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Performing Death in Tyre: The Life and Afterlife of a Roman Cemetery in the Province of Syria

LIDEWIJDE DE JONG

Abstract

Between 1959 and 1967, Chéhab excavated a Roman and Byzantine cemetery on the outskirts of Tyre in Lebanon. This cemetery proved to be one of the most extensive and best preserved in the region, but because of the political circumstances in Lebanon, the excavation and publication of the material were never completed. This article presents a reevaluation and analysis of this burial ground, with a particular focus on its spatial components. Through discussion of the funerary architecture and location, I illustrate the profound changes that took place in the first centuries of the principate in the Roman province of Syria. As the city centers of the province were monumentalized, the burial grounds outside the city walls received similar treatment. I argue that the tombs played a new role in the performance of civic identity and local power strategies. Unlike the standardized city centers of the Roman province, however, the tombs present a more diverse picture whereby Roman trends are combined with local elements and new fashions, ultimately resulting in a new style of burial.*

INTRODUCTION

The province of Syria (roughly modern Lebanon and Syria) witnessed a gradual but profound transformation of its urban and rural landscapes in the Roman period. Starting in the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E., the cities and towns expanded in size, and their centers filled up with public buildings for entertainment, commerce, and religious life. Survey research demonstrates a similar increase in activity outside the urban centers, in the rural hillside, steppe, river valleys, and even in the desert around Palmyra. Less known perhaps, but equally prominent, were the necropoleis and individual tombs that still dot the landscape of Lebanon and Syria. Thousands of graves remain from the period of Roman rule. Often monumental, built aboveground,

and situated along the main thoroughfares to the ancient cities, these tombs are a visual reminder of the immense building activity undertaken by the inhabitants of the province. Travelers and archaeologists in the 19th century noted this wealth in funerary remains, but unfortunately many tombs and cemeteries are known only from their accounts. A relatively small number of graves and even fewer complete necropoleis have been excavated and/or published. As a result, the tombs do not often feature in general studies of the province of Syria or in discussions of funerary practices in the Roman period, with the exception perhaps of the conspicuous funerary towers at Palmyra.

This situation is slowly changing as new research on architecture and inscriptions in recent decades has increased the available data on funerary practices of the province. Studies such as those by Sartre-Fauriat and Griesheimer present an overview of previously excavated or surveyed but largely unpublished tombs in the regions of the Hauran and the Limestone Plateau.¹ Additional data come from new excavations and regional projects such as those at Baalbek, Beirut, Palmyra, and Qanawat² and from the inclusion of Roman tombs in the publication of survey projects.³ Emerging is a rich picture of funerary architecture in Roman Syria with a high degree of regional variation and a strong emphasis on public display. This was a largely new phenomenon, starting in the late first century B.C.E. and reaching a peak in the second and third centuries C.E. Stylistically, these tombs were connected to local traditions, Hellenizing influences, and Roman fashion.

In this article, I focus on the Roman cemetery at Tyre (al-Bass cemetery), one of the largest excavated cemeteries of the region. This burial ground, with more than 40 tomb complexes—including at least

* This research was made possible in part with the support of the University Research Council and the J.P. Harland Endowment Fund at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The following people have offered valuable feedback and support: Jennifer Trimble, Patricia Bikai, Pierre Bikai, Ali Badawi (Lebanese Antiquities Service), Emily Baragwanath, Brendan Boyle, Daniel Contreras, Owen Goslin, Elyse Hamilton, Sharon James, Paco Núñez, Elizabeth Robinson, the anonymous reviewers for the *AJA*, and Editor-in-Chief Naomi J. Norman. An appendix with more information on the al-

Bass cemetery is available on the *AJA* Web site (<http://www.ajaonline.org>), under "Supplementary Data."

¹ Griesheimer 1997a, 1997b; Sartre-Fauriat 2001, 2002–2003.

² Schmidt-Colinet 1992; Higuchi and Izumi 1994; van Ess and Weber 1999; Oenbrink 2000, 2003; de Jong 2001; Higuchi and Saito 2001; Stuart 2001; van Ess and Petersen 2003.

³ E.g., Jean-Marie 1999; Wilkinson 2004; Wilkinson et al. 2007.

825 graves and the preserved physical remains of almost 4,000 individuals—was in use between the first and fourth centuries C.E. and was reused in the Byzantine period (fifth–seventh centuries C.E.). Despite its relatively undisturbed state and wealth of finds, the al-Bass cemetery is largely unknown to the wider scholarly community because of the limited publication of the remains and the inaccessibility of the site during the Lebanese Civil War. I here reevaluate and analyze the available data, discuss the methodological limitations of such work, and contextualize the tombs in their historical and cultural setting.

The cemetery is the location of particular social actions by members of a community and of the creation and maintenance of social relations among these members. The study of funerary practices yields information about both the interactions among the living members of a community and their views about death.⁴ In the Roman period, the inhabitants of Tyre constructed a new type of tomb, in terms of layout and shape, at a new location. This indicates the emergence of a series of new principles guiding the creation of the tombs and, therefore, funerary ritual. I discuss these changes from a spatial perspective and suggest two conclusions about the new role of the tombs in the Roman period. First, physically, chronologically, and conceptually, the cemetery was connected to urban space and in particular to public architecture. Among other things, the tombs highlighted the civic identity of the deceased. The second conclusion concerns the elaboration of the tomb wall and its role in the public display of the deceased or burying group. The spatial analysis demonstrates that these highly visible funerary monuments contained messages about group membership and socioeconomic position. In the process of commemoration and memorialization of the deceased, the tombs played a new part in social strategies of the Tyrians, or at least of the members of the leading families of the city.

It is my aim to connect these developments to the Roman empire and to demonstrate the value of analyzing funerary practices in the context of imperialism. Imperialism here refers to the ongoing incorporation into and consolidation of the political, economic, and social processes that constituted the Roman empire. Whereas funerary ritual was carried out and shaped within the local community, the changing circumstances that accompanied Rome had an impact on social relations and their performance in the cem-

eteries of the province. This contextualization of the archaeological remains of Syria within the wider Roman world is often missing in studies of the province, which, unlike other provinces, is considered to have undergone only a limited cultural integration and to have experienced few changes in the social makeup of society. Instead, the inhabitants of the new province largely continued pre-Roman, Hellenized traditions.⁵ The tombs at Tyre, however, demonstrate that the coming of Rome was not just a new economic and military reality but also caused social and cultural changes, which were acted out in part in the cemetery.

ROMAN TYRE

Tyre (Roman Tyrus, modern Sur) is located 80 km south of Beirut in Lebanon. The ancient settlement was originally partly on an island and partly on the mainland, but when Alexander the Great besieged the city in 332/1 B.C.E., he built a mole and connected the island with the mainland (fig. 1[1]). In subsequent centuries, sediments deposited on either side of the mole turned the island into a peninsula. Excavations have yielded archaeological remains from the Roman period on the island, the mainland, and the newly created isthmus.⁶

In 64 B.C.E., with the incorporation of the region into the Roman empire, Tyre became part of the newly established province of Syria. Numismatic evidence indicates that the city received metropolis status in the late first century C.E.⁷ In 193 C.E., when Septimius Severus restructured the provinces of the Near East, the province of Syria Phoenice included Tyre as a main urban center. The same emperor bestowed on the city the title of *colonia* (Septimia Tyrus Metropolis Colonia) and additional privileges in reward for support during his war against Pescennius Niger. Textual and material evidence indicates that Tyre was an important commercial center for linen and purple dye in the first centuries C.E. and a local production center for glass.⁸ In this section, I explore the urban development of Roman Tyre through a discussion of its excavation history. As argued below, a close chronological connection can be postulated between the construction of the cemetery and the rebuilding of the city center. Here, I present the information available about the urban development.

In 1837, the Swiss Jules de Bertou carried out the earliest recorded exploration of the archaeological remains of Tyre under the auspices of the Geographi-

⁴Morris 1992; see also Joyce 2001.

⁵de Jong 2007b.

⁶The location of the causeway on fig. 1 is based on Marri-ner et al. 2008. For an alternative location, see Stewart 1987.

⁷Butcher 2003, 101.

⁸For general references on Roman Tyre, see Poidebard 1939; Bikai and Bikai 1987; P.M. Bikai 1992; Millar 1993; Butcher 2003; Sartre 2005.

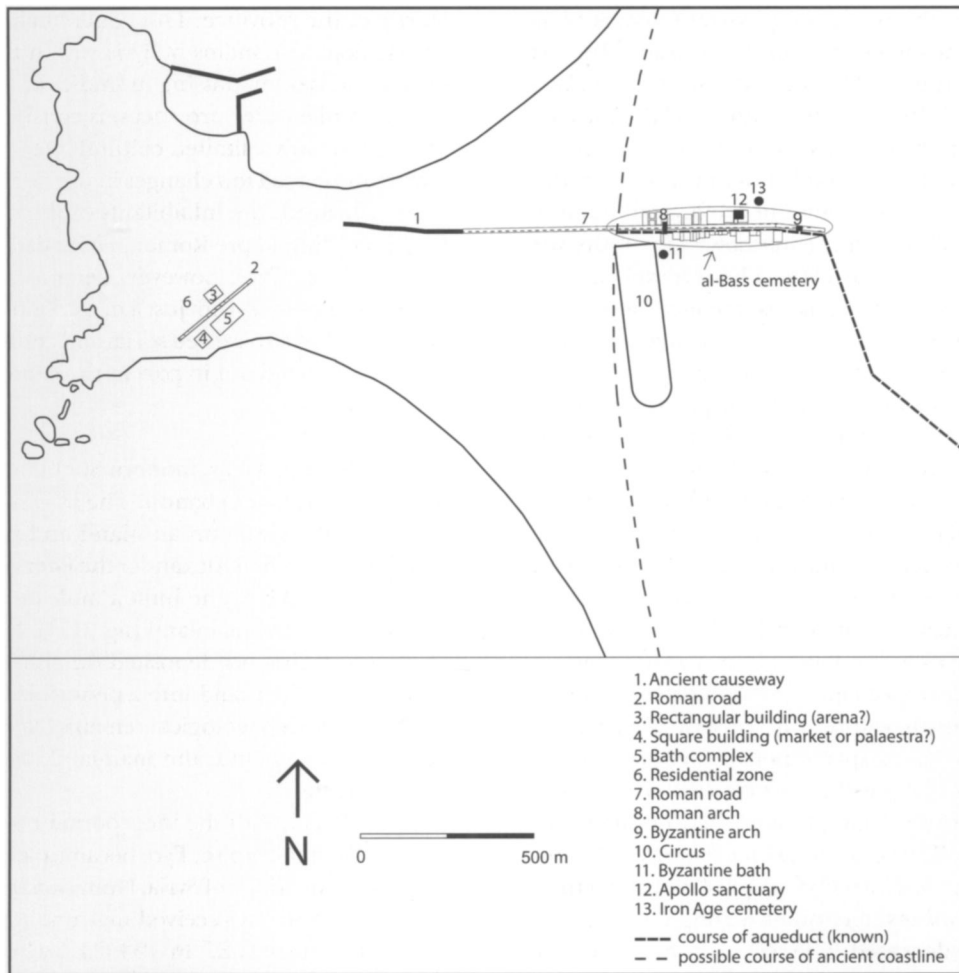


Fig. 1. Plan of Roman Tyre.

cal Society of Paris. As elsewhere in the Middle East, archaeological research increased throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries and in Tyre focused in particular on the ancient harbors and Phoenician remains.⁹ More systematic excavations of the city started in 1947 under the leadership of Chéhab, director of the Department of Antiquities of Lebanon. His excavations, although only partly published, provide the most complete insights into the urban development of Tyre under Roman rule.¹⁰ Chéhab concentrated on the southern part of the former island, where he uncovered segments of a paved Roman road on top

of a landfill (see fig. 1[2]). This road, 11 m wide and excavated over a length of 175 m, crossed the town running northeast–southwest. Tall, green Cipollino columns flanked the road on either side and provided access to 5 m wide porticoes. The date of the paving and colonnade is unknown but lies well before the fourth century C.E., when black-and-white mosaic floors covered the road. Slabs of Proconnesian marble obscured the mosaics in the final excavated phase, possibly dating to the fifth or sixth century C.E.

Several large public buildings arose alongside this Roman road. The first, a rectangular building (45 x

⁹ P. Bikai 1992, 26–32; Jidejian 1996, 3–9, 24, 163–68; Lipiński 2004, 298.

¹⁰ Most of the excavations in the city center remain unpublished or are only briefly summarized (e.g., Badawi [n.d.];

Chéhab 1970, 45–9; Joukowsky 1992; Jidejian 1996, 170–87). Bronze and Iron Age remains were published by Bikai (1978); Rey-Coquais (1977, 1979, 2002, 2006) reported on the Greek and Latin inscriptions.

