

# INSCRIPTIONS, SYMBOLS AND GRAFFITI NEAR JOUSSEF PASHA<sup>1</sup>

BY

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## 1. Inscriptions

During the 1986 season of the archaeological survey which is being conducted in the environs of El-Qitar (district of Membij)<sup>2</sup>, the necropolis situated a little to the west outside the village of Joussef Pasha up the local *wadi* was further explored. Close by the *hypogeum* reported in *Abr-Nahrain* xxiii (1984-1985), 90-95 another similar tomb-chamber was examined. It is trefoil in design with a vestibule of some three metres square off which open out three *arcosolia*. Each *arcosolium* contains six sarcophagi picked out of the living rock, in two of which the arrangement is identical: two parallel sets of two sarcophagi have a narrow passageway between them which leads to two further sarcophagi located lengthwise, at right angles to each of the pairs, along the back-wall of the *arcosolia*. In the third *arcosolium*, however — the one on the right-hand side as you enter — the arrangement is different: there are two unusually long *loculi* on the extreme left, running the full depth of the *arcosolium*, being some 2.7m. in length, and then there are three parallel, but shorter sarcophagi, with a fourth at right angles to these three along the back of the *arcosolium*. The chamber has been robbed and its contents severely disturbed (no clearance work was attempted).

On the front face of the arch of each *arcosolium* there is an inscribed area; on all three arches, it runs down the right-hand side of the arch.

*Inscription A*: left-hand *arcosolium* on entering (see Fig. 1 and Pl. 1)<sup>3</sup>

EPMHC

Characteristic letter shapes: **EMC**

This is cut in deep and confident lettering, the upright letters being a regular 10 cm. in height (a fault-line in the limestone which runs around the chamber cuts over the top of the mu). The reading is not in doubt.

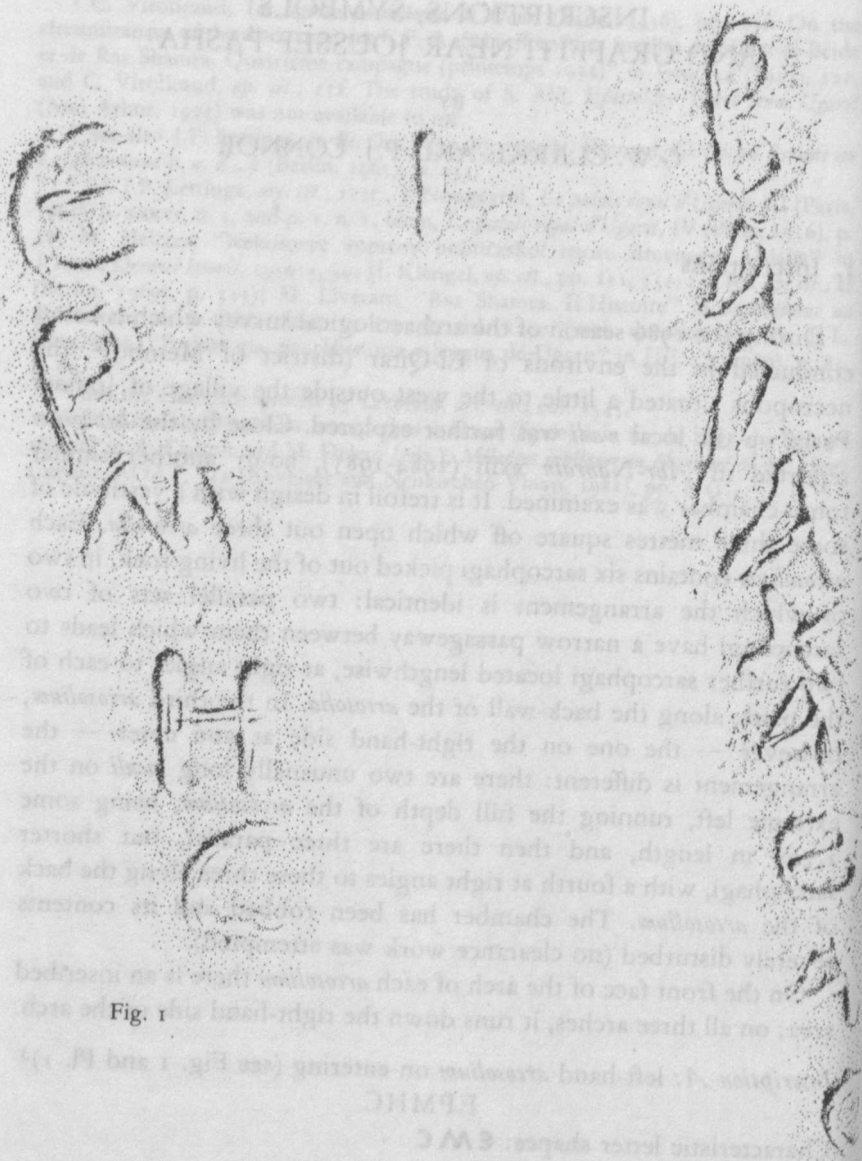


Fig. 1

This is cut in a regular to cut in height (a point in the horizontal which runs around the character cut over the top of the run). The reading is not in doubt.

Fig. 2

*Inscription B: central arcosolium (see Fig. 2 and Pl. 2)*

BAPAXAΘAC

Characteristic letter shapes: **A C**

The letters are manifestly cut by a different hand from inscription A. The angle of the lettering is oblique (not upright) and its style less assured, the cutting less deeply executed, the rho less clearly formed, the sigma less deeply lunate. The alphas have the horizontal bar running from the base of the left leg across to the middle of the right leg, in imitation of cursive script. The only doubtful letter is the fifth down — kappa, or (more probably) chi given the fact that all arms are at different angles. Altogether the inscription is less planned than inscription A. The letters start off at a very generous 12 cm. each but get progressively — though somewhat erratically — smaller and more cramped towards the end, reducing to 5 cm. in height at the very last in an effort to fit the inscription into the available space of 88 cm. (The fault-line in the limestone here cuts through the rho.)

27 cm. to the left of the two initial letters there is a clearly chiselled vertical downstroke (Piota).

*Inscription C: right-hand arcosolium on entering (see Fig. 3 and Pl. 3).*

Arranged in six inscribed lines, 70 cm. × 80 cm.

1. MA (vacat) MAP
2. KOC
3. ΘYM
4. OC
5. AKE
6. BAC

Characteristic letter shapes: **A M C E**

The surface here is of extremely flaky limestone, being the nearest of the three inscribed surfaces to the entrance-way and most subject, therefore, to the effects of water-seepage and weathering.

*Line 1:* The initial two letters are not in doubt but after a clear gap of 10 cm. the next three are faint and broken. The mu seems certain whereas the last two letters, whilst certainly consistent with alpha and rho, must remain a trifle doubtful.

*Line 2:* The reading is certain.

*Line 3:* The cross bar of the initial letter (theta) is faint and the final letter whilst not perfectly legible seems to be a poorly formed mu.

*Line 4:* The two letters (clearly read) appear to be squeezed in awkwardly; they are significantly smaller (5 cm. in height) whereas most that precede are on the average some 10 cm. in height and can reach 12 cm. (kappa).

*Line 5:* The kappa has the lower arm broken away but there is enough there to make the reading certain.

*Line 6:* The reading is clear. The left leg of the alpha extends down beyond the join with the horizontal bar, unlike the other alphas.

There are reasonable grounds to suspect that more than one hand has been at work here. The last two lines are uniformly in letters 15 cm. high (significantly higher than any of the letters in lines 1 to 4) and though still somewhat rustic are reasonably spaced and consistent, whereas the lettering elsewhere can change dramatically in size, especially in line 2 (where the letters range from 12 cm. to 5 cm.) and line 4 (see comment above) and the letter formation itself is noticeably less assured and practised. Epigraphically, lines 5 and 6 should be separated from lines 1 to 4.

### *Interpretation*

A name on the outside face of an *arcosolium* normally indicates the owner of that *arcosolium* or the head of the household whose family used the *arcosolium* as its vault. We appear to have here the names of different owners of the several *arcosolia* each of whom set up his own inscription: hence the different epigraphic hands.

*Inscription A: Hermes.* As a personal name Hermes hardly needs parallel. It is a common and widely distributed name in the West as well as in the East and in particular is to be found elsewhere in this region and its immediate vicinity, for example, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* (= IGLS), 194 (region of Aleppo), 1671 (Serâ<sup>e</sup>); C.H.E. Haspels, *The Highlands of Phrygia*, Princeton, 1971, inscriptions nos. 11, 128, 148. It is to be found in Christian circles (e.g. IGLS 1671 above) as well as in Jewish contexts (e.g. *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*, *Jewish Inscriptions from the third century B.C. to the seventh century A.D.*, ed. J.-B. Frey, vol. 1 (1936), 2nd ed. B. Lifshitz, New York, 1975, vol. 2, Vatican, 1952, [= CIJ] 1.684 [Panticapaeum]). An unexceptionable Greek name, therefore.

