Introduction

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sarcophagi which certainly number over 10,000 examples and may stretch to as many as 20,000 including fragments (many unpublished).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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9 See Elsner 2004, 277–86.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

24 Dresken-Weiland 2003, 98–107.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

36 See Elsner 2004, 271–86.

37 Cumont 1942.

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

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

And again:

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

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

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

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

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

41 Nock 1946, 166 and 169.

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

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

44 For instance, Himmelman 1979.

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

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

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

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

47 Nock 1946, 170.

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

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

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

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

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

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

52 Ewald 2004 and in this volume.

53 Işık 2007 and Smith 2008.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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