35 m) with five rows of seats and a sand floor, was perhaps a theater or arena (see fig. 1[3]).¹¹ This complex, which could date to the fourth or fifth century, sat on top of an earlier, first-century C.E. building. Numerous cisterns surrounded the building, and a fountain with a mosaic floor was found directly to the southwest. On the other side of the colonnaded road, a square building (30 x 30 m) was erected and adorned with gray granite columns (see fig. 1[4]). Its interior court housed a basin with a white mosaic floor, and finds from this building included a marble statue of Victory. Chéhab interpreted it as a palaestra or market, dating perhaps to the second century C.E.¹² Deep reservoirs for the production of purple dye occupied this location in the fifth century C.E., when the older building was abandoned or destroyed. The space next to this building held a Roman bath complex, also perhaps of second-century date (see fig. 1[5]). A second bath arose in the vicinity. Chéhab mentions a residential quarter stretching out toward the southwest near the sea consisting of houses paved with marble and mosaic floors (see fig. 1[6]). Large slabs covered the deeply rutted streets that ran between the residences.¹³

A second area of investigation was Alexander's causeway and the region directly to the east on the original mainland. Here, a wide road (7.80 m) ran east out of the city toward the hills (see figs. 1[7], 2). This road was paved in the second century C.E. but likely covered an older passage out of the city. In usual Roman fashion, porticoes (width 4.12 m) and small shops arose on either side of the road. An aqueduct built between 100 and 154 C.E. and originating from a spring approximately 6 km to the south of Tyre at Ras al-'Ayn followed the road toward the city.¹⁴ Flanking the road on the south side were pillars that were more than 4 m high and supported the water canal. A monumental arch with three gates (second century C.E.) marked the road close to the spot where the causeway connected the former island to the mainland (see figs. 1[8], 3). Two large, paved circular features of unknown function, one with a mosaic pavement, occupied the area directly to the north and south of the arch (see fig. 2). A smaller arch arose about 315 m to the east in the Byzantine period (see figs. 1[9], 2), perhaps about the same time as the construction of a new and much smaller road (5.07 m) on top of the older one. A circus with a length of almost 500 m and probably dating to the second century C.E. extended to the south of the road (see fig. 1[10]). On its east

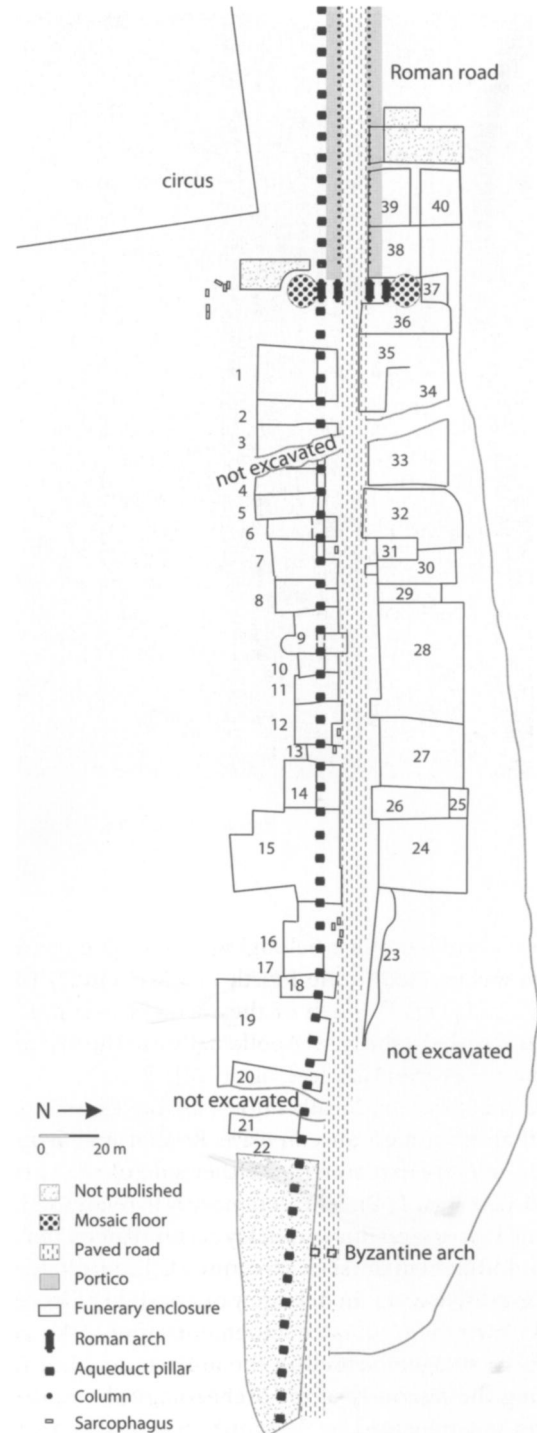


Fig. 2. Plan of al-Bass cemetery (after Ward-Perkins 1969, fig. 6; Chéhab 1984, figs. 1, 7, 9, 15–16, 20–1, 25–7, 30–3, 35–9, 42–8; Bikai et al. 1996, iv, x).

¹¹ Butcher (2003, 257) suggests that this building was connected to Maioumas rites. A series of rooms dedicated to this festival also existed in the cemetery (these are described elsewhere in the article).

¹² Chéhab 1970, 49. For date, see Jidejian 1996, 174.

¹³ Chéhab 1970, 47.

¹⁴ Chéhab 1983, 132; P.M. Bikai 1992, 63; Lipiński 2004, 300.



Fig. 3. Roman road, arch, and portico (on right); view to the east.

flank, a bath complex belonging to the blue chariot team was erected in the fourth or fifth century C.E. (see fig. 1[11]).¹⁵ North of the road, excavations by Bikai revealed a shrine of Apollo dating to the first and second centuries C.E. (see fig. 1[12]).¹⁶

At this location, locally known as the al-Bass area, Chéhab excavated an extensive Roman and Byzantine cemetery extending on either side of the paved road (see figs. 1, 2). The cemetery was relatively undisturbed, as sand dunes quickly accumulated after its abandonment in the seventh century C.E. and covered the graves, leaving them largely out of sight of looters and protected from later settlement. After 1948, Palestinian refugees settled in the al-Bass area. But following the discovery of the archaeological site, their camp was relocated to the north, where it remains.

The Lebanese Antiquities Service, under the direction of Chéhab, excavated the cemetery between 1959 and 1975. The al-Bass cemetery, comprising more than 40 large tomb complexes or funerary enclosures, including a minimum of 825 individual graves, represents one of the largest excavated Roman cemeteries in Lebanon and the province of Syria. Thus far, it is the only cemetery associated with Roman Tyre; but finds elsewhere in the vicinity of the city may point to additional burial grounds.¹⁷

The Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) cut short the archaeological research, including the publication of the material. The recording was not complete when the archaeologists were forced to leave the site, and as a result, Chéhab published only 39 tomb complexes in the 1980s, although he had excavated more.¹⁸ As he

¹⁵ Kahwagi-Janho 2007.

¹⁶ Bikai et al. 1996. More buildings were excavated in the area but remain unidentified and unpublished. A complete report exists of the monumental arch (Chéhab 1983; see also Chéhab 1970; P.M. Bikai 1992; Jidejian 1996).

¹⁷ Rock-cut chamber tombs (hypogea) are reported in the region by Renan 1864–1874, 527–96, 632–94; Takase et al. 2003, 326; Shibasaki et al. 2006, 52. Limestone, marble, and

lead sarcophagi originated from the area of Mashuq to the east of the city, and between Mashuq and Rachidiye (Chéhab 1934a, 1935; P. Bikai 1992, 28–32; see also Jidejian 1996, 3–9, 24, 163–68). In more recent years, Aubet (Aubet 2004; Aubet et al. 1998–1999) excavated an Iron Age cemetery (ninth–sixth centuries B.C.E.) in the al-Bass area; see also Sader 1991; Seeden 1991.

¹⁸ Chéhab 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986.

explains in his report, the circumstances in Lebanon at the time prevented his team from having access to the objects and the excavation notes.¹⁹ Despite Chéhab's best efforts as the head of the Antiquities Service to safeguard the Lebanese archaeological heritage, for instance, by protecting the artifacts in the National Museum of Antiquities in Beirut from looters and destruction, the whereabouts of most of the finds from the al-Bass cemetery and excavation documentation are currently unknown. Furthermore, several tombs mentioned by Jidejian and uncovered after Chéhab's excavations between 1975 and 1996 still await publication.²⁰ On a brighter note, in 1984, UNESCO placed the city of Tyre, including the al-Bass cemetery, on the World Heritage List, which led to a series of projects undertaken by the Lebanese Antiquities Service and foreign teams.²¹

THE AL-BASS CEMETERY

Location

The inhabitants of Tyre buried their dead most likely outside the city limits but close to the settlement. The cemetery stretched out along either side of the main east–west road leading to the city (see figs. 1, 2). The burial ground covered about 1.5 ha, but it was not completely excavated.²² Satellite imagery and on-site inspection by the author have revealed a minimum of six tomb complexes to the southeast of the published collection, two in the northwest and at least one near the southeast corner of the circus. An area of about 110 x 50 m, which seems to belong to the cemetery in the northeast, remains unexcavated.²³ It is unclear how far the tombs continue to the north, east, and south underneath the modern settlement. The total surface area could include more than 2.5 ha, extending 395 x 60–30 m to the north of the road and 384 x 40–15 m to the south. Given the average sizes of the funerary buildings, this area perhaps held between 49 and 60 tomb complexes.

The size of the city of Tyre and its growth and decline throughout the Roman centuries, and thus its proximity to the cemetery, are largely unknown. Small clues come from excavation trenches that revealed evidence for habitation in most areas of the island region, indicating that the city possibly extended toward the mainland. Bikai and Bikai argue that this corroborates

Pliny's statement that the circumference of the city was 22 stadia, or 4,800 m. The island part of the modern city covers only 2,750 m; therefore, Pliny's estimates must have included part of the isthmus.²⁴ Whatever the extent of the city, the cemetery was close to the inhabited area. Urban or civic features surrounded the burial ground, and over time the separation between funerary and nonfunerary space blurred. Originally, for instance, the walls of the tomb complexes started, on average, 8 m from the paved road, leaving a path or open area between the road and the tombs (figs. 4, 5). Over time, the tomb complexes expanded toward the road, and by the fifth or sixth century C.E., the funerary buildings had incorporated portions of the road itself as well as the northern colonnade and portico (see fig. 2). In this period, a smaller road replaced the wide Roman one. A similar process of encroachment occurred in the case of the aqueduct that was constructed in the first half of the second century C.E. on the southern edge of the paved road. The pillars supporting the canal originally occupied the section between the road and the southern tomb complexes, but as they increased in size, the aqueduct became part of the funerary architecture (see figs. 5, 6). Over time, the tomb walls wrapped around the aqueduct, and sarcophagi and other graves leaned against its supporting pillars. Sometimes the same plaster that covered the tomb walls continued on the aqueduct. Other public buildings arose in the second century C.E.; these included the circus occupying the stretch of land directly to the south of the cemetery and the monumental arch with associated circular pavements. Throughout the centuries, the tomb complexes moved closer to these buildings (see fig. 2). The cemetery, therefore, although most likely outside the city boundaries, was in the midst of built-up space related to the city and was surrounded by civic constructions (i.e., of public function and connected to the urban center).

Figure 2 is a visual representation of the cemetery. This is, however, a provisional map. As mentioned above, the Lebanese Civil War prevented the full publication of the cemetery. Several key components are missing from the excavation reports, such as a plan of the entire cemetery and its relation to the nonfunerary architecture in the vicinity. Also missing are the complete plans of 26 tomb complexes, and thus im-

¹⁹ Chéhab 1985, 540.

²⁰ Jidejian 1996, 214.

²¹ New research on the ancient harbors has been carried out since 2005 as part of a UNESCO project (e.g., Marriner et al. 2005, 2008; Morhange and Saghih-Beydoun 2005). A Japanese team undertook a three-dimensional modeling and scanning project of the arch and circus (Takase et al. 2003; Shibasaki et al. 2006).

²² Approximate dimensions: 238 x 28 m to the north of the road and 300 x 40–15 m to the south.

²³ A collection of sarcophagi found along the main road in this area was published as part of a single funerary building (Tomb Complex 23) but probably stood in front of multiple tomb complexes that are not excavated.

²⁴ Plin. *HN* 5.17; Bikai and Bikai 1987, 73–6.

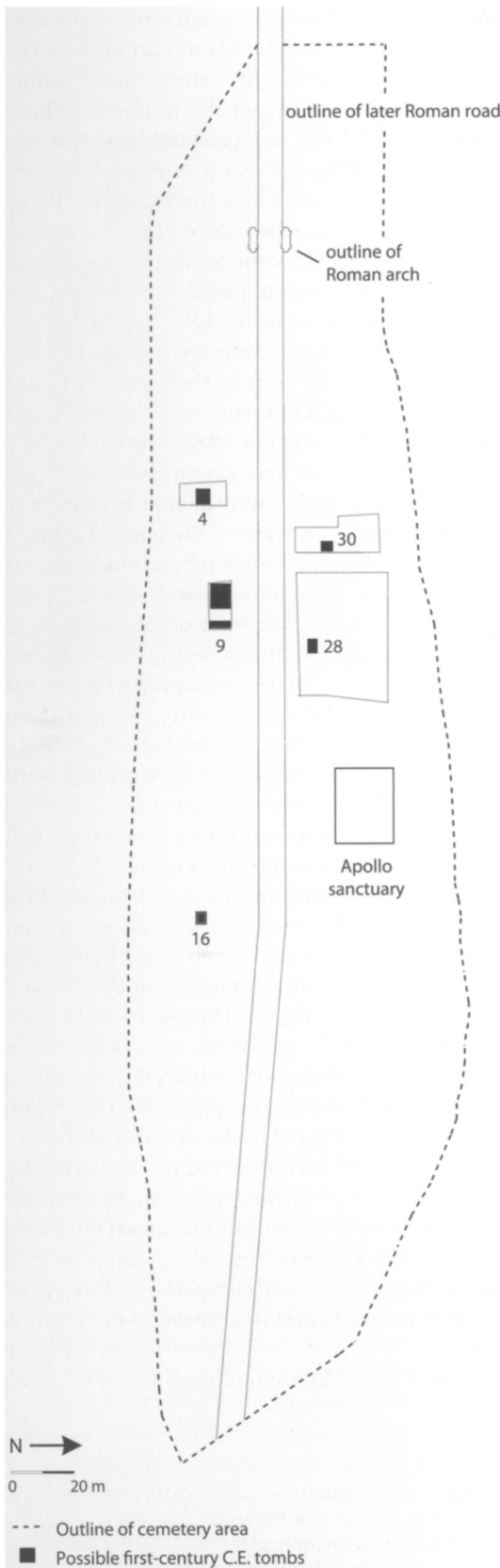


Fig. 4. First phase of al-Bass cemetery, perhaps late first century C.E.