*Inscription B: Barachathas.* I have not located a precise parallel for this particular form of the name but the most immediately attractive explanation is that it is based on the pansemitic radicals BRK ('bless',



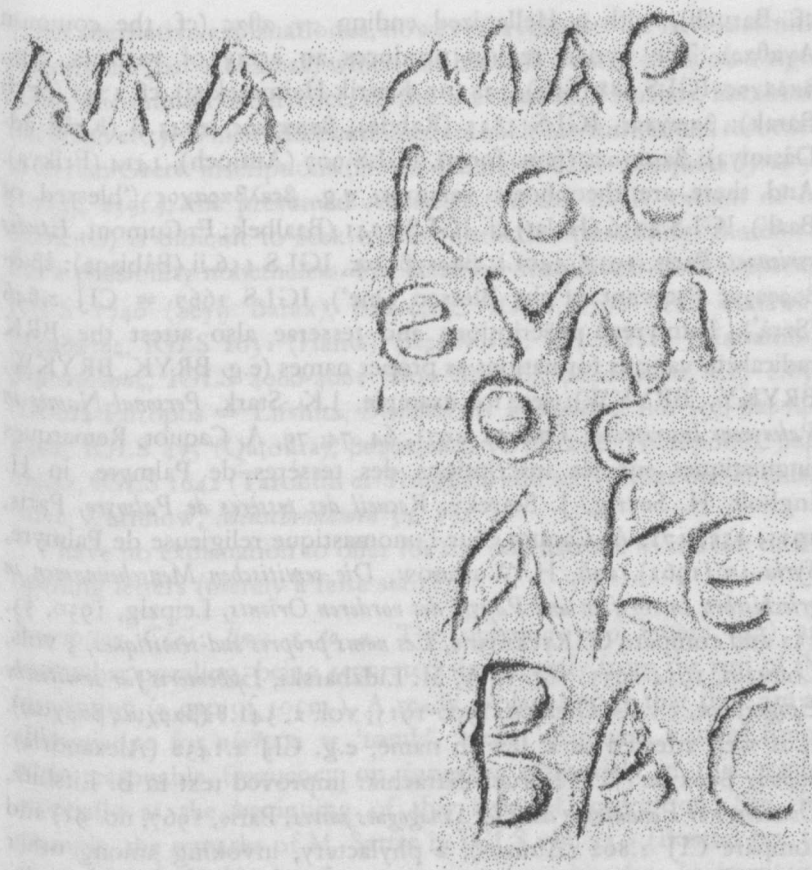


Fig. 3

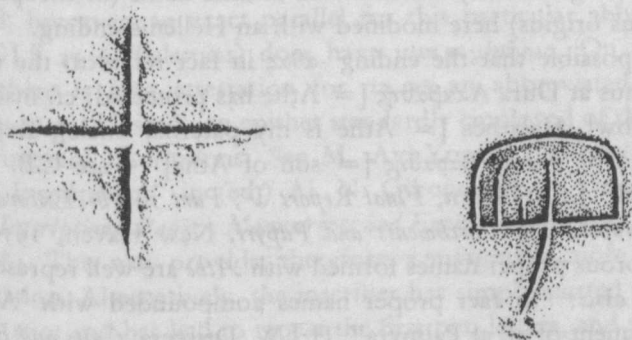


Fig. 4

cf. Baruch), with a Hellenized ending — αθας (cf. the common Ἀγαθας). The Syrian region produces an array of variants, e.g., βαραχος, IGLS 488 (Srir, 734 (nr. Kesrik Haimasekisi), cf. 1741 (Šeyh Barak); βαριχος, IGLS 1835 (Rabdé); βαραχος, 2143.B (Krâd ad-Dâsiniya); βαραχους (fem. form), IGLS 907 (Antioch), 1414 (Frikya). And there are theophoric versions, e.g. βεελβαραχος ('blessed of Baal'), IGLS 4056 (Halat) cf. IGLS 2741 (Baalbek; F. Cumont, *Études syriennes*, Paris, 1917, 340f.); βαρεχβηλος, IGLS 556.ii (Bâbisqa); ἐβιδ-βορουχος ('servant of the Blessed One'), IGLS 1667 = CIJ 2.846 (Serâ'). Palmyrean inscriptions and tesserae also attest the BRK radicals in various formations as proper names (e.g. BRYK, BRYKW, BRYKY, 'BRYKW): see, for example, J.K. Stark, *Personal Names in Palmyrene Inscriptions*, Oxford, 1971, 64, 74, 79, A. Caquot, Remarques linguistiques sur les inscriptions des tessères de Palmyre, in H. Ingholt, H. Seyrig, J. Starcky, *Recueil des tessères de Palmyre*, Paris, 1955, 155, 171, A. Caquot, Sur l'onomastique religieuse de Palmyre, *Syria* 39 (1962), 246, H. Wuthnow, *Die semitischen Menschnennamen in griechischen Inschriften und Papyri des vorderen Orients*, Leipzig, 1930, 33, 132 and compare G. Ryckmans, *Les noms propres sud-sémitiques*, 3 vols, Louvain, 1934-1935, vol. 1, 55, M. Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik*, 3 vols, Giessen, 1900-1915, vol. 2, 341.8 (βαρχιας βαρχιου). It is well attested as a Jewish name, e.g. CIJ 2.1438 (Alexandria): βορουχ βαραχια (= ? Boruch Barachia: improved text in B. Lifshitz, *Donateurs et Fondateurs dans les Synagogues juives*, Paris, 1967, no. 91) and compare CIJ 2.802 (Amisus), a phylactery, invoking among other magic names of beneficent power, one called βαριχααα, and the *index nominum* to E. Diehl's *Inscriptiones latinae christianae veteres* reveals many Christian formations also (Baric, Burica, Barrucinus, etc.). Basically, therefore, a generously disseminated semitic name (of theophoric or auspicious origins) here modified with an Hellenic ending.

(It is possible that the ending -αθας in fact refers to the divinity *Athe*. Thus at Dura Αχαβαθης [= *Athe* has protected; cf. inscription C(ii) below], Halathes [= *Athe* is my paternal uncle], Ζαβαδαθης [= given by *Athe*], βαραθης [= son of *Athe*] — see C.B. Welles, R.O. Fink, J.F. Gilliam, *Final Report V, Part 1. The Excavations at Dura-Europos. The Parchments and Papyri*, New Haven, 1959, 61ff. Theophorous proper names formed with *Athe* are well represented at Palmyra also: "In fact proper names compounded with 'Athe are most frequent of all at Palmyra", H.J.W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, Leiden, 1980, p. 88, n. 34 [with many examples]. *Baracathas* would then become "Blessed of *Athe*").

An alternative explanation is, however, available: we have a semitic patronymic (bar-Achathas) which has become a name in its own right (a not uncommon occurrence, cf. the well-known Barnabas, Barabbas, Bardesan etc.). Whilst there certainly are such *bar*-formations recorded in Syrian Greek inscriptions (cf. the Palmyrean BR-: Caquot, *Syria* 39 [1962], 239f.), the presumed Achathas (or any likely variant of its elements) is difficult to seek. A less attractive possibility, therefore, but a possibility nonetheless. For some *bar*-formations note βαρβεσος, IGLS 1740 (Šeyh Barak), βαρυμης, IGLS 1798 (Tell Halâwa), βαραδατος, IGLS 2031 (Hama), βαραθνοννα, IGLS 2111 (Mariamîn), βαρσαιουσος, IGLS 4060-4061 (Bou Sheeib), βαρσφαρα, CIJ 2.831 (Doura-Europos = Lifshitz, *Donateurs et Fondateurs*, no. 59), βαρσιμ-σησα, IGLS 453 (Qâtoûra), βαρσαμεος, IGLS 232 (Hierapolis), βαρσημεα, IGLS 1642 (Taroûtîn et-Touġġâr) and see further on these last three Wuthnow, *Menschennamen* 34, 132.

I have no explanation to offer for the downstroke to the left of the opening letters (merely a false start?).

*Inscription C(i): lines 1 to 4.* The opening two letters (μα) are somewhat puzzling, being separated significantly from the rest of the inscription (a gap of 10cm.). A ready explanation is that they are an abbreviation for μ(νῆ)μα = 'tomb', 'burial chamber', a word found with reasonable frequency on funerary memorials in this region especially at the beginning of this type of inscription. See, for example, the remarks of M. Sartre in IGLS vol. 13.1 (Bostra) pp. 39, 59 and cf. J. Kubińska, *Les monuments funéraires dans les inscriptions grecques de l'Asie Mineure*, Warsaw, 1968, 15ff. As often with the case of abbreviations, the grammatical construction has then been forgotten: the following names ought strictly to be in the genitive. I have not located, however, an exact parallel for this particular abbreviation, but IGLS 2536 (Salamias) does have μμα = μ(νῆ)μα. On the other hand there is firm attestation for μα as an abbreviated form of μα(χαριος) = 'blessed', an epithet standardly employed of the dead in such funerary inscriptions. See M. Avi-Yonah, "Abbreviations in Greek Inscriptions" in (ed.) Al. N. Oikonomides, *Abbreviations in Greek Inscriptions, Papyri, Manuscripts and Early Printed Books*, Chicago, 1947, 83. This may provide, therefore, a marginally more attractive explanation. Alternatively, the inscriber has simply started off on the wrong spot and has had to repeat the first two letters, and we should interpret lines 1 and 2 accordingly as <μα>μαρχος. For a somewhat similar stonemason's erroneous start cf. CIJ 2.1025 (Beth She'arim)

⟨θυμ⟩ τοπος θυμης, ILCV 645 (Rome) ⟨cum⟩ cumvixit Severa Seleuciane cum Aurelio Salutio ..., IGUR 1321 ⟨POT⟩ Ρουφεινου ταφος ούτος ...

