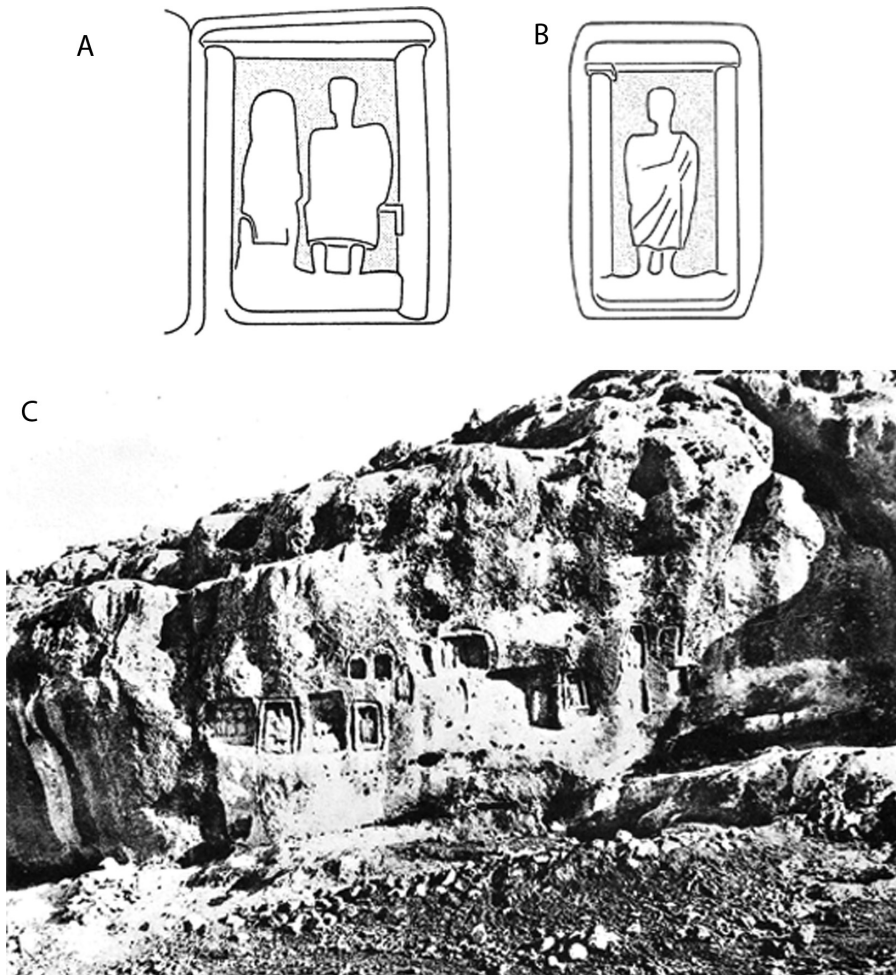
18. Rock–reliefs. Qatura. A: Niche of Augaios. B: Niche of Barathes. C: Rock–reliefs in cliff

sarcophagus. The rectangular or trapezoid–shaped coffins were elaborately decorated on the lid and box. Common were geometric and floral motives, depictions of architecture (temple façade, columns), masks, sphinxes, lions, and standing or seated persons.

Unknown Shapes: Rock-Reliefs (Chart 2)

A cliff face at Qatura on the Limestone Plateau contained at least thirteen reliefs depicting seated or standing people in rectangular frames, dating to the 2nd c. CE (Figure 18). They feature in the introduction of this book. The framed reliefs were not associated with graves, although Butler believed that pit–graves were located at an undiscovered location in the bottom of the ravine under

the niches. Others considered them cenotaphs, i.e., commemorative memorials without graves.[6] The type of decoration, combination of figural relief and text, and content of the inscriptions find close parallels with funerary material from the Limestone Plateau and elsewhere in the province, and confirm their commemorative nature.

Several other relief groups associated with cemeteries come from Roman Syria, but their publication record is poor, and few are dated. Examples have been found elsewhere on the Limestone Plateau and in the steppe lands directly to the east, as well as in the vicinity of Apamea, Damascus, Byblos, and Tyre, and in the Beqa' Valley. They are described in detail in Appendix 2. The reliefs depicted seated and standing people, busts, and stylized stelae or cone-shaped projections. The latter are often considered aniconic depictions representing the spirit of the deceased, or nfs/nefesh – a discussion to which we will return in Chapter 5 (p. 159). The rock-reliefs and associated tomb structures require extensive research, but some preliminary conclusions can be drawn. In several regions of Syria, cliff walls depicted iconic and aniconic scenes. They likely date to the Roman period or to the preceding Hellenistic centuries. Their spatial association with tombs, pit-graves, and hypogea, and the inclusion of epitaphs, point to a funerary nature.

A final word about the fragmentary materials from the second-tier assemblage (Chart 4). The largest group is formed by inscriptions published in epigraphic corpora. Such corpora sometimes add a few lines about the shape of the stone that held the inscription (e.g., stele, altar, lintel, column, or cippus), but little else is included about the associated tomb, decoration, and placement. The chart also contains fragments of sculpture that, according to the publications, belonged to funerary monuments, such as eagles and busts (T. 17–24). Without images or justification, this identification is difficult to assess.

DIVERSITY AND UNIFORMITY IN FUNERARY ARCHITECTURE

Despite the gaps in the publication record and decontextualized preservation, the remains tell us a great deal about the choices that guided the construction of the final resting places of Syrian communities. Most of the time, they chose pit-graves and hypogea, two types that often appeared in the same cemeteries. In some cases, multiple pit-graves surrounded a single hypogeum. Syrians also turned to a variety of other tomb types, and the burial grounds of the province reflect this mixture of shapes. One of the main overarching principles of Syrian mortuary practices was diversity. People were not buried in similar types of tombs or containers, nor were they commemorated with the same epitaphs or

[6]   Butler 1920, 249–250; Griesheimer 1997a, 170; Peña et al. 1999, 154–163.

reliefs. Instead, Syrian cemeteries display an eclectic mix of tombs, coffins, and forms of decoration.

The cemeteries of Apamea illustrate how the variation in the burial grounds developed. The oldest tombs here are jar-burials and pit-graves with cremations, possibly of the 1st c. CE. To the same period dates a stele with a Greek inscription commemorating a woman and her infant son. In next two centuries, hypogea were constructed, and numerous funerary stelae honored Roman soldiers and local inhabitants of the city. Groups of decorated sarcophagi stood on pedestals in the open air, and a brick mausoleum housing two stone coffins aligned the main north–south road. All the while, pit-graves and cist-graves continued to be constructed. By the middle of the 3rd c. CE, the older communal tombs (hypogea, mausolea, sarcophagus groups) were likely still operational and some new cist-graves were constructed, but overall, the diversity in the Apamean burial grounds had diminished. The final stele dates to around 252 CE. Elsewhere in Syria, the urban cemeteries also witnessed an increase in variety of tomb types and decorative styles, with a peak in the 2nd c. CE. Toward the late 2nd c. CE, diversity decreased, following the cessation of the construction of tower-tombs and possibly cist-graves. A further slimming down occurred after the 3rd c. CE with the disappearance from the funerary record of jar-burials and funerary enclosures, and a reduction in popularity of stelae.

This pattern of increasing and decreasing diversity in funerary architecture and decoration was mostly an urban phenomenon. The cemeteries of smaller and rural sites were less diverse. Most sites in the Hauran, for instance, yielded a single mausoleum and a handful of stelae, whereas on the Limestone Plateau, single hypogea were common, sometimes in combination with pit- or sarcophagus-burials. Larger settlements in the Hauran, such as Qanawat, Shahbā, and Si', displayed more diversity in tomb types. It seems that the larger the site and, to some extent, the longer the time-span of usage, the more varied the types of tomb in the associated cemeteries.