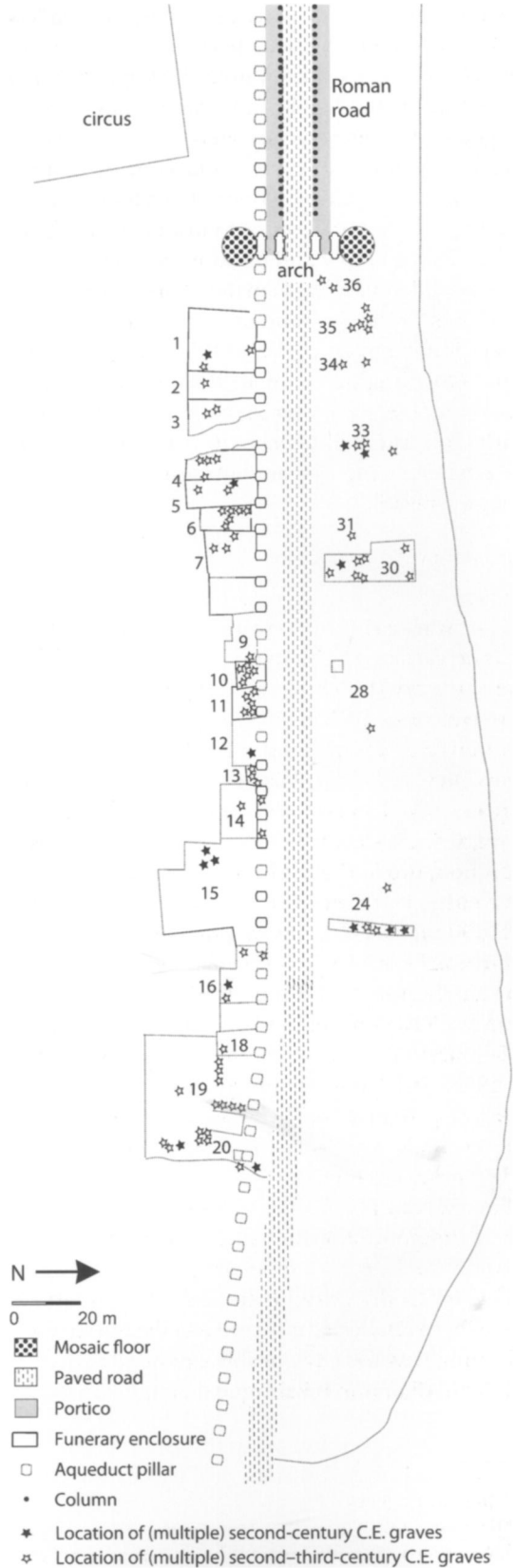


Fig. 5. Second phase of al-Bass cemetery, second century C.E. Some "location" symbols represent multiple graves.



Fig. 6. The front of Tomb Complex 1. An aqueduct pillar is visible in the background on the right.

portant evidence for the understanding of the spatial development of the burial ground. With the aid of the coordinates listed in the excavation reports, and satellite and aerial imagery, I was able to combine the existing drawings and create the provisional map in figure 2.²⁵

The Tombs

The funerary architecture at Tyre represents a new type of tomb that was perhaps regionally popular. The tomb complexes were large, conspicuous, and constructed aboveground. I argue below, on the basis of spatial analysis, that the walls of the tomb became the locus for the display of wealth and access to resources, and that the tombs represent a new phenomenon of the first centuries C.E. The excavation reports offer a description of each tomb but unfortunately no summary, comparanda, or numerical lists of features, di-

mensions, or the like. Therefore, before discussing the importance of the form and layout of the tomb complexes, a description of the funerary architecture is necessary.

These tomb complexes can be termed “funerary enclosures”: large, enclosed spaces housing multiple graves. The funerary enclosures were extensive in size and constantly enlarged throughout the centuries of use. Chéhab published 39 funerary enclosures, two of which did not contain any graves (Tomb Complexes 8, 38). As mentioned above, at least 10 additional funerary enclosures were uncovered, but these remain unpublished and are not included in this article. The complexes consisted of a perimeter wall of limestone and sandstone blocks enclosing a rectangular space (see figs. 6–10). Most of these walls were not of load-bearing thickness (average between 30 and 60 cm), suggesting that the enclosures were intended as open-

²⁵The excavation reports include the complete plans of 10 tombs and portions of four additional tombs. Drawings of three more tombs and the schematic outlines of eight tombs appear in Ward-Perkins 1969; Bikai et al. 1996. I thank Daniel Contreras and Elizabeth Robinson for assisting with the setup of the plan.

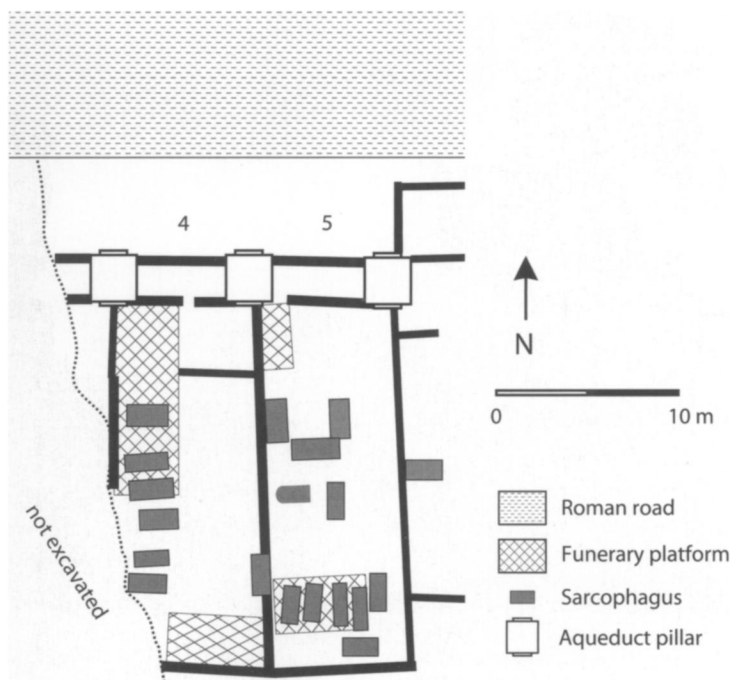


Fig. 7. Plan of Tomb Complexes 4 and 5 (after Chéhab 1984, fig. 9).



Fig. 8. Tomb Complexes 4 and 5, view from the back (to the north). Two damaged sarcophagi in gray (“Assos”) stone on the right are standing on a funerary platform with loculi blocked at a later stage.

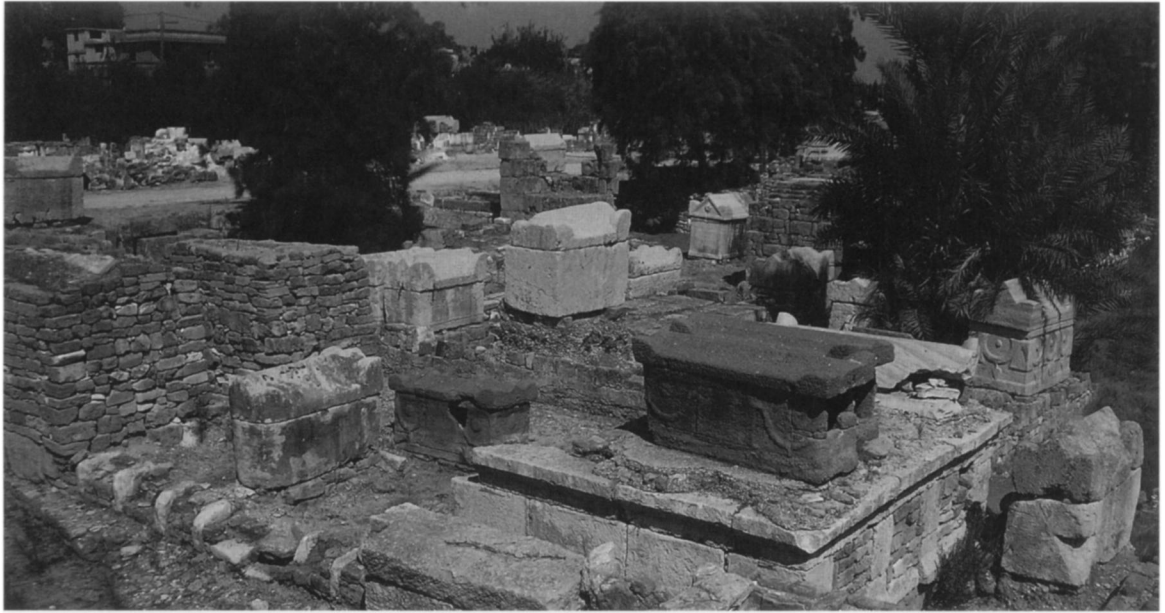


Fig. 9. Tomb Complex 5, view to the northeast. The Assos sarcophagi are visible in the right foreground, and an unfinished sarcophagus from Proconnesus is visible in the right corner.



Fig. 10. Tomb Complex 7, view to the south. A part of the stone paving is visible in the foreground. The lid of the marble sarcophagus on the left carries a Byzantine inscription.

air structures. The enclosures measured on average 21.23 x 12.46 m but varied in size (see fig. 2).²⁶ Doorways with posts, lintels, thresholds, and sometimes arches faced the road and provided access (see fig. 6). The interior was often paved with limestone or sandstone slabs and divided into several compartments by low partition walls (see figs. 7, 10). Inside the enclosures, different burial types occurred side-by-side, most commonly in the form of loculus graves and sarcophagi (table 1). Rectangular buildings or platforms of roughly hewn and squared limestone and sandstone blocks contained rows of open spaces (loculi) for burial with flat or vaulted ceilings (see figs. 8, 10).²⁷ Seven funerary platforms had a rounded or gable-shaped roof covered with tiles. A single stone slab closed the loculi, which were accessible on the short side.²⁸ The loculi were arranged in single, double, or—in two cases—triple rows containing between 1 and 12 loculi; the average was 3 loculi per funerary platform.

The second type of burial consisted of freestanding stone sarcophagi placed on a low stone or earth pedestal inside the funerary enclosures or outside along the walls facing the road (see figs. 7–10).²⁹ Groups of sarcophagi also covered the roofs of the funerary platforms.³⁰ Most were carved from local stone, but a substantial number were constructed from more exotic materials imported from Turkey, Greece, and Egypt (fig. 11).³¹ Chéhab identifies the gray-purple stone of a small group of coffins as basalt, which may have come from the Hauran in southern Syria or near Homs in the Orontes Valley. Ward-Perkins, however, speculates that they instead originated from Assos in the Troad and were made of the famous *lapis sarcophagus* described by Pliny the Elder.³² This is corroborated by the decoration on at least four of these coffins, consisting of the unfinished relief of slim garlands and a large central panel, which is similar to decoration on the Assos examples depicted by Koch (see fig. 9).³³

Occasionally, limestone, lead, and terracotta coffins were placed inside the loculi, and in one case two lead sarcophagi filled a larger limestone coffin.³⁴ Ceramic analysis of similar terracotta sarcophagi in Beirut has identified their place of origin as eastern Cilicia,³⁵ but no such research was conducted on the Tyrian examples. Lead coffins were possibly produced in Syria or perhaps even locally at Tyre.³⁶ Unfortunately, the lead and terracotta sarcophagi from Tyre are only listed in the excavation report and not further published, and I do not know their whereabouts. Aside from the sarcophagi and loculi, the final type of grave within the funerary enclosures is represented by a small number of underground pit graves dug into the soil and covered with stone slabs, and in one case containing a lead sarcophagus (see table 1).

Different forms of decoration adorned the tomb complexes. Lime plaster often covered the walls of the enclosures and the facades of the funerary platforms as well as the interior of the loculi. Beveled cornices in relief crowned the funerary platforms, and engaged columns or arches occasionally framed the loculi (see figs. 8–10). At least 27 mosaics covered the floors of rooms and less frequently the roofs of the funerary platforms. Few are dated, but the white mosaics and the black-and-white mosaics with geometric patterns were often associated with Roman-period tomb complexes, whereas the later Byzantine examples were polychrome with geometric and floral motifs. As explained below, the cemetery was extensively reused in the Byzantine period, when additional decoration embellished the tomb walls, particularly in the form of Christian symbols in relief and paint.³⁷

The most ornate structures in the cemetery, however, were the stone sarcophagi. Almost 40% of the freestanding coffins had relief decoration, including the majority of the imported marble examples. The most popular decoration consisted of moldings, rosettes,

²⁶The smallest enclosure covered ca. 11 x 6 m and the largest ca. 36 x 29 m. The height of walls is generally not recorded, although one wall was preserved up to almost 6 m.

²⁷The average size of the funerary platforms was 3.40 x 2.40 x 1.60 m.

²⁸Closing slabs were marble, limestone, or sandstone. Chéhab (1984, 1985, 1986) also reports one pink granite and two terracotta examples.

²⁹The average dimensions of the sarcophagi were 2.20 x 1.03 x 1.44 m, but they varied widely. The smallest sarcophagus measured 1.30 x 0.57 x 0.65 m, whereas the tallest was 2.57 x 1.40 x 2.28 m.

³⁰Several sarcophagi are published elsewhere but omitted in the excavation reports. These include five stone examples in Ward-Perkins (1969), four in Rey-Coquais (2006), and one in Will (1946–1948).

³¹The decorated (imported) sarcophagi from Tyre are better known than the rest of the graves and analyzed in several

studies (Will 1946–1948; Chéhab 1968; Ward-Perkins 1969; Linant de Bellefonds 1985; see also Koch 1977; Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 407, 411, 425, 562–63).

³²Ward-Perkins 1969, 124; Chéhab 1986, 44.

³³Koch 1993, 171–72. This decoration is found on Sarcophagi 609, 629, 641, and 833. The Assos sarcophagi are also found elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean and Italy.

³⁴Total: 25 lead, 6 terracotta, and 1 limestone coffin.

³⁵Stuart 2001; Butcher 2003, 200; see also Shapiro (1997) for Cilician sarcophagi in Galilee.

³⁶Rahmani 1999, 72. The earliest production date of the lead sarcophagi is not known, but scholars assume it lay between the mid second and early third centuries C.E. (Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 570–72; Rahmani 1999, 4).

³⁷Most common are red crosses. One funerary enclosure had a fresco of what appears to be the Virgin Mary (Tomb Complex 31); see also Salamé-Sarkis 1986, 201.

Table 1. Burials in the al-Bass Cemetery.

Feature	Total No.	No. of Burial Spots
Funerary enclosures (tomb complexes)	39	–
Funerary platforms	145	–
Loculi in platforms	–	449 ^a
Freestanding sarcophagi	–	357
Pit graves	–	19
Total burial spots	–	825

^a This is a minimum count; the upper section of several platforms was destroyed, and others were never completely excavated.

busts, victories, and an empty *tabula ansata* (see figs. 8–10).³⁸ Some of the imported sarcophagi had elaborate reliefs with depictions from Greek mythology, such as the life of Achilles and Bacchic scenes. Reclining figures carved in the round topped a small number of lids (seven in total). The assemblage also included three strigil sarcophagi and six lids with roof-tile imitation. Garland sarcophagi complete with bucrania, ram's and bull's heads, flowers, fruit, and Medusa faces framed by heavy garlands formed a group of 16 coffins. A related collection of 20–22 Proconnesian imports were still in so-called quarry state with stylized garlands and disks in relief panels (see fig. 9). These coffins were imported to be finished by a local sculptor on-site, which never happened. Excavations elsewhere in the Mediterranean have yielded similar coffins with unfinished decoration.³⁹ Ward-Perkins notes that in Tyre not only some of the imported pink granite, and the majority of the examples in "Assos" stone, but also at least two locally produced sarcophagi had similar stylized decorations. This suggests that at some point, the stylized decoration itself had become fashionable and was imitated by local sculptors.⁴⁰

Unlike elsewhere in Syria, the Tyrian graves contained relatively few inscriptions from the Roman period; only seven possibly dated before the fifth century

C.E.⁴¹ Two mosaic floors in the funerary enclosures carried an inscription, and one sarcophagus had an admonition for potential looters warning them about the penalty for disturbing the grave.⁴² More than half of the inscriptions were left by parents mourning a deceased child.⁴³ Rey-Coquais' most recent study adds four funerary stelae to the collection, including two belonging to military graves and inscribed in Latin. Unfortunately, it is not known whether these stelae originated from the al-Bass cemetery.⁴⁴ Another inscription, which may not be funerary, refers to the Maioumas festival and is described below. A large number of inscriptions, at least 253, dated to the fifth or sixth century C.E. (see, e.g., fig. 10). These texts were several centuries younger than the tomb complexes they adorned and represent the phase of reuse of the graves.

