

NEW INSIGHTS ON THE PHOENICIAN ANTHROPOID SARCOPHAGI

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Abstract: The discovery of anthropoid sarcophagi in the Near Eastern area has revealed different phenomena of emulation of a funerary tradition interested in preserving the bodily integrity of the deceased. The burial in monumental stone sarcophagi according to the Egyptian custom is not alien to the practices documented in the coastal region of the Levant as evidenced by the case of Ahiaram of Byblos, attributable to the 10th century, but is part of a local tradition that dates to the Middle Bronze Age and seems to continue up to the Late Bronze Age. A similar funerary practice is documented in Phoenicia even later, as Egyptian anthropoid sarcophagi were re-used for burial by the kings of Sidon in the last quarter of the 6th century BCE. This example led to the spread throughout the region of the funerary practice of deposition in dorsal *decubitus* (i.e. with the body lying in a supine position) within a sarcophagus. This custom persevered among aristocratic and merchant classes for about two centuries, until the last quarter of the 4th century BCE. In this case, the emulation of Egyptian funerary practice was achieved through a 'formal translation' into a local taste, which evokes Hellenic art. The analysis illustrates how the progressive diffusion of the anthropoid sarcophagi and the adoption of *theca*-type sarcophagi in the local necropolises of Phoenicia were contemporary phenomena. The archaeological traces of the conservation treatment of the deceased, crossed with the inscriptions mentioning the use of aromatic gum-resins, have provided plausible documentary support to the thesis of a Phoenician practice of the embalming/mummification of the body of the dead, and in particular of that of sovereigns. This examination of the documentation has highlighted different historical modes and dynamics that testify the presence in the social upper classes (holding authority and wealth) of a strong cultural and ideological attraction (and openness) towards Egyptian culture in the Levant, traceable over a very long period.

Keywords: Anthropoid Sarcophagi, *Theca*, Phoenician Burial Custom, Dorsal *Decubitus*, Mummification.

1. THE ORIGINS OF AN UNUSUAL FUNERARY PRACTICE

In the Levant during the second half of the first millennium BCE, there is documentary evidence of the funerary use of anthropoid sarcophagi (made of marble, terracotta and/or locally available stone) recognised as Phoenician artistic produce. The use of sarcophagi for the preservation of the bodily integrity of the deceased is a distinctive cultural trait in some Phoenician centres during the Achaemenid period and has been traced back to a funerary practice of Egyptian origin: the term "anthropoid", traditionally used among scholars, refers to the specific morphology of these sarcophagi and was initially adopted by Ernest Renan¹ on the basis of a passage from Herodotus' Histories (II, 86.7: ἐνθεῦτεν δὲ παραδεξάμενοί μιν οἱ προσήκοντες ποιεῦνται ξύλινον τύπον ἀνθρωποειδέα, ... «which done, they give back the dead man to his friends. These make a hollow wooden figure like a man»²).

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1 Renan 1864, p. 412.

2 Herodotus with an English translation by A.D. Godley. Books I-II, London 1975 («The Loeb Classical Library» 1st ed. 1920), pp. 370-371.



FIG. 1. Plan of the eastern Mediterranean with mentioned sites.

The origin of the use of sarcophagi is associated with the appearance of the first stone specimens in Egypt in the pre-dynastic period,³ which was later complemented by the practice of mummification of the body.⁴ The depiction of the features of the deceased on the mummified body is documented in a later historical phase with the appearance of a portrait mask realised with the *cartonnage*⁵ technique as a partial replacement of the physical features of the deceased concealed by the body bandage.⁶ Only starting from the period of the XII dynasty, from the Middle Kingdom onwards, there is evidence of real anthropoid sarcophagi (made of wood or *cartonnage*), endowed with the function of substituting the body, but also holding an apotropaic protective value through the representation of specific details, namely the headdress (*nemes*), the false beard and the collar (*wsekh*) worn on the chest, which gave the image of the deceased a divine appearance.⁷ An anthropoid morphology of stone sarcophagi is attested only starting from the New Kingdom, with

3 Hayes 1990a, p. 50; Grallert 2002, p. 191.

4 Hayes 1990a, p. 79.

5 The French term *cartonnage* defines a rigid material formed by superimposed layers of bandages made compact with plaster, usually fashioned in a volumetric way and decorated on the surface with paint and gilding, Leca 1976, p. 72; Hayes 1990a, p. 303.

6 Hayes 1990a, p. 309.

7 Hayes 1990a, pp. 310-311; Hayes 1990b, p. 223; Handoussa 1981, pp. 143-145; Grallert 2002, pp. 191-192.

the appearance of the first examples (in stone or other material) that date back to the XVIII-XIX dynasty;⁸ their use is widespread by the XX dynasty and becomes prevalent (and characteristic) in the Late Period.⁹

The sudden appearance of anthropoid sarcophagi at the end of the 6th century BCE in the Phoenician area (see FIG. 1) has been unanimously attributed by scholars to an Egyptian cultural influence interpreting the phenomenon as an emulation of an external foreign tradition, whereas recognising the specificity of its particular local adaptation, evident in the outward artistic appearance of the artefacts. In this regard, it has also been emphasised that the production of Phoenician anthropoid sarcophagi must be distinguished from the so-called “Philistine” production documented in the Palestinian and Jordanian area between the Late Bronze and Iron Age I-II.¹⁰

1.1. *The Dorsal Decubitus in Sarcophagi*

When introducing the phenomenon of deposition inside a sarcophagus, it is useful to point out that a burial in dorsal *decubitus* (i.e. with the body lying in a supine position), reserved for local dynasts, was a well-known ancient funerary practice in the eastern coastal area, documented by the hypogea of Byblos of the second millennium BCE; the local kings of the Bronze Age who had surely been in close contact with Pharaonic Egypt when alive, were placed in hypogeal tombs within large stone (and wooden) sarcophagi. The excavations of Byblos have documented the presence of a royal necropolis within the inhabited area, consisting of underground chambers dug in the subsoil where the sarcophagi were hidden.¹¹ These hypogea have been distinguished on the grounds of their structural differences and common position, and divided into two groups: a first northern group (tombs I-IV) dating precisely to the XII Egyptian dynasty and a second southern group (tombs V-IX) dating to a subsequent period between the Middle and the Late Bronze Age.¹² At the time of the discovery,¹³ the hypogea of the first group were intact with the exception of hypogeum IV,¹⁴ whereas those of the second group (tombs V-IX) had been almost entirely emptied before archaeological exploration. The tangible difficulties in the evaluation of this group of tombs have determined a vague attribution to the final period of the Bronze Age, whereas hypogeum V was distinguished as a case due to the presence of the sarcophagus with the inscription of the king Ahiram.¹⁵

8 Kuchman 1977/78, p. 11.

9 Garstang 1907, p. 208; Kuchman 1977/78, p. 17; Cotellet-Michel 2004, pp. 16-17. The use is also documented in Nubia and in the Eastern Delta, e.g. in Steindorff 1937, pp. 72-73.

10 Ferron 1993, p. 37; Elayi – Haykal 1996, p. 110; Richter 2002, p. 263; Lembke 1998, p. 105; in an extensive presentation of Phoenician anthropoid sarcophagi, only plausible Egyptian or Greek influences are considered (in iconography and funerary use), see Lembke 2001, pp. 117-119; Frede 2002, pp. 79-80. During the Achaemenid period the presence of anthropoid sarcophagi is also documented in Mesopotamia (in Babylon) and in Persia (in Khuzestan); the analysis of this specific phenomenon will be soon object of a future contribution by the Author.

11 The hypogea were accessible through large and deep access shafts, Montet 1928, p. 153, overall plan on pl. 73.

12 Montet 1928, pp. 202-204; Jidejian 2004, pp. 56-74; Salles 1994, p. 53.

13 The presence of objects in the tombs interpreted by scholars as relating to male and/or female individuals has generated the hypothesis that these were the burials of individuals of royal lineage laid jointly in pairs in individual underground chambers; Montet 1928, p. 199. At the time of the discovery of tomb I, the academic debate recorded a lot of interest and/or perplexity around the gender identity of the sovereign deposited in it. The human osteological analysis had indicated that the remains found corresponded to an adult male, confirming some archaeological hypotheses; but other scholars later considered this gender attribute to be difficult to reconcile with the presence in the tomb of a precious Egyptian cosmetic container made from obsidian (also documented in female Pharaonic burials), for these observations see Clermont-Ganneau 1922; Naville 1922; Pottier 1922, pp. 303-304; Virolleaud 1922, pp. 281-282; an extensive discussion on the issue is also presented in Vincent 1923, pp. 556-566.

14 Montet 1928, p. 153.

15 Montet 1928, pp. 215-238; Jidejian 2004, pp. 85-86; Salles 1994, p. 53. G. Scandone indicated a precise attribution of the hypogea V-IX to contemporary local rulers of the 13th Egyptian dynasty, Scandone 1994, pp. 43-44.

The deceased were placed inside cuboid limestone sarcophagi, closed with a heavy lid equipped with handling tenons,¹⁶ of which a total of six specimens were found.¹⁷ One specimen comes from tomb I (FIG. 2: above)¹⁸ whereas another container without a closing plate¹⁹ was kept in tomb IV (FIG. 2: below).²⁰ In the second group of hypogea an intact specimen has been found in tomb VII (FIG. 3: below),²¹ the decorated sarcophagus of Ahiram (FIG. 4)²² was found in tomb V together with two other specimens (FIG. 3: top and centre).²³ P. Montet dated the Ahiram sarcophagus to the 13th century BCE, the final phase of the Late Bronze Age, to which he had roughly assigned the second group of hypogea in the Byblos royal necropolis (FIG. 4); in support of this hypothesis, the discovery of Mycenaean and Cypriot ceramics²⁴ and alabaster fragments was highlighted, including one bearing a hieroglyphic inscription with the title of Ramses II;²⁵ also the analysis of the iconographic motifs and some antiquarian details of the sarcophagus decoration were considered as supporting evidence for an attribution of the artefact to the tradition of Late Bronze Age.²⁶ Instead, an alternative dating of the sovereign to the early Iron Age has led to the more appropriate hypothesis of the reuse of a sarcophagus dating back to an earlier period for the Ahiram deposition.²⁷ The analysis of the short (apparently intimidating) inscription engraved in the access shaft of the hypogeum²⁸ and of the

16 The limestone is described as a non-local fine-grained variety, coming from the surrounding hills, Montet 1928, p. 153.