The remainder of lines 1 to 4 appear to be one name viz. Markos Thymos, though it is possible they are to be kept separated. Markos, a Latin praenomen, has long been domesticated in the East, but it here seems to come combined with a personal name found rarely in Greek. The feminine form θυμη does occur as a Jewish name at Beth She'arim, CIJ 2.1023, 1025 = M. Schwabe and B. Lifshitz, *Beth She'arim*, vol. 2, *The Greek Inscriptions*, New Brunswick, 1974, 5ff. (Hall C<sup>24</sup>), but given the Palmyrene inscription also found in the same burial hall (where the name Thyma also occurs = CIJ 2.1024), it is clear that this θυμη was the wealthy head of a Jewish Palmyrene family whose remains were brought from Palmyra to Beth She'arim in Palestine for burial. TYM (cf. arabic *تام/تم*) is in fact found not uncommonly on inscriptions and tesserae at Palmyra as a theophoric element (= 'servant of [a divinity]') in various combinations. Among examples are TYMLT ('servant of Allat'), TYMRSW ('servant of Arsou'), TYMSMŠ ('servant of Shamash'), etc. and see further Stark, *Personal Names*, 116f., Caquot, *Recueil*, idem, *Syria*, 39 (1962), 239, 179, Wuthnow, *Menschenamen*, 54, 175, Ryckmans, *Noms propres sud-sémitiques*, 1.252, Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris*, vol. 1.219, 329, 331, 337; vol. 2, 327, 331. The personal name θαμος is undoubtedly a variant (occurring, for example, in IGLS 9240, 9319 [Bostra]) and the root is found in various combinations of *θαμ-*, *θυ-*, *ταμ-*: thus θαυμαλα IGLS 9028 (Bostra: 'servant of Allah', cf. 9331 [Bostra]), θαλαλαθος IGLS 2571 (Zāidal: 'servant of Allath', cf. 2213[Homs]), 2584 [Zāidal]), ταμα[λα]τος IGLS 2709 (Yabrouūd: 'servant of Allât'). We have here, therefore, a Latin forename combined with a semitic theophoric, assimilated into Greek form and written out in Greek lettering, and modified perhaps by a Greek — and frequently (but by no means exclusively) Christian — epithet for the dead (*μα[χαριος]*): altogether, a neat encapsulation of some of the ethnic, political and cultural history of this district in North Syria.

*Inscription C(ii): lines 5 and 6: Akebas.* This name further adds to the concentration of semitic elements in this particular tomb-chamber. For the name is undoubtedly based on an Aramaean personal name and made famous in Jewish tradition by the celebrated Palestinian rabbi of the first century A.D., Aqiba ben Joseph (see the monograph



by L. Finkelstein, *Akiba. Scholar, saint and martyr*, New York, 1975). Versions of it are attested in IGLS 778 (Antioch: Ακκιβα[ς], a Christian deacon) and in IGLS 1845 (Ed-Dabbâgîn: Ακωβαν), βηλακκ-βος and Ακαβαθης are recorded at Dura-Europos and for further testimony see Wuthnow, *Menschennamen*, 15, 87, 159 (Ακαβαιος, Ακ-βησιος, Οκβεος etc.), Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris*, vol. 1, 219.57, vol. 2, 14.30, Caquot, *Syria*, 39 (1962), 248 (based on 'qb = "whom [god] guards"'), Stark, *Personal Names*, 73, 107, 108.

With the epigraphic separation in inscription C of lines 1 to 4 (Markos Thymos) from lines 5 and 6 (Akebas) the special arrangement of the *loculi* in this *arcosolium* becomes intelligible. There were two owners for the two clearly defined divisions of the *loculi* within the *arcosolium*. Such tomb-sharing arrangements are common enough in Syria: examples in IGLS 1510-1522 [Hâss], 1547 [Mo'arret en No'mân], 4047 *bis* [Safita].

By a remarkable coincidence CIL 6.27959 (Rome: via Appia) records in the one funerary inscription the personal name *Baricha* (L. Valerius L.L./Baricha, lines 1-2), cf. inscription B, along with that of *Achiba* (L. Valerius L.L./Achiba, lines 5-6), cf. inscription C(ii). The general ethnic origins of these deceased should now be obvious.

*Dating*: The tomb-chamber is as yet uncleared but one chance surface sherd of very light buff unglazed ware with a 'pie-crust' decorative rim suggests a Byzantine date: a fifth/sixth century A.D. dating would also be consistent with the cursive shape of the alphas (see Sartre, *op. cit.*, 32ff.) and the general style of the epigraphy. There is no indication of religious adherence: the temptation, given the concentration of semitic and indeed specifically Jewish names, to deduce that we have here a Jewish burial chamber ought, therefore, to be resisted.

## 2. Symbols

Two robbed tombs with symbols cut in low relief were located in the recent campaigns. The first tomb, which lies beside the road from Joussef Pasha to El-Qitar, in the low hills to the right not far past the *wadi*, was evident in January, 1985. The front part of the tomb with chambers to left and right (traces still remain) has been completely destroyed. The remaining, central, vaulted *arcosolium*, however, now exposed to clear view (Pl. 4), is evidence of the general arrangement<sup>4</sup>: small, low, neatly shaped, with three *loculi*, one of which is

placed across the end of the *arcosolium* which is decorated with a large shell carved in relief (Pl. 5). The shell fills the arch with its curving scallops at the top whilst the hinge, placed at the bottom as is usual in the East<sup>5</sup>, forms a suitable horizontal at the base. The ribs of the shell, sensitively carved, curve outwards from the centre regularly. The hinge of the shell, however, is severely damaged, though there are traces still of vertical ribbing on the underside to the right of centre. At each side of the shell, at the bottom, springs a palm-tree from a type of calyx.

The lateral *loculi*, now almost filled with debris, stretch from the horizontal *loculus* to the end of the chamber; the horizontal *loculus* has a higher edge than they (Pl. 4a). The lateral *loculi* are approximately equal in width: the left is 84cm. from the wall to outer edge, the right is 83cm.; the length is 170cm.; the space between them 41cm. The greatest width at the back of the chamber, along the shelf above the *loculus*, is 162cm. The left *loculus* (Pl. 4a) has a rounded end near the carved surface; the right *loculus* is squared, but appears to be rounded at the end furthest from the shell. The height of the *arcosolium* from the flattened resting-place for the lid (just below the hinge of the shell) is 112cm. The left palm-tree (Pl. 5a) is 72cm., the right palm-tree 77cm.

The shell and the palm-tree form part of a rich, often funerary, symbolism encountered throughout the Middle East in the early centuries of our era. Some salient features can be usefully reviewed here. It was at one time customarily claimed that the shell was merely a convenient filler for the arcuated lintel since the two shapes matched perfectly, and generally speaking the arcuated lintel rather than tombs and sarcophagi (though the arcuated lintel is found on these also)<sup>6</sup> is where the shell fills the whole space, as here, rather than being placed, smaller and emblematically, in some more confined position.

A telling example of the arcuated lintel can be found in the representation of the Torah Shrine at Dura Europos, Syria<sup>7</sup>, where in fact it appears twice, in the niche proper and in the painted depiction of the shrine immediately above the niche. In the niche proper, where there is no need to observe a horizontal, the hinge of the shell, ribbed, forms a shallow downward curve, answering the semi-circular arch above. This clear association of the shell with the Torah Shrine establishes beyond doubt that the shell is richly attached to religious imagery, whereby it suggests 'the saving power and love of God which the Torah brings to men'<sup>8</sup>. The shell signifies the holiness of

the place. Also in the Dura Europos synagogue the Temple of Aron is shown with the arcuated lintel of each of its three doors filled with a shell-design<sup>9</sup>.

Others, too, in what Cumont called "a community of symbolism"<sup>10</sup>, share the symbolism of the shell. At S. Vitale in Ravenna, in the sixth century A.D., a large arcuated lintel is filled with a shell<sup>11</sup>. The hinge of the shell is along the horizontal base of the arch: perhaps because Ravenna, a Byzantine centre, shows a mixture of East and West<sup>12</sup>.

The symbolic property of the shell derives from Greco-Roman imagery and from its association with Aphrodite and with fertility. The shell represents the vulva of the sea from which Aphrodite was born and which becomes by extension a sign of man's rebirth into immortality<sup>13</sup>. A statue of a nymph in the Prado which has a shell superimposed on the loins given graphic sense to the use of the Greek *kteis*, 'comb' or 'vulva', to denote also 'shell'<sup>14</sup>. In Christian and Jewish hands the symbolism is no doubt divested of the rawer spheres of meaning alive in these pagan origins, and Cumont has stressed the virtuosity with which old myths were turned to represent new allegories<sup>15</sup>. So, for example, Venus rising from the sea in a shell on Early Christian objects like the marriage casket of Proiecta and Secundus (British Museum, London) and the silver patera (Petit Palais, Paris) of the Esquiline Treasure<sup>16</sup>, suggested 'the Christian Soul or the Church born or reborn in Baptism'<sup>17</sup>. A more stylised relief depicting Aphrodite from Ahnas el-Medineh "has nothing to do with religion", being simply "suitable for the entertainment of a permissive society"<sup>18</sup>.