Aside from graves, the funerary enclosures included additional features such as benches constructed against the interior walls. Chéhab's report mentions 26 rectangular and circular water basins paved with terracotta tiles or marble slabs. Canals and terracotta pipes crossing the funerary enclosures were attached to these basins (fig. 12). Most of these were associated with the latest phase of the cemetery, and several came from rooms with a religious function.⁴⁵ It is therefore

³⁸ Similar to the funerary platforms, the sarcophagi were also sometimes covered with incised or painted crosses at a later stage.

³⁹ Asgari 1977; Koch and Sichtermann 1982; Waelkens et al. 1988, 20.

⁴⁰ Ward-Perkins 1969, 115–16.

⁴¹ Published in Rey-Coquais 1977, 1979, 2006.

⁴² Dated between 200 and 400 C.E. (Rey-Coquais 1977, cat. no. 100). One mosaic commemorated Zosimas, who paid for the mosaic and perhaps part of the tomb in 375 C.E. (cat. no. 69); the second mosaic inscription (cat. no. 74) only provides a date (154/5 C.E.).

⁴³ Four in total: two on sarcophagi dating perhaps to the third or fourth century C.E. (cat. nos. 149a, b, 150) and two

on stone fragments of which the exact location is unclear (cat. nos. 5, 6) from the first–third centuries C.E. (Rey-Coquais 1977). A fifth was published by Rey-Coquais in 2006 (cat. no. 393), but it is not certain whether this inscription originated from the al-Bass cemetery.

⁴⁴ Rey-Coquais 2006, cat. nos. 383, 384. The other two (cat. nos. 108, 382) were short texts in Greek, one of which carried a date (177/8 C.E.).

⁴⁵ E.g., chapels and the Maioumas building (described below). A series of rooms in Tomb Complex 15 is interpreted by Chéhab as a postmortem baptistery and included several basins. Chéhab also mentions a water tower with a series of pipes leading to the aqueduct (Tomb Complex 38) but offers no further description.

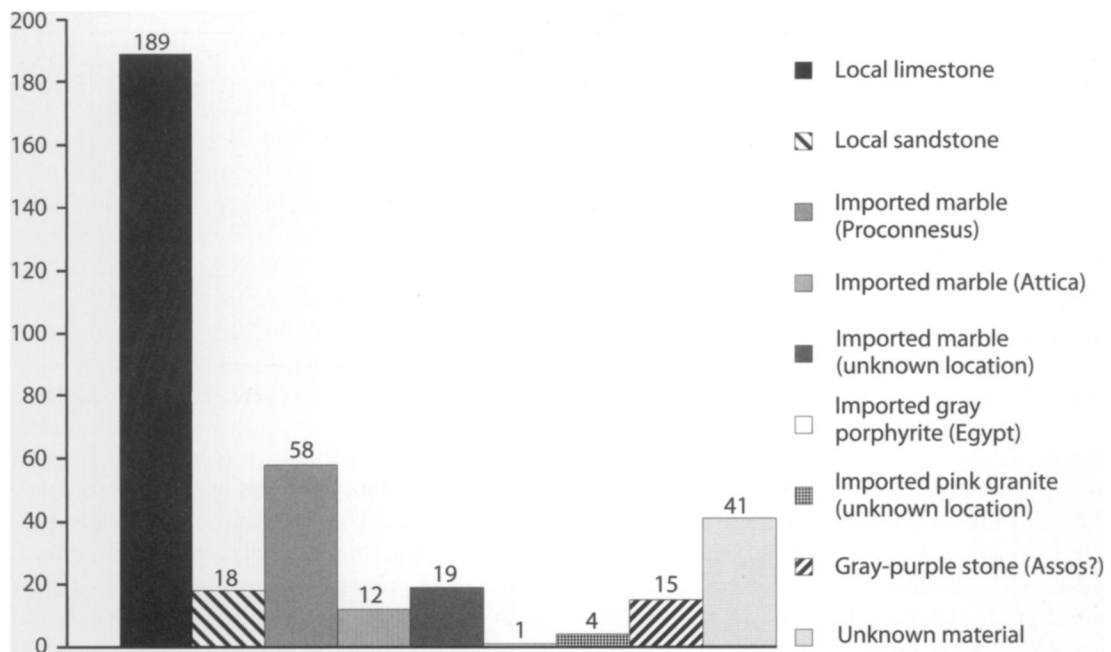


Fig. 11. Material of sarcophagi from al-Bass cemetery.

possible that the construction of the basins should be placed in the Byzantine period. However, this is not certain in each case; alternatively, the water features may have been connected to religious rituals taking place in earlier centuries. It is perhaps significant that the Apollo sanctuary in the northern section of the cemetery included a well and water pipes.⁴⁶

Occasionally, a room was found with no graves, and two enclosures were seemingly never used for burial (Tomb Complexes 8, 38). These areas were perhaps designated for burial rites. Furthermore, at the back of most funerary enclosures extended open areas, sometimes surrounded by low walls and crossed by canals. The canals in Tomb Complex 15 had outlets at regular intervals, leading Chéhab to interpret these areas as gardens with irrigation installations (see fig. 12). A late inscription does mention a garden as part of the tomb complex, indicating that at least by the fifth–sixth centuries C.E., the enclosures could have included such a space.⁴⁷ Chéhab also mentions four altars in the shape of small rectangular blocks situated in front of loculi or near sarcophagi. One of these had traces of fire, and a second was decorated with a garland in relief. Seven reused column fragments of

marble and sandstone perhaps functioned in similar ways, since they were only between 30 and 48 cm high and positioned in front of graves.

Physical Remains and Grave Goods

The 39 published tombs contained a minimum of 825 places for burial: 19 pit graves, 357 sarcophagi,



Fig. 12. East wall of garden area of Tomb Complex 15 with canal.

⁴⁶Bikai et al. 1996, 2–11. Cormack (2004, 31, 33) describes water features in Roman tombs in Asia Minor, perhaps sugges-

tive of banqueting practices, gardens, and/or libations.

⁴⁷Rey-Coquais 1977, 132, cat. no. 108.

and 449 loculi (in 145 funerary platforms).⁴⁸ These graves were extensively reused, and most contained the skeletal remains of multiple individuals. A total of 3,955 individuals are reported, all belonging to inhumation burials.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, the excavation report only mentions the total number of skulls found inside each grave, and no other information is given. A further complication is that graves were reused in the Byzantine period. The excavation report mostly lacks notes about the stratigraphy and about the connection between the grave goods and skeletal evidence. In most cases, therefore, it cannot be established whether the physical remains belonged to the Roman or Byzantine period.⁵⁰

Similar complications arise in the case of grave goods. The graves yielded a total of 6,526 finds, most commonly items of gold, silver, and bronze jewelry, glass and pottery vessels, bronze coins, and less frequently terracotta oil lamps, bone clothing pins, and glass and stone beads.⁵¹ In the absence of a stratigraphical report, it is difficult to connect the finds to the individual burials or other finds in each grave. Whereas some of the materials such as glass vessels and coins are datable, this is more complicated for items of jewelry. The pottery vessels and terracotta oil lamps, furthermore, are unpublished, and their current whereabouts are unknown to the author. At present, it is generally unclear if an object was deposited in the first, Roman phase of use, during the following centuries, or in the Byzantine period. The problems this raises for establishing the chronological development of the cemetery are explained below.

Chronology

Numismatic evidence indicates that the cemetery had a long lifespan, lasting from the first to the seventh centuries C.E. It was in the early centuries (first–third centuries C.E.) that the inhabitants of Tyre constructed a new tomb type revealing a series of new choices in funerary ritual. After the third century C.E., few new tombs were constructed; instead, older ones were reused. Since the excavation reports offer little description of the chronology, and because the chronology they do provide is not always reliable, a discussion of dating methodology follows.

⁴⁸ On average, there were 22 individual burial spots per enclosure, ranging from 96 to 2. Each enclosure held funerary platforms (average 4 with 12 loculi) and sarcophagi (average 9–10).

⁴⁹ Average 119 individuals per enclosure, 12 per coffin, and 16 per loculus.

⁵⁰ The practice of frequent reuse of loculi and sarcophagi was, however, common in Roman Syria and sometimes oc-

The limited publication of the stratigraphy and grave goods complicates the dating of the cemetery and the individual graves. Chéhab provides a brief discussion of the chronology, which is primarily based on the date of coins found in the graves. This approach is problematic for two reasons. First, because of the high level of reuse of each grave and the lack of a stratigraphical report, the coins cannot be connected to a particular burial or to the first phase of the tomb. The date of the earliest coin does not necessarily reflect the construction period, since the coin could have been deposited years, decades, or even centuries later. The second problem is that the coins could have been minted long before they were deposited in a grave. Several tombs from the second century C.E. in Beirut, for instance, contained early first-century C.E. coins.⁵² One of the few securely dated examples from the al-Bass cemetery indicates that the same phenomenon occurred here as well. Building 837, a platform with loculi, was constructed about the same time as the mosaic placed in front. An inscription dates the mosaic and thus the funerary platform to 154 C.E. One loculus in 837, however, contained a coin dating between 4 B.C.E. and 6 C.E., about 150 years prior to the construction of the tomb complex. Similarly, Sarcophagus 833, placed on top of the mosaic and therefore later in date, yielded coins from the reigns of Caligula and Trajan, decades earlier than the sarcophagus itself. Elsewhere, three loculi included coins from the Seleucid period (second century B.C.E.). Placing old coins in graves was probably a common practice in Tyre. As a result, without additional datable evidence, extreme caution is required when using numismatic evidence to date the graves.

Moreover, most of the other find categories, such as the oil lamps and pottery vessels, are unpublished or are difficult to date, such as jewelry. What remains are the glass vessels that are illustrated in the excavation report, the extant stone sarcophagi, the architecture of the funerary enclosures, the inscriptions, the limited stratigraphy offered in the reports, and the building sequence of the other (nonfunerary) constructions in the cemetery. On the basis of this evidence, I have reconstructed a tentative chronological development of the cemetery comprising at least

occurred in relatively short periods of time. In Beirut, e.g., seven loculi in a funerary platform contained the remains of 35 individuals, all buried between 100 and 215 C.E. (de Jong 2001).

⁵¹ The average was 11 finds per sarcophagus and 16 per loculus. The remainder came from the vicinity of the tombs.

⁵² de Jong 2001. This practice is also known from elsewhere in the region.

three major phases.⁵³ The description of these phases highlights the complex patterns of use and reuse of the cemetery and the individual tombs between the late first and the early seventh centuries C.E.

The Roman Period

Little remains from the earliest phase of the cemetery. Only five funerary enclosures yielded possible evidence for a construction date late in the first century C.E., based on architectural style, glass, and coins. The finds come from 6 funerary platforms with 27 loculi and 1 sarcophagus, but as table 2 illustrates, the evidence is minimal.⁵⁴ The early graves were situated on either side of the road, which indicates that both areas were already designated for burial in this early phase (see fig. 4). The fact that these graves did not abut the enclosure walls, and that in one case an enclosure wall included a sarcophagus, could suggest that they were not originally surrounded by walls but instead lay scattered in the fields. The enclosure walls arose in a subsequent phase, but it is not clear whether this happened about the same time as the construction of the aqueduct (100–154 C.E.) or earlier. The drawings of the tomb complexes indicate that the enclosure walls had a slightly different orientation than the aqueduct pillars and the paved road, suggesting that these walls predated the aqueduct construction.

This first phase of the cemetery possibly dates to the late first century C.E., when the inhabitants of Tyre designated a new area for burial. In this period, the Apollo sanctuary was active (see fig. 4). A second phase started in the first half of the second century C.E. with the construction of the aqueduct, monumental arch, circus, and the paving of the road. It is possible that the abandonment of the Apollo sanctuary (after 132 C.E.) accompanied this stage.⁵⁵ This erection of public architecture coincided with an increase in building activity in the cemetery. Ten funerary enclosures were in use, including 6 funerary platforms with 25 loculi, 9 sarcophagi, and 1 pit grave (see fig. 5; table 3). An additional 16 funerary enclosures belong to the second or third century C.E., including 34 funerary plat-

forms with 112 loculi and 62 sarcophagi. At this time, the limit of the cemetery was perhaps Tomb Complex 20, the easternmost enclosure to produce finds from the second or third century C.E. To the north of the road, the finds from the second century C.E. reached as far as Tomb Complex 24; however, the area farther east was only partially excavated. No graves from this century came from the area to the west of the arch. As mentioned, the pillars of the aqueduct were built on the northern edge of the tomb complexes, and the area between the pillars quickly became part of the funerary enclosures. A dated mosaic floor indicates that this happened at least by 154 C.E. On the other side of the road, the funerary enclosures extended a few meters to the north of the paved road (see fig. 5).

This phase continued into the third century C.E., when the entire area excavated by Chéhab was filled with funerary enclosures. In total, 53 sarcophagi dating between 200 and 250 C.E. belong to the 3 types described by Ward-Perkins (table 4).⁵⁶ In addition, 3 funerary platforms with 8 loculi and 21 sarcophagi can also be placed in the third century (fig. 13; table 5). This brings the total to 27 funerary enclosures with evidence for third-century construction. As mentioned, 34 funerary platforms with 112 loculi and 62 sarcophagi date to either the second or third century C.E., and 9 funerary platforms with 20 loculi and 37 sarcophagi date to the third or fourth century. At least nine enclosures were newly constructed in this period.⁵⁷ Furthermore, 27 earlier graves contained coins from the third century C.E., perhaps pointing to reuse practices. However, as indicated above, coins were often deposited at a later time and provide little indication about the reuse phase. The evidence for reuse of existing graves in the third century C.E. is therefore not secure.