17 One sarcophagus was found respectively in tomb I, IV, VII, while three specimens were found in tomb V.

18 The lid of the sarcophagus of tomb I has a convex appearance on the upper face, shaped in faceted planes arranged at right angles to the convex surface at the ends of the massive protruding cylindrical pins; from the photos taken at the time of the discovery, there were only three big tenons at the corners, while the fourth edge of the slab was shapeless and not modelled, probably due to a deficiency in the size of the material used; the section of the container shows the upper shape of the edge cut obliquely on the outside in order to favour a better adherence of the lid, which has a concave lower side to facilitate the interlocking of the closure, Virolleaud 1922, pp. 275-276, pls. 59-61; Montet 1928, pp. 153-154, a photograph shows the lid entirely preserved at the time of its discovery in pl. 11, drawings in pls. 74-75, the photograph taken after the opening of the sarcophagus shows the partial loss of the lid in pl. 84: 1.

19 In tomb IV the large container of the sarcophagus has the upper edge on the long sides cut obliquely to the outside and was intended to fix a lid which is absent/not preserved (traces interpreted as residues of the decomposition of the wood were visible on the container), Montet 1928, p. 154, plan in fig. 64, drawing in pl. 77: 2, 4, picture in pl. 87: 2; Dunand 1937, pl. 28: 4.

20 The prevailing integrity of the first group of hypogea has made it possible to hypothesise the presence of wooden sarcophagi also in tombs II and III, found intact but without containers intended for deposition; in tomb II, in the centre of the burial chamber, there were large square blocks which were reasonably interpreted as a base with the function of raising an unpreserved wooden sarcophagus from the floor, Montet 1928, p. 147, picture in pl. 84: 2. Also in tomb I has been suggested the presence of a wooden coffin decorated with a pair of *wedjat*-eyes made of *faïence*, see Schiestl 2007.

21 The sarcophagus of tomb VII has a flat upper edge on the long sides intended to fix a convex plate lid framed by a flat edge and featuring pairs of cylindrical tenons arranged externally on the short sides, Montet 1928, pp. 207-208, figg. 64, 93, drawing in pl. 77: 1, picture in pl. 121: 1; Dunand 1937, pl. 28: 1.

22 Montet 1928, pp. 215-238, plan in pl. 125, picture in pl. 16, 127-141; inscription in Dussaud 1924, Lehmann 2005; description in Porada 1973; Rehm 2004.

23 In tomb V there was also a sarcophagus with a single cylindrical tenon protruding at the ends of the cover and a second larger sarcophagus with a convex plate lid framed by a wide flat edge and featuring a pair of massive cylindrical tenons arranged on the outside of the short sides, Montet 1928, p. 217, drawing in fig. 103, plan in pl. 125; Dunand 1937, pl. 28: 2 (minor sarcophagus), pl. 28: 3 (picture with major sarcophagus in the foreground and minor in the background).

24 Montet 1928, pp. 219-220, pl. 143.

25 Montet 1928, pp. 221, 224-225, pl. 142: 883.

26 E. Gubel narrows the chronological period of reference for the realisation of the sarcophagus around 1250-1150 BCE on the basis of comparisons and assigns its reuse and the Ahiram inscription to around 1000 BCE, Gubel 1994a, pp. 74-76. In a more recent study, E. Rehm observes that at the current state of knowledge the discrepancy between the likely dating of the sarcophagus and its decoration cannot be resolved with respect to the dating of the inscription, Rehm 2004, pp. 67-70.

27 *Post scriptum* added in the revised and updated edition of *Byblia Grammata*, Dunand 1946, pp. 143-145.

28 A recent re-reading of this text has interpreted the inscription as a functional element for carrying out particular initiation rites in the hypogeum's shaft, which provided access to the sepulchral space, in Lehmann 2005, pp. 51-54.

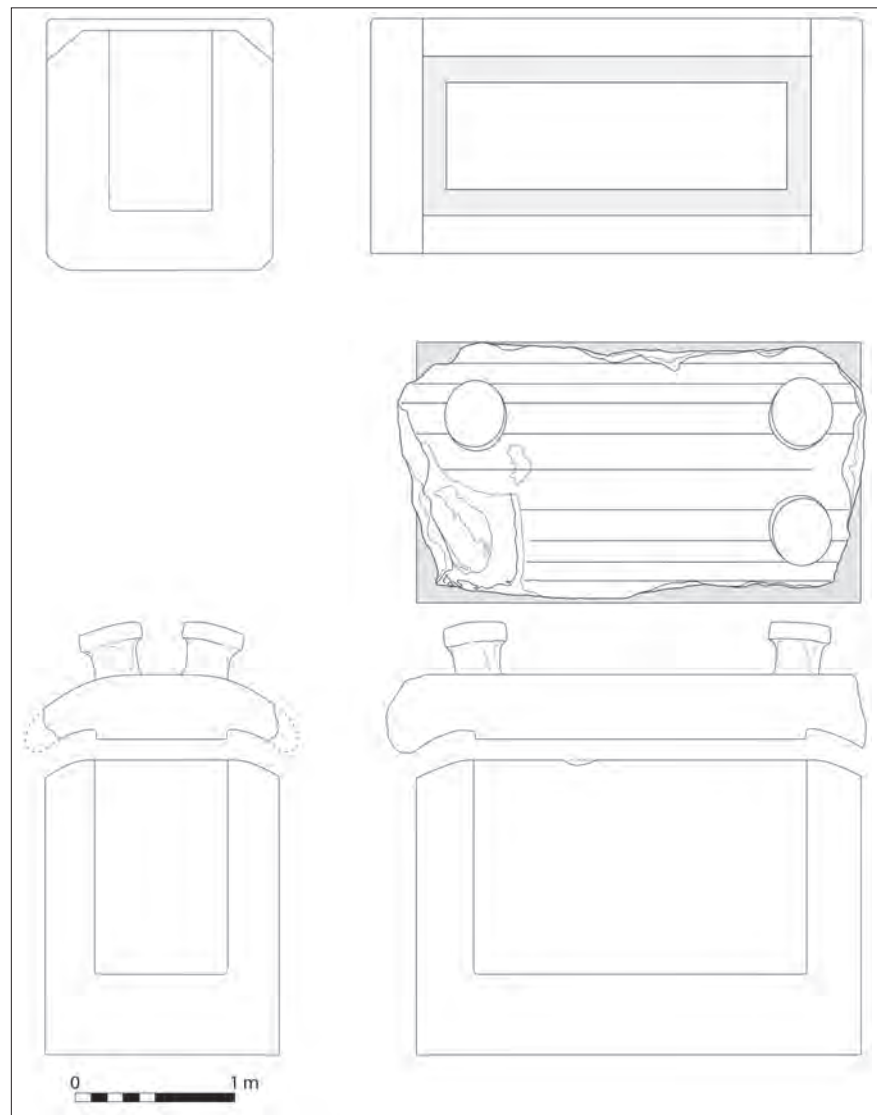


FIG. 2. Sarcophagi from Byblos tomb I (top: drawings of latitudinal cross-section and from above based on Montet 1928, pl. 77) and IV (centre and bottom: drawings from above with the lid and latitudinal and longitudinal cross-sections based on Virolleaud 1922, pl. 60).

dedicatory inscription on the sarcophagus engraved on the short side of the lid²⁹ and on the long western side of the container,³⁰ has oriented the dating of the king's burial around the beginning of the 10th century BCE, owing to the archaic aspect of the Phoenician linear alphabetic characters of the text.³¹ With regard

29 In the description it is referred to as *côté sud*, Montet 1928, tav. 138.

30 In the description it is referred to as *côté de l'entrée*, Montet 1928, tav. 130.

31 The hypothesis was initially put forward in Dunand 1946, pp. 143-145; the thesis has been shared in Albright 1947, pp. 153-156; on the subject also Martin 1961, pp. 70-75; Röllig 1982; Mazza 1994, pp. 129-130; Salles 1994, p. 53, fig. 3B, in particular it has been stated that the pottery found cannot be associated with the deposition in Salles 1994, pp. 63-65; Sader 1998, p. 126, fig. on page 127; Jidejian 2004, pp. 75-84; Lehmann 2005, pp. 53-54; Dixon 2013, pp. 35-40; H. Sader reaffirmed her opinion on this matter in Sader 2015, fig. 1 on page 65, and in Sader 2019, pp. 234-235, fig. 5.27. A high dating for the inscription has been argued in Vincent 1925, pp. 183-193, pl. VIII; Torrey 1925, p. 269; Garbini 1980, pp. 31-40. M. Martin described in detail the presence of traces of a previous inscription on the sarcophagus in pseudo-hieroglyphic characters, suggesting a hypothesis attributing it to the original recipient of the monument in Martin 1961, pp. 73-75, fig. 8, pl. XI.

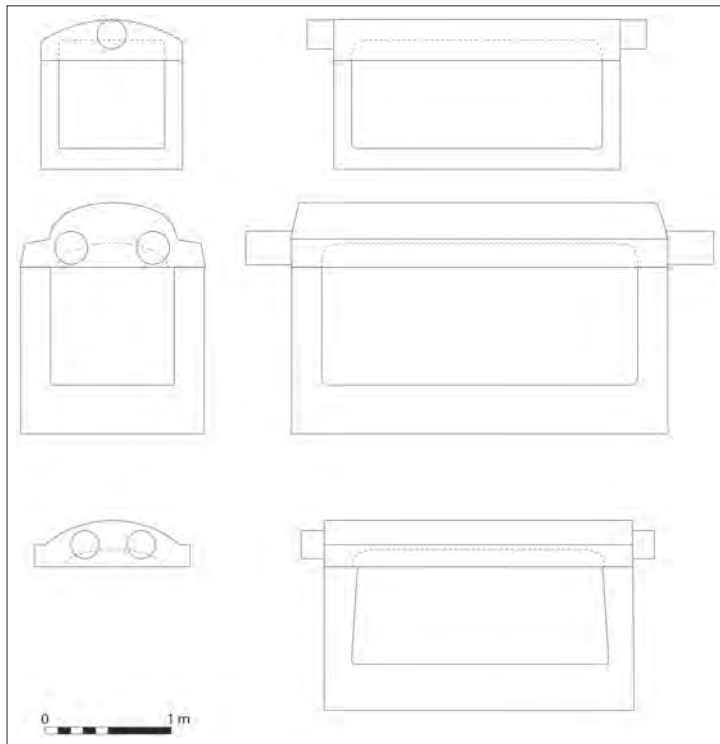


FIG. 3. Sarcophagi from Byblos tomb V (top and centre: drawings of latitudinal and longitudinal cross-sections based on Montet 1928, fig. 103) and VII (bottom: drawings of latitudinal and longitudinal cross-sections based on Montet 1928, fig. 93).