A close relationship between the shell ornament above apses and architectural recesses and the shell of funerary symbolism, assumed here so far, may not in fact, as Barb suggests, be essentially accurate; for the symbolism of the shell representing the sky or 'heaven' or holy place may derive from rather older and more primitive conceptions than the shell of funerary symbolism<sup>19</sup>. But the two are perhaps combined when the shell is used on the entrance to a Jewish tomb, dated after the fall of Jerusalem, which has three doorways carved into the rock; the taller central door with an arcuated lintel is decorated with a shell<sup>20</sup>. The facade of this tomb has been given a synagogue facade, and is claimed to be the first time the shell appeared on the door of a tomb rather than a synagogue. The portal of death has become a sign of immortality. Furthermore, it appears

that with this tomb, symbols, present on the lintel outside, also found their way inside, though placed normally at this period only on sarcophagi, ossuaries and lamps<sup>21</sup>. There are other instances of related interest. At Beth She'arim a Torah Shrine crudely carved on the wall has a shell cut into the arcuated lintel (its hinge is at the bottom)<sup>22</sup>: the shell intensifies the symbolism of the arch.

Beth She'arim (Sheikh Ibriq) provides a particularly close comparison with our Joussef Pasha tomb: a large shell (Pl. 5b) is carved into an *arcosolium*<sup>23</sup>. Whilst it is comparable in that it is large and is the only carved decoration of the *arcosolium*, it is more rounded than the Joussef Pasha shell and by no means fills the whole of the arc. A larger shell carved in relief in a tomb in Cyrene is a further close example of this motif<sup>24</sup>. The shell-filled arc of a niche in a second-century A.D. tomb at Kom esh-Shuqafa, Alexandria, is comparable for the design; but beneath it, rather than a burial *loculus*, is a rounded bench which may have served for the consecration of food<sup>25</sup>.

Whilst all these Jewish examples serve to give clear indications of this symbol's range of significance, and whilst the *arcosolium* at Beth She'arim provides the best comparison (all the more because of the Jewish names revealed in a Joussef Pasha tomb, see above), there is no absolute evidence here that we are dealing with a Jewish tomb. The symbol of the shell in a funerary context is found frequently in the Christian East<sup>26</sup> as is testified, for example, by two Coptic tombstones decorated with a shrine. On the first<sup>27</sup>, an orant stands between two columns surmounted by a gable, above which are birds with a leaf in their beaks. In the pediment is a shell, designed after the fashion of a palmette, but interpreted as a shell by Goodenough<sup>28</sup>. The second<sup>29</sup> has a shell in an arcuated lintel above a firmly rectangular door — above the lintel is a bust of Christ in a vine branch with bunches of grapes. Goodenough interprets this as a doorway into the next world. The shell is a token not merely of the sacred; it indicates, too, the hopes of life hereafter<sup>30</sup>.

The shell, carrying the sense of a rebirth, also frames portraits on both Roman and Christian sarcophagi. The symbolism is made visually clear on a sarcophagus in the Louvre<sup>31</sup>. Just as Aphrodite/Venus came to be transported on a shell, so here two bearded marine creatures transport the deceased, represented as a bust within a shell, to the 'happy Isles'<sup>32</sup>. The busts of L. Antistius Sarculo and his wife on the sarcophagus in the British Museum are each set in a shell<sup>33</sup>. There are numerous instances on Christian sarcophagi: the Two



Brothers Sarcophagus, for example<sup>34</sup>, and a sarcophagus in the Lateran where images of Jonah beneath the shell no doubt reinforce the symbolism<sup>35</sup>.

Note that in these examples with portrait busts the hinge is always down; the shell in other words opens from the bottom<sup>36</sup>. This has been interpreted as showing "the ascent of the deceased through a new birth". When the hinge is above, an eagle's head can occasionally take the place of the hinge whilst the lower edge of the shell is subtly transformed into feathers. The shell then becomes a symbol of light<sup>37</sup>.

The symbolic significance of the shell, immortality, rebirth, light, blessedness, is emphasised and intensified by the palm trees (Pl. 4b and 5a): slim trunked, swaying palms, delicately carved<sup>38</sup>. On account of the trunk and what is perhaps a cluster of fruit beneath the branches, these trees should most probably be designated palms<sup>39</sup>; but the quite distinct swaying fronds that crown the trunk are not at all usual. Palms are normally represented with a more even rounded contour incorporating several symmetrical sprays of branches<sup>40</sup>. Some examples, rather disparate perhaps, may however show similarities. A sarcophagus in Ravenna has a scene centred on Christ as the Lamb flanked by two palm trees which have branches as individual and mobile as those in our tomb, though they are also more symmetrical and so do not disturb the canopy-effect<sup>41</sup>. An Egyptian painting from a private tomb in the necropolis of Thebes also has three delicate fronds<sup>42</sup>. Worthwhile noting at least, in this list of far-flung examples, is a Mycenaean signet ring now in the National Museum, Athens, which has a slim-trunked, stylized palm tree growing out of a calyx which much resembles the calyx at the base of the Joussef Pasha palms<sup>43</sup>.

Again, the palm tree is common to Roman, Christian and Jewish imagery and is especially favoured in the East<sup>44</sup>. Its message is triumph and a more abundant life. In Roman funerary art, the instances are perhaps not so numerous<sup>45</sup>, but Cumont<sup>46</sup>, as well as Goodenough, lists a number of good examples and specially noteworthy are those with palm trees flanking the decoration.

In the Jewish tradition, the palm tree is as important in the synagogue as on funerary monuments. In the synagogue it represents heaven<sup>47</sup>, for example at Beth Alpha and on a lintel relief at Capernaum: as well as victory it signifies the reward. At Rome, in Jewish catacombs, the palm tree flourishes. An *arcosolium* in the small

catacomb in the Via Appia Pignatelli, known only from a written description, had "a palm tree 1.20 meters high painted on the plaster at the left, which at once recalls the four palm trees in a *cubiculum* of the Catacomb Vigna Randanini. Balancing this on the other side is a second palm tree whose trunk is now gone ..." <sup>48</sup>. The catacomb is dated in the third century A.D. A fragmentary Roman-Jewish sarcophagus, from that Catacomb Vigna Randanini and formerly in Berlin, was decorated with several palm trees <sup>49</sup>. Palm trees figure frequently, too, on Christian sarophagi <sup>50</sup>; especially noteworthy is the sarcophagus of Archbishop Giovanni at S. Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna <sup>51</sup>, which has palm trees (and crosses) beneath arcuated lintels decorated with a shell.

Considering the shared imagery it is clearly impossible without further evidence, which in this case is unlikely, to determine whether the tomb is Roman, Christian or Jewish, particularly since it is clear that all three groups inhabited this area.

The second tomb, also robbed and in a dilapidated condition, was explored during the 1986 survey. It is situated on the hill to the left of the *wadi* going away from the village, yet quite close to the Joussef Pasha-El-Qitar road. Its damaged state makes certainty difficult but its layout, especially the slot near the door to accommodate the rolled stone for opening and closing the tomb, is evidence that it shares the same general chronology as other tombs in the area, which cannot however be precisely dated as yet <sup>52</sup>. The relief carving is cruder than that of the shell and palm trees, and the interpretation is not as clear, though the following suggestions are made with reasonable certainty.

Within an arcuated niche (Pl. 6) cut in low relief into the rock inside the tomb, just to the right of the entrance, is a shape which may perhaps be described as a horned altar: horn-like protrusions on a rectangular base; between the horns is a shallow curve. The line across the base of the left horn and at approximately the centre of the right horn is caused by a fault in the soft stone, the continuation of which can be seen on either side of the illustration (Pl. 6). There are assorted scratches on the surface of the altar proper, roughly forming a square, and further scratches, random and certainly incomprehensible, on the wall to the right.

The dimensions are as follows: the base is 21 cm.; the greatest height of the left side (from the base to the tip of the horn) is 28 cm., of the right side, 38 cm. The shallow arcuated niche has a horizontal base measuring 41 cm., and is 65 cm. high.

The shrines carved in relief at Sheikh Ibreq (Beth She'arim) may possibly give a context against which this Joussef Pasha relief can be seen<sup>53</sup>. Although, within the Christian sphere, the Coptic tombstone already mentioned because of the shell in the pediment is also interpreted as having horns on top of the carved shrine<sup>54</sup>, the majority of examples come from Jewish imagery. Goodenough reports that the horns of Minoan-Mycenaean shrines are "famous for having come early into Israelitish use"<sup>55</sup>. The horned altar can be found at Beth Alpha<sup>56</sup>, and on an amulet with a representation of Abraham and Isaac who walks towards an altar "of peculiar form — rectangular block with upward-curving horns supported by a round column which rests on a larger base"<sup>57</sup>. The horned altar appears to be better accommodated within Jewish imagery<sup>58</sup>.