At some point, the southern tomb complexes increased in size, and their walls were extended toward the paved road. This extension is difficult to date. In the eastern section, starting with Tomb Complex 15, several funerary platforms were erected against the northern extension walls. This possibly happened in

⁵³ In total, 60 funerary platforms, 185 sarcophagi, and 1 pit grave could be dated. The dates of the sarcophagi are based on Chéhab 1968; Ward-Perkins 1969; Koch and Sichtermann 1982; Linant de Bellefonds 1985. The glass is based on Isings 1957; Chéhab 1986; Dussart 1998; Jennings and Abdallah 2001; Jennings 2004–2005. The inscriptions are dated by Rey-Coquais (1977). The other information comes from descriptions in the excavation report.

⁵⁴ See also the appendix on the *AJA* Web site (<http://www.ajaonline.org>), under "Supplementary Data."

⁵⁵ Bikai et al. 1996, 27. The excavators, however, also men-

tion the possibility that the sanctuary was abandoned later, in the early third century C.E., when a platform with sarcophagi covered the building.

⁵⁶ Ward-Perkins 1969; see also Koch and Sichtermann 1982.

⁵⁷ Tomb Complexes 17, 21–3, 25, 32, 37, 39, 40. The tombs that surrounded the circular structure to the south of the arch remain undated and unpublished, but they postdated the monumental arch. Based on the architectural development of this area, a third-century C.E. date is possible.

Table 2. Phase 1 of the al-Bass Cemetery (First Century C.E.).

Grave	Tomb No.	Evidence for First-Century C.E. Construction Date
FP 789 ^a	Tomb 6; 3 loculi	late first-century C.E. coins; entrance blocked in late first or second century C.E. by S 613 ^b and S 615
FP 764	Tomb 9; 12 loculi	glass dating to late first–second centuries C.E. ^c
FP 777	Tomb 9; 3 loculi	glass dating to 50 B.C.E.–second century C.E. ^c ; S 779 (second or early third century C.E.) built against FP 777 and slightly later
FP 1109	Tomb 16; 4 loculi	glass dating to late first–second centuries C.E. ^d
S 4038	Tomb 28	sarcophagus type: 96–180 C.E. or slightly earlier ^e
FP 4034	Tomb 28; 3 loculi	constructed at same time or earlier than S 4038 (located on top)
FP 4114	Tomb 30; 2 loculi	constructed under floor level of second-century C.E. phase

^a FP = funerary platform

^b S = sarcophagus

^c Chéhab 1986; Dussart 1998

^d Isings 1957; Chéhab 1986

^e Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 411; Chéhab 1984

the third century C.E., providing a date for the enlargement of the tomb complexes (see fig. 13). The earliest date for the enlargement of Tomb Complexes 1–14 in the western half was perhaps late in the fourth century C.E.⁵⁸ Occasionally, a sarcophagus was placed in front of the western funerary enclosures in the third century C.E.

A series of rooms in Tomb Complex 28 indicates that nonfunerary (or nonburial) activities also took place in the enclosures. Three interconnected rooms occupied the southeastern part of the enclosure and initially included a few graves. At one point, the old doors became niches, and new doors leading to an area with a canal and collection basin opened in the west. Painted geometric and floral motifs, as well as female or female and male figures, covered the interior walls. A Greek inscription painted on the wall identified the users of the room as participants in the Maioumas festival.⁵⁹ The inscription and associated paintings date perhaps to the early fourth century C.E., but the building may have been in use since the third century or even earlier.⁶⁰ Because none of the graves is contemporary with the Maioumas inscription, it is possible that the rooms housed nonfunerary activities in the fourth century C.E. Not much is known about the Maioumas festival, but it was often associated with

pools and perhaps water-based activities, and it was celebrated in the eastern Mediterranean throughout the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.⁶¹ To my knowledge, there is no evidence elsewhere for the performance of Maioumas rites in a funerary setting, and the building may have been owned by a funerary association of Maioumas participants, rather than having served as a site for aquatic rituals. However, none of the graves is contemporary with the inscriptions, and the association with water existed everywhere in the cemetery, in the form of canals, basins, bathing facilities, and the aqueduct.

Evidence from the fourth century C.E. is scarcer and more difficult to interpret. Although none of the funerary platforms or sarcophagi yielded secure evidence for a fourth-century C.E. date, finds from two funerary platforms with four loculi and two sarcophagi potentially point to construction in this century (fig. 14; table 6), in addition to those mentioned above dating to the third or fourth century. As for reuse, 41 platforms and 33 sarcophagi yielded coins from the fourth century C.E. Eight older funerary platforms and one sarcophagus contained additional and more reliable fourth-century C.E. finds in the form of oil lamps and glass vessels, providing secure evidence for the practice of reuse in the fourth century.

⁵⁸This is based on an inscription in a mosaic floor dating to 375/6 C.E. in Tomb Complex 9 and the reused lid of a fourth-century sarcophagus in a wall in Tomb Complex 11.

⁵⁹ “[T]hose who celebrate the Maioumas in this place have nice days” (Chéhab 1986, 6; Rey-Coquais 1977, 86, cat. no.

151).

⁶⁰Chéhab 1986, 5–8.

⁶¹Roueché 1993, 188–89. Butcher (2003, 257) suggests that the rectangular building in the city center could have hosted Maioumas rites.

Table 3. Phase 2 of the al-Bass Cemetery (Second Century C.E.).

Grave	Tomb No.	Evidence for Second-Century C.E. Construction Date
FP 146 ^a	Tomb 1; 6 loculi	constructed at same time as or earlier than S 152 ^b (early third century C.E.), which is placed on top
S 605	Tomb 5	sarcophagus type: 150–200 C.E. ^c
FP 837	Tomb 12; 9 loculi	constructed at same time as mosaic with 154 C.E. date; 7 coins from first century B.C.E.–second century C.E.; 7 unguentaria from first–second centuries C.E. ^d
S 954	Tomb 15	sarcophagus type: late second century C.E. ^e
S 690	Tomb 15	possibly constructed between 150 and 200 C.E., based on S 954 and alignment with aqueduct
P 3394 ^f	Tomb 15	possibly constructed between 150 and 200 C.E., based on S 954 and alignment with aqueduct
S 1133	Tomb 16	sarcophagus type: late second century C.E. ^g
S 2772	Tomb 19	sarcophagus type: 190 C.E. ^h
S 908	Tomb 20	sarcophagus type: 150–175 C.E. ⁱ
FP 3914	Tomb 24; 5 loculi	below level of third century C.E.; glass from first century B.C.E.–fourth century C.E. ^d
FP 3920	Tomb 24; 2 loculi	same area as FP 3914
S 3881	Tomb 24	same area as FP 3914; glass from late first–third centuries C.E. ^j
FP 1351	Tomb 30; 1 loculus	under level of concrete floor with S 4048 and S 4049 (180–235 C.E.) on top ^k
S 4107	Tomb 30	under level of concrete floor with S 4048 and S 4049 (180–235 C.E.) on top ^k
FP 4252	Tomb 33; 2 loculi	construction at same level as Roman road; S 1279 on top of FP dates to 180–235 C.E. ^l
S 668	Tomb 33	same construction date as FP 4252

^a FP = funerary platform

^b S = sarcophagus

^c Chéhab 1968, 72–4; 1984; Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 562

^d Dussart 1998

^e Chéhab 1968, 21–7; 1984; Linant de Bellefonds 1985

^f P = pit grave

^g Chéhab 1968, 68–71; 1984; Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 425; Linant de Bellefonds 1985

^h Chéhab 1968, 36–40; 1984; Linant de Bellefonds 1985

ⁱ Chéhab 1968, 61–7; 1984; Linant de Bellefonds 1985

^j Chéhab 1986; Dussart 1998

^k Chéhab 1984; Linant de Bellefonds 1985

^l Chéhab 1968, 41–4; 1984; Linant de Bellefonds 1985

Whereas the number of new burials from the fourth century was perhaps low, there is better evidence for the construction of other features in the tomb complexes in this period. As mentioned above, Tomb Complexes 1–14 increased in size (see fig. 14). Compared with other parts of the funerary enclosures, these newly created rooms contained few graves, and at least five were completely devoid of burials. This suggests

a different or additional function for the rooms. The earliest evidence for the erection of a Christian building also comes from the fourth century C.E. Tomb Complex 15 contained an apsidal room oriented east–west and surrounded by smaller rooms. Several water basins occupied the rooms, and marble slabs covered the floors. Chéhab interpreted the building as a postmortem baptistery dating between the second

Table 4. Sarcophagi of Ward-Perkins (1969) Types I–III from the al-Bass Cemetery (200–250 C.E.).

Tomb Complex	Sarcophagus	Tomb Complex	Sarcophagus
1	S 152, S 162, S 344	19	S 2711, S 2715
2	S 133, S 141	20	S 3064
3	S 115, S 117	23	S 931, S 937
4	S 647	24	S 3877, S 3949
5	S 603	26	S 1979, S 4040, S 4060, S 4078
6	S 621	32	S 684, S 686
7	S 655, S 715, S 717	33	S 657, S 659
9	S 771, S 779	34	S 17
12	S 823, S 825	35	S 27, S 29, S 31, S 33, S 35, S 39, S 45
15	S 1045	36	S 217, S 227
16	S 939, S 943, S 1095	37	S 252, S 254, S 255a
17	S 1149	39	S 412
18	S 1164	40	S 418

and early fifth centuries C.E.⁶² It is unlikely, however, that Christian architecture was built openly before 200 C.E., and it was quite uncommon before the fourth century C.E. The construction date of the chapel more likely belongs in the fourth century C.E.⁶³

To summarize the second phase: starting in the second and increasing in the third century C.E., the cemetery witnessed large-scale construction and frequent modifications of existing space. In the fourth century C.E., the building of new graves slowed and reuse of older graves perhaps became more common. Although none of the tomb complexes impeded the nonfunerary architecture at this stage, they did begin to encroach on and surround civic constructions such as the road, circus, and aqueduct (see fig. 14).

The Byzantine Phase

A third phase of the cemetery was Byzantine, dating between the fourth or fifth and seventh centuries C.E. No new tomb complexes arose in this period, but the existing funerary enclosures showed signs of large-scale reuse (fig. 15). The best evidence comes from the

inscriptions dating to the fifth or sixth century C.E. Of the 253 published inscriptions, 60 occurred on loculi (perhaps 44 funerary platforms), 180 on sarcophagi, and 13 have unknown locations (table 7). These were inscribed on the lids of the sarcophagi and on the closing slabs of the loculi.⁶⁴ The 2006 publication of Rey-Coquais lists 33 additional inscriptions that are similar in appearance to the fifth–sixth-century C.E. examples but remain undated and without a findspot. More circumstantial evidence for reuse stems from the Christian motifs (mostly crosses) incised or painted on the tombs and coffins. Often these crosses were associated with an inscription and therefore likely of similar date, although this is not certain. In any case, the open and visible use of Christian motifs is not likely to have occurred before the fourth century C.E.⁶⁵ Apart from the graves with an inscription, two sarcophagi and five funerary platforms have recorded cross decoration. Some graves also produced other datable Byzantine finds, such as glass, coins, and lead sarcophagi, and others included bronze crosses, another potential indicator of late use (table 8). This adds up to 84 funerary

⁶² Chéhab 1984, 299–300; 1986, 1–3.

⁶³ The earliest known basilica church was built in Tyre ca. 314–317 C.E. (Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 10.4.2–71).

⁶⁴ Published and dated by Rey-Coquais (1977, 1979, 2006). Most of the inscriptions are short and include a single name

and profession. For 44 sarcophagus inscriptions and 19 closing slabs, the tomb number is unknown; another 3 come from unidentifiable pieces of marble.

⁶⁵ Although tombs around Rome did have Christian iconography in the third century C.E., see, e.g., Spera 2003, 25.

Table 5. Phase 2 of the al-Bass Cemetery (Third Century C.E.).

Grave	Tomb No.	Evidence for Third-Century C.E. Construction Date
FP 3210A ^a	Tomb 1; 2 loculi	same construction date as S 344; ^b possible early third-century glass ^c
S 164	Tomb 1	group with S 162 and S 166 (200–250 C.E.)
S 168	Tomb 1	group with S 162 and S 166 (200–250 C.E.)
S 119	Tomb 3	possibly group with S 115 and S 117 (200–250 C.E.)
S 719	Tomb 4	possibly group with S 647 (200–250 C.E.)
S 721	Tomb 4	possibly group with S 647 (200–250 C.E.)
S 734	Tomb 7	possibly group with S 655 (200–250 C.E.)
S 781	Tomb 9	stratigraphically slightly later than FP 764 (late first–second centuries C.E.) and S 779 (200 C.E.)
FP 1028	Tomb 15; 1 loculus	constructed in third century C.E., based on architecture and glass ^d
S 1030	Tomb 15	constructed in third century C.E., based on architecture and glass ^d
S 1032	Tomb 15	constructed in third century C.E., based on architecture and glass ^d
S 1034	Tomb 15	constructed in third century C.E., based on architecture and glass ^d
S 941	Tomb 16	possibly group with S 939, S 943, and S 1095 (200–250 C.E.)
S 1093	Tomb 16	possibly group with S 939, S 943, and S 1095 (200–250 C.E.)
S 2713	Tomb 19	possibly group with S 2711 (200–250 C.E.)
S 3928	Tomb 24	group with S 3930 (200–250 C.E.)
S 4229	Tomb 25	sarcophagus type: 230–240 C.E. ^e
S 4227	Tomb 25	group with S 4229 (230–240 C.E.)
S 4035a	Tomb 28	sarcophagus type: 230–240 C.E. ^e
FP 15	Tomb 34; 5 loculi	stratigraphically contemporary with or slightly later than S 17 (200–250 C.E.)
S 229	Tomb 36	group with S 227 (200–250 C.E.)
S 231	Tomb 36	group with S 227 (200–250 C.E.)
S 284	Tomb 39	stratigraphically contemporary with or slightly earlier than S 412 (200–250 C.E.)
S 285B	Tomb 39	stratigraphically earlier in date than S 284

^a FP = funerary platform^b S = sarcophagus^c Chéhab 1984^d Chéhab 1986; Dussart 1998^e Linant de Bellefonds 1985; see also Chéhab 1984

platforms and 192 sarcophagi that were reused or still in use in the Byzantine period. These include graves on either side of the road and in the majority of the funerary enclosures (31 out of 39).