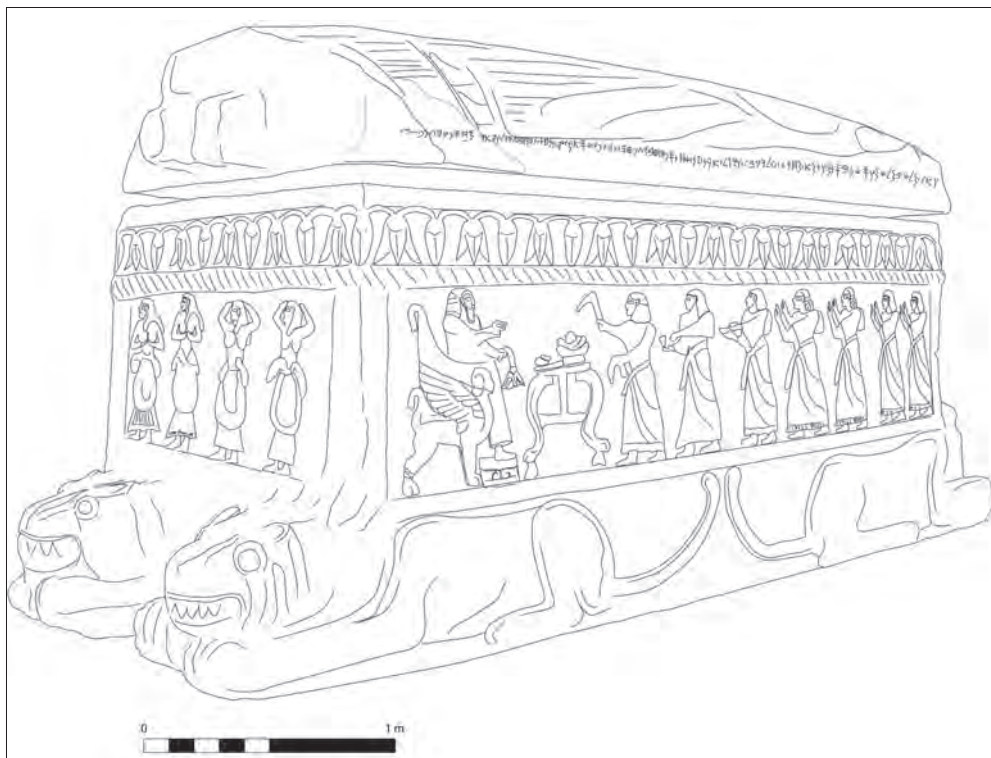


FIG. 4. Ahiaram sarcophagus from Byblos tomb V (drawing based on Montet 1928, pls. 128-141, integrated with details of inscription from Lehmann 2005, p. 71).

to the figurative decoration on the sarcophagus, it was also observed how the multiple depiction of the sovereign's image and the floral theme of the lotus show strong links with Egyptian iconographic tradition and with the issue of preserving the physical image of the deceased king,³² recalling the dynamics that brought to the creation of anthropoid sarcophagi in Egypt.³³ A recent restoration intervention on the surface of the monument³⁴ then confirmed the hypothesis of the reuse of the sarcophagus,³⁵ pointing to the (macroscopic and already known) traits of incompleteness and roughness of the execution,³⁶ and the original presence of colours applied to the artefact to enhance the decorative representations.³⁷

1.2. *Phoenician Anthropoid Sarcophagi*

Despite this relevant but isolated testimony from Byblos, the documentation of the Phoenician region during the Iron Age, perhaps also due to the lack of textual data and evidence adequate for an in-depth analysis,³⁸ does not seem to document the presence of burials in sarcophagi after the case of the sovereign Ahiram.

Thus is true, at least until the beginning of the Achaemenid period, when some anthropoid sarcophagi of Egyptian manufacture and origin appear in Sidon in the last quarter of the 6th century BCE. This use of Egyptian specimens is documented in the Aya necropolis near Helalié by the local king Tabnit (FIG. 5: above) and probably his wife 'Amm'āstart (FIG. 5: below),³⁹ and in the necropolis of Magharat 'Abloun by the king 'Ešmun'azar II (FIG. 5: centre); later this funerary custom affirms itself over time with the appearance of anthropoid sarcophagi of Egyptian inspiration as well as in Sidon (FIG. 6), also in Cyprus (FIG. 8: left),⁴⁰ in Arados and on the coast between Tartous and Amrit (FIG. 8: right), in Byblos, Beirut, Tyre, Gaza,⁴¹ Paros,⁴² Soloi,⁴³ with groups of specimens found also in areas frequented by Phoenician communities in Egyptian territory,⁴⁴ in Malta,⁴⁵ in Sicily⁴⁶ and even

32 Doumet Serhal 1996, p. 12; Markoe 2000, pp. 137-138.

33 «Realizing that, in spite of such precautions, the body was still subject to deterioration and to eventual destruction, the Egyptian provided his spirit with reproductions of himself in stone and wood, placed in his tomb, and with oft-repeated representations of his figure in paintings and reliefs on the walls of his mortuary chapel. So came into being the numerous tomb statues, statuettes, paintings, and reliefs which have been preserved to us from every period of dynastic history and to which we owe the greater part of our knowledge of Egyptian life and art», in Hayes 1990a, pp. 79-80.

34 A cleaning of the surface was necessary as the sarcophagus had been enclosed for a long period of time in a protective concrete container during the years of the Lebanese civil war and was carried out on the occasion of a temporary exhibition organised in Paris at the *Institut du Monde Arabe*.

35 Various proposals for dating the monument by a large group of scholars are listed in Rehm 2004, pp. 17-19.

36 The technical report has emphasised the neglect in the realisation of the less visible sides of the sarcophagus after its installation, with the aim of confirming the improbable hypothesis that the decoration of the artefact was carried out on site inside the funerary chamber at the time of its reuse, Délivré 1998. Against this hypothesis, see also the stringent arguments in Rehm 2004, p. 68.

37 The technical *dossier* has not been published on the occasion of the exhibition, but an accurate graphic elaboration is visible in Rehm 2004, pls. 1-4.

38 In 1995, a study by H. Sader enumerated the customary traditional or prevailing funeral practices of the Iron Age in Phoenicia, in Sader 1995. H. M. Dixon, in a recent research on the Phoenician mortuary practice, has related archaeological evidence and textual evidence «to reconstruct a model of the variety of funerary practices in use» and from which «a more nuanced model of Phoenician society can be reconstructed»; Dixon 2013, pp. 22-23.

