Katharina Meinecke, **Sarcophagum posuit. Römische Steinsarkophage im Kontext**. Sarkophag-Studien, volume 7. Publisher Franz Philipp Rutzen, Ruhpolding, in commission at publisher Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2014. 442 pages with 69 figures, 10 tables, 16 colour plates.

This book, publishing a doctoral project completed in 2009 at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, investigates the material environments and ritual contexts in which Roman sarcophagi were experienced, as well as the social milieu in which their use developed. The study area comprises Rome and Latium between the fifth century B. C. and third century A. D. Alongside other recent work, for example by Barbara Borg (Crisis and ambition. Tombs and burial customs in third-century CE Rome [Oxford 2013]) and Jutta Dresken-Weiland (Sarkophagbestattungen des 4.–6. Jhs. im Westen des römischen Reiches [Freiburg i. Br. 2003]), on sarcophagi of third and fourth to sixth century date respectively, Katharina Meinecke's investigation makes a key contribution to widening sarcophagus scholarship beyond its predominant focus on figural decoration.

Although the poverty of context information for Roman sarcophagi is often lamented, Meinecke's trawl of archives and publications harvested data from many tombs (168 examples), presented in the chronologically-ordered catalogue which comprises more than half the book. This reports the location and form of the tombs containing sarcophagi as well as the characteristics of the containers themselves (inscriptions, iconography, grave goods, skeletal data, etc). This underpins the analysis presented in the first half of the volume, which begins with a succinct review of previous sarcophagus scholarship and a justification for the focus on spatial and ritual context. The bulk of Meinecke's investigation is organised in three chapters which examine three principal periods, the Republican (II), the first century A. D. (III) and second to third centuries (IV). Each chapter is organised along similar lines, setting out the form, material and iconography of sarcophagi before examining their placement in the tomb, including their relationship to other burials and decoration, as well as the associated inscriptions and evidence of grave goods or burial rituals. To navigate the detailed exposition readers would be best advised to begin with the conclusions (pp. 145–149) which summarise the spatial, ritual and social settings of sarcophagi across the eight hundred years surveyed by Meinecke.

From the fifth century B. C. onwards sarcophagi are documented in Rome, mostly in tombs found on the Esquiline, and in neighbouring cities. Surviving Republican sarcophagi are mostly fourth to third century B. C. in date and dominated by the very great numbers (more than 650 examples) attested at Praeneste; the few instances of late Republican date derive primarily from Rome. The massive plain monolithic tuff chests which are typical of this period were mostly placed in fossae rather than above ground. The sarcophagi of the Scipiones are the best known of the period but their placement within a chamber, their materials (peperino and lapis Gabinus), and the presence of decoration and extensive epitaphs make them atypical in many respects. The small numbers from Rome reflect both the restriction of sarcophagus use to a narrow elite and the destruction wrought on burial areas of Republican date as the ancient city expanded. At Praeneste the superabundance of examples suggests that the ›sarcophagus habit‹ was more socially extensive than elsewhere.

After nearly disappearing from the funerary repertoire at the end of the Republic, small numbers of sarcophagi (thirty-six) are known from the first century A. D. (chapter II). With a shift from tuff and peperino to marble as the principal material a higher proportion of these are decorated (pp. 28–31). Few sarcophagi were placed in fossae; many instead remained visible on the floors of rock-cut or free-standing tombs of the period (pp. 31–37). What later becomes a common arrangement, the placing of one sarcophagus opposite the entrance and others along the walls of tomb interiors, is now first attested, for instance in the tomb of the imperial slave Tiberius Claudius Nicanor on the Via Nomentana. Surviving skeletal evidence, epitaphs and portraits reveal individuals of both sexes and all ages encased in sarcophagi; burials of women and children were sometimes richly furnished with gold ornaments (p. 40). Some sarcophagi preserve evidence for the application of aromatic substances to the corpse and for mummification; in the ›Ipogeo delle Ghirlande‹ at Grottaferrata, for example, within the interiors of adjacent sarcophagi for Aebutia Quarta and her son, Titus Carvilius Gemellus, evidence survived of floral garlands and textile wrappings, as well as traces of myrrh and rosin (pp. 198 s., A2). The surviving epitaphs from this period indicate the use of sarcophagi in a wealthy milieu, including members of the senatorial order and former imperial slaves such as Tiberius Claudius Nicanor.