It is not clear whether the graves were continuously in use or whether there was a hiatus. In 18 graves, Chéhab identifies two layers: a lower earth stratum cov-

ered by an upper sand layer, both with multiple burials. This could be evidence for a gap in time between original use and reuse. Unfortunately, the finds from these layers do not provide clear evidence for time distinction, although, with two exceptions, none of the upper layers contained coins predating the fourth century C.E. A similar gap was noted by Bikai et al. in



Fig. 13. Second phase of al-Bass cemetery, third century C.E. Some "location" symbols represent multiple graves.

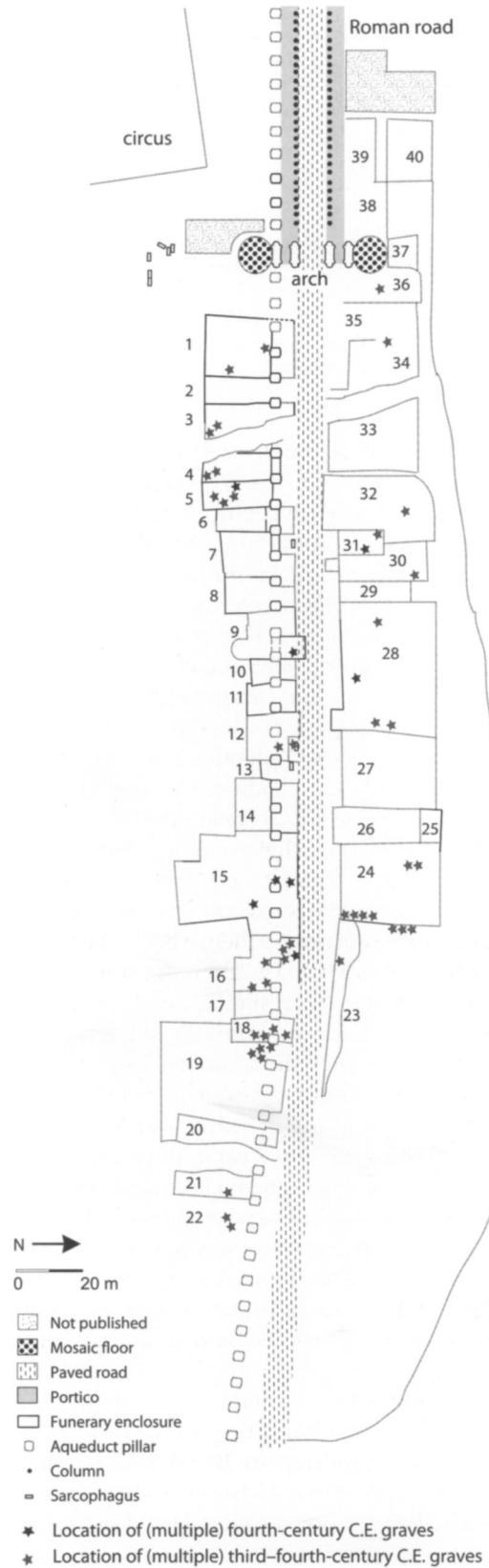


Fig. 14. Second phase of al-Bass cemetery, fourth century C.E. Some "location" symbols represent multiple graves.

Table 6. Phase 2 of the al-Bass Cemetery (Fourth Century C.E.).

Grave	Tomb No.	Evidence for Fourth-Century C.E. Construction Date
S 631 ^a	Tomb 5	glass dating to fourth–sixth centuries C.E.; 4 coins dating to fourth century ^b
FP 774 ^c	Tomb 9; 3 loculi	possibly connected to mosaic dating to 375/6 C.E.
S 4043	Tomb 28	glass, possibly fourth century C.E. ^d
FP 4112c	Tomb 31; 1 loculus	glass, possibly fourth century C.E. ^d

^aS = sarcophagus

^bChéhab 1984

^cFP = funerary platform

^dChéhab 1986; Dussart 1998

the excavation of the Apollo sanctuary area, where a group of third-century C.E. sarcophagi was covered by a new layer in the fourth century C.E. This layer contained coins and pottery dating between the fourth and sixth centuries C.E., indicative of a gap or cessation of use in the fourth century C.E.⁶⁶ The relative poverty of fourth-century C.E. graves mentioned above could indicate that this development was widespread. Subsequently, in the later fourth or fifth century C.E., the graves were reopened to receive new burials.

This phase coincided with other building activity in the cemetery, such as the addition of mosaic floors and water basins and the transformation of sections of the tomb complexes into religious architecture and perhaps a bath house. Tomb Complex 24 now included a chapel consisting of an apse with traces of paint and smaller rooms to the north. Chéhab dated the building to shortly after 440 C.E. based on the stratigraphy.⁶⁷ In Tomb Complex 32, a similar apsidal room with marble floor slabs arose to the east of a large paved court and a forecourt with a mosaic floor. Traces of paint depicting clothed figures covered the walls of the apse, and several water features were found inside. The chapel was perhaps built after the fourth century C.E.⁶⁸ A more elaborate chapel occupied portions of Tomb Complex 35. Here, a paved court and corridor with an *opus sectile* floor gave way to a nave and aisle with additional marble floors. A fountain was situated to the left of the chapel entrance. Inside, excavations yielded fragments of mosaics and an inscription that mentions “Kamara.” According to Chéhab, this term perhaps referred to the communal grave erected to the west of the chapel consisting of a single room with the remains of 44 individuals. Based on the finds and mosaic fragments, Chéhab dates the chapel and the Kamara building between 450 and 650 C.E.⁶⁹

Sometime before 440 C.E., a new, smaller road (width. 5.07 m) with a new arch on the east end occupied the space of the Roman road. Not only was the original Roman road no longer in use in this area, the colonnade to the northwest of the arch was incorporated into the funerary enclosures perhaps in this period (see fig. 15). On the southwest end of the cemetery, a bath complex arose in the fourth or fifth century C.E. Mosaic floors underneath this bath are at the level of nearby funerary enclosures, leading the excavators to wonder whether the bath replaced (part of) a tomb complex.⁷⁰ To summarize the third phase: a substantial number of earlier graves had a second life in the Byzantine years, and this final phase of the cemetery occurred between the fourth and seventh centuries, with a peak in use in the fifth and sixth centuries.

A NEW TYPE OF TOMB

The inhabitants of Tyre used the al-Bass area as their final resting place for a long period of time. Although the exact chronology of the architectural development is difficult to establish, it is clear that multiple phases spanned several centuries. The earliest graves arose in the first century C.E., and the peak of building activity occurred in the following 200 years. As argued below, this form of burial differed from earlier practices and should be understood as a change in the role of funerary architecture. In this section, I take a closer look at what these changes involved and how they were connected to the urban landscape and to new forms of conspicuous display.

Elements of the architecture of the funerary enclosures occurred elsewhere in Syria, although the form of an enclosed precinct containing sarcophagi and platforms was unusual before and during the Roman period. The pre-Roman burial grounds of Tyre exca-

⁶⁶Bikai et al. 1996, 30–1.

⁶⁷Chéhab 1985, 525–26; 1986, 3.

⁶⁸Chéhab 1985, 676–77; 1986, 3.

⁶⁹Chéhab 1985, 743.

⁷⁰Kahwagi-Janho 2007, 29–30.



Fig. 15. Third phase of al-Bass cemetery, Byzantine period.

vated so far were located on the mainland. A cemetery dating between the ninth and sixth centuries B.C.E., and consisting of cinerary urns in pits possibly marked by stone stelae, lay directly to the north of the al-Bass cemetery (see fig. 1 [13]).⁷¹ Chéhab reported the discovery of a series of rock-cut tombs dating to the eighth century B.C.E. at Rachidiye, approximately 5 km south of Tyre.⁷² Although no Hellenistic graves have been found, the region of Tyre has yielded a small group of funerary stelae of possible Hellenistic date, or slightly earlier. These include two stelae perhaps from the third or second century B.C.E. and originating from a cemetery in the hills at Bursj esh-Shemali, 2 km east of Tyre. One of these stelae depicts two framed columns, and the second depicts a person with a raised hand. The latter was found at the entrance of a rock-cut chamber tomb (hypogaeum).⁷³ An unusual funerary stele depicting two mourning women seated around an anthropoid sarcophagus is also said to have originated from the vicinity of Tyre.⁷⁴

Better evidence for pre-Roman funerary architecture comes from elsewhere on the Levantine coast. The two common tomb types in the first millennium B.C.E. were single pit graves (including cist and shaft graves)⁷⁵ and communal rock-cut chamber tombs with burial on the chamber floor or in separate loculi.⁷⁶ These types largely continued into the Hellenistic centuries, although in this period fewer resources were directed toward tomb construction and decoration, and the reuse of older tombs became common practice.⁷⁷ Usually the tombs were completely underground, but a few examples from the Persian period consisted of a built, aboveground portion on top of the rock-cut burial chamber. These include the so-called Meghazil in Amrit (fifth and early fourth centuries B.C.E.)⁷⁸ and the so-called Tomb of Hiram, located 6 km southeast of Tyre.⁷⁹ The latter consisted of a hypogaeum marked aboveground by a stone sarcophagus on a 3 m high stone platform. This possibly Persian-period tomb (ca. 550–330 B.C.E.) could have served as an inspiration for the sarcophagus burials in the al-Bass cemetery. There is some evidence for the presence of aboveground markers of the graves in the form of funerary stelae, although the original

⁷¹ Sader 1991; Seeden 1991; Aubet et al. 1998–1999; Aubet 2004.

⁷² Chéhab 1942–1943.

⁷³ Chéhab 1934b.

⁷⁴ Seyrig (1940, 120–22) dates this stele between the sixth and third centuries B.C.E., whereas Parlasca (1981, 8) gives a Hellenistic date.

⁷⁵ E.g., at Beirut (Stuart 2001) and Khalde (Doumet-Serhal 2007). Urns and pits with cremation remains were also found at Akhziv and Rachidiye (Doumet-Serhal 2007).

⁷⁶ E.g., at Arwad (Saidah 1969, 122), 'Atlit (Moorey 1980,

8), Beirut (Stuart 2001), and Sidon (Elayi and Haykal 1996).

⁷⁷ Hellenistic evidence from the Levantine coast includes hypogaea and pit graves at Beirut (Thorpe 1998–1999, 63; Stuart 2001; Curvers and Stuart 2005, 194–97), hypogaea and a pit grave at Jebleh (Badawi 2007), hypogaea and pit and cist graves at Sidon (Contentau 1920a, 136; 1920b, 198, 213, 216; Dunand 1969, 101–3; Jidejian 1971), and pit and cist graves at Tell Kazel (Badre et al. 1990, 1994; see also de Jong 2007a).

⁷⁸ Dunand et al. 1954–1955, 200–3; Saliby 1989, 26–7.

⁷⁹ Jidejian 1996, 24–8.

Table 7. Graves with Byzantine Inscription(s) from the al-Bass Cemetery.

Tomb Complex	Grave(s)
1	FP 150 ^a (3 inscriptions), FP 158 (2 inscriptions), FP 170 (3 inscriptions), S 152 ^b (3 inscriptions) S 154, S 162, S 164, S 168, S 338, S 340, location unclear (1 inscription)
3	S 115, S 117 (2 inscriptions), S 121
4	S 721, S 723
5	S 603, S 605, S 633
6	S 609, S 611, S 613, S 615, S 619, S 621, S 627
7	FP 751, S 655 (3 inscriptions), S 709, S 715, S 717, location unclear (1 inscription)
9	S 771
10	FP 801 (2 inscriptions)
12	FP 837 (3 inscriptions), S 839 (2 inscriptions), location unclear (1 inscription)
13	S 841, S 863, S 867
14	FP 976 (3 inscriptions)
15	S 1030, S 1032, S 1034, S 1045, on small column (1 inscription)
16	FP 1087, S 939, S 941, S 943, S 1085 (2 inscriptions), S 1091, S 1093, S 1095, S 1105, location unclear (4 inscriptions)
18	FP 1175, S 1164
19	FP 1224, FP 2786 (2 inscriptions), FP 2798 (2 inscriptions), FP 2800, S 1203 (3 inscriptions), S 1208, S 1228, S 1230, S 1232, S 2681, S 2692, S 2711, S 2717, S 2719, S 2732, S 3040, S 3046, S 2772 (2 inscriptions), S 3056B, location unclear (1 inscription)
21	S 883, S 887
22	FP 950, S 900, S 904, S 952
23	S 879, S 921, S 923 (3 inscriptions), S 925 (3 inscriptions), S 931, S 935, S 937
24	FP 3867, S 3875, S 3953
26	FP 3812
28	P 4066 (2 inscriptions), S 3983 A-B, S 4018 (2 inscriptions), S 4020, S 4038, S 4040, S 4043, S 4062 (2 inscriptions), S 4076, S 4078, S 4080, S 4082
30	FP 4200, S 1343 (2 inscriptions), S 1349, S 4050, S 4192
31	FP 1135 (2 inscriptions), FP 4111, FP 4112 A, FP 4112 C, FP 4860 (3 inscriptions), S 4056
32	FP 4862, S 678, S 682, S 684, S 686, S 1341, S 4864, S 4950, S 4958
33	S 659, S 668
34	location unclear (1 inscription)
35	FP 84, S 31, S 33, S 39, S 45
36	S 203, S 205, S 209, S 211, S 213, S 217 (2 inscriptions), S 227, S 229, S 231 (3 inscriptions), S 243, S 248
39	S 412
40	S 418

^aFP = funerary platform^bS = sarcophagus

Table 8. Phase 3 of the al-Bass Cemetery, Byzantine Reuse (Fourth–Seventh Centuries C.E.).