Even the urban cemeteries display considerable differences in levels of variation. The Apamean examples yield at least six tomb types, whereas the al-Bass Cemetery of Tyre hosted solely funerary enclosures. Four cemeteries at Palmyra included hypogea, mausolea, and tower-tombs, but a fifth – the Northeast Cemetery – held only pit-graves with stelae. At this point, it is useful to start unpacking the tomb-type categories of the previous section, and to look more closely at how people were buried. For instance, a lining of stones in a pit was the only thing that distinguished cist-graves from pit-graves at Apamea, and the differences between other tomb types were perhaps not always so pronounced, either. The al-Bass Cemetery included only a single type, and its rows of funerary enclosures give an impression of homogeneity, yet this picture changes quickly once one looks inside the tombs. Here, we find a great

variety, with people buried in stacked loculi, pit-graves, and local and imported, plain and elaborately decorated coffins.

In other words, when zooming in on regions and cemeteries, the strong patterning of increasing diversity in funerary architecture dissolves and appears more random. In order to assess, therefore, whether people in Roman Syria were buried in similar or distinct ways, the focus should move away from (only) formal tomb types. Minor architectural differences aside, does the funerary record suggest that Syrians made the same choices in the construction of tombs? The answer to this question is no, and to a lesser extent, yes. Great variation existed within the cemetery and within the tombs, in terms of shape, degree of adornment, materials used, and so on. People were placed in single pit-graves or communal hypogea. In the communal tombs, we find the deceased deposited on the floor, in loculi, or in coffins, which could be made of marble, lead, or wood. Some burial spots were elaborately decorated with busts of the deceased or with myths carved in expensive high relief. Others were left plain. Even simple pit-graves could contain stone coffins or a cover of marble or terracotta. This does not give an impression of homogeneity in burial types, and clearly indicates that Syrians were not buried in similar fashion. The next chapters address whether it is possible to attach certain identities (i.e., status, gender, profession) to these distinctive practices.

The notion of eclecticism within cemeteries of Syrian cities stands in contrast to the simultaneous increasing standardization of location of the burial grounds, as discussed in the previous chapter. This adds further support to the claim that the new concept of space was not intended to present members of the burying community in similar ways, but that it was related to a new or stronger emphasis on the links with the urban landscape. In other words, with the overhaul of the urban landscape, the suburban area, where the cemeteries were found, followed suit.

Nevertheless, and here we come to the second answer to the question of variability in funerary architecture, in spite of the great variation in how people were buried, certain overarching principles seemed to guide the construction of many tombs. These concern regionalization, compartmentalization, single and co-burial, visibility, embellishment, and display. It is here that the divided communities and their choices for burial appear more unified. They are discussed next.

Regional Styles

Roman cemeteries in Syria flourished in regional styles. Every region, by which is meant geographically defined territories encompassing multiple settlements, developed particular tomb shapes, decorative styles, or other signature aspects. This point can be best illustrated by summing up the regional

trends: characteristic of the Limestone Plateau were hypogea marked by double columns (2nd c. CE), hypogea with decorated façades (2nd c. CE–Byzantine period), elevated sarcophagi (2nd/3rd c. CE–Byzantine period), tetrastyle mausolea (3rd c. CE–Byzantine period), and pit-graves with sarcophagus lids (mid 2nd c. CE–Byzantine period). In the Syrian Upper Euphrates region, large storage jars covered pit-graves in the 1st–2nd c. CE. Distinct types in eastern Syria included pit-graves with trough- and perhaps tub-shaped terracotta sarcophagi (Parthian period–3rd c. CE?), as well as a dearth of funerary stelae. Funerary enclosures arose on the Lebanese coast between the late 1st and the 4th c. CE. Imported stone coffins reached the Mediterranean coast and West Syria in the late 1st–3rd c. CE, and the same area produced lead sarcophagi in the mid to late 2nd c. CE–Byzantine period. In the hills of southern Lebanon, painted hypogea were in vogue between the late 1st and the 3rd c. CE. Rectangular mausolea gained popularity in Central–West Syria in the 2nd c. CE, perhaps around the same time as the use of rock-reliefs to mark graves. Tower-tombs were characteristic of Palmyra and the Middle Euphrates between the late 1st c. BCE and the early/mid 2nd c. CE. Tower-tombs with hypogea (1st–2nd c. CE), large T-shaped hypogea (late 1st c. CE–2nd c. CE), mausolea with elaborate façades (mid 2nd–mid 3rd c. CE), and stelae depicting curtains (1/50–150 CE) were typical for Palmyra. The Hauran stood out for its tumuli (100 BCE–100 CE) and circular tombs (1st c. CE?), and had distinct sculptural traditions expressed in sarcophagi and stelae. Sarcophagi and funerary reliefs in Palmyra also represented distinct sculptural traditions, as did perhaps the sarcophagi in the Beqa' Valley.

This long list illustrates regional distinctions in funerary architecture in Roman Syria. From largest to smallest, these regions are: East Syria (east of the Euphrates), West Syria (including the Middle Euphrates region), Central–West Syria (Limestone Plateau, the Orontes Valley, and the Hauran), the Middle Euphrates region, the Coastal Levant, the Limestone Plateau, the Hauran, South Lebanon, and Palmyra. Regional styles, for instance, in figural sculpture and stele decoration, extended across the provincial borders into southeast Turkey and northwest Palestine, and, in the case of the tower-tombs and terracotta coffins, beyond the imperial boundaries into Parthian territory. With signature tomb shapes and portrait busts, the Palmyrenes arguably developed the most distinct funerary culture. The flourishing of regional funerary styles can be clearly traced in time. Tumuli and circular mausolea in the Hauran and the aforementioned Palmyrene tower-tombs are early examples of regional expressions, dating between the later 1st c. BCE and the 1st c. CE. By the end of the 1st c. CE, funerary enclosures and imported sarcophagi appeared in the coastal Levant, painted hypogea in southern Lebanon, and figural sculpture in Palmyra. Regional diversity had reached its fullest expression in the first half of the 2nd c. CE, and continued on a diminished scale in the Byzantine period.

The following chapters illustrate that pronounced regionalism also played a role in sculpture and epitaphs, but not so much in the way the body of the deceased was treated or the gifts that were selected to accompany them. Regionalism became a key element in constructing local identities in the Roman province, but did not infiltrate all aspects of the mortuary ritual.

Spatial Divisions

If we move away from the formal tomb types, and look at single and multiple-occupancy tombs, considerable differences start to emerge in the sample. The layout of pit-graves, cist-graves, and jar-burials (Figures 8, 13) was designed for one burial at the time. Communal tombs held more than one spatially delineated burial spot, such as loculi, pits, and coffins, and could accommodate multiple simultaneous burials. Hypogea, mausolea, funerary enclosures, tower-tombs, and tumuli are all communal tombs (Figures 9–12, 15).

Within the sample, communal tombs make up about a third more than the single tombs, but this may not represent a real pattern. Many single tombs, simpler in design, likely remain unpublished. It is also unclear to what type the funerary stelae, displaced sarcophagi, and rock-reliefs belonged. What is important here is that both types were common, and they were popular around the same time. Sometimes, they are grouped: single pits surrounded hypogea on the Limestone Plateau and a mausoleum at Homs. Elsewhere, they were physically separated, such as in the Northeast Cemetery of Palmyra, which contained only pit-graves. At Selenkahiye, a cemetery with single tombs occupied the mound, whereas possibly contemporaneous communal tumuli extended at the bottom of the mound. Urban cemeteries of Beirut and Tyre may have held only communal tombs, and at Tell Kazel, only single types were discovered. Few cross-provincial patterns emerge from the sample, except that burial grounds consisting only of single tombs were rare and mostly restricted to non-urban regions. This picture may change rapidly as a result of current excavations in the urban setting of Beirut, where burial grounds consisting of pit- and cist-graves are currently under excavation.[7] The following chapters illustrate that the distinction between single and communal tombs concerned more than just a choice of architectural types. It involved also different social classes, as well as different concepts of ritual space and display of kinship.