39 For the supposed association of the sarcophagus with this queen see § 1.2.2.

40 Frede 2000, pp. 50-56, 135-141, pls. 116-124; Georgiou 2009; Hermary 2015.

41 Mendel 1912, pp. 245-247, cat. 93, Ist. Nr. 2168; Frede 2000, pp. 44-45, 132-133, pls. 111-112.

42 Frede 2000, pp. 56-57, 141-142, pls. 125-127.

43 Frede 2000, pp. 48-50, 134-135, pl. 115.

44 Frede 2000, pp. 45-48, 133-134, pls. 113-114.

45 Frede 2000, pp. 57-59, 142-144, pls. 128-129; Hermary 2015.

46 Frede 2000, pp. 59-61, 144-146, pls. 130-133; Kreikenbom 2002, pls. 30-32.

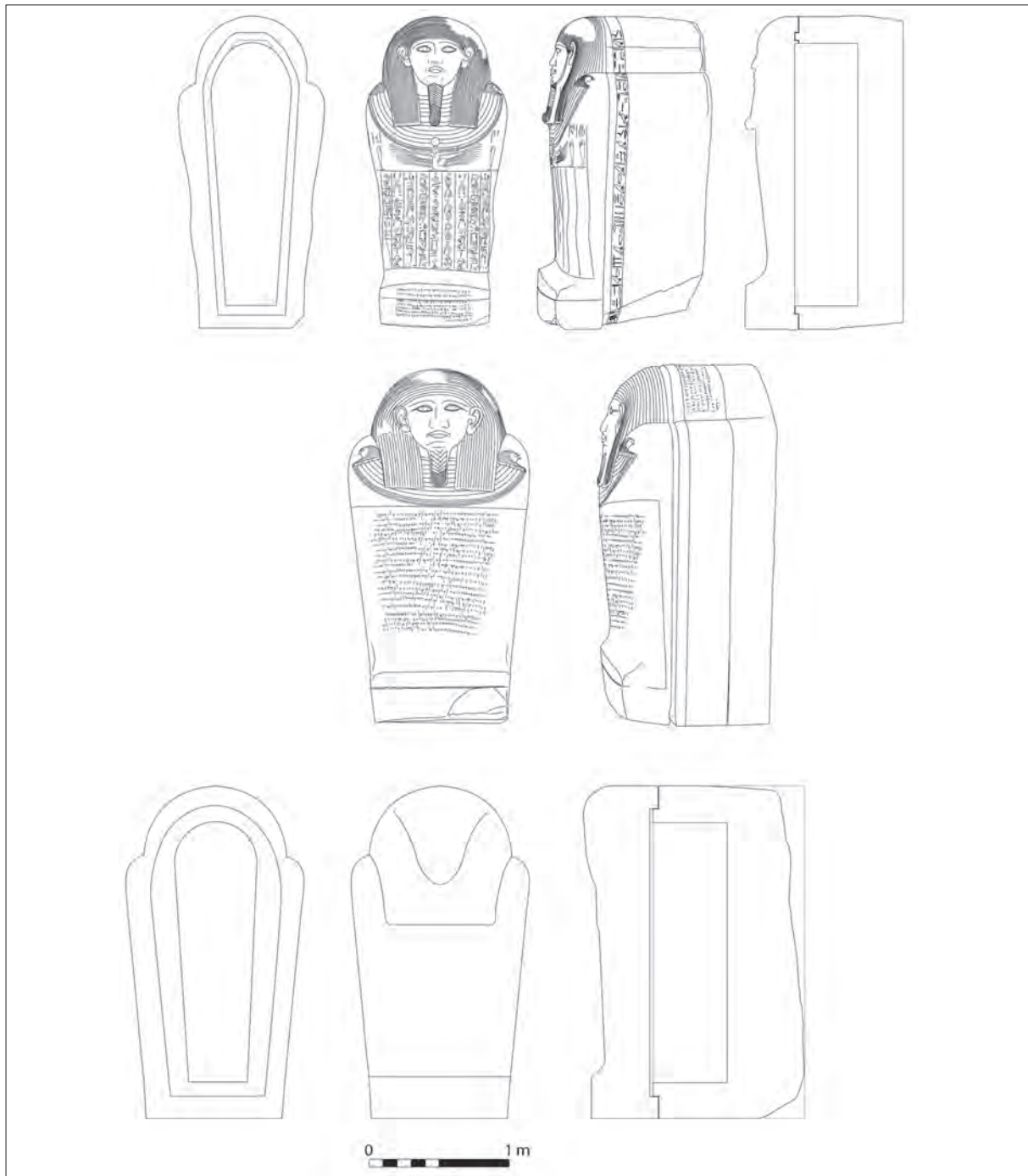


FIG. 5. Sarcophagi of Tabnit (top: from Ayaa hypogeum B; Istanbul 800, drawings from above and to the side without and with lid and longitudinal cross-section, based on Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pl. 43, Mendel 1912, p. 211, integrated with details from photos of Frede 2000, figs. 8-9, pls. 1-2), of 'Esmun'azar II (centre: from Magharat 'Abloun tomb XXXIII; Louvre AO 4806, drawings with lid from above and to the side based on images of Louvre Département des Antiquités Orientales AO 4806, Ph. 1 integrated with details from photos of Frede 2000, fig. 23, pl. 3) and 'Amm'aštart (below: from Ayaa hypogeum A; A, I-17, Istanbul 793, drawings from above without and with lid and longitudinal cross-section based on Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pl. 41, integrated with details from photos of Frede 2000, pl. 4).

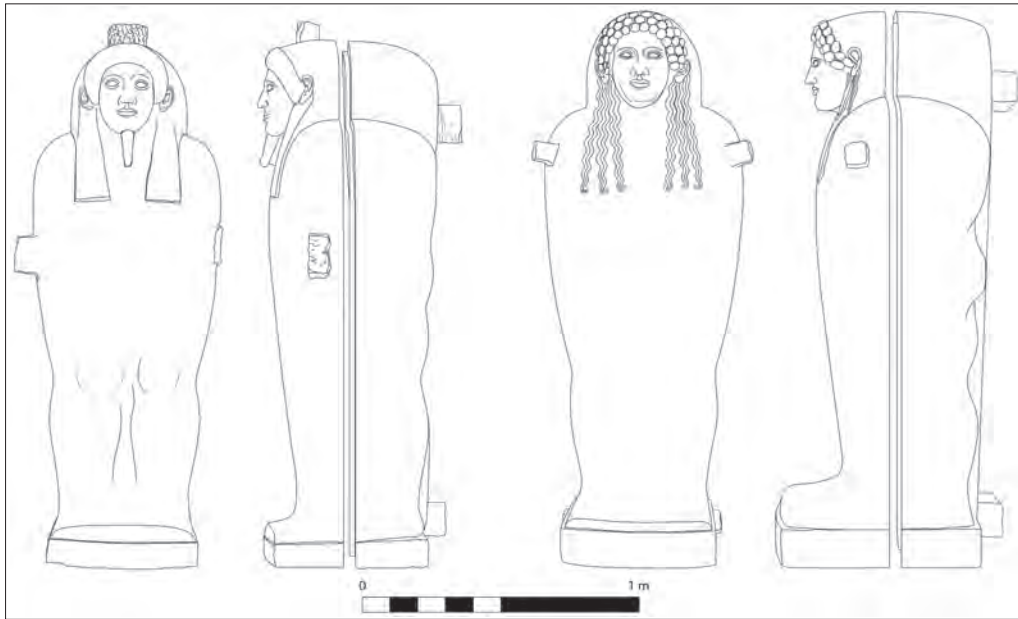


FIG. 6. Anthropoid sarcophagi from Ayaa hypogeum A (left: A, II-3, Istanbul 799, drawings from above and to the side based on Frede 2000, fig. 17; right: A, VII-11, Istanbul 798, drawings from above and to the side based on Frede 2000, fig. 18).

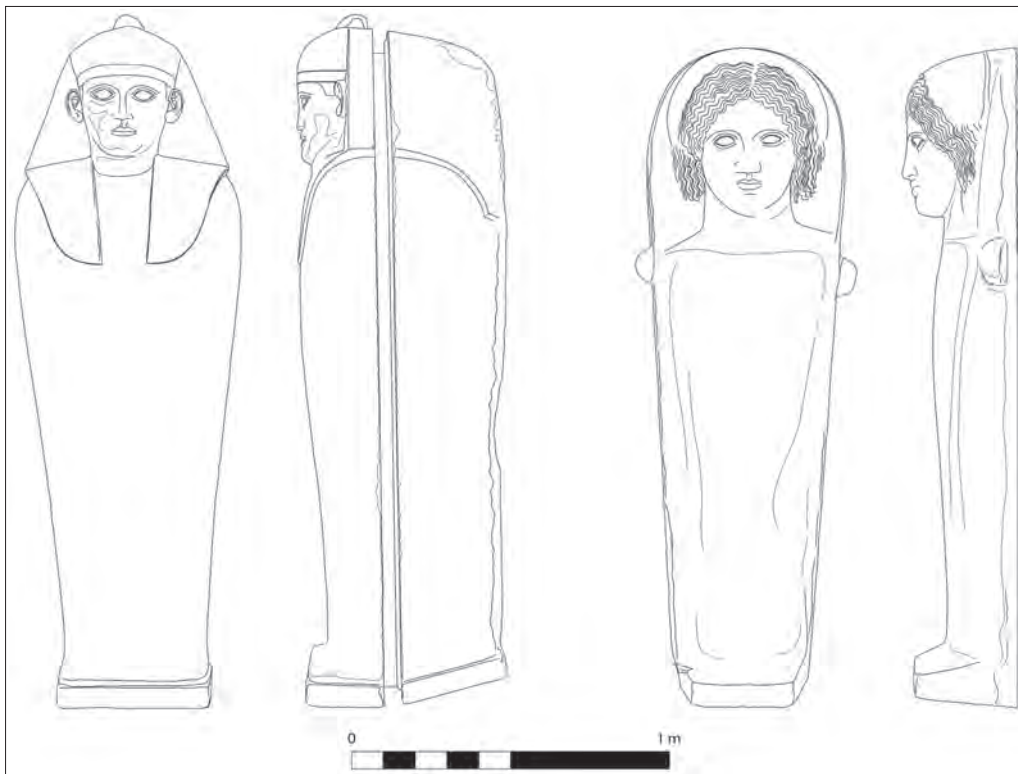


FIG. 7. Anthropoid sarcophagi from Lebanon (left: Istanbul 795, drawings from above and to the side based on Frede 2000, pl. 105) and Damascus (right: Istanbul 791, drawings of the lid from above and to the side based on Frede 2000, pl. 109).

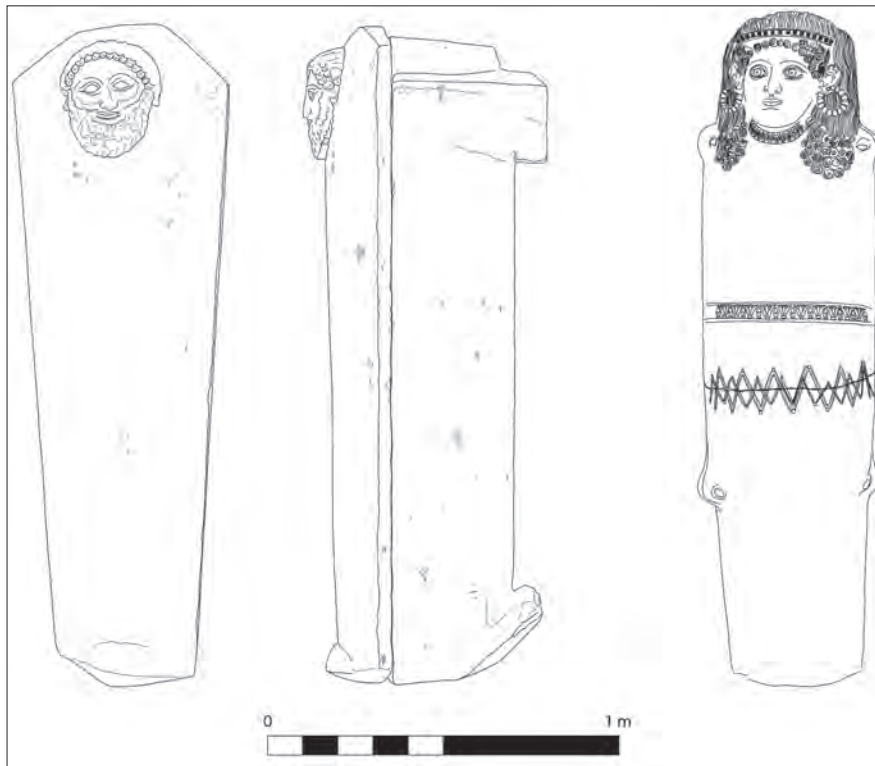


FIG. 8. Anthropoid sarcophagi from Amathus tomb 256 (left: British Museum 1894.11.1.448-449, drawings from above and to the side based on Frede 2000, pl. 116) and from Arados tomb of the *zone des chalets*, Loculus C (right: Tartous Museum 647, drawing of the lid from above based on Frede 2000, pl. 76).