Grave	Tomb No.	Evidence for Reuse in Byzantine Period
FP 146 ^a	1	cross decoration
FP 129	2	one loculus has glass bottle dating to 450–500 C.E. in upper layer ^b
FP 730a	4	cross decoration
FP 1941	4	Byzantine lead sarcophagi ^c
FP 623	7	one gold earring in form of cross; cross decoration
FP 764	9	two sixth-century C.E. coins in one loculus
S 779 ^d	9	seventh-century C.E. coin
FP 837	12	glass dating to fourth–seventh centuries C.E. in three loculi ^e
FP 972	14	cross decoration
S 991	14	nine fifth-century C.E. coins
S 1034	15	glass dating to fourth–seventh centuries C.E. ^e
FP 1083A	16	small bronze cross pendant
FP 1087	16	fifth-century C.E. coin in one loculus
FP 1123	16	glass dating to fifth century C.E. in one loculus ^f
S 1085	16	21 fifth- or sixth-century coins
S 1107	16	cross decoration
S 1117	16	possible Byzantine glass in upper layer ^e
S 1143	17	glass perhaps dating to fourth–sixth centuries C.E. ^e
FP 1168	18	sixth-century C.E. coin in one loculus; pottery vessel stamped with monogram of Maurice (582–602 C.E.) in second loculus ^g
FP 1175	18	early seventh-century C.E. coin in one loculus
S 1208	19	small bronze cross pendant
S 2838	19	glass dating to fourth–seventh centuries C.E. ^e
FP 916	23	possible Byzantine glasse; 14 fifth-century C.E. coins
S 879	23	glass dating to fifth century C.E. ^h
FP 3914	24	fifth-century C.E. coin in one loculus
FP 3818	26	sixth-century C.E. coin in one loculus; bronze cross
S 3977	28	bronze cross
S 4043	28	glass dating to fourth–sixth centuries C.E. ^e
S 4072	28	glass dating to fourth–seventh centuries C.E. in upper layer ^e
FP 4113	30	sixth-century C.E. coin in one loculus
FP 4200	30	five sixth-century C.E. coins in one loculus
FP 1135	31	inscription 440 C.E. (possibly reused) ⁱ
FP 4112c	31	bronze cross
S 4052	31	fifth-century C.E. coin
FP 4955	32	bronze cross
S 686	32	glass possibly dating to fifth century C.E. ^j
S 668	33	glass possibly from end of fourth–mid seventh century C.E. ^e
FP 1	34	gold cross
S 4	34	sixth-century C.E. coin
FP 5169	35	sixth-century C.E. coin in one loculus; early seventh-century C.E. coin in second loculus

Table 8 (continued).

Grave	Tomb No.	Evidence for Reuse in Byzantine Period
"Kamara"	35	Byzantine glass ^c ; three sixth-century C.E. coins and three early seventh-century C.E. coins
FP 4960	36	sixth-century C.E. coin in one loculus; bronze cross
FP 5186	36	fifth-century C.E. coin in one loculus
S 284	39	cross decoration
FP 416	40	sixth-century C.E. coin in one loculus
FP 459	40	cross decoration

^a FP = funerary platform

^b Jennings 2004–2005, 111–12; see also Chéhab 1986; Dussart 1998

^c Chéhab 1984

^d S = sarcophagus

^e Chéhab 1986; Dussart 1998

^f Chéhab 1986; Dussart 1998; Jennings 2004–2005

^g Chéhab 1984

^h Jennings 2004–2005, 176; see also Chéhab 1986; Dussart 1998

ⁱ Salamé-Sarkis 1986, 200

^j Chéhab 1986; Jennings 2004–2005

findspot of these stelae is mostly obscure.⁸⁰ Most of the tombs from the first millennium B.C.E., however, differed from the al-Bass examples in the underground location of burial space, and the architectural type of the funerary enclosures did not have clear predecessors in the pre-Roman centuries. The same is true with regard to the location of the burial ground. Hellenistic cemeteries displayed few commonalities in terms of position in the landscape; they could be situated in the fields surrounding the settlement, at some distance from the town, in the steppe fringes, or along the coastal cliffs.⁸¹ The prominent roadside location of the al-Bass cemetery and the emphasis on visibility represents largely a new phenomenon of the Roman centuries.

Different aspects of the al-Bass tombs, however, such as the use of sculpted sarcophagi and the practice of communal burial, did have their origins in pre-Roman periods. The richest hypogea on the Levantine coast often contained terracotta and stone sarcophagi, locally produced or imported from Egypt and the Greek world.⁸² These coffins, as well as the grave good assem-

blages, demonstrate that conspicuous display largely focused on the interior of the tombs. Communal tombs, often with rows of loculi, coexisted with single graves throughout the first millennium B.C.E. and often belonged to high-status members of society. Therefore, although funerary enclosures did not exist on the Levantine coast before the Roman period, the al-Bass tombs incorporated elements of pre-Roman funerary traditions.

The al-Bass enclosures find closer connection with tombs constructed elsewhere in Roman Syria. The funerary architecture of the province consisted of a diverse collection of types, most popular of which were collective mausolea (aboveground) and hypogea (underground) and single pit graves.⁸³ Outside the cities of Syria, and to a lesser extent in the countryside, tall and visible monuments arose in the Roman period, including tombs in the shapes of towers, temples, and tumuli. The specific form of the funerary enclosure is currently only known from Beirut.⁸⁴ A tomb in Nawa-Tell Umm al-Hauran in southern Syria was possibly similar in form, but the available information is too

⁸⁰ Examples of Iron Age and Hellenistic stelae are listed in Parlasca 1981; Sader 1991.

⁸¹ In addition to those mentioned (*supra* n. 77), excavations have revealed Hellenistic tombs at Amrit (Dunand 1953, 166; Dunand et al. 1954–1955, 191–203) and farther inland at Dura Europos (Toll 1946), Jebel Khalid (Littleton and Frohlich 2002), and Palmyra (Fellmann 1970; Saito 2005, 34).

⁸² See, e.g., Jidejian 1971; Lembke 2001.

⁸³ Evidence comes from Apamea, Baalbek, Beirut, Halebiye, Hama, the Hauran, northwest Syria (the Limestone Plateau), Palmyra, and Tell Sheikh Hamad (de Jong 2007a; see also Konrad 2004).

⁸⁴ de Jong 2001; Stuart 2001. These enclosures dated between 75 and 215 C.E.

limited to establish close similarity.⁸⁵ Other tombs in the province did contain elements of the architecture of the funerary enclosures, such as large dimensions, a partly or completely aboveground portion, and a roadside location. Often these tombs were communal. Stone sarcophagi became ubiquitous in the Roman period, placed alongside roads, on top of or inside tombs. Occasionally these coffins stood on high stone platforms, similar to the al-Bass examples.⁸⁶ The stacked loculi in the funerary platforms also had their parallels in mausolea and hypogea elsewhere in the Roman province.⁸⁷

The funerary enclosure thus combined elements common elsewhere in the Roman province, although its specific form was found only at Tyre and Beirut, perhaps indicative of a regional (coastal) trend in funerary architecture. This explanation would fit the provincial pattern of regional variation in funerary architecture that accounts for the tower tombs in the desert and middle Euphrates region, circular mausolea in the south, and the enigmatic pillar tombs on the Limestone Plateau of northwest Syria.⁸⁸

The tomb architecture of the province underwent profound changes in the Roman period, but this was less the case in other aspects of funerary practices. Although this article focuses on funerary architecture, it is important to point out that as far as the evidence shows, the type and number of objects placed in the Roman graves at Tyre and elsewhere in the province did not change significantly from the previous centuries when compared with assemblages of the Hellenistic cemeteries mentioned above. Similarly, traditions concerning the treatment of the body, such as the practice of inhumation and corporeal adornment, were also carried out in earlier periods.⁸⁹ The evidence from the al-Bass cemetery points only to a partial reworking of funerary ritual through the construction of a new architectural type.

A Public Place

Upon leaving and entering the urban environment of Tyre, one would first encounter its dead. The tomb complexes arose alongside the major and possibly only paved road leading to the city. The funerary enclosures were aligned with this road and their entrances faced

it, at least at a later stage. The particular geography of the Tyrian isthmus may account for the proximity of the cemetery to the road, since there were few available locations for a main thoroughfare. Nevertheless, it does indicate a wish to bury the dead near the city limits, rather than farther inland on the coastal plain or hillside.

Roadside burial was not restricted to Tyre but was common elsewhere in the Syrian province. At Apamea and Bosra, and probably at Beirut, Hama, and Palmyra, multiple cemeteries extended along the main routes radiating from the city. Location alongside a main thoroughfare and proximity to the city were primary components in the selection of a place for burial. The city was in fact entered through its funerary space, and its deceased citizens were on display before entering the urban area.⁹⁰ This was also the case elsewhere in the Roman world, perhaps most famously in the capital itself.⁹¹ Despite its relative ubiquity, it is nevertheless important to stress the roadside location of the al-Bass cemetery for two reasons. First, the tomb complexes at Tyre represent a new form of architecture, and the roadside location increased the visibility of this new type. This emphasis on display is discussed below. Second, the proximity of the road to the tomb complexes highlights a connection between funerary and civic architecture that is also exemplified by other building projects. As noted, the earliest graves (first century C.E.) appear scattered throughout the fields on either side of the road, but a century later, graves had acquired enclosure walls and occupied a clearly defined space. In the same century, the main road was paved and embellished with a monumental arch and a colonnade housing shops. A circus arose directly southwest of the tomb complexes, and an aqueduct further crowded this part of the coastal plain (see figs. 1, 2). With the exception of the Iron Age cemetery in the northeast, test trenches in the al-Bass area have yielded little evidence dating before the first century C.E. It is unlikely, therefore, that this land was built up in earlier periods, and certainly not with anything monumental. By the end of the second century C.E., however, the area of the cemetery had become intertwined with that of the main road, aqueduct, and circus of Tyre. The tomb complexes did not extend

⁸⁵ Sartre-Fauriat 2001, 97.

⁸⁶ E.g., at Apamea (Vandenabeele 1972, 90), Bosra, and Si (Sarte-Fauriat 2001, 51, 191).

⁸⁷ E.g., at Qanawat (Sarte-Fauriat 2001, 118–26) and Palmyra (e.g., Higuchi and Izumi 1994; Higuchi and Saito 2001).

⁸⁸ Gawlikowski 1970; Griesheimer 1997a; Sartre-Fauriat 2001; Oenbrink 2003; de Jong 2007a.

⁸⁹ de Jong 2007a, chs. 6, 7.

⁹⁰ Evidence from the rural areas in the Hauran (Sarte-Fauriat 2001) and the Limestone Plateau (Tchalenko 1953; Tate 1992; Griesheimer 1997a; Chéhadeh and Griesheimer 1998) indicates that this was less of an issue in the case of smaller settlements, although certainly not uncommon; see also de Jong 2007a.

⁹¹ E.g., von Hesberg and Zanker 1987.

outward, away from the road and public buildings, nor were they moved to a different location; instead, they grew toward the road. Commercial, public, celebrative, and economic space now intersected with funerary space.

The connection between civic and funerary architecture was not only physical but also chronological, since the new buildings arose about the same time as the first major expansion phase of the cemetery in the second century C.E. Although information about the urban development of the island part of the city is sparse, excavations have uncovered a series of monumental features in what was presumably the center of the city in the first and second centuries C.E. (see fig. 1). The monumentalization of the urban core of Tyre seems to have occurred in the first centuries C.E. This pattern is better known from other cities in Roman Syria whose centers filled up with stone temples, baths, aqueducts, colonnaded roads, and other features typical of a Roman city. This building fever started in the late first century B.C.E. on a small scale but increased between the mid second and early third centuries C.E.⁹² The inhabitants of Tyre possibly participated in this program of urban renewal as well, and if so, this construction ran parallel with the erection of the funerary enclosures.

A Visible Place

Because of its position on either side of the main thoroughfare, the place of death in Roman Tyre was a visible one. The roadside location increased the visibility of the tombs, which was further stressed by their form and size. Burial took place predominantly aboveground in stone platforms rising several meters above the surface or in sarcophagi placed on pedestals and funerary platforms. Tall stone walls enclosed the graves. These tomb complexes were prominent buildings in the landscape, more so than underground hypogea or pit graves, and they demanded attention from passers-by, visitors and citizens alike. The aboveground and public character of the funerary monuments suggests that they played a role in the life of the community after the death of an individual. The tomb walls thus communicated a variety of messages.

What, then, was communicated? First and foremost, one would see the communal facades. Although variation existed in terms of individual burial places, the enclosures themselves were similar in appearance and

formed a relatively uniform set. Walking through the cemetery, one would encounter, at least by the second century C.E., a series of tomb complexes of similar shape. At first glance, the tombs did not attract attention to a single individual. In fact, they were the final resting place of multiple individuals. Inscriptional evidence from tombs elsewhere in Roman Syria indicates that at the time of construction, the majority of communal graves belonged to members of the same family or of larger clans. If this were the case in Tyre as well, the funerary enclosures highlighted familial and kinship relationships.⁹³

The enclosure walls perhaps obscured much of the interior, although their thickness and height varied by tomb, and not every tomb complex may have been closed on the side of the road during the earliest centuries. Sarcophagi sometimes occupied a place in front of the enclosures or rose several meters aboveground on pedestals. Depending on the height of the enclosure walls and the position of doors and open areas, portions of the interior were visible. At second glance, thus, if one were able to peek inside, a variety of individual burial types would appear in the form of pit graves, loculus graves, and locally produced and imported sarcophagi, the last marked by their brilliant white, pink, or gray color. Compared with the exterior facades, the interior displayed greater heterogeneity, perhaps pointing to an internal hierarchy within the burying group.

One would perhaps also see the plastered walls and decorated facades of the funerary platforms, the mosaic floors, the rich carvings on the coffins, and expensive, imported building materials such as marble and granite. The display of access to building materials and labor was a component of these funerary complexes. The sarcophagi also signaled that their users were well aware of empire-wide trends. Although burial in stone sarcophagi was an old tradition in the coastal Levant, the decoration and origin of the Tyrian coffins conformed to elite modes of burial typical of the Roman empire.⁹⁴

Regardless of the visibility of the interior and who was allowed inside, the frequent construction and rebuilding of the funerary enclosures were also forms of display. New sarcophagi and funerary platforms appeared, and blocked doors, later partition walls, and multiple layers of plaster and floors indicate that sections of the interior underwent further construction.

⁹² Butcher 2003; Sartre 2005; see also MacDonald 1986.

⁹³ The fourth-century C.E. Maioumas inscription may indicate that the participants of the festival formed a funerary club and were buried together. However, as pointed out, none

of the tombs is contemporary with the inscription.

⁹⁴ See, e.g., Morris (1992) and Cormack (1997) for this pattern elsewhere in the Roman empire.

The difference between digging a small pit grave and constructing a stone building with doors and stairs is not only a matter of expense but also an active and visible process. First, building a funerary enclosure was a considerable undertaking. The stone blocks were quarried perhaps in the vicinity of the city and transported to the cemetery. Once at the site, high walls were constructed, floors were leveled, and paths were paved. Craftsmen moved in to decorate the walls, sometimes covering older graves with molding and brightly painted floral motifs. These funerary enclosures were in use for several decades and centuries, and were thus living monuments, expanding and changing over time.