The number of sarcophagi with context information increases massively in the second and third centuries A. D. (220 examples), when marble predominates among the materials and complex relief decoration is commonplace (chapter IV). Rome now takes centre stage as the provenance of most recorded examples, especially on roads running south and east of the city (pp. 45–48). Sarcophagi are documented in many

monumental tomb types, both newly built and adapted, above and below ground (pp. 55–62), now being placed within recesses created specifically to house them. Despite the increased numbers, it is worth noting here the rarity with which sarcophagi are attested in the now extensive corpus of excavated cemeteries from Rome and environs (Dossiers d'Arch. 330, 2008). This reinforces the limited epigraphic evidence (see below) for the narrowness of the social milieu in which they were used.

In tombs of this period a maximising of visual impact was sometimes an evident priority, realised either by placing sarcophagi directly opposite tomb entrances, framed within arcosolia, or by their elevation on plinths; in the case of the senator Plotius Sabinus on the Via Tiburtina (B84) and others, monumental epitaphs were affixed to the latter. However for many sarcophagi, Meinecke finds expediency dictating their placing and the visibility of decoration to be compromised by tomb structure or adjacent burials (pp. 76–79). She detects little evidence for connections either in iconography or configuration between sarcophagus decoration and that of tomb walls (painting, stucco, and incrustation) or floors (mosaic and opus sectile). The patching-up of damage created where sarcophagi were introduced into existing tombs reinforces the impression that pragmatic accommodation rather than programmatic planning often organises the disposition of containers for the dead (pp. 81–91). Many sarcophagi were also buried in fossae, regardless of whether or not they carried carved decoration, portraits or inscriptions (pp. 71–75).

Among the tombs of this date forty-one had associated inscriptions, including twenty-eight on individual sarcophagi. The latter are evenly divided between children, men and women, but indicators of specific status are rare; a few senators and equestrians, the latter all dated to the later third century, and a handful of imperial freedmen can be identified (pp. 103–116). Evidence from human remains is available from sixty-eight sarcophagi, one third of whom appear to be immature subjects, but good anthropological documentation is available in only eleven cases, and the associations Meinecke detects between age, gender and burial treatment should be treated with caution. The discovery of the remains of multiple individuals in single sarcophagi suggests frequent re-use, but limited documentation makes it impossible to differentiate sequential burial over a short period and re-use distant in time from the original interment (pp. 120–125). Mismatches between anthropological data and portraits or inscriptions may also suggest further examples of re-use (pp. 125–127). Re-use and tomb robbing limit the data on burial rituals, but mummification and related procedures are again attested, albeit less commonly than before, as well as the wrapping of the body in multiple layers of textiles, some with gold thread. Where grave goods are documented, especially in the less disturbed fossa burials, the furnishing of child and young female corpses with gold jewellery and cosmetic implements again stands out in its richness (pp. 127–134). Textual evidence (albeit amalgamated from different periods) for the likely complexity of pre-burial rituals is occasionally amplified by sarcophagus finds. In a girl's grave from Vallerano, for example, an incense burner and two wooden boxes identified as supposed acerrae (incense containers) are considered to be possible funerary equipment.

The inelegant manoeuvring often required to convey the sarcophagus to its resting place, as well as limited space and light, suggest that the opportunities for viewing the corpse and sarcophagus within the tomb were limited (pp. 134–139). The scarcity of evidence for ovens, triclinia or wells in tomb environs, as well as the absence of libation tubes, also suggests that commemorative activity took place away from the tomb itself (pp. 139–144).

