

in distribution, and at what point do products in state controlled centres enter the civilian market place? At the port, or the actual market? Fulford argues for samian as a state supported contractual business, being the only way to explain its wide success, but on the contrary, I think many of the papers suggest that we need to look at alternative, more flexible models that take into account private markets stimulated by the military presence, the location of fuel supplies and primary trade. In general, I found this volume to be very accessible and useful for exploring ideas that can be related to other pottery types, defining future directions for all ceramic research.

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S. BIRK, *DEPICTING THE DEAD. SELF-REPRESENTATION AND COMMEMORATION ON ROMAN SARCOPHAGI WITH PORTRAITS*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2013. Pp. 333, illus. ISBN 9788771240184. D.kr. 349.95.

This book focuses on sarcophagi produced in Rome between the mid-second and early fourth centuries A.D. with figures or busts carved with portrait features, or with roughly-worked bosses ready to receive portraits. 676 entries are presented in the catalogue, which the author estimates represents around 90 per cent of the preserved material. The study aims to present a method for 'reading' Roman sarcophagi applicable to sarcophagi without as well as those with portraits, exploring Roman attitudes to gender expressed in sarcophagus imagery and 'locating the individual' in standardized iconography. The detailed study of the iconography is put in the context of 'patronage' (who bought and commissioned the sarcophagi?), their production (workshop constraints) and the circumstances of their display (who would see them?). Birk asks how much choice was available, concluding that the identity and individuality of the deceased could be expressed by manipulating a standardized iconographic language, and that the imagery chosen could give comfort and consolation to the bereaved viewer. The portrait figures expressed the deceased's virtues and thus served as rôle models for the living. They comprise a fairly limited range of 'body types', the most numerous on third-century sarcophagi being those described as 'learned figures' (Muses, philosophers, men and women holding a scroll, or — women only — a musical instrument, or as an *orans*). Less than one quarter of the sarcophagi use portrait figures as part of a narrative scene, including mythological narratives (especially those including sleeping figures such as Ariadne and Endymion), hunt scenes and a category described as 'ritual' (mainly 'biographical' scenes and couples united in the *dextrarum iunctio*).

The methodology used is only partially explained: the central question of how a portrait can be recognized (mainly by the hairstyle, apparently) is only considered briefly, leaving this reader not entirely convinced that B. has correctly identified all instances of portraits. Moreover, 'blank' (i.e. unfinished) faces, which comprise around 30 per cent of the total, are treated equally as portraits. B. argues that leaving these faces as blanks may have been deliberate, as a meaningful symbol expressing the annihilation of the person. She also emphasizes that a 'portrait' was an idealized representation of the deceased rather than a likeness, and for this purpose a blank face was just as effective.

The methodology is less clear in the interpretation of the symbolism or meaning of the various scenes and motifs associated with the portrait figures and busts. Although B. is at times quite dismissive of the interpretations of other scholars, claiming that they are subjective or lack evidence, many of her own are similarly unsubstantiated and arbitrary. B. is in general reluctant to allow that sarcophagus iconography might allude to 'belief in the Afterlife', preferring explanations which involve identity, status, virtues and (sporadically) consolation. Analysis of key pieces is, however, skilfully used to illustrate the ways in which standard iconography might be varied and how this can be interpreted, but these tend to be unique pieces and may express ideas that were not commonly held.

Although I have some reservations about the methods used, some interesting conclusions do arise from B.'s analysis, especially with regard to the representation of gender. B. argues that in the third century women could be shown in similar ways to and with apparent equality with men, but only when represented as individuals: when they appear as part of a (married) couple the perception of their relationship becomes hierarchical. Thus a woman may hold a scroll (a 'symbol of power', or

at least ‘intellectual authority’) when standing alone, but when a married couple is represented it is always held by the man, and whereas he may be characterized as a philosopher, she is more likely to be his Muse. But particularly intriguing is the surprisingly large number of cross-gendered images: female portrait heads on male bodies and vice versa, resulting in female lion hunters and men appearing with breasts and drapery slipping off one shoulder. I am still not convinced that these cannot be explained as workshop pieces poorly adapted to their clients’ needs, or reused, but B. suggests that these images were deliberately chosen to express the cross-gendered attributes of the person, and that ‘the binary gender system was not the only, or even predominant, way of understanding gender in Roman society’.

B. also comments on the chronological development of the imagery and the changing attitudes it represents. While portraits can be found on sarcophagi as early as the mid-second century, the fashion for them is seen as a third-century phenomenon, especially in the form of the ‘learned figures’. B. sees this as related to a new mental climate in which concepts of the self were being re-negotiated, and perception of female rôles was changing.

The organization of the material, both in the text and in the catalogue, is rather unclear, and the discussion tends to go off at unexpected tangents without concluding the current issue. There are also too many glib and sweeping statements without supporting evidence, especially when discussing funerary symbolism. The expression is at times clumsy to the point of obscurity, and is characterized by the use of ill-defined jargon, such as ‘the negotiation of identity’, ‘role models’ (e.g. ‘the same role models were used for constructing men’s and women’s identities’), or ‘virtues and qualities’ (which the patron wished to be remembered for). Throughout there is a tendency towards incomplete referencing (works cited without page numbers), and there are also some other slips, such as the suggestion that *univira* refers to a wool-working woman, or the apparent mis-identification of a *stola*. There are also rather too many uncorrected typographical errors (e.g. martial for marital).

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M. GALINIER and F. BARATTE (EDS), *ICONOGRAPHIE FUNÉRAIRE ET SOCIÉTÉ: CORPUS ANTIQUE, APPROCHES NOUVELLES?* Perpignan: Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 2013. Pp. 271, illus. ISBN 9782354121754. €28.00.

Study of scenes and motifs on Roman sarcophagi has a long history, in which aesthetic forms and inner meaning have been the main interest. But in the ‘cultural turn’ in later twentieth-century scholarship, with its emphasis on social and material factors in the shaping of visual imagery, it moved to consider the contexts in which the images (and the sarcophagi themselves, long neglected) were made, used and viewed. This has opened up rich opportunities for fresh interpretative approaches to sarcophagi and their images, and for exploring their potential as historical source material: social contexts, the polyvalent images and viewers’ responses thus become major considerations.

Such opportunities inspired the colloquium at Perpignan in 2010 from which this volume derives. No introduction sets the agenda for readers, but the final contribution by Robert Turcan relates the fourteen papers to the key themes of society and funerary iconography. Information on the back cover adds that the event was also intended to honour Turcan and Franz Cumont. Despite inevitable variations in quality and innovation, the papers fulfil these aims using many different approaches (although viewer-response is not much involved). Space only permits comment on one paper from each of the two sections, and (in more detail) on the first paper which stands alone.

In this discussion on ‘Franz Cumont et l’interprétation symbolique des sarcophages romains’, Jean-Charles Balty addresses an important need. Published sixty years ago, Cumont’s influential *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* is undoubtedly due for re-evaluation. Radical changes in approaching Roman funerary art make it seem outmoded, yet there is also a growing sense that if we accept images as polyvalent, then they were also likely to involve symbolism of the kind that Cumont discussed. Balty’s response is largely based on a detailed record of how subsequent scholarship has reacted to the *Recherches*, and what he sees as recurrent concerns or misunderstandings. This paper was abbreviated from his longer study of the topic, which may