The acquisition of sarcophagi was another time-consuming affair. Most coffins were made from local limestone, possibly in workshops in or near the city, but some sarcophagi came from other parts of the Mediterranean. After being off-loaded in one of the two harbors or hewn and sculpted at a quarry or workshop, these heavy coffins had to be moved to the funerary buildings. Today it takes a crane to remove a single sarcophagus lid; then, it must have taken a small army of men and/or oxen to carry a sarcophagus across the streets of the city and place it on top of a pedestal. This act probably created quite a spectacle, a performance of access to labor and expensive material.⁹⁵

It is difficult to ascertain the percentage of the total population buried at the site because of both the limited chronological and stratigraphical evidence for the site and the practice of reusing individual graves. The al-Bass cemetery, at least the excavated part, likely represented only a portion of the entire population of the city. Several hundreds of people would have died each year in a mid-sized city such as Tyre, but only 825 individual burial spots and 3,955 individuals were reported for the entire five or more centuries of use. Even if these statistics are doubled or tripled to account for the unexcavated portions and the missing data, the numbers would still represent a minority. However, since it is not clear whether the remains of older depositions were pushed aside to make space for new burials or whether the graves were completely emptied, the total number of people using the burial ground may have been far greater. There are, nevertheless, other restrictions on the total number of people involved. First, the burial ground included between 49 and 60 funerary enclosures, built in about 250 years. Assuming that these tomb complexes or associated plots of land, at least initially, belonged to a single group, family, or individual, a relatively limited

total number of people were involved in the original construction of the tomb. Second, the wealth poured into the construction and importation of coffins and building materials was certainly not available to the entire population. The construction of the tombs, therefore, likely was restricted to a small segment of the population, although over time a larger group may have used the graves.

PERFORMING DEATH

The al-Bass site served as the final resting place for Tyrians. This location was the site of a series of commemorative rituals that ensured that the transition from life to death to the afterlife was not disrupted, for disruption could potentially lead to harmful situations for both the living and the dead. It was also a site of memorialization where the deceased was put in his or her proper context. There is no information about the timeline of construction, but it is possible that the graves were built during the lifetime of the owner, in which case he or she potentially had a voice in the creation of this memorialization. As discussed, the funerary enclosures of the al-Bass cemetery represent a new type of architecture and thus attest a series of new choices. These tomb complexes, I argue, provided a stage for the expression of several identities, which were performed in front of an audience through the shape and setting of the tombs. This performance incorporated messages about civic identity, group membership, and socioeconomic position. In this section, I contextualize the tombs and offer a series of conclusions about the connection between changes in funerary ritual and incorporation into the Roman empire.

In the al-Bass cemetery, a spatial connection existed between the commemoration and memorialization of the dead and civic architecture. The tomb complexes were surrounded by civic structures that placed emphasis on the civic identity of the deceased. The dead, although probably located outside city boundaries, were never completely removed from civic life. "Civic" here refers not just to a physical place but also to the city as a cultural and political construct. Tyre had a long history as an urban center and political unit before Roman rule, and its inhabitants always performed some form of urban identity. In the Roman period, however, funerary architecture played a role in this expression and, unlike in the previous centuries, the dead now lay surrounded by buildings of a civic nature. Outside the walls of the city, one came across the (deceased) civic community.

⁹⁵ Cf. Frizell 1998, 174–76.

Because of their communal nature, the tomb complexes also expressed group membership of some sort, be it familial or otherwise. At the same time, individual burial spots were demarcated within the enclosed precinct of the tomb, although it is difficult to assess whether these represented individuals or were designed to hold several people. This complex interplay between collective and individual space is the second characteristic of the funerary architecture at Tyre. Third, the al-Bass tombs were monumental and displayed access to labor, building materials, and valuable items such as sarcophagi, thereby giving signals about the economic position of the deceased, real or perceived. This increase in spending cannot be explained as solely resulting from the prosperity that followed the Augustan Peace and the greater availability of marble sarcophagi in the first centuries C.E., since this leaves open the question of why these resources were redirected to funerary architecture and to the creation of a new type of tomb.

The interpretation of these three sets of messages emanating from the tomb walls, about civic identity, group membership, and economic position, depends on who was buried inside. The tombs perhaps belonged to the urban elite, and if so, their role in local governance may explain the civic setting of the cemetery. Famously lacking in central administrators, the Roman empire relied on provincial urban elites for local governance. Elsewhere in the empire, competition for these positions expressed itself in the city, which acted as a stage for the advertisement of political aspirations and social position, for instance, in the form of sponsorship of public architecture.⁹⁶ The tombs at Tyre perhaps were also central to the competition for access to civic positions and could have provided a past that gave weight to claims in the present. For instance, by connecting themselves to the civic identity of past group members, the urban elite found a new arena for legitimizing their position. If these tombs were indeed familial, they expressed lineage and connection to a long line of important family members. The cemetery showcased and monumentalized the leading families of the town and those who aspired to that position and whose exploits could also be admired in the form of public architecture.

Although only a small segment of Tyrian society was likely in charge of construction of the tomb complexes,

the actual burying group may have encompassed more people. Perhaps the tomb complexes served a larger portion of the community than only the urban elites, and if so, this suggests an extension of the practice of architectural display to a wider group of people. Whereas few had the means to sponsor the construction of a colonnade or arch, the cemetery perhaps became the arena for the expression of identity for the rest of the population. I do not mean to suggest that the motives behind sponsoring public architecture and funerary display were the same—far from it. The commemoration and memorialization of the deceased were the main functions of the tombs, and at Tyre, these placed emphasis on access to materials and labor, on group membership or family connections, and perhaps on hierarchy within that group. The public benefactions highlighted different aspects. Both, however, were a new form of public display. Furthermore, in the cemetery, as in the city, the emphasis lay primarily on architecture and not on grave goods or treatment of the body. The practice of conspicuous display concentrated on the walls of the tomb.

The Timing of Change

Through the display of socioeconomic position and civic and group identity, the tombs played an important and new role in the definition of social groups, and perhaps in the renegotiation of the boundaries of these groups. The chronology of change provides a framework for explaining the construction of the new tombs. The first funerary enclosures arose in the late first century or second century C.E., the period during which, Butcher argues, the political and cultural integration of the inhabitants of the Syrian province into the Roman empire occurred. In his timeline, the second half of the first and particularly the second century C.E. are pivotal to understanding the impact of Rome on the region.⁹⁷ Two aspects of this integration may be relevant to the tombs. First, the political integration: the first century C.E. witnessed the end of pre-Roman forms of political leadership through the annexation of local kingdoms, chiefdoms, and perhaps city-states, as well as the incorporation of these areas into the central administration of the province.⁹⁸ This period was thus marked by redefinitions of local power structures, possibly much more so than in the decades immediately following conquest in 64 B.C.E.

⁹⁶Veyne 1976; Whittaker 1997; Woolf 1997, 2000. For Syria, see Butcher 2003, 101, 223–28.

⁹⁷Butcher 2003, 42–4; see also von Hesberg and Zanker 1987, 17. Butcher (2003, 228) also remarks that this building activity slows down at the end of second century and was

perhaps replaced by sponsorship of civic festivals. The al-Bass cemetery, however, saw its greatest expansion in the third century.

⁹⁸Grainger 1991; Millar 1993.

The monumental tombs in the civic outskirts of Tyre could have served as tools for dealing with these altered circumstances by associating members of the urban population with civic identity, lineage, and economic wealth.

Second, the urban landscapes of Syria underwent profound changes in the first centuries of the principate. A series of buildings and passage features with similar function and, to some extent, comparable form and style characterized the general layout and centers of these cities. The example from Tyre, as well as from other cities in the province, suggests that the choice of location of burial ground was part of this redevelopment of the urban layout. Although the practice of roadside burial and using the public road as an integral part of display strategies were longstanding traditions in both the Greek and Roman world, the first evidence in Syria dates to the Roman period, when the cemeteries were moved to a fixed place in the landscape. In addition to bath houses, theaters, and wide, paved roads with colonnades, each self-respecting city would designate space for burial directly outside the city boundaries and alongside the main thoroughfares. The cultural integration of the province thus extended beyond the city limits to include the cemeteries. The same was true with regard to the sculpted sarcophagi. The collection of stone sarcophagi in the al-Bass cemetery provides a good sample of the type of coffins popular throughout Syria between the second and fourth centuries C.E. Burial in sculpted and imported coffins, especially from Egypt, Greece, Rome, and Turkey, was popular among the wealthy classes throughout the Roman world.⁹⁹ These coffins and their local imitations, however, do not demonstrate just the impact of supraregional or empire-wide trends in elite burial but also the stylistic influence of the exporting area, in this case Greece and Turkey, on Syrian funerary practices.

Other aspects of funerary architecture confirm this trend. The sarcophagi in the open air or those raised on a podium, for instance, had local (pre-Roman) parallels at Tyre but also occurred outside Syria before and during the Roman period.¹⁰⁰ In fact, Roman funerary architecture of Syria in general, and the new mausolea in particular, often seems to be inspired by Hellenistic and Roman tombs in areas such as Palestine and Asia Minor.¹⁰¹ Although a discussion of the

other Syrian cemeteries lies outside the scope of this article, it appears that the new architectural types often drew from multiple sources. Similarly, the Tyrian tombs illustrate the cultural integration of the region into the larger Roman world, in the form of stylistic influence not just from the center but also from other areas of the empire.

In addition to incorporating trends from outside Syria, construction in the al-Bass cemetery followed developments in funerary practices occurring elsewhere in the province. Segments of the urban population and, to a lesser extent, of the villagers built new showy tombs that served as markers in the landscape. These tombs shared a visible and aboveground location, decorated facade, large dimensions, and collective mode of burial. This process of standardization, however, ceased at the level of architectural style. As noted above, the shape of the tombs varied widely from region to region in Syria. Inspiration for the funerary enclosures in Tyre and Beirut may have come in part from local, pre-Roman traditions, such as the collective Iron Age and Hellenistic tombs with loculi and sarcophagi. The Tomb of Hiram, found in the vicinity of Tyre, also provides an interesting parallel. The aboveground portion of this tomb, consisting of a massive stone coffin on a high platform, was perhaps mimicked by the sarcophagi in the al-Bass cemetery, all of which stood on a stone or earth pedestal, or on a funerary platform. At least one sarcophagus rested on a decorated podium several meters high.¹⁰² Although centuries older than the al-Bass cemetery, the Tomb of Hiram was likely still visible in the Roman period, as it was in the mid 19th century, when it entered the reports of Renan.¹⁰³

When constructing the new tombs, the Tyrians reached back to preexisting regional and perhaps local traditions and were also influenced by developments in funerary practices elsewhere in the Roman world. Changes in power structures and social position, and perhaps a new role for cities, allowed for similar changes in funerary architecture throughout the Roman province of Syria, but the actual form of the tomb was regionally distinct. At the same time, it is important to stress that despite the new architecture and location, other aspects of funerary ritual did not change significantly in the Roman period. Incorporation into the empire was not characterized by a

⁹⁹ See, e.g., Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 562–72. For Syria, see Butcher 2003, 209–11.

¹⁰⁰ E.g., in Turkey, see Cormack 1997; Abbasoğlu 2001, 183–87; Köse 2005.

¹⁰¹ E.g., Fedak 1990; Cormack 2004.

¹⁰² Chéhab 1985, pl. 64. I would like to thank Patricia and Pierre Bikai for pointing out the similarities between the Tomb of Hiram and the al-Bass sarcophagi.

¹⁰³ Renan 1864–1874, pls. 47, 48.

complete or sudden overhaul of indigenous practices. Rather, depending on the actor and his or her socio-economic context, elements of existing practices were singled out to perform new roles and mixed with new and/or foreign (Roman) traditions.

The Afterlife

The use of funerary architecture to draw attention to civic identity, group membership, and socio-economic position was mainly restricted to the period between the late first and the third centuries C.E. Afterward, the tomb complexes functioned in different ways, although it is difficult to reconstruct the usage patterns of the fourth century C.E. A new phase started in the Byzantine era, when a good portion of the graves received multiple burials, perhaps after a short interval. In this period, starting in the later fourth or fifth century C.E., the meaning of funerary architecture clearly differed from the previous decades. No new complexes arose; instead, older tombs were redesigned to suit the desires of the new users most often through the addition of an inscription or a Christian motif. The inscriptions included a name and profession, which highlighted identity, proprietary rights, and access to the tombs, and suggests that there was little continuity with the previous period in terms of ownership. The textual reference to a garden also originates from this period, pointing to the possible existence of small plots of land or gardens behind the tomb complexes. Similar evidence for tombs and gardens sharing the same space comes from villages in northwest Syria, Jordan, and the suburban necropoleis in Alexandria in Roman Egypt.¹⁰⁴ In the Byzantine period, furthermore, portions of the tombs were transformed into Christian buildings. These new chapels were perhaps related to the burial of important Christians or martyrs whose physical remains attained importance and became sites of veneration throughout the Byzantine world.¹⁰⁵ There is unfortunately no evidence for the specific function of these buildings in the al-Bass cemetery. A final change in the burial practices of this period came in the form of basins and water canals, pointing to modifications in function or ritual. These features were perhaps connected to water collection and irrigation of nearby gardens but also likely to funerary rites. In fact, with an aqueduct running overhead, a new bath house on the southwestern edge of the cemetery, perhaps a clubhouse for Maioumas participants, a baptistery, basins, and

canals crossing the cemetery, water was a key element of this Late Antique burial ground.

By the fifth and sixth centuries C.E., the tombs had overtaken parts of the paved road and colonnaded portico. A smaller road now covered the path of its spacious Roman predecessor. This infilling of urban space and the alteration of function and layout of public buildings are attested at various locations in Syria and are typical of the final years of Byzantine rule.¹⁰⁶ The latest coins in the graves belong to the early seventh century C.E., providing a terminus post quem for the latest activity in the cemetery. At some point in the seventh century, perhaps related to the changing circumstances of the post-Byzantine world, the inhabitants of Tyre abandoned the cemetery, leaving it to be buried slowly by sand dunes.

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¹⁰⁴ Purcell 1987, 29; Smith 1992, 222–24; Griesheimer 1997a, 195–96.

¹⁰⁵ Caseau 1999, 36. For extramural martyria in Anatolia,

see Mitchell 1993, 65.

¹⁰⁶ See, e.g., Kennedy 1985; Foss 1997.

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