### 3. Graffiti

The rocky eastern flank of Djebel Khaled, washed for its c. 1,500 m. length by the river Euphrates, is naturally steep and in places precipitous (see the preliminary report on this site in N. Syria, 2-3 km. south of Joussef Pasha, in *Abr-Nahrain* xxiii [1984-1985], 73ff.). But its natural defensiveness has been enhanced in many places by quarrying operations — no doubt in order to supply the large limestone blocks for the construction of the elaborate Hellenistic wall (some 4 kilometers of it) and defence towers (at least 25 of them) that protected the Djebel. The effect has been to provide on this flank some artificially scarped rock-faces, impossibly sheer for any would-be attacker. There is one such quarry-face (the pick-work is plainly visible) high up towards the southern end of the river frontage. Some steps have been cut out of the rock leading up towards — but not quite reaching — a low doorway cut into this sheer rock-face (see Pl. 7a): it gives access to a snall, and apparently naturally formed, cave within.

There is no doubt that this cave was once employed as a dwelling-place by some Christian solitary — or it served as a cell for periods of withdrawal from some monastic community, for example, in order to practise Lenten austerities (for other evidence of Christian occupation of Djebel Khaled see *Abr-Nahrain* xxiii [1984-1985], 77ff.). It is certainly suitably isolated and can be reached only with great difficulty: its occupant, looking out, enjoyed an almost sheer drop of nearly 100 metres down to the river (a spectacular prospect) but in so doing would always be facing East, in an attitude of prayer.

On the quarry-face just below the doorway have been cut a clear equal-armed ('Greek') cross and, less clearly, a *croix nimbée* (see Fig. 4 and Pl. 7b). The *croix nimbée* is a regular indicator of the presence or cult of a Christian recluse (see I. Peña, P. Castellana, R. Fernandez, *Les reclus syriens. Recherches sur les anciennes formes de vie solitaire en Syrie*, Milan, 1980, Figures 65, 82, 97, 111). The steps which fail to reach the doorway are now to be explained. Bread and water (or other supplies) could be handed to the recluse from the top of the step — or his spiritual counsel could there be sought — but actually getting from the step into the cell, or back onto the step out of the cell, is a perilous operation, not to be done with any frequency. The cell, therefore, falls into the category of the 'cellules', as one of the preferred options for Syrian solitaries (as opposed to, remote huts, abandoned rural temples, cisterns, tombs, etc.) according to the analysis of I. Peña *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 46:

"D'autres préféraient les CELLULES taillées au bord des précipices ou creusées dans les parois rocheuses des montagnes. Ces cellules existent encore dans les endroits les plus inaccessibles du territoire syrien, dans la région entre Ariha et Ma'arrat en-No'man par exemple, dans les montagnes escarpées de Qalamoun (N. de Damas) et au pied du mont Hermon. Cette catégorie de reclus était considérable, vu le nombre de cellules qui subsistent encore. Quelques-unes sont aujourd'hui occupées temporairement par des chrétiens en quête de recueillement et de prière. Nous en avons rencontré dans le lieu dit Mar Elias, près du village chrétien de Ma'arrat Sednaya".

Various graffiti have been crudely chiselled into the hard limestone surface on the inside of the doorway (those on the side which is on the left when viewed from the outside are recorded here): see Fig. 5 and Pls 8-10. There are, naturally enough, several varieties of cross, equal-armed (Fig. 5.a), double-barred (Fig. 5.b) and angle-armed (Fig. 5.c, d). They can be readily paralleled from similar contexts elsewhere in Syria: for double-barred crosses, see, for example, I. Peña *et al.*, *Les cénobites syriens*, Milan, 1983, Figs. 70 and 71, for angle-armed crosses, I. Peña *et al.*, *Les reclus syriens*, Fig. 128. There is a serpent (Fig. 5.e) closely similar to those found depicted at the base of Syrian stylite monuments: see I. Peña *et al.*, *Les stylites syriens*, Milan, 1975, p. 206 and Figs. 33, 54. To indicate the victory over the serpent for which the recluse forever struggled the letter nu (= N[IKH], Victory) has been carved three times (twice in reverse), Fig. 5.f, g, h.

Finally, but much less certainly, there seems to be an attempt to depict a human figure kneeling in prayer (Fig. 5.i): for similar crude



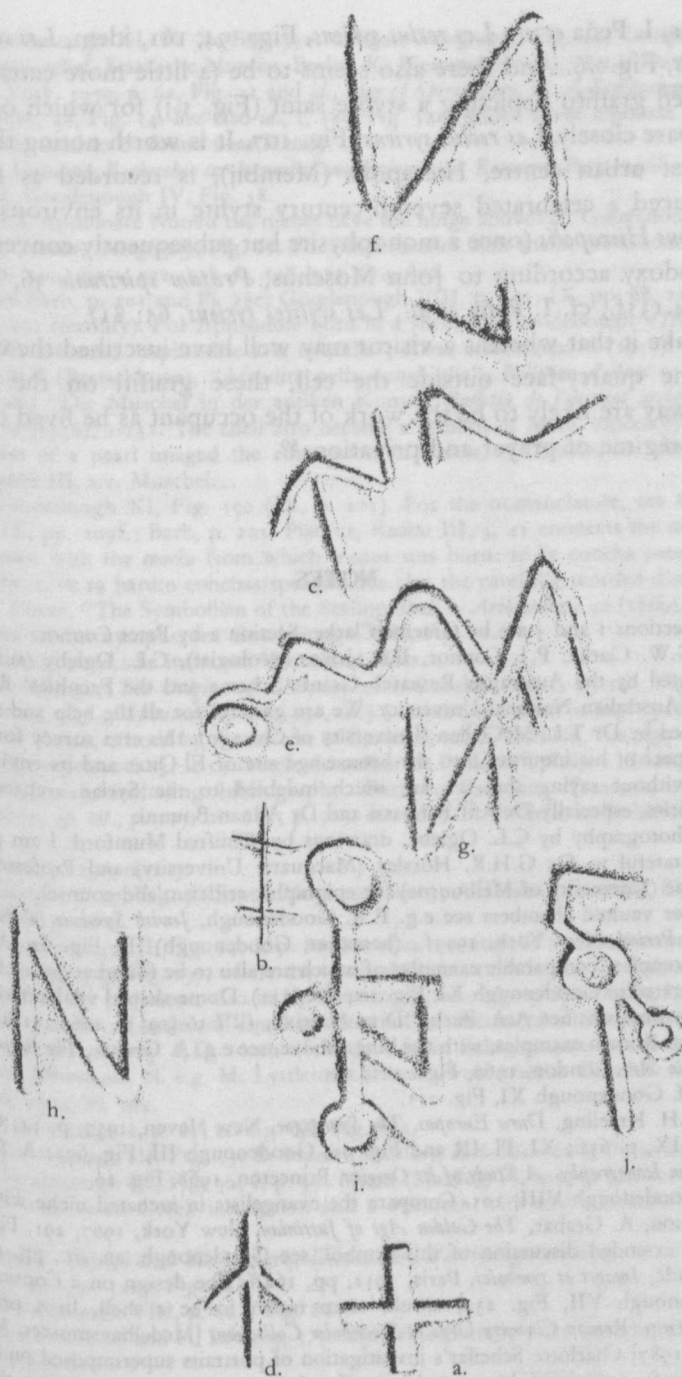


Fig. 5

efforts, I. Peña *et al.*, *Les reclus syriens*, Figs. 94, 161, *idem*, *Les cénobites syriens*, Fig. 76. And there also seems to be (a little more certainly) a stylised graffito depicting a stylite saint (Fig. 5.i) for which one can compare closely *Les reclus syriens*, Fig. 107. It is worth noting that the nearest urban centre, Hierapolis (Membij), is recorded as having produced a celebrated seventh-century stylite in its environs — *in partibus Hierapolis* (once a monophysite but subsequently converted to orthodoxy according to John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 36, Migne PL 74.135f., cf. I. Peña *et al.*, *Les stylites syriens*, 65, 81).

I take it that whereas a visitor may well have inscribed the crosses on the quarry-face outside the cell, these graffiti on the inside doorway are likely to be the work of the occupant as he lived out his daily régime of prayer and privations<sup>59</sup>.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sections 1 and 3 are by Graeme Clarke, Section 2 by Peter Connor.

<sup>2</sup> G.W. Clarke, P.J. Connor, E.B. Joyce (geologist), C.L. Ogleby (surveyor), supported by the Australian Research Grants Scheme and the Faculties' Research Fund, Australian National University. We are grateful for all the help and support provided by Dr T.L. McClellan (University of Chicago): this area survey forms but one aspect of his inquiries into the bronze-age site of El-Qitar and its environs. It goes without saying that we are much indebted to the Syrian archaeological authorities, especially Dr Afif Bahnassi and Dr Adnan Bounni.

<sup>3</sup> Photography by C.L. Ogleby, drawings by Winifred Mumford. I am particularly grateful to Dr G.H.R. Horsley (Macquarie University) and Professor M.J. Osborne (University of Melbourne) for epigraphic criticism and counsel.

<sup>4</sup> For vaulted chambers see e.g. E.R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, New York, 1953f., (hereafter, Goodenough) III, Fig. 64. A larger tomb complex, comparable examples of which are also to be found at Joussef Pasha, is illustrated in Goodenough XI, Fig. 204 (IX, 211). Dome-shaped vaults may reflect uterus-symbolism: See A.A. Barb, "Diva Matrix", *JWT* 16 (1953), 206; 231 n. 213.

<sup>5</sup> For Roman examples, with the hinge above, see e.g. A. Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art*, London, 1967, Figs. 281, 285.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Goodenough XI, Fig. 215.