In the communal tombs, there is little evidence of spatial hierarchy within, i.e., the placement of certain graves in more prominent positions. Many of the hypogea had burial niches along three walls, directing axial attention to the loculus in the back wall. Yet no other means were employed to mark these graves, e.g., through sculpture or painted decoration. Sarcophagi were often

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[7] Personal communication with Vana Kalenderian.

prominently and centrally placed inside a tomb, to such an extent that they blocked access to other burial spots, but this was not always the case, and no cross-provincial patterns emerge. Axiality was more important at Palmyra, especially in the hypogea (Figure 9d). Here, the elongated spaces focused attention on the back wall, where the tomb of the founder was located, often behind an elaborate sculptural relief. But even in Palmyra, this was not uniform in every tomb, and side-niches and lateral rooms sometimes yielded equally lavish sculptural scenes and decorated coffins.

A different kind of ordering of space did occur in the Syrian tombs, in both communal and single types. Across the various types of tomb of Roman Syria, people were buried in relatively narrow rectangular spaces: coffins, pits, and niches. Exceptions are hypogea where multiple individuals were placed on the floor of a chamber, such as at Beirut (T. 25) and Hama (T. 26). Yet, in both cases, we cannot be certain that the corpse was not placed in a wooden coffin, no longer preserved, and that we are not looking at the result of later disturbances. At Dura Europos, the earliest hypogea of the Hellenistic period contained benches on which corpses were placed, but over time, the tombs grew and loculi were added. The compartmentalization of burial space indicates the existence of strong sentiments about where a corpse was placed in relation to the space of the tomb. The compartments also give an impression of individualizing the space of the tomb: each person lies in his or her own loculus, pit, or sarcophagus. Chapter 4 demonstrates that in practice, this was not upheld. Even within compartments with the smallest dimensions, multiple individuals were buried.

OLD AND NEW IN FUNERARY ARCHITECTURE

Thus far, this chapter has concentrated on trends in funerary architecture in the Roman period. To what extent did they follow older traditions? We start this discussion by turning to two pre-Roman sites that yield relatively high numbers of tombs (Figure 19). In Beirut, a cemetery occupied the older burial ground to the west of the town (see Appendix 1). This Iron Age burial ground contained hypogea and shaft-graves, i.e., pit-graves that are accessed by deep vertical shafts. Several of the tombs were still used in the Hellenistic period (4th–1st c. BCE) and perhaps the early Roman decades, to be abandoned only when the city expanded. On the other side of town, east of the city wall, extended a field containing twenty pit-graves dating to the 2nd c. BCE (Bey 152). A nearby third location (Bey 045) yielded several 4th–3rd c. BCE pit-graves. Throughout the Hellenistic period, pit-graves and hypogea seem to have been the preferred mode of burial in Beirut.

Moving east to the Khabur region in the Syrian steppe, an extensive cemetery was excavated at Tell Sheikh Hamad. At least 140 tombs were found here,
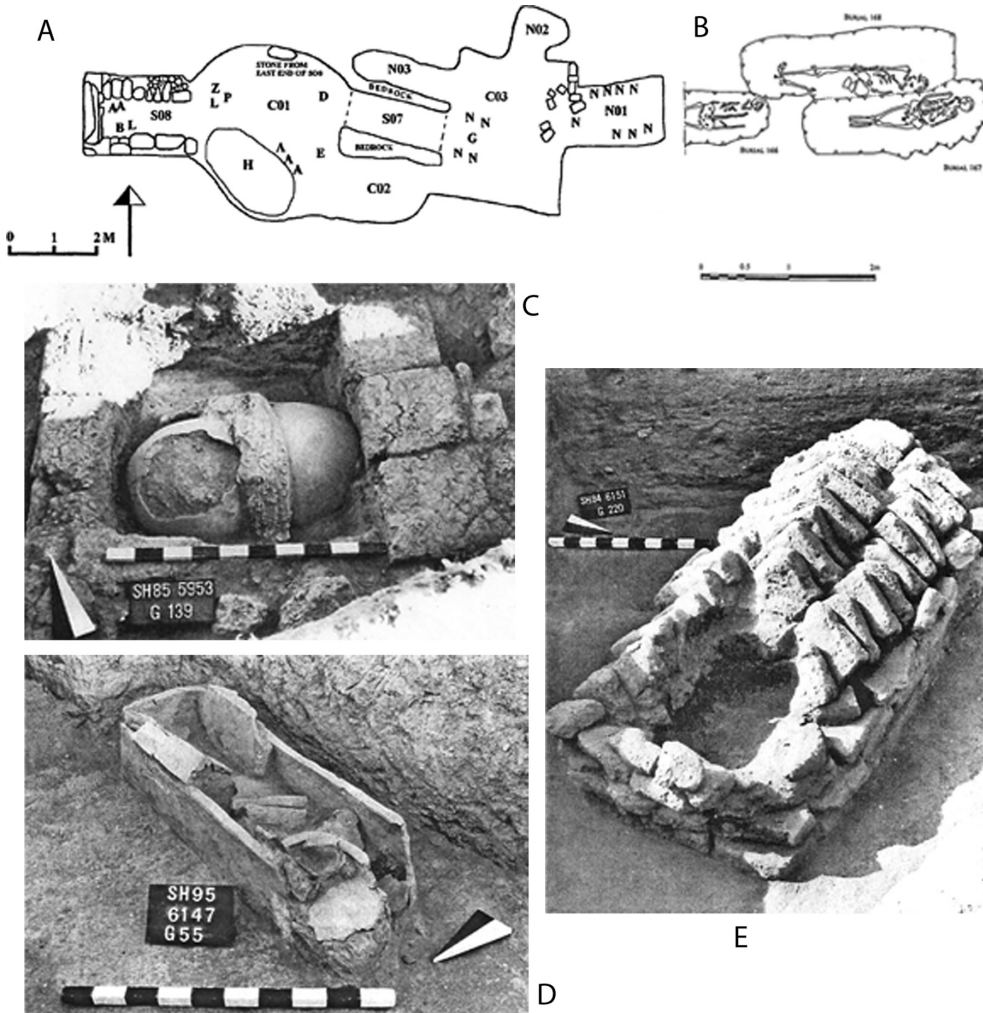
19. Pre-Roman graves. A: Hypogeum 8 (Beirut). B: Pit-graves Bey 045 (Beirut). C: Jar-burial (Tell Sheikh Hamad, Grab 84/03). D: Sarcophagus burial (Tell Sheikh Hamad, Grab 93/122). E: Cist-grave (Tell Sheikh Hamad, Grab 84/101)

dated between the 2nd c. BCE and the 2nd c. CE, comprising the Hellenistic and Parthian periods in this region. Pit-graves and cist-graves lined with mud-bricks represent the most common types. In some cases, the deceased were placed in oval and tub-shaped terracotta coffins, while others were covered by or put inside jars.[8] One hypogeum was discovered at a different location, dating to the 1st–3rd c. CE. In Beirut and Tell Sheikh Hamad, hypogea and pit-type graves, e.g., shafts, jars, coffins in pits, and cists, represent the most common modes of burial. This is also true elsewhere, as illustrated by Chart 5. The continued popularity of these types in the Roman period, save for stylistic
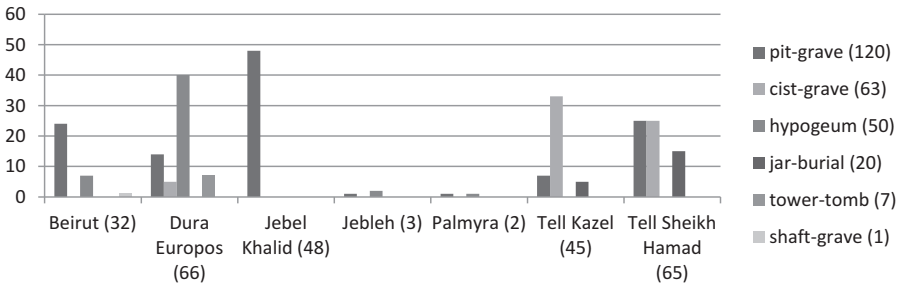
[8]   Kühne 2005; Novák 2000.