in Cadiz.⁴⁷ Almost all of the sarcophagi are made out of insular marble of Greek origin and carved with a style that recalls Hellenic art; their discovery has resulted in a great critical output and a series of in-depth studies over the last three centuries.⁴⁸ Archaeological data document a production of marble specimens dated to the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, flanked by specimens made of different materials locally available, such as limestone (FIG. 8: left), basalt and terracotta (FIG. 8: right). Relevant groups of anthropoid sarcophagi are preserved and/or exhibited in important museums, namely e.g. the Louvre hosts several specimens brought to France at the time of the *Mission de Phénicie* of Ernest Renan⁴⁹ or during the Second French Empire, the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul is enriched by the presence of the sarcophagi found in the royal necropolis of Ayaa near Sidon,⁵⁰ and the Beirut Museum houses the Ford Collection made up of twenty-three sarcophagi found in the necropolis of Ain el-Helwé near Sidon in 1901 together with other subsequent findings of the local archaeological authority.⁵¹

1.2.1. Classification

An initial attempt to classify the production of Phoenician sarcophagi was made by Erich Kukahn in 1955 with unsatisfactory results. The scholar assigned an overall dating of the 5th-4th century BCE to the finds, with the a-critical belief that they were the exclusive work of itinerant Greek artists who would have de-

47 Frede 2000, pp. 61-63, 147-149, pls. 134-139; Almagro-Gorbea *et al.* 2010; Lapuente *et al.* 2020.

48 Renan 1864; Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892; Studniczka 1894; Mendel 1912; Kukahn 1955; Buhl 1959; Elayi 1988; Gubel 1994b; Elayi – Haykal 1996; Ghadban 1998; Frede 2000; Lembke 2001; Frede 2002; Hermary 2015; Mustafa – Esquivel – Esquivel 2017.

49 Renan 1864.

50 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892. The first news on the discovery of the tomb is evocatively narrated in Eddy 1887.

51 Sader 2015, p. 61.

picted the recipients of the artefacts with 'barbaric' features in their faces, interpreted as 'ethnic' trait of a Levantine factor transferred to the realisation of the sarcophagi,⁵² according to a misleading theoretical approach little appreciated by scholars.⁵³

In 1959 Marie-Luise Buhl, starting from an analysis of late Egyptian sarcophagi (including the Sidonian specimens), also examined the Phoenician anthropoid ones in marble, considering them "imitations" of Egyptian originals and comparing them with the specimens produced between the Saitic Period (663-525 BCE) and the end of their production in the 4th century BCE.⁵⁴ The scholar hypothesised that the three Egyptian sarcophagi found in Sidon had been taken away from Memphis during the Cambyses' campaign of conquest in 525 BCE; she also postulated the existence of at least two sarcophagus production centres in the regions of Sidon and Arados, placing the beginning of these activities around 480 BCE⁵⁵ and dating its end to around 370 BCE.⁵⁶

These previous studies have formulated a typological distinction based on iconographic and aesthetic criteria; afterwards, from 1963, operating a methodological change into an in-depth analysis, J. C. Assmann (in the wake of F. Studniczka's reflections)⁵⁷ proposed a reconstruction of the sequence of the Sidon dynasts by associating a group of sarcophagi found in the suburban necropolis with the local rulers and dividing them into two consecutive phases.⁵⁸ The analysis of the hypogea was carried out according to an interesting interpretation of the methods of deposition that identifies aspects of the underlying funerary

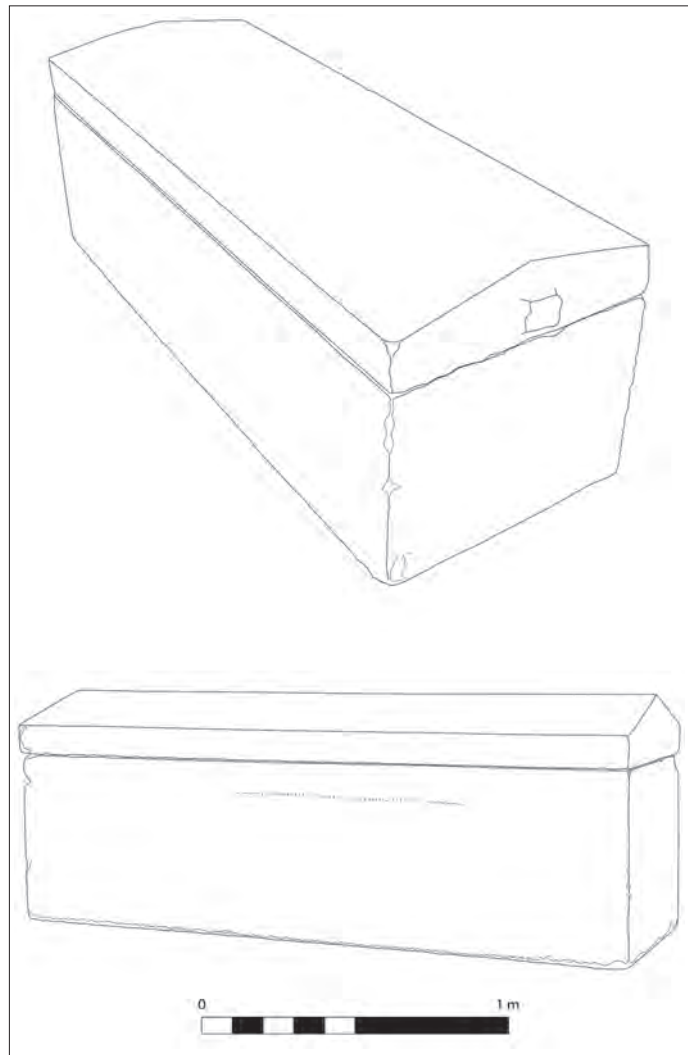


FIG. 9. Sarcophagi from Sidon (above: Louvre AO 4808, drawing based on image of Louvre Département des Antiquités orientales AO 4808) and from Byblos (below: Batno'am sarcophagus, drawing based on Sader 2015, fig. 4).

52 Kukahn 1955.

53 Frede 2002, pp. 9-10.

54 Buhl 1959, p.181.

55 Buhl 1959, p. 195.

56 Unlike what Kukahn proposed, fixing the end of sarcophagi production around 325 BCE, Buhl 1964, pp. 67, 78.

57 Studniczka 1894.

58 Assmann 1963.

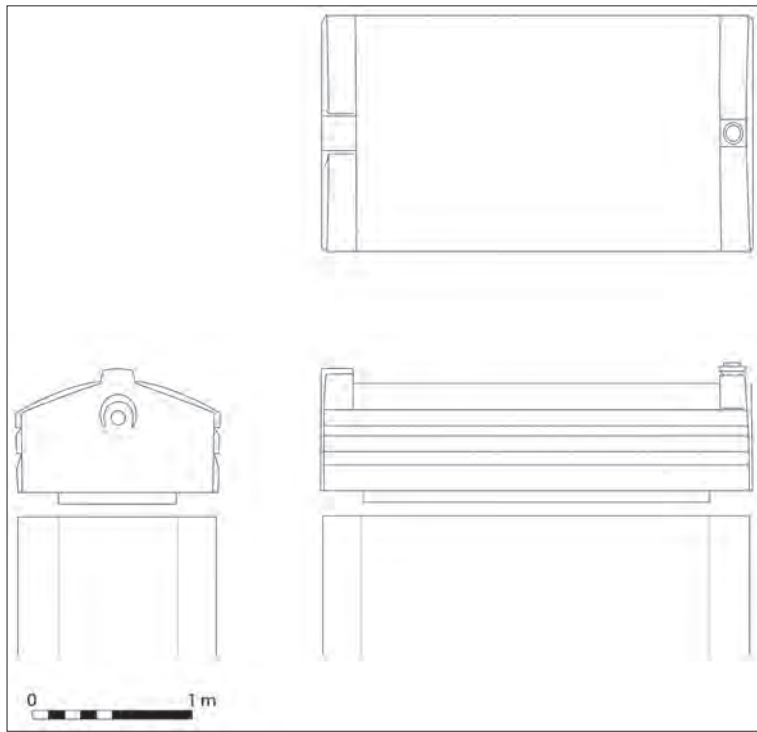


FIG. 10. Sarcophagus from Sheikh Zenad (drawing of the lid from above and drawings of latitudinal and longitudinal cross-sections based on Brossé – de la Bassetière – Pottier 1926, pls. 38-39).

Ayaa connected to a collateral dynastic branch, are attributed to the first phase, characterised by inaccessible tombs and strong Egyptian influences. The second phase of ‘accessibility’ was instead associated with the numerous marble sarcophagi with *thecae* or decorated in Greek style (FIG. 11).⁶¹

In more recent years, and through various contributions, Josette Elayi has proposed an overall re-examination of the documentation with a historical approach to the material culture that is not reductively focused on the stylistic analysis of the sarcophagi.⁶² She has suggested a chronological subdivision of the output (using a “Hellenocentric” terminology) divided into an initial *archaïque* phase corresponding to the expansion of the Achaemenid empire towards the west, a following phase defined as *classique*, corresponding to the peak of the maritime power of the Persians before the Athenian thalassocracy, and finally a *pré-Hellénistique* phase which reaches to the end of the 5th century BCE.⁶³ The scholar has taken a decidedly “Phoenician-centric” position in her works, denying the existence of Greek artists in the production of these sarcophagi and considering the Egyptian-inspired factor prevailing through the oriental production of “Phi-

ideology that change over time. The first recognised phase would be characterised by a strong influence from Egyptian funerary ideology which would have determined the inaccessibility of the sarcophagi, which are placed in single tombs, covered/hidden and made inaccessible from the outside.⁵⁹ A second subsequent phase would document depositions accessible inside the burial chambers in which the presence of other “family” members was foreseen, and would correspond to the use of sarcophagi showing a strong Persian/Anatolian-Greek artistic influence, including richly decorated architectonic sarcophagi.⁶⁰ Following this interpretation, the few anthropoid sarcophagi of Egyptian origin from Ayaa and Magharat ‘Abloun and the anthropoid specimens of white marble found in hypogeum A of

59 The idea of the accessibility of the burial is deduced by the scholar on the basis of the methods of deposition and the plan of the hypogeum, Assmann 1963, pp. 702-704.