Overall the cumulative impression from Meinecke's discussion is of practicality often determining the arrangement of sarcophagi in tombs. From the close analysis of funerary architecture emerges, somewhat paradoxically, an emphasis on the relative insignificance of the tomb as a setting for viewing these containers for the dead. The principal encounters with sarcophagi and their occupants by funeral participants must, in Meinecke's argument, have taken place prior to interment. Other recent evidence supports her emphasis on pre-interment rites as the key locus for display, at least through the medium of the body of the deceased. Examples continue to accumulate from the wider empire where well-preserved organic materials reveal substantial resources expended in the dress, wrapping, coiffure and floral adornment of corpses and of mid- and later Roman date, as Maria Pia Rossignani discusses in the context of reporting excavations in Milan (La Signora del sarcofago. Una sepoltura di rango nella necropoli dell'Università cattolica [Milan 2005]). Innovation in the biochemical detection of plant and animal material is also illuminating the elaboration of the funeral with effects of colour and smell. For example analyses by Rhea Brettell and colleagues of plant exudates from burial contexts have revealed evidence for mastic and related substances detected in association with late Roman burials from Britain, suggesting manipulation of the olfactory environment of the deceased, as well as possible mummification (The semblance of immortality? Resinous materials and mortuary rites in Roman Britain, Archaeometry 56, 2014, 444–59). Burials from Naintré (Vienne), for example, reveal the spreading of Tyrian purple dye across the corpse of an adult buried within a lead-lined coffin in the third century A. D. (T. Devièse et al., First chemical evidence of royal purple as a material used for funeral treatment discovered in a Gallo–Roman burial [Naintré, France, 3rd century A. D.], Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry 401, 2011, 1739–1748).

Arguably however Meinecke overstates the argument for downplaying the interior of the tomb as a dis-

play space. Perhaps the previous orthodoxy that third-century tombs were commonly susceptible to heavy-handed adaptation or destruction has influenced this argument; Borg's recent re-evaluation suggests that this indifference to the fabric of older tombs or the creation of new monuments has been overstated (cit.). As Borg has also contended, even if clear thematic links between different decorative media in tombs are lacking, a rich visual impression could nonetheless be created within third century tombs, with sarcophagi adding to the effects of colour, luminosity and texture in tomb interiors created by paint, mosaic, incrustation, stucco, and so on. Tombs from the Vatican discussed by Meinecke provide well-preserved examples where these effects can be appreciated (pp. 295–308, B48–50). Since many sarcophagi lack complex relief decoration, the imperfect conditions for viewing may also not have compromised overmuch the spectacle of, say, strigillated containers, or the proliferating framing devices on sarcophagi to which Verity Platt draws attention (Framing the Dead on Roman Sarcophagi, Res. Anthr. and Aesthetics 61/62, 2012, 213–227). There is clear scope here for further simulation of viewing experience through digital reconstruction, in particular to model the varied possibilities for light and colour.

The discussion is very clearly set out, although the accumulation of detail can occasionally be overwhelming (e. g. pp. 91–97 on the spatial relationships to other burials in the same tomb). I noted only few mistakes: for example page 7 locates Praeneste to the west of Rome, and the epitaph of Lucius Plotius Sabinus, a second century senator (p. 348, B84), is mis-transcribed (»salvation[em]« instead of »salutation[em]«). More significantly, the separation between the discussion and the images and tables, located in and following the catalogue, impedes the presentation of spatial detail by obliging continual cross-referencing. The catalogue, enhanced by provision of many tomb plans, is an important research resource in its own right, but its provision in electronic form, replacing or complementing the print version, would considerably facilitate its exploitation and have enabled a much more generous provision of images, especially of the interiors of surviving tombs.

It is unfair, however, to finish on negative points. The analysis is a fundamental contribution to the study of the experience of a key Roman sculptural medium by its viewers. For the imperial period the expediency in sarcophagus placing and the consequent compromising of visibility, as well as the interment of sarcophagi ab initio after their introduction to the tomb, is a recurring phenomenon, seemingly as important as those instances where visibility was more carefully framed. Thus while Meinecke does not propose a new reading of sarcophagi, any subsequent consideration of ancient encounters with them must take account of her insights into their spatial and, by inference, their ritual setting.

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