CHART 5. Distribution of tomb types – Hellenistic and Parthian periods

alterations, highlights the deep-rootedness of these forms of burial. Communal and single tombs occurred side-by-side, although more cemeteries contained only single types when compared to the Roman assemblage.

Chart 5 also illustrates another point. Hellenistic and Parthian cemeteries displayed far less variation than their Roman successors. This is directly related to the introduction of new types in the period between the 1st c. BCE and the 2nd c. CE. Appendix 2 describes the evolution and chronological development of each of the tomb types, as well as the possible pre-Roman antecedents. Here, a summary suffices. Pit-, cist-, and jar-burials, as well as hypogea, represent older types. No mausolea can be securely dated before the 1st c. BCE. Debate exists on this matter, and scholars have pointed to a 28 m–high tower at Hermel in the northern Beqa' Valley as a Hellenistic example (p. 320).[9] Yet, both the date and the funerary nature of this tomb remain uncertain. The funerary enclosures of the Lebanese coast also had no predecessors before the Roman period, although different components of this type, such as burial in rock-cut pits or loculi, pre-dated the Roman centuries. The same is true of the groups of stone sarcophagi raised on a pedestal, as we find them in the Syrian province of the 2nd and 3rd c. CE. The construction of tumuli in the Hauran started in the 1st c. BCE. No examples have been identified from the preceding centuries. The fact that a much older (Chalcolithic and Bronze Age) tradition in tumulus building existed in the region may indicate that the inspiration for this new type was drawn locally. The last section of this chapter discusses more examples of this phenomenon, whereby Syrians may have mimicked funerary architecture of times long past.

The origin of another newcomer, the tower-tomb, has received more attention. Several predecessors have been identified, yet the evidence is slim and hardly convincing (see discussion later). To this date, the tower-tombs at Palmyra and the Euphrates sites, constructed between the second half or final quarter of the 1st c. BCE and the early 2nd c. CE, form a distinct group without obvious forerunners. It is important to note that both the tower-tombs

[9] For instance, Fedak 1990, 148; Cormack 1997b, 348.

and the tumuli were not restricted to Roman territory per se. Both emerged late in the 1st c. BCE, in a period when provincial boundaries continuously moved (p. 11). The Hauran and Palmyra fell in and out of Roman control, whereas the Euphrates region of Dura Europos and Baghuz was in Parthian hands. The introduction of new tomb types did not, necessarily, accompany the establishment of the Roman rule. In fact, a close examination of the chronology of change reveals an important point. The new types appeared between the 1st c. BCE and the 2nd c. CE. In this period, more than 150 years after the creation of the Roman province in 64 BCE, we can truly speak of eclectic burial grounds as just described, where older tomb shapes stand side by side with new types. This timing of change also applies to the so-called "unknown shapes." Funerary stelae occurred in Hellenistic contexts, but this practice was not widespread. The majority date to the 2nd and 3rd c. CE. Stone and terracotta coffins were common in pre-Roman periods, although very few can be placed in the centuries directly before the 1st c. BCE. They become increasingly visible in the archaeological record of the late 1st and 2nd c. CE. It is possible that rock-reliefs drew on older, or at least Hellenistic, practices, yet it was only in the 2nd and 3rd c. CE that inscriptions with dates accompanied the reliefs. The available evidence from Syria points to an overhaul of funerary architecture there during the first centuries CE.

The degree of regional variation in pre-Roman cemeteries is more difficult to assess. To some extent, regional variation always exists in the material record of funerary practices. In pre-Roman Syria, the most pronounced distinction was between East Syria and West Syria/Lebanon. The irregularly shaped hypogea and deep shaft-graves found in Hellenistic Beirut are characteristic types of the Levant, whereas the tub-shaped and oval terracotta coffins of Tell Sheikh Hamad are a peculiar feature of East Syria and further east in Mesopotamia. The use of stone as a building material, the import of sarcophagi, and the erection of stelae were largely restricted to the Mediterranean coast and West Syria, whereas mudbricks, pits with tub-shaped terracotta coffins, and jar-burials characterize cemeteries further east. A cultural border is not clearly defined, but it may have lain slightly west of Palmyra and the Balikh Valley. A lack of precisely dated tombs does not allow for ascertainment of whether this east–west distinction was characteristic of the Hellenistic period or only appeared after the Parthian conquest of eastern Syria in the late 2nd c. BCE. Tomb types and materials in the pre-Parthian cemeteries of northern Iraq suggest that similar differences already existed before the Parthian expansion.[10]

10   For instance: cemeteries at Nimrud (250–145 BCE), with cist-graves of baked bricks, trough-shaped sarcophagi in terracotta, and jar-burials (Oates & Oates 1958); Seleucia-on-the-Tigris (ca. 307–141 BCE), with similar cist-graves and baked brick hypogea with vaulted roofs (Graziosi 1968–1969; Hopkins 1972; Invernizzi 1967; Negro Ponzi 1970–1971, 1972, 2002; Valtz 1986, 1988; Waterman 1931; Yeivin 1933); Tell ed-Der (325–200 BCE), with cist-graves of baked brick (Gasche 1991, 1996); and Uruk (400–200 BCE), with tub- and reversed-tub-shaped terracotta sarcophagi (Boehmer et al. 1995).

As we shall see, this distinction persisted throughout the Roman centuries, with Palmyra combining in its funerary architecture and decoration elements from both East and West Syria.

In spite of the strong east–west differences, however, Hellenistic and Parthian burial grounds never attained the degree of regionalism that characterized the Roman examples. This has much to do with the contexts in which we find this regional expression. New forms of decoration, such as sculpted sarcophagi, busts, and painted walls, and built portions of the tomb, most notably those aboveground (i.e., funerary stelae, decorated façades, and mausolea), became canvases on which regional styles were prominently expressed. Hellenistic and Parthian tombs were relatively plain, and rarely contained aboveground makers. It is here that Roman tombs started to part with older traditions.

A NEW CONCEPT OF FUNERARY SPACE: VISIBILITY AND MONUMENTALITY

What characterizes the new tombs of the Roman period? As discussed, one can question the differences between the tomb types identified in this book, and point to the somewhat arbitrary nature of these categories as developed by archaeologists. Many practices remained the same, such as burial in rectangular compartments, and the co-existence of communal and single tombs. This section, therefore, takes a different approach and addresses how the new tomb types involved a different concept of funerary space. The tombs shared a number of features regarding visibility and elaboration, and, importantly, this was also introduced in the older architectural forms. In other words, there was a general trend toward greater spending of resources on the construction and decoration of funerary architecture. Sometimes, it took monumental shape.