60 The so-called phase of accessibility and visibility of funerary monuments is discussed in Assmann 1963, pp. 705-707.

61 Assmann 1963, diagram on page 692, diagram on page 694, tables I and II on page 716.

62 The study includes the entire group of Phoenician sarcophagi from this phase, including architectural specimens from the Sidon necropolis, Elayi 1988, pp. 299-320.

63 Elayi 1988, p. 277.

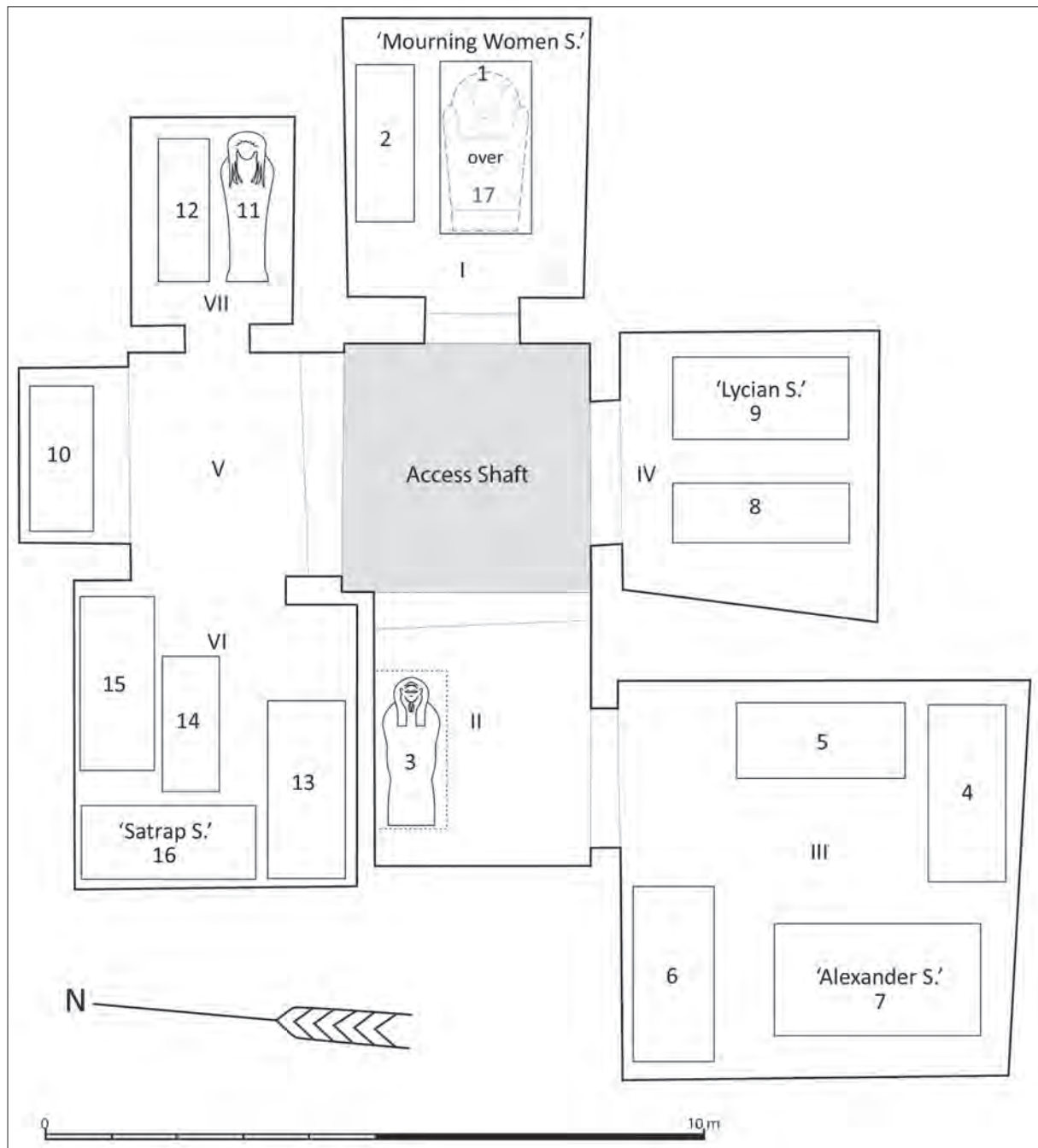


FIG. 11. Schematic plan of the Ayaa hypogeum A (drawing based on Asmann 1963, fig. 1).

listine” anthropoid sarcophagi.⁶⁴ In this view, the first phase of designing the sarcophagi made of imported marble coincides with the specimens featuring more Egyptian characteristics (FIG. 6: left; FIG. 7: left) and

64 Elayi – Haykal 1996; against this view see in Frede 2002, pp. 11-12.

dates back to the second quarter of the 5th century BCE;⁶⁵ the production in the Arados area of sarcophagi made of local materials including terracotta is attributed to the same phase (FIG. 8: right).⁶⁶

The scholar Katja Lembke has dated the introduction of the first anthropoid sarcophagi from Egypt and their use in Phoenicia around the 520 BCE⁶⁷ suggesting to date the beginning of the production of (Parian) marble specimens to around 500 BCE, owing to a hypothetical commercial connection between some Aegean island centres and the Levantine region, also hypothesising a simultaneous beginning in the Arados region of the production (or imitation) of sarcophagi with local materials.⁶⁸ With regard to the production of clay sarcophagi typical of this region, she has also very plausibly highlighted their affinity with the Cypriot coroplastic tradition, owing to the iconography but also to the technical ability in the creation of large-sized artefacts.⁶⁹ In the analysis, the introduction of the use of anthropoid sarcophagi to Cyprus is dated to around 480/470 BCE, together with the beginning of the production of specimens in local stone,⁷⁰ whereas the production of clay sarcophagi in Malta has been hypothesised to date to the second quarter of the 5th century BCE.⁷¹ In her classification, the scholar considered that the creation of the sarcophagi was the work of Greek artists, and in the evaluation of the specimens she emphasises the presence of “misunderstandings” with respect to the development of a Greek “model” between the 5th and 4th century BCE (i.e. in the transition between the severe style and the classic style), with the appearance of local production workshops. Applying a quality criterion, according to which the “best” specimens would coincide with the work of Greek craftsmen and the less successful creations would be the result of local workshops, she has pointed out the affirmation of a phenomenon of “standardisation” of the specimens during the 4th century BCE.⁷² She has also noted a change in the morphological reference “model” of the production with the introduction of the Anatolian-Lycian or Greek-type architectonic sarcophagus adopted by the royal dynasty of Sidon, which would later assert itself among the wealthy aristocratic classes.⁷³ With regard to this classification, it must be noticed that the singular criterion for distinguishing the sarcophagi on the basis of the conformation of the container (and of its base plinth corresponding to the feet of the figure)⁷⁴ has not been shared by other scholars.⁷⁵ Although this study has investigated the technical aspects relating to the production of the sarcophagi, their provenance and the existence of local workshops, however this kind of analysis is not particularly convincing due to its qualitative assessment based on a rigid “Hellenocentric” aesthetic approach, which does not help to clarify the role of the clients merely considered, inside this production context, as wealthy paying subjects.

65 Elayi 1988, p. 279.

66 It is reasonably hypothesised that the six anthropoid terracotta sarcophagi found in the area of Arados were produced locally, see Elayi – Haykal 1996. Two clay specimens found in Malta are also known, Frede 2000, pls. 128-129; a quadrangular sarcophagus with a figure depicted in relief on the lid is known from a discovery in Lilibeo but is currently missing, Frede 2002, p. 79.

67 The hypothesis of a possible public display of the Egyptian sarcophagi was also presumed to be the result of military booty and their possible figurative “reproduction”, that would have supported the need to start a local production of anthropoid sarcophagi; Lembke 2001, pp. 26-28, 41.

68 Sarcophagi made of clay, limestone and basalt are documented in the region, Lembke 1998; Lembke 2001, pp. 42-43.

69 Lembke 2001, p. 105.

70 Lembke 1998; Lembke 2001, pp. 1, 26.

71 Lembke 2001, p. 117.

72 Lembke 1998; Lembke 2001, pp. 42, 105, 107.

73 Lembke 1998.

74 Lembke 2001, pp. 99-101.

75 Frede 2002, pp. 12-14.

A study by Simone Frede was dedicated to the Phoenician anthropoid sarcophagi and assigned their production between the beginning of the 5th and the last third of the 4th century BCE;⁷⁶ here it is reiterated that the beginning of this funerary custom in the area is recognisable in the use of sarcophagi of Egyptian origin in the royal hypogea of Sidon in the last quarter of the 6th cent. BCE.⁷⁷ In this reconstruction, the first anthropoid specimens made of Greek marble would therefore have been sculpted for a dynastic commission around 500 BCE⁷⁸ and would be characterised by a predominant Egyptian style, which would be followed over time by a more extensive production destined to the wealthy classes of local society. The classification is based on the stylistic analysis of the heads sculpted on the sarcophagi and of the related hairstyles, divided by genders into groups of “iconographic schemes”⁷⁹ and into particular variants⁸⁰ and iconographies,⁸¹ following the assumption of the aesthetic derivation from Greek art through a phenomenon of reception and a subsequent chronology with respect to Hellenic artistic development.⁸² The most recent specimens have been ascribed to the second half of the 4th century BCE (in the years after 330) and correspond to sarcophagi with the depiction of the deceased reduced to a funerary mask affixed to containers with an almost box-like appearance, whose morphology was connected with the simultaneous spread of the *thecae* (FIG. 9: top).⁸³ The sudden end of the production after the Macedonian conquest is finally attributed to the phenomenon of the definitive Hellenisation of the practices of Phoenicia and the fading of its artistic autonomy; according to this vision, the anthropoid sarcophagi, due to their eclectic character, would no longer have satisfied the needs of the ruling class.⁸⁴

1.2.2. The Identification of the Recipients

A central factor in the evaluations of the various scholars concerns the succession and dating of the rulers of Sidon, which, in the analysis, is intertwined with the different hypotheses of interpretation of the monuments and sarcophagi which have been found. Over time this has created opinions based on a dense

76 Frede 2002.

77 In her work, S. Frede follows the chronological sequence argued by S. Grallert according to which the sarcophagi date back to the end of the XXVI dynasty (after 547 BCE) and would have passed into the hands of the ruler of Sidon thanks to the help offered to the Persians on the occasion of the capture of Memphis in 525 BCE; on the basis of the dynastic succession, the burial of Tabnit dates to just beyond 525 BCE, that of ʿEšmunʿazar II to around 510 BCE and that of ʿAmmʿāstart around 500 BCE, Grallert 2002, p. 211; Frede 2002, pp. 43-44.