<sup>7</sup> C.H. Kraeling, *Dura Europos. The Synagogue*, New Haven, 1957, p. 54; Goodenough IX, p. 65f.; XI, Pl. III and Fig. 93; Goodenough III, Fig. 602; A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography. A Study of its Origins*, Princeton, 1968, Fig. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Goodenough VIII, 105. Compare the evangelists in arcuated niche with shell decoration, A. Grabar, *The Golden Age of Justinian*, New York, 1967, 291. Fig. 335. For an extended discussion of this symbol, see Goodenough, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-105; M. Eliade, *Images et symboles*, Paris, 1952, pp. 164ff. The design on a Coptic pulpit (Goodenough VII, Fig. 233) would seem rather to be a shell. In a projected publication (*Roman Cinerary Urns in Stockholm Collections* [Medelhavsmuseet. Memoir No. 6, 1987] Charlotte Scheffer's investigation of portraits superimposed on a shell, because of a connection between the motif and the inscriptions, reveals that the shell seems to be an indication of "the sphere of love and beauty").

<sup>9</sup> Goodenough XI, Pl. X; Fig. 332; Grabar, *Iconography*, Fig. 49. Compare the Hetoimasia relief, Staatliche Museen, Berlin: K. Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality*, I, New York, 1979, p. 62, Fig. 11 and *id.*, *Age of Spirituality*, II. *A Symposium*, New York, 1980, 48, Fig. 14. See also *id.*, I, 589, Fig. 529 (gilded silver repoussé plaque from Syria, said to be found near Hama).

<sup>10</sup> F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains*, Paris, 1966, p. 484.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Goodenough IV, Fig. 58.

<sup>12</sup> In S. Apollinare Nuovo the niches have the hinge above: cf. Goodenough IV, Fig. 58; Grabar, *Iconography*, Fig. 68. For other facades with shells, see Goodenough III, Figs. 440, 462-3, 472, 538-40, 548, 573, 614, 617.

<sup>13</sup> See Barb, p. 205 and Pl. 28c; Goodenough VIII, p. 105; IX, pp. 68, 214; IX, pp. 203-205 (fertility). For Aphrodite born in a shell, see Goodenough VIII, Figs. 58-61. W. Déonna, "Aphrodite à la coquille", *Revue archéologique* 6 (1917), 392 f.; M. Brickoff (Bratschkova), "Afrödite nella conchiglia", *Bolletino d'Arte* 9 (1929), 563 ff.; and "Die Muschel in der antiken Kunst", *Bulletin de l'institut archéologique bulgare* 12 (1938), 1-131. The shell also became a symbol of Mary, especially as the formation of a pearl imaged the conception of Christ, cf. *Lexicon der christlichen Ikonographie* III, s.v. Muschel.

<sup>14</sup> Goodenough XI, Fig. 190 (IX, p. 205). For the nomenclature, see Goodenough IX, pp. 209 f.; Barb, p. 205. Plautus, *Rudens* III, 3, 43 connects the *concha* of the women with the *concha* from which Venus was born: *te ex concha natam esse autumant, cave tu harum conchas/spernas*. See also the carefully worded discussion of H.C. Coote, "The Symbolism of the Scallop Shell", *Archaeologia* 42 (1869), 322 ff. For three similar nymphs, see Goodenough VIII, Fig. 71.

<sup>15</sup> Cumont, 20f.; he instances Venus and Mars.

<sup>16</sup> M. Gough, *The Origins of Christian Art*, London, 1973, p. 141, Fig. 131; Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, I, p. 330, n. 310 where the motif is explained as the toilette of Venus, echoed by the toilette of Proiecta; see E. Barbier, "La signification du cortège représenté sur le couvercle du coffret de Proiecta", *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 12 (1962), 7-13, including bibliography. For the Esquiline Treasure, see also Weitzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 177, no. 155; p. 329, no. 309; for the patera, Barbier, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Barb, p. 230, n. 203.

<sup>18</sup> Gough, p. 17, Fig. 9 (Coptic Museum, Cairo); A. Grabar, *Justinian*, Fig. 276.

<sup>19</sup> Barb, p. 207.

<sup>20</sup> Goodenough III, Fig. 34; I, p. 84. See also the ampulla in Dumbarton Oaks, Grabar, *Iconography*, Fig. 295, where the tomb of Christ, attended by the holy women, has a shell in the pediment; also in K. Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality*, I, p. 153, Fig. 16b. A series of large and small arcuated niches decorated with a shell is found on the second century A.D. tomb of Yarhai, from Palmyra now in the National Museum, Damascus, cf. e.g. M. Lyttleton, *Baroque Architecture in Classical Antiquity*, London, 1974, Pl. 162.

<sup>21</sup> Goodenough I, p. 85; cf. e.g. XI, Fig. 215.

<sup>22</sup> Goodenough III, Fig. 53; B. Mazar (Maisler), *Beth She'arim* I, Pl. xxxiii.

<sup>23</sup> Goodenough III, Fig. 76; I, p. 97; Mazar (Maisler) Pl. xxv, 4. Maisler noted a partially obliterated Greek inscription and a menorah with seven branches in red colour.

<sup>24</sup> See F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, Paris, 1914, 3, p. 3227, Fig. 3481.

<sup>25</sup> Goodenough VIII, p. 101; Fig. 82.

<sup>26</sup> See F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, 3, p. 2905 f., especially 2907 for apse with shell (coquille absidale).

<sup>27</sup> Goodenough IV, Fig. 96 (drawing). A. Grabar, *Justinian*, p. 247, Fig. 281, where the hinge of the shell is clearly visible.

- <sup>28</sup> Goodenough IV, p. 137.
- <sup>29</sup> Goodenough IV, Fig. 100.
- <sup>30</sup> Goodenough VIII, p. 105; IX, p. 66.
- <sup>31</sup> Grabar, *Iconography*, Fig. 30.
- <sup>32</sup> Grabar, *Iconography*, p. 14. For a list of portrait busts in a shell, see Goodenough VIII, p. 102, n. 264; A. Rumpf, *Die Meerwesen auf den antiken Sarkophagreliefs* (1939), pp. 23ff., nos. 67-90.
- <sup>33</sup> E. Strong, *JRS* 4 (1914), Pl. xxiv; Barb, Pl. 32a.
- <sup>34</sup> F. Klauser and F.W. Deichmann, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage in Bild und Wort*, Olten, 1966, pp. 62-64; Grabar, *Iconography*, fig. 73.
- <sup>35</sup> Grabar, *Iconography*, fig. 27. See also the shell become circular frame (with hinge), e.g. Grabar, *Iconography*, Fig. 268. A strigil sarcophagus in S. Prassede, Rome, has a portrait in a shell: Goodenough VIII, Fig. 104; C.F. Guglielmi, *Basilica di S. Prassede*, Bologna, n.d., p. 7, Fig. 3.
- <sup>36</sup> An exception on a Christian tombstone at the Villa Albani was noted by Brickoff (Bratschkova), *Muschel*, p. 61, Fig. 46. See also K. Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality*, II, p. 145, Fig. 5.
- <sup>37</sup> See, for example, F. Gerke, *Der Sarkophag des Iunius Bassus*, 1936, Figs. 4, 9f., and p. 8; Grabar, *Iconography*, Fig. 29. This image is found also in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna: Grabar, *Justinian*, Fig. 133.
- <sup>38</sup> *Lexicon der christlichen Ikonographie*, s.v. Palme.
- <sup>39</sup> Other trees share religious significance, as for example trees that flank Orants: Grabar, *Beginnings*, Figs. 26, 146; Gough, Fig. 15.
- <sup>40</sup> See, for example, Goodenough VII, Figs. 106-133; and the palm tree on Roman coins with the inscription JUDAEA CAPTA: BMC Palestine, Pl. xxxi; H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum* II (1930), *passim*; A. Reifenberg, *Ancient Jewish Coins*, Jerusalem, 1940, no. 156.
- <sup>41</sup> Goodenough VII, Fig. 131.
- <sup>42</sup> Goodenough VII, Fig. 113.
- <sup>43</sup> Other examples of a calyx: Gough, p. 119, Fig. 161; Goodenough VII, Fig. 134 (San Clemente, Rome).
- <sup>44</sup> H. Dantine, *Le palmier-dattier dans l'iconographie de l'Asie occidentale ancienne*, Paris, 1938. See recently, for example, *Antike Welt* 17.3 (1986), 46, Fig. 7, 2. See *Lexicon der christlichen Ikonographie*, s.v. Palme; Cabrol and Leclercq, I, p. 949ff. Note the large painted palm-trees in Anfushi Tomb V, Alexandria: B.R. Brown, *Ptolemaic paintings and mosaics and the Alexandrian style*, Cambridge, Mass., 1957, Pl. xxvii-ix; pp. 54, 60. Unlike the shell which has no literary source in Judaeo-Christian texts, the palm tree is often mentioned, e.g. Exodus 15, 27; Ps. 92, 13.
- <sup>45</sup> Goodenough VII, p. 112; for discussion see VII, pp. 109f.
- <sup>46</sup> F. Cumont, *Recherches*, p. 481.
- <sup>47</sup> Goodenough VII, p. 90; III, Fig. 638.
- <sup>48</sup> Goodenough II, p. 34; for Jewish eschatology, see for example Cumont, *Recherches*, pp. 478f.
- <sup>49</sup> Goodenough III, Fig. 788.
- <sup>50</sup> For Christian sarcophagi, see examples collected in Goodenough VII, Figs. 126-133.
- <sup>51</sup> Goodenough VII, Fig. 130.
- <sup>52</sup> For the doors of such tombs, see for example, L.H. Grollenberg, *Atlas of the Bible*, London, 1963, p. 132, Figs 385-6.
- <sup>53</sup> Goodenough I, p. 94f.; III, Figs 51, 53, 55; IV, pp. 116f.
- <sup>54</sup> Goodenough IV, p. 137; Fig. 117.
- <sup>55</sup> Goodenough IV, p. 134; he illustrates a Minoan crystal gem with a priest or god blowing a shell at a horned altar, on which are sacred trees, VII, Fig. 111. See



also Goodenough VII, Fig. 50 (Minoan signet ring from Knossos). Horns of consecration and horned altar in Cyprus: V. Karageorghis, *View from the Bronze Age. Mycenaean and Phoenician discoveries at Kition*, New York, 1976, Figs. 48, 51, 52. For the Anatolian origins, see S. Diamant and J. Rutter, "Horned objects in Anatolia and the Near East and possible connexions with the Minoan 'Horns of Consecration'", *Anatolian Studies*, 19 (1969), 147-177.