The architectural types introduced in the 1st c. BCE and later centuries were visible aboveground, either by the addition of an aboveground portion, such as tumuli or rock-reliefs, or by raising the burial space itself above the surface, as in the case of the mausolea, elevated sarcophagi, tower-tombs, and funerary enclosures. An increasing emphasis on visibility was also noticeable with regards to older architectural forms. Hypogea in the Roman period could be marked with columns, stelae, or other standing architecture. The reliefs on the exterior cliff walls of the hypogea drew attention to the façades and entrances of the tombs. Visibility was enhanced by elevated placement. The double pillars of the distyle tombs, in themselves already reaching 10 m in height, stood on the side of hills (cf., Figure 45). Griesheimer mentions that the example from Turin was visible in at least five of the surrounding (ancient) villages (T. 27).[11] Tower-tombs stood over 20 m tall on elevated spots in the landscape, and sarcophagi were raised on pedestals. Even simpler graves were marked: pit-graves received a

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[11] Griesheimer 1997a, 186.

stone, gabled sarcophagus lid, or a stele. We have already seen that many tombs were aligned with the main roads leading to and from the urban centers, a location that drew further attention to the tomb buildings.

Close to half of all the tombs in the sample were, at least in part, above-ground (this number excludes the stelae and sarcophagi of which the original location is uncertain). Research biases likely overemphasize the popularity of grave markers, which are easier to find in the archaeological record and were thus more commonly recorded. The percentage of the total tombs that were visually marked remains unclear. However, the fact that the trend can be discerned across all types of tomb, both communal and single, and in every region of the province, suggests that it constituted a widespread phenomenon. An epitaph from the Hypogeum of Zabda in Palmyra (T. 28) honors the founders who built the tomb and "the construction that is above it." No trace remains of this construction, but the inscription serves as a reminder that even underground tombs could be marked by structures long gone.[12]

Tomb markers existed before the Roman period, but with notable differences. Amphora rims (Tell Sheikh Hamad) or tumuli (Dura Europos) marked Parthian tombs, and cairns were associated with pit-graves in Hellenistic Beirut (Bey 045). A handful of funerary stelae originated from the Levantine coast in the Hellenistic centuries. None were found in situ, but they may have marked the locations of underground burial spots. A possible trend in relief carving of cliff façades existed in the Lebanese mountains, although, as described already, both the funerary nature and date of the reliefs remain uncertain. None of the pre-Roman tombs had funerary space above the ground, and, with the possible exception of the Hermel tower, the existing markers did not draw attention to the tombs by large dimensions in the way they did in the Roman period.

Resources: Size, Building Material, and Decoration

An increase in the amount of resources spent on the tombs represents a second characteristic of the Roman funerary assemblage, after visibility. Construction, size, and decoration are examples of this trend. Building materials now more often included imports, mostly in the form of coffins made of marble or other stones from Turkey, Egypt, or Greece. These imports started around the late 1st c. BCE and increased in the 2nd and subsequent centuries. Tombs also grew larger, although sizes varied widely. Some hypogea reached twice or three times the size of the average Parthian and Hellenistic hypogea. The largest tomb in pre-Roman Dura Europos (55 m²) could easily fit inside the Hypogeum of Artaban at Palmyra (89 m²). The new tomb types for the most part also stood

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[12] Henning (2013, 15) also notes that new research in Palmyra identified aboveground markers by the entrances to hypogea.

tall. The average rectangular mausoleum measured ca. 11 × 11 × 5 m, and funerary enclosures covered on average 200 m².

Perhaps the increase in resources directed toward funerary architecture appears most clearly when considering the levels of embellishment, i.e., the addition of decoration. Almost half of all Roman tombs in the sample received some sort of decoration, or non-structural elements used for adornment; this number excludes the sarcophagi (Figures 3, 12, 14, 18, and 20). Decoration was sparse in the cemeteries before the 1st c. CE, and came in the form of reliefs on stelae from the Levantine coast, white plastered walls on the hypogea of Dura Europos, and the previously mentioned Lebanese rock-reliefs.[13] The earliest new types, tumuli and tower-tombs, also received minimal decorative embellishment. It was only in the later 1st and 2nd c. CE that relief, paint, and sculpture in the round appeared in large numbers in the burial grounds, including in the later tower-tombs and the rectangular mausolea that replaced the Hauranite tumuli. Chapter 4 describes a similar chronology for the adoption of another form of embellishment: the funerary inscription.

What motifs were used in Roman tombs? Most forms of decoration were in relief, but sculpture in the round, as well as plaster and paint, is also attested. Some Tyrian funerary enclosures had mosaic floors. Most popular were forms of architectural decoration, such as pediments, columns, cornices, and the like. Geometric patterns and floral and faunal elements such as eagles, ram's heads, and bucrania also occurred. The common occurrence of figural sculpture in the form of busts and full-length statues is described in Chapter 4. Less frequent were painted scenes from Greek mythology and reliefs of deities.[14] References to Graeco-Roman gods and myth, as well as reclining scenes, were uncommon in Syria before the Roman period. During the Roman period, early forms of decoration were floral designs, such as palms, rosettes, and garlands. Funerary busts were introduced in Palmyra in the second half of the 1st c. CE, and elsewhere in the 2nd c. CE. In the same century, mythological scenes were painted on hypogeum walls, and the use of decorated stone coffins spread across the province. The trend toward increased embellishment is evident in equal measure in the newly introduced tomb types and the older shapes. The ratio

[13] Meurdac & Albanèse (1938) report the find of a hypogeum of Hellenistic date with paintings of an individual standing in an aedicula and of garlands with leaves, fruit, and masks at Helalieh, east of Sidon, but provide little evidence in support of its early date.

[14] Online Appendix Palmyra 1, #101 (2nd c. CE): Achilles at court of Lycomedes and Abduction of Ganymede; Online Appendix Tyre 1, #1 (75–150 CE): busts with personifications of the winds; Online Appendix Tyre 1, #8 (75–150 CE): Psyche bust, Tantalus, Heracles and Alcestis, abduction of Persephone, Priam and Achilles, and the Sirens. Depictions of Victories were common in Palmyrene tombs. Other depictions of Victories came from the Limestone Plateau. Less common motifs are gorgon or Medusa heads, wreaths, cartouches, baskets, and the hanging curtains typical of the Palmyrene stelae, although these are perhaps also depicted in the hypogeum of Hama (Online Appendix Hama 1, #15).
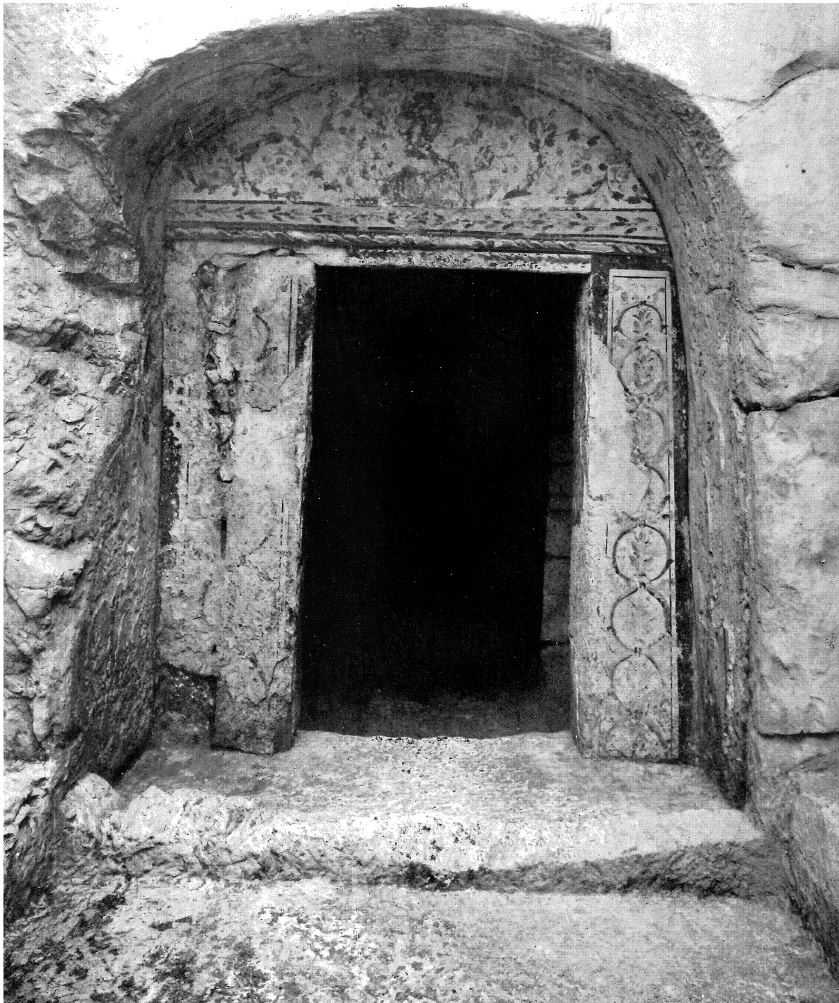
20. Plaster and painted decoration. A: Plastered ceiling in Tomb of 'Abd'astor (Palmyra). B: Painted ceiling in Hypogeum 1 (Djel el-'Amed, Tyre). C: Painted entrance of Hypogeum 1 (al-Awatin, Tyre)

and visibility depended on the type of tomb. Decoration inside the communal tombs usually drew attention to the individual deceased, through figural sculpture or elaboration of the individual burial spot, the loculus or coffin. Exterior ornaments focused on the façade and often the area around the door.

Billboards in the Provincial Landscape

Despite the continuity with earlier architectural traditions, tombs in Roman Syria demonstrate new attitudes toward funerary architecture. Not only did greater variation exist in types, but also more emphasis was put on the visibility of the tomb, and extensive resources were directed toward its construction. Based on their dimensions, visibility, and decoration, the mausolea, tower-tombs, tumuli, and funerary enclosures can be considered display tombs. Some of the hypogea reached equally monumental size and lavish embellishment. The widespread occurrence of these features, and the fact that they are found on both new and old tomb types, suggests that the change was structural. In other words, it was not (merely) a change in fashion, but an alteration in the way tomb buildings functioned in society. By the 2nd c. CE, most areas of Syria were filled with visible funerary markers. We have already seen that many tombs were positioned alongside roads. Travelers through provincial Syria could not fail to notice the cemeteries, prominently placed and filled with structures that screamed for attention.

Chapter 1 made clear that there was little evidence for spatial differentiation within the cemetery, indicating that people or families were not singled out by the location of their tomb. The cemeteries represented the communal identity of the deceased urban dwellers. This chapter demonstrates an opposite trend. The regional, local, and intra-tomb diversity portrayed little unity among the users of the cemeteries, but rather a heterogeneous community. The inhabitants of Roman Syria sought to distinguish themselves from one another when selecting a type of tomb, although the level and degree of this distinction varied by region, site, and cemetery. This was a feature found both in the cities and in the countryside of the province.

DISCUSSION: THE USERS AND MODELS OF THE NEW TOMB TYPES

If the tombs reflected a new concept of funerary architecture, what portion of the population participated in their creation? This question is relevant, as the tombs discussed in this book housed only a tiny fragment of the inhabitants of Roman Syria. In other words, the new tomb shapes may represent exceptions rather than a pattern. Chapter 5 elaborates on this topic and discusses how a portion of the provincial population likely never received a grave that left archaeological traces. Furthermore, not every tomb followed the new trends in

architecture. Within the cat. 1 sample, perhaps about a third of the tombs continued to adhere to pre-Roman traditions. Monumental tombs, those that were significantly larger than other tombs, elaborately decorated, conspicuous in the landscape, and often built with expensive materials, constituted around 30% of the cat. 1 assemblage. This percentage is surely an overestimation. Scholars have concentrated on the tall and visible tombs of Roman Syria at the expense of smaller and less visible examples. The sample is thus slanted toward aboveground, inscribed, and tall tombs, particularly in areas where little excavation took place, such as in the Hauran and the Limestone Plateau. Even in the case of better-studied Palmyra, the only cemetery with non-monumental tombs, the North-East Cemetery, was never published.

Despite these limitations, the numbers are informative about changes in the size of the participating group. Although perhaps not making up 30% of the assemblage, monumental tombs were not uncommon either. The cat. 2 sample includes at least 250 examples, not counting tomb doors and inscribed lintels that could have adorned large standing tombs. The contrast is stark with the pre-Roman period, which has yielded perhaps only one monumental tomb, found at Hermel. It is also significant that monumental types stood outside cities and villages, and isolated in the countryside, occurring everywhere in Syria with the exception of the steppe. Their construction represents a widespread phenomenon across the province. Urban cemeteries usually contained multiple examples, and the smaller sites often had a single monumental tomb.

Both the popularity of monumental tombs and the general increasing emphasis on visibility and adornment followed clear chronological patterns. Initially, only a small collection of tomb-designs departed from earlier forms. The al-Bass Cemetery at Tyre had perhaps only five funerary enclosures in the late 1st and 2nd c. CE. In the region of the Hauran, about twenty-one monumental tombs arose between the 1st centuries BCE and CE, and around thirty-six tower-tombs at Palmyra in the period between 50 BCE and 50 CE. Henning comments that the years 70–80 CE mark the start of a building-boom in tower-tombs at Palmyra.[15] Approximately 140 new towers arose here in the period between this date and 128 CE. Rectangular mausolea spread in popularity across the Hauran, the number of funerary enclosures at Tyre rising to thirty-nine in the 2nd and 3rd c. CE. What had started on a small scale had, by the 2nd c. CE, turned into a widespread phenomenon across the province. As we have seen, this is also the period that witnessed the popularity of creating regional styles and adding aboveground portions to the tomb. In other words, starting in the mid-late 1st c. CE, more people were involved in the construction of visible, decorated, and regionally distinct tombs, some of monumental

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[15] Henning 2003, 98; see also al-As'ad & Schmidt-Colinet 1995, 31.

dimensions, others marked by simple stelae. Diversity and regionalism peaked in the 2nd c. CE. The end point of these developments is harder to pinpoint, and varied per region. The 3rd c. CE tombs at Palmyra were smaller than the earlier examples, and elsewhere a decrease in size can be detected in the 4th c. CE. After the 3rd c. CE, no new tombs appear to have been built in the al-Bass Cemetery at Tyre, although older enclosures were still used. On the Limestone Plateau, by contrast, the construction of large tombs continued in the 4th and subsequent centuries, and this was also true for rural areas such as the Orontes Valley and Hauran. Due to the abandonment of several tomb types in the 2nd and 3rd c. CE, the cemeteries became less diverse after the 3rd c. CE, but there is no indication that the visibility and funerary adornment decreased. Pronounced regional styles existed on the Limestone Plateau in the Byzantine period, particularly in the construction of mausolea. Whereas urban cemeteries did not alter significantly, it seems that rural areas witnessed a period of continuity or even increased elaboration of the tomb in the Byzantine period.

Sources of Inspiration: Achaemenid, Hellenistic, and Roman Models

Where did Syrians find the inspiration for the new shapes of tomb, the above-ground markers, imported building materials, and forms of decoration? The question of architectural models is complicated but important. Were the sources of inspiration purely local, entrenched in Syrian traditions, or were they related to foreign influences? In this section, I discuss possible models by way of comparison with the funerary assemblage of Iron Age Syria and that of the surrounding territories in and before the Roman period. This analysis is cursory, as it awaits the publication of Syrian funerary materials of the 1st millennium BCE, as well as comprehensive studies of other parts of the Hellenistic and Roman Near East. One can microscopically search the Hellenistic world, the Roman Empire, and Parthian Mesopotamia for stylistic parallels and likely unravel a complex mosaic of influences. It is, however, not the purpose of this book to trace the origin of each new element, even if such an endeavor were possible. Rather, it aims to reconstruct the general cultural milieu in which the creation of the funerary styles of Syria took place.