78 Frede 2002, p. 93.

79 Frede 2002, pp. 14-15, 92-93.

80 In the classification there are six large groupings with internal subdivisions, Frede 2002, pp. 15-36. The first includes heads with a raised mass of hair in relief, Frede 2002, pp. 15-17; the second features heads with puffy curls with or without loose locks on the shoulders, Frede 2002, pp. 17-22; the third shows heads with Egyptian elements such as the beard of Osiris, the Egyptian wig, the veil inspired by the Egyptian *nemes* (*nms*) (which has a closer resemblance in the clay specimens), the large ears drawn above the veil (which recalls Osiris listening), the *wsekh* (*wsh*) collar visible on the clay sarcophagi, Frede 2002, pp. 22-26; the fourth grouping includes bearded male heads, Frede 2002, pp. 26-27; the fifth contains the male heads with short hairstyles, including an original version not equivalent to Greek hairstyles, Frede 2002, pp. 27-29; the last group presents female heads with long hairstyles in the normal style with a central parting, in a varied style with a crown of hair and loose locks on the shoulders, of the style with loose hair up to the shoulders or in the Assyrian style with curled curls, Frede 2002, pp. 29-36.

81 There is a distinctive type of male figure with a long sceptre that appears on the basalt sarcophagi of Arados, cat. II.10-11, Frede 2000, pp. 113-114, pls. 79-81; Frede 2002, p. 15; Dridi 2002, pl. 28. The type of female figure with peplum holding an object in her hand is also described separately, cat. XIII.2, Frede 2000, pp. 145-146, pls. 132-133; Frede 2002, p. 15, pl. 26a; Kreikenbom 2002, pp. 30-32.

82 Frede 2002, p. 37; the study also addresses the issue of the phases in the production procedure by distinguishing a roughing and pre-processing phase at the quarry in Greece before shipping the sarcophagi and a subsequent finishing phase at arrival on site in workshops located in Phoenicia (certainly in Sidon and Arados), Frede 2002, pp. 83-85.

83 Frede 2002, p. 61.

84 Frede 2002, pp. 65, 94.

intersection of archaeological, epigraphic and numismatic data, all illuminating, yet problematic and not fully conclusive.⁸⁵ Simone Frede's studies, which are precisely based on these general considerations and on the data from archaeological research in the funerary complexes of Sidon, also present a reconstructive scheme that attributes the individual sarcophagi of the royal hypogea to specific local dynasts on the basis of an intersection between chronological considerations⁸⁶ and the genealogical sequence of the dynasties of 'Ešmun'azar I (550-530) and of Ba'lsille I (470 / 460-450). However, according to more updated studies, the dating of this last dynastic branch should be chronologically postponed in the time and the reign of the ruler Ba'lsille I would be set between 450 and 426 BCE.⁸⁷

In this reconstruction the series proposed by the scholar opens with the sarcophagus of Tabnit, found isolated in the Hypogeum B of Ayaa and recognised as that of the ruler of Sidon⁸⁸ thanks to the inscription in Phoenician alphabet affixed to the sarcophagus, originally intended for the Egyptian general Pen-Ptah, but left unfinished and perhaps never used in Egypt (FIG. 5: top);⁸⁹ on the basis of various historical and archaeological considerations, the deposition of Tabnit has been attributed by Frede to the last thirty years of the 6th century BCE, around 530-525.⁹⁰ The next sarcophagus in chronological sequence is that of 'Ešmun'azar II,⁹¹ found in 1855 in the Magharat 'Abloun (= Apollo's cave)⁹² southern necropolis and identified by its long inscription (FIG. 5: centre); the reuse of this sarcophagus is dated by the scholar around 524-510 BCE.⁹³ In this regard, however, a recent chronological reconstruction proposed by M.G. Amadasi Guzzo is more convincing: according to her, king Tabnit would have died during the last quarter of the sixth century BCE, whereas his son Eshmunazar would have reigned in the last years at the end of the century⁹⁴.

The third Egyptian sarcophagus corresponds to the specimen found in the chamber I of the Hypogeum A (A, I-17; FIG. 5: below; FIG. 11);⁹⁵ the sarcophagus which remained in an unfinished stage of realisa-

85 Babelon 1891; Dussaud 1905; Newell 1916; Galling 1963; Merker 1964; Dunand 1965; Mullen 1974; Betlyon 1976; Gabelmann 1979; Gibson 1982; Kelly 1987; Elayi – Elayi 2004, pp. 692-694; Jacobs 2006; Cohen 2011, pp. 463-472; the existence of some sovereigns has been disputed as for example in the case of Straton III, Schmidt-Dounas 1985, pp. 125-130; Messerschmidt 1989, pp. 68-69; Elayi – Elayi 2004, p. 693; recently E.E. Cohen has dated the reign of Straton II to the years between 342 and 333 BCE but has denied the existence of a Straton III, Cohen 2011, p. 471.

86 Frede 2002, tables on pages 43 and 44.

87 Elayi 2006, pp. 18-21; Elayi 2008; Amadasi Guzzo 2012, pp. 5-6.

88 The dynastic configuration and succession were subject of study as early as the nineteenth century, Derenbourg 1887; while the chronology was also recently discussed in Jacobs 2006, p. 144.

89 It is a specimen made of black amphibolite. Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 86-109, 127-143, pls. 43-44; Mendel 1912, pp. 210-216, cat. 78 (Ist nr. 800).

90 M.-L. Buhl dates it to 570-526 at the time of Amasis, Buhl 1959, pp. 32-33, 181-182, cat. nr. C, a3, pl. 2: inscription C, a3; Galling 1963, pp. 141-145; Gubel 1994b, p. 86; S. Grallert has defined it as made of Greywacke and has reported its specific bibliography in Frede 2000, pp. 65-68, cat. I.1.1; on the use of an earlier chronology for the dynasty see Elayi 2006, pp. 15-17.

91 CIS I-1, pp. 9-20, tav. 2; the sarcophagus (this specimen also made of black amphibolite) comes from the tomb 33 of the necropolis north-west of Sidon, as shown on the plan by Charles Gaillardot in Renan 1864, pl. 62: *Tombeau d'Eschmounézer* XXXIII, pl. 64: *coupes* figg. 1-2, 5-6; Louvre (*aile Sully, niveau 0, salle 311*), AO4806 Ph 1, acquired in 1855 as a gift from Honoré Théodorice Paul de Luynes from the owner Aimé Antoine Napoléon Péretié, dated to 500-475 BCE, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010120357>, accessed on March 24, 2022.

92 In the sixties, an archaeological investigation of this necropolis on the hillside of Sidon, already briefly explored in the nineteenth century, led to the discovery of other anthropoid sarcophagi dated to the 5th-4th cent. BCE and luxury objects and ornaments that testify the princely status of its occupants, Ghadban 1998, pp. 145, 147.

93 M.-L. Buhl has roughly defined it as made of basalt and has dated it around 525 BCE, Buhl 1959, pp. 34, 181-182, cat. nr. C, a5; Galling 1963; Gubel 1994b, p. 86; S. Grallert has defined it as made of Greywacke and has reported its specific bibliography in Frede 2000, pp. 72-74, cat. I.2.1; on the building activities of this sovereign see Zamora 2016, pp. 254-255.

94 Amadasi Guzzo 2018, p. 17.

95 The specimen (this specimen also made of black amphibolite) was found hidden under the surface on which the 'Sarcophagus of the Mourning Women' rested, Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 127-143, pls. 41: I, 42: 17; Mendel 1912, pp. 216-218, cat. 79 (Ist nr. 793).

tion has been attributed by S. Frede to queen 'Amm'aštar,⁹⁶ wife (and sister) of king Tabnit, and its reuse has been dated to around 500 BCE.⁹⁷ The first Phoenician anthropoid sarcophagi attested in the hypogeum are two specimens of (Parian) marble found in the chamber II (A, II-3; FIG. 6: left; FIG. 11) and in the chamber VII (A, VII-11; FIG. 6: right; FIG. 11)⁹⁸ and on the basis of the chronological succession, the first has been attributed to the sovereign Bod'aštar (510-490/480)⁹⁹ and the second, considered more recent, to his wife.¹⁰⁰

In the series outlined by S. Frede, the adoption of a type of *theca* by a new dynastic branch was hypothesised after a chronological leap of a generation,¹⁰¹ with the black/grey stone specimen found in chamber IV of the hypogeum (A, IV-8; FIG. 11)¹⁰² being attributed to Ba'lišillem I (470/460-450),¹⁰³ whereas the 'Sarcophagus of the Satrap'¹⁰⁴ in Parian marble found in chamber VI (A, VI-16; FIG. 11)¹⁰⁵ has been assigned to the sovereign Ba'ana¹⁰⁶ and attributed to the years 430-400 BCE.¹⁰⁷ Five *thecae* made of white marble found in the same hypogeum, should appear in the diagram proposed by this scholar:¹⁰⁸ however, one example from chamber V (A, V-10; FIG. 11),¹⁰⁹ three from chamber VI (A, VI-13/15; FIG. 11)¹¹⁰ and

96 The hypothesis has been widely accepted by various scholars, although the discovery of a golden diadem in a secondary shaft of the hypogeum B raised some perplexities, Jidejian 1995, p. 244; in opposition to the traditionally shared identification of the gender of the deceased as female, see recently Hermary 2015, p. 206, in particular note 39.