<sup>56</sup> Goodenough III, Fig. 639; Figs. 973f. (gold glass).

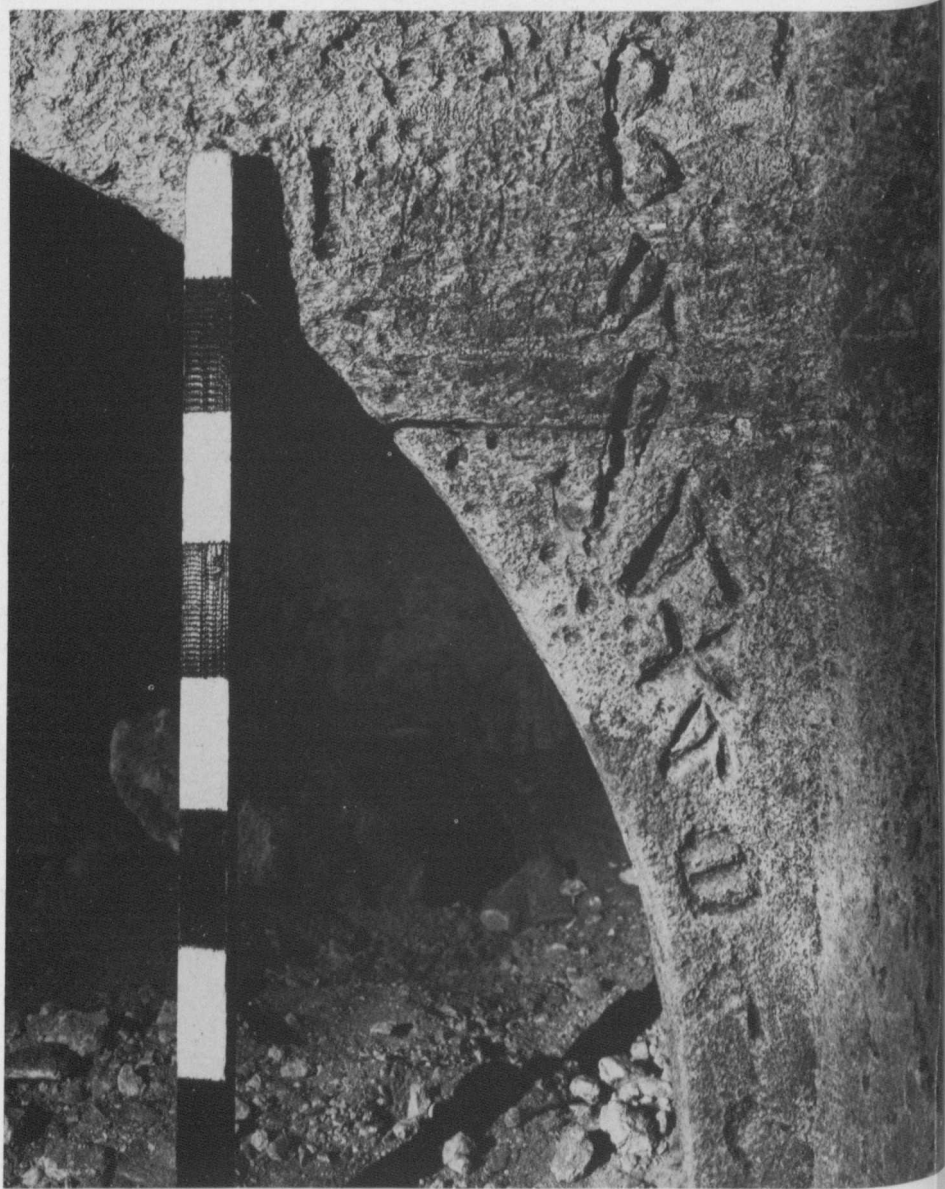
<sup>57</sup> Goodenough II, p. 224; III, Fig. 1039. For horned altar see also H.G. May, *Material remains of the Megiddo Cult*, 1935, Pl. XII; K. Galling (ed.), *Biblisches Reallexikon*<sup>2</sup>, Tübingen, 1977, s.v. Altar 6ff., at 9 [A. Reichert]; J.B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures relating to the Old Testament*<sup>2</sup>, 1969, Index s.v. altar. Dr A. Sagona (Melbourne) and Mr R. Barnes (Canberra) are thanked for their help on this topic.

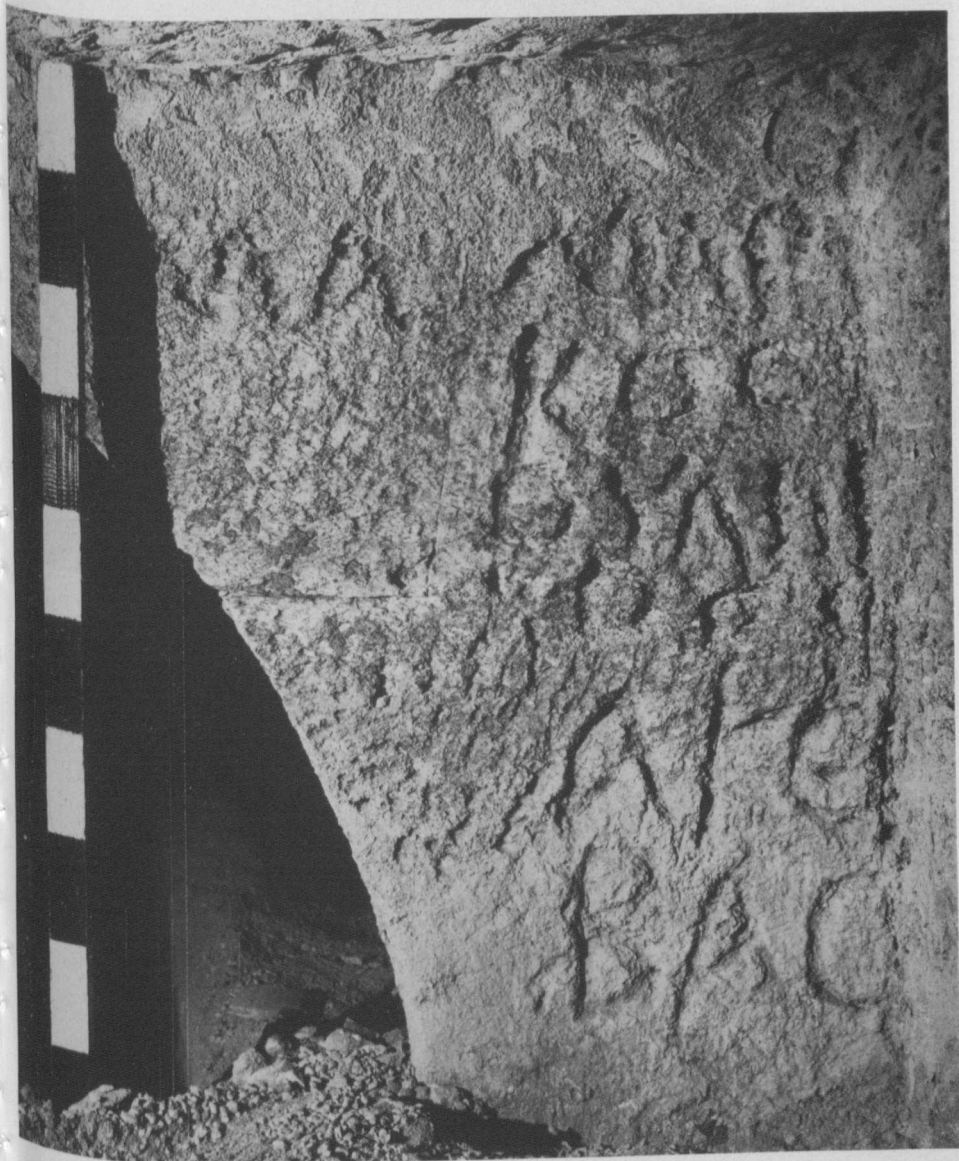
<sup>58</sup> For the synagogue in Aleppo, Goodenough I, p. 83 (sixth century A.D.?).

<sup>59</sup> Drawings by Winifred Mumford. These are by way of preliminary reports: we would be grateful for comment, criticism and correctives.



Pl. 1





Pl. 3





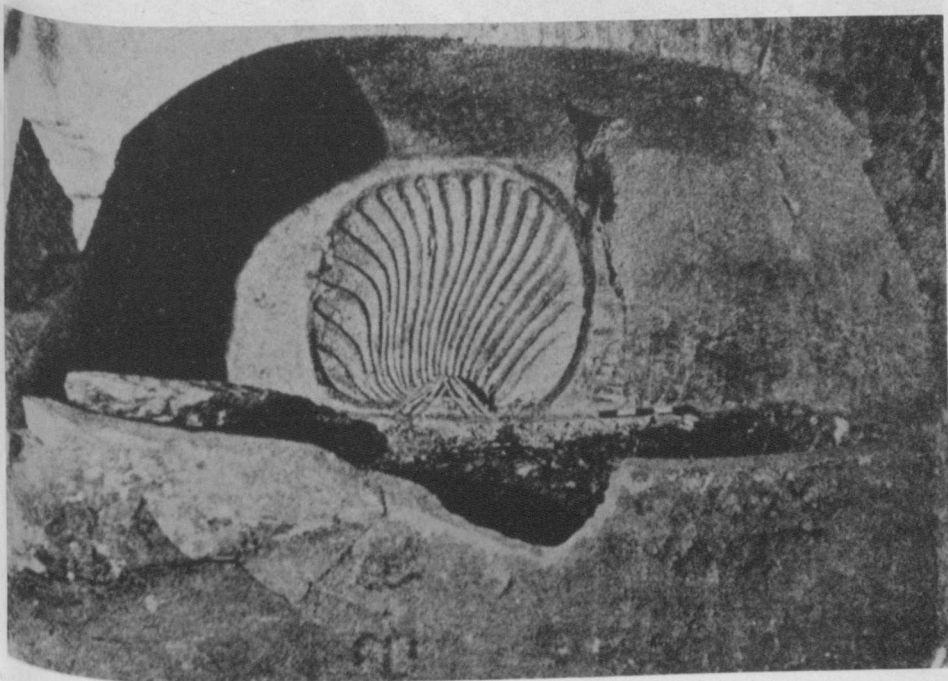
Pl. 4a



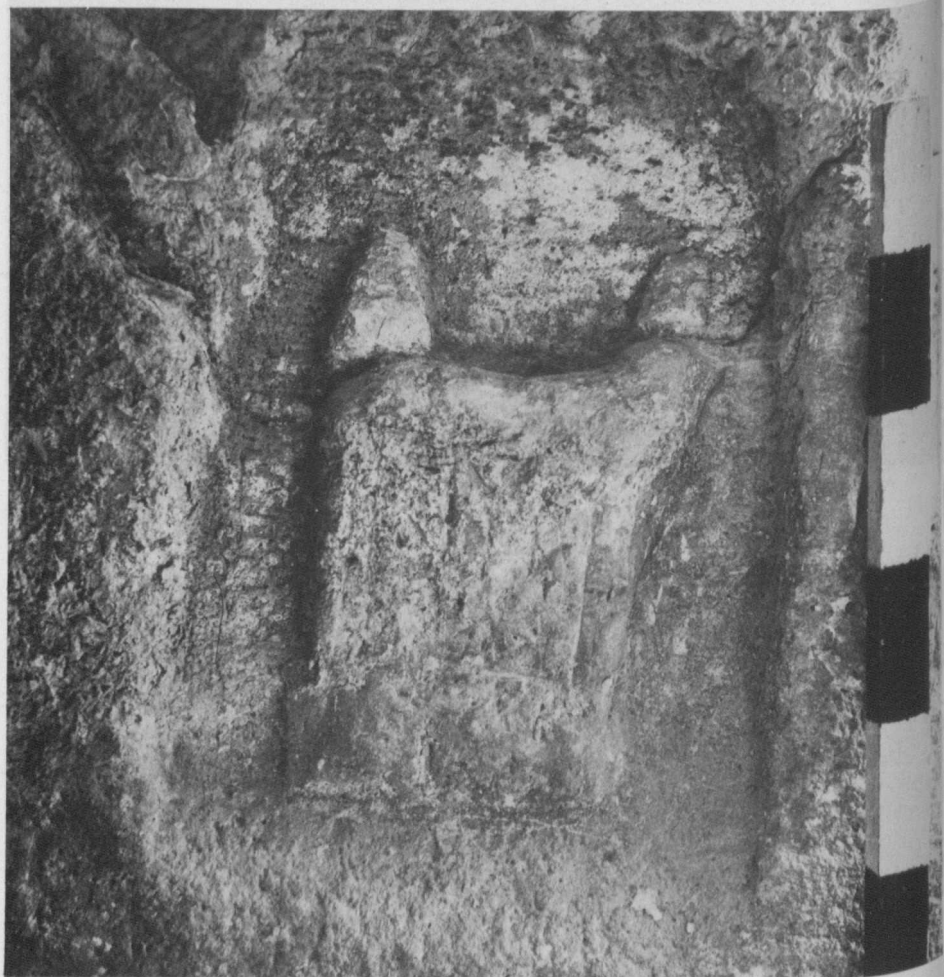
Pl. 4b



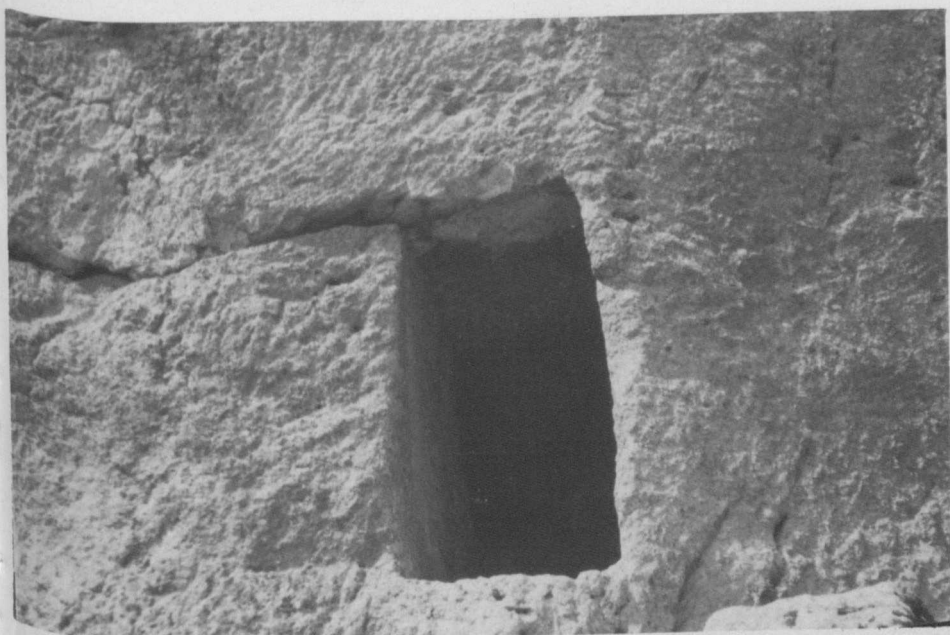
Pl. 5a



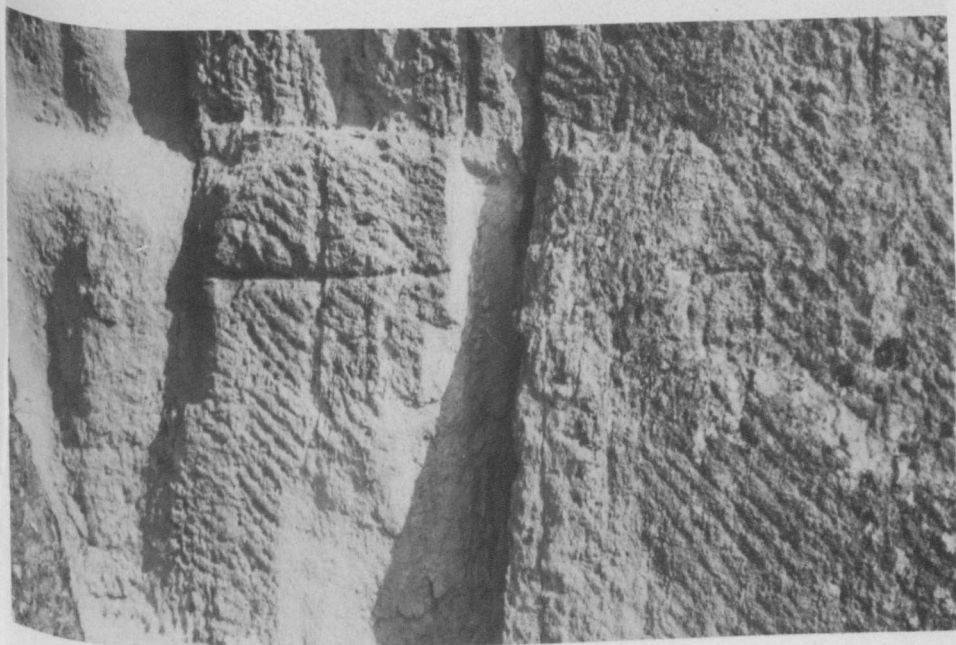
Pl. 5b



Pl. 6



Pl. 7a



Pl. 7b