The Achaemenid period (6th–4th c. BCE) produced tombs with stylistic parallels to those in Roman Syria, both in the Persian homeland and in the provincial territories. The so-called Tomb of Hiram found ca. 6 km southeast of Tyre consisted of a large sarcophagus resting on a 3 m high stone platform marking a hypogeum, and possibly dates between 550 and 330 BCE (Figure 21).[16] This tomb was still visible when the sarcophagi were hoisted on pedestals and platforms in the nearby al-Bass Cemetery in Roman Tyre.

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[16] Jidejian 1996, 24–28; Renan 1864–1874, plates 47, 48.
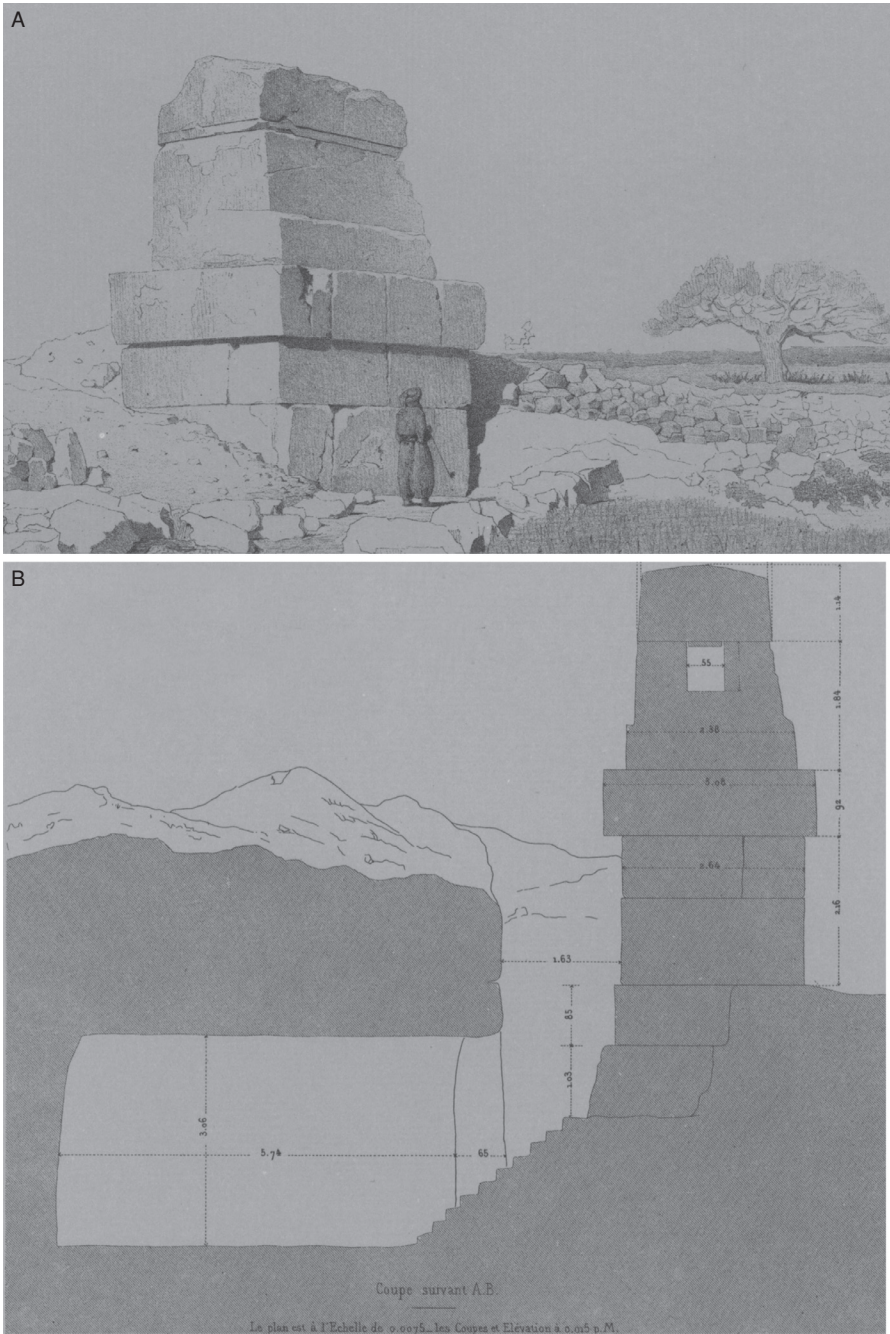
21. Tomb of Hiram (Tyre region). A: Artist's impression. B: Section of aboveground and below-ground portion

Elevated sarcophagi can be found in other Achaemenid provinces, such as 5th c. BCE Lycia, and in Persia itself, most famously represented by the Tomb of Cyrus at Pasargadae. Both regions have also yielded hypogea with elaborately sculpted façades, which share features with those on the Limestone Plateau in the Roman period, such as pediments and columns framing the entrance.[17] To the Achaemenid era date the aboveground funerary monuments at Amrit in northwestern Syria (Figure 22). Three tombs here, known as Meghazil, consisted of a hypogeum topped by a square pedestal with monolithic markers reaching 7–10 m in height.[18] They were constructed between the 6th and mid 4th c. BCE. Although their shape and decoration have little in common with Roman tomb-markers, the idea of adding a monumental and decorated marker to an underground tomb was repeated in the Roman examples. The same was true for the tradition of burial in monumental stone coffins on the Levantine coast. Sarcophagi imported from Egypt and the Greek world were common between the late 6th and mid 4th c. BCE, and could be adorned with figural busts and (mythological) scenes in high relief.[19] The Achaemenid period examples mentioned in this section originated out of various regional traditions and represent a diverse collection. None of them were closely replicated in the Roman period. Yet, inspiration was likely drawn from these predecessors, still highly visible in the landscape, in terms of shape, dimensions, aboveground construction, decoration, material, and coffin burial.

Tower-shaped mausolea and tumuli perhaps also had local predecessors, but this evidence is circumstantial. Clauss and Will have demonstrated that the form of a tower-shaped mausoleum on a podium, topped by a pyramid-shaped roof, appeared in Phoenician territories in North Africa and the western Mediterranean in the Iron Age. They hypothesize the existence of a tradition of burial in towers in Phoenicia itself, which in turn could have served as inspiration for the tower at Hermel, the Tomb of Sampsigeramos at Homs, and the tower-shaped mausoleum at Serrin in the Syrian Upper Euphrates region (73 CE).[20] The fact that no tower-tombs have been reported in Iron Age Phoenicia makes this thesis uncertain (see also Appendix 2). Tumulus burials raise similar questions, and it is striking that in areas with Roman-period tumuli there also stood much older examples. In the Hauran and neighboring Golan, tumuli date to the Bronze Age, and one Chalcolithic example from Der'a was reused in the

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[17] For an overview, see Fedak 1990 and Nunn 2001. See also Cormack 2004, 17–27.

[18] The shapes of the monoliths were cylindrical with a rounded top and square with a pyramid-shaped upper part. A double geometric frieze covered one of the Meghazil, and sculptures of lions were attached to its base (Dunand 1953; Dunand et al. 1954–1955; Elayi & Hakal 1996; Renan 1864–1874, 59–90; Saliby 1989).

[19] Tombs in Sidon (Lebanon): Hamdy Bey & Reinach 1892; Jidejian 1971, 121, 131–137; Smith & Ertuğ 2001, 71–90. Anthropoid coffins in local basalt and imported marble were discovered in Arwad and Arados on the Levantine coast (Elayi & Haykal 1996; Lembke 2001, 6–16).

[20] Clauss 2002; Will 1949b. Serrin tomb: Gogräfe 1995.
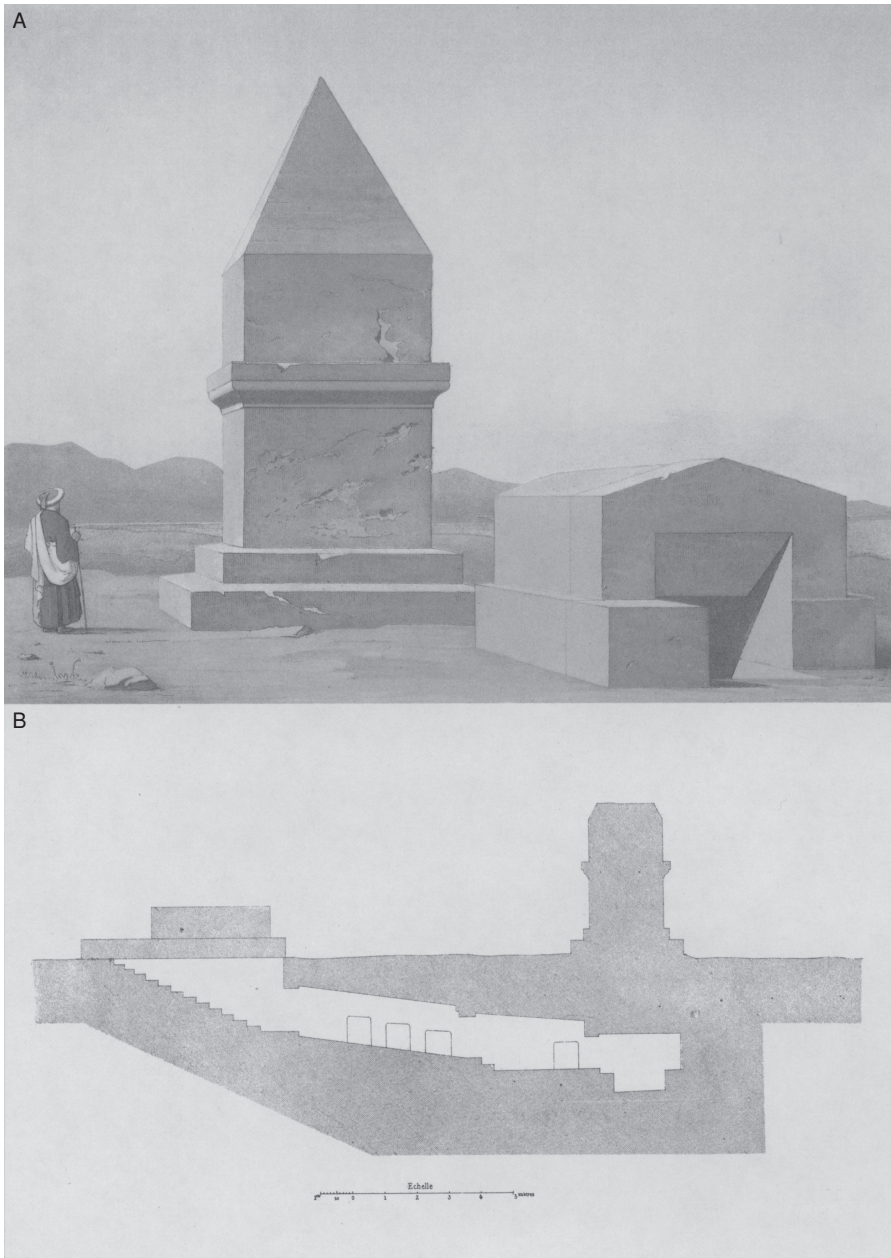
22. Tomb at Amrit. A: Reconstruction and artist's impression. B: Section of aboveground and belowground portion

Bronze Age and possibly again in the 1st c. CE.[21] In the Euphrates region of Selenkahiye, Bronze Age tumuli dotted the landscape.[22] There is no evidence

[21] Nasrallah 1950. Other tumuli in the Hauran: Sartre-Fauriat 2001, vol. II, 52; 2007b, 239.
[22] Porter 2002.

for uninterrupted use of these tumuli, and their construction in the Roman period was a phenomenon of the 1st c. BCE or CE. Yet, they perhaps referred to older local traditions. Like the Tomb of Hiram and the Amrit Meghazil, the older tumuli were still prominent in the landscape and possibly held special meaning, as evidenced by the reuse of the Der'a example. The first mausolea of the Hauran copied the circular shapes from the tumuli. This copying of elements of older tombs may have been a conscious choice by the provincial population. In Chapter 6, I come back to this issue when discussing strategies for embedding local traditions in times of social change.

Other models for Roman tombs in Syria were those constructed in the surrounding regions. In particular, elite tombs in Anatolia and Palestine displayed similarities in architectural type, decoration, and monumentalization. The most obvious example is the mausoleum, a monumental, rectangular, and heavily decorated tomb type whose construction began in 4th c. BCE Asia Minor and subsequently spread through the Hellenistic world. Its rectangular shape, podium, and architectural and figural decoration on the exterior façade were copied in the mausolea of Roman Syria. The late 2nd and 1st c. BCE mausolea in Jerusalem, with pyramid-shaped roofs, architectural decoration, and sunken courts, also bear similarities with the later Roman examples. These tombs, too, combined underground burial space with an aboveground marker. Sculpted façades covered the rock-cut tombs in Nabataean territory, most famously at Petra between the 1st c. BCE and 1st c. CE. The type of decoration of the Petra tombs bore only limited resemblance to the sculpted façades on the Limestone Plateau, but both the eclectic nature of decoration, borrowing from local, Alexandrian, and possibly Achaemenid repertoires, as well as the use of cliff walls to draw attention to the tomb, were copied in the funerary architecture of Roman Syria. Colledge describes 1st c. BCE tombs of local royalty in Commagene as topped with a double column.[23] This feature is reminiscent of the later distyle tombs of the Limestone Plateau. One source of inspiration for the new tombs in Syria, therefore, came in the form of monumental display tombs of the Hellenistic period in the neighboring territories. These tombs belonged to elite members of society, and often local royalty, and perhaps portrayed a dynastic feel that was aspired to by Roman Syrians.[24]

Another area of inspiration was the Roman world. Stone sarcophagi, for instance, decorated with garlands, bucrania, gorgoneion, and mythological and Bacchic scenes, were produced on a large scale in marble quarries of Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome for wealthy classes of the Roman Empire. The mausolea in Palmyra and the Limestone Plateau followed Roman traditions in sacral

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[23] Jerusalem: Kloner & Zissu 2006. Petra: McKenzie 1990. Commagene: Colledge 1977, 46–47. See also Wagner 2000, 18–23.

[24] Cf., de Jong in press.

architecture and perhaps copied elements of theater design. Busts were a common phenomenon in the funerary sculpture of the Roman world, and in Syria, they occurred on stelae, closing slabs of loculi, painted medallions, and freestanding sculpture (see Chapter 4). The same was true for depictions of reclining individuals on sarcophagus lids, relief carvings, and stelae. Whereas the origin of these elements lay in different areas of the eastern Mediterranean and Italy, it was their large-scale production and consumption that was typical of Roman elite culture. In this form, the new elements made their way to Syrian tombs as well. We discuss this incorporation of Syrian communities into the globalized networks of the empire in Chapter 6. Here, is it important to note that in addition to earlier local Achaemenid and Hellenistic models, the population of Roman Syria also turned to contemporary styles in sculpture and architecture, consumed by empire-wide elites, for inspiration.