97 M.-L. Buhl generically has defined it as made of basalt and has dated it around 525 BCE, Buhl 1959, pp. 142, 181-182, cat. no. K IV; Galling 1963, pp. 141, 151; S. Grallert has defined it as made of greywacke and has analysed it in Frede 2000, pp. 68-69, cat. I.1.2.

98 Originally the sarcophagus would have been placed in chamber V of the same hypogeum, it would have been moved to the chamber VII only after its more recent construction, Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, p. 346, fig. 94; Assmann 1963, p. 697.

99 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 145-149, 153, pls. 41: II, 42: 3; Mendel 1912, pp. 225-226, cat. 81 (Ist nr. 799), defined as made of Greek insular marble; M.-L. Buhl dates it around 470/460 BCE, Buhl 1959, p. 186, cat. V (b); Buhl 1991, p. 675, fig. 2a; S. Grallert has described it and has reported its specific bibliography in Frede 2000, pp. 69-71, cat. I.1.3; about the activities of the reign of the sovereign see recently Zamora 2007; Xella – Zamora López 2013; Zamora 2016.

100 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 149-153, fig. 7, pls. 41: III, 42: 11; Mendel 1912, pp. 222-224, cat. 80 (Ist nr. 798), generically defined as made of insular marble; M.-L. Buhl dates it to about 470 BCE, Buhl 1959, p. 186, cat. V (a); Buhl 1991, p. 678, fig. 3b; S. Grallert has analysed it and has reported its specific bibliography in Frede 2000, pp. 71-72, cat. I.1.4.

101 No specific burial in the hypogea has been associated with the reign of the ruler Yatonmilk set by the scholar at 490/480-470/460 BCE, Frede 2002, table on page 43.

102 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 31-33, 344, fig. 11; Frede 2000, p. 19; Frede 2002, table on page 44. This sarcophagus, which is no longer preserved, had an inner anthropoid shaping with an upper edge equipped with an internal contour raised by the regularized perimeter -tending towards the hexagonal- destined to fit together with a specular negative recess made on the lower face of the cover plate, Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, p. 181.

103 Otherwise, the dating of the reign of Ba'lišillem I is fixed between 450 and 526 BCE according to more recent studies, Elayi 2006, pp. 15-17; Elayi 2008; Amadasi Guzzo 2012, pp. 5-6.

104 The presence of blue, red and yellow colours can be interpreted as signals of the original polychromy of the sarcophagus, Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 39-40. The architectural style of the sarcophagus is not associated with the Egyptian tradition, unlike the certain connection evident in the concern for the protection of the body and the anthropoid shape of its interior, Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, p. 189.

105 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 43-48, 187-208, pls. 18-22; Mendel 1912, pp. 33-47, cat. 9 (Ist nr. 367); Kleemann 1958.

106 For alternative solutions to dating the reign of the ruler Ba'ana see Dunand 1965, pp. 106-108; Mullen 1974, pp. 25-26, 29; Dunand 1975/76, p. 496.

107 No specific burial in the hypogea has been associated with the reign of the king 'Abd'amon set by the scholar around 450-430 BCE; Frede 2002, table on page 44.

108 The sarcophagi were "dismembered" during the recovery operations and are currently missing.

109 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 38-39, associated with the discovery of a golden *gorgoneion* pendant, fig. 14; the *theca* is defined in the text on page 39 as a white marble specimen but is then cited as a local white limestone sarcophagus on page 182.

110 In this funerary chamber together with the "Sarcophagus of the Satrap" (A, VI-16), three *thecae* of Parian marble were found with strong traces of blue paint visible on the walls: two larger *thecae* (A, VI-13 and A, VI-15) were shaped like a building with *acrotéria* and rich mouldings and were characterised by an anthropoid-shape interior, and a smaller *theca* (A, VI-14) was of the type with a

one from chamber VII (A, VII-12; FIG. 11) have been ignored in this reconstruction. Instead, other decorated architectonic sarcophagi appear in the scholar's sequence, starting with the "Lycian Sarcophagus"¹¹¹ found in chamber IV (A, IV-9; FIG. 11),¹¹² dated to about 400-372 BCE and attributed to Ba'lsillem II. The 'Sarcophagus of the Mourning Women' found in chamber I of the hypogeum (A, I-1; FIG. 11)¹¹³ was attributed to Straton I (372-359), a sovereign known as *philhellenus* for his close contacts with Athens and identified by the scholars as the Sidonian king 'Abd'ašart I.¹¹⁴ The dating of his reign has been much debated: M. Dunand has proposed a dating of 374-358 BCE¹¹⁵ although numismatics scholars have suggested alternative hypotheses of 375/374-361,¹¹⁶ 372-359/358 BCE¹¹⁷ and more recently J. Elayi has proposed a dating of 365-352 BCE.¹¹⁸

Another specimen, a *theca* found in chamber I of the hypogeum (A, I-2; FIG. 11)¹¹⁹ should instead be assigned to a gap in the chronological sequence of the Frede's proposed attributions, between 355 and 333 BCE, in a phase corresponding to the revolt of the satraps, the regional government of the governor Temnes and king Straton II /'Abd'ašart II.¹²⁰ Instead, the last *theca* contemplated in the scholar's scheme is the one made of Pentelic marble, conventionally called the "Sarcophagus of Alexander", found in chamber III (A, III-7; FIG. 11),¹²¹ dated to 332-312 BCE and assigned to king Abdalonymos.¹²² The dating and identification of the recipient of this sarcophagus are the subject of an endless debate; the analysis of monetary issues of the last thirty years of the 4th century BCE¹²³ did not provide the grounds for a definitive solution to the question, and the dating of the deposition in the sarcophagus has been variably fixed at 320,¹²⁴ 312,¹²⁵ or up to about 300 BCE.¹²⁶ The hypothesis of the attribution to Abdalonymos,¹²⁷ shared by many, does not seem to fully resolve the perplexities of scholars who have formulated alternative hypotheses; Waldemar Heckel

regular cuboid interior; only fragments of the *acroteria* were preserved and transported to be kept within the Istanbul museum, Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 39-42, figg. 15-17; Mendel 1912, pp. 208-209, catt. 75-77 (Ist nr. 2104-2106); Frede 2000, pp. 17, 20.

111 The ogival shape of the sarcophagus belongs to a type recurrent in the Anatolian region but which is rarely present in Phoenicia.

112 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 209-237, pls. 12-17; Mendel 1912, pp. 158-171, sarcophagus cat. 63 (Ist nr. 369) and acroteria catt. 64-67 (Ist nr. 2107-2110); Schmidt-Dounas 1985; Langer-Karrenbrock 2000.

113 This monumental sarcophagus was found on a soil floor level under which was hidden the Egyptian sarcophagus A, I-17, 'traditionally' attributed to the queen 'Amm'ašart; Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 238-271, pls. 6-11; Mendel 1912, pp. 48-73, cat. 10 (Ist nr. 368); Fleischer 1983; Will 1985.

114 Barbara Schmidt-Dounas has assigned this sarcophagus to Straton dating his reign to 372-359 BCE, Schmidt-Dounas 1985, pp. 126, 129.

115 Dunand 1973, p. 18; Dunand 1975/76, pp. 496-497, 499.

116 Mullen 1974, p. 28.

117 Betlyon 1976, pp. 24-27.

118 Elayi 2005; Elayi 2006, pp. 19-20, pl. 1.

119 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 29-30, fig. 10.

120 Dunand 1975/76, pp. 498-499.

121 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 54-61, 272-342, pls. 23-37; Mendel 1912, pp. 171-201, cat. 68 (Ist nr. 370) and fragments catt. 69-71, it is generically defined as insular Greek marble; Winter 1912; Schefold – Seidel 1968; von Graeve 1970; Pasinli 2000; Corfù 2014.

122 Frede 2002, table on page 44.

123 Newell 1916; Merker 1964, pp. 19-20; Merker 1970, p. 143.

124 Bol 2000, p. 594.

125 von Graeve 1970, p. 13.

126 Smith 1991, pp. 190-192.

127 For a recent study on the ruler see Stucky 2017.

has identified the deceased as the Persian Mazaeus/Mazaïos, according to a bold theory that would justify the burial of this historically controversial character in Sidon around 327 BCE.¹²⁸ A different dating of the sarcophagus to 350-332 BCE has been supported by N.A. Corfù, who has vaguely assigned it to a local pro-Persian ruler (or to Mazaeus according to W. Heckel's hypothesis);¹²⁹ but this hypothesis seems artificial and not very convincing, and moreover it does not explain the presence of these evanescent figures of 'strangers' within a hypogeum considered as dynastic and familial.

Three other Pentelic marble *thecae* with richly decorated lid and friezes remain excluded from the proposed sequence for the Sidonian royal hypogea;¹³⁰ the specimens, attributed to two female individuals (A, III-4¹³¹ and A, III-5)¹³² and to one male individual (A, III-6),¹³³ were placed in chamber III with the "Sarcophagus of Alexander" (FIG. 11): it has been hypothesised that they were intended for two married couples and that they were produced in the same workshop.¹³⁴

With regard to these chronologically fitting and evocative attributes, it should be emphasised that the gender recognition of the recipients of the sarcophagi remains problematic in most cases of the Ayaa hypogeum; as clearly highlighted by A. Hermary, at the time of the discovery some indications on the gender of the deceased, based only on the analysis of the skulls, are completely unreliable or inconclusive according to contemporary scientific standards,¹³⁵ therefore – despite the prevailing silence on the subject by scholars – only the specimens with inscriptions of the tombs could be considered to be attributed without reasonable doubt.

1.2.3. Fine-Tuning of the Typological Classification

Ultimately, numerous studies have repeatedly attempted to frame the data and classify the sarcophagi which have been found, although it is useful to note that some observations raised by discoveries in regions which are not as central within the research – such as in Cyprus, for example – have recently led to a necessary rearrangement of the acquired knowledge. The general scope of the findings reveals that the anthropoid sarcophagi found on the island (in particular from Amathus and Kition) are the numerically largest group of their type outside Phoenicia proper (FIG. 8: left). Cyprus probably hosted another centre for the production of anthropoid sarcophagi, given the presence on the island of specimens made of local stone.¹³⁶ However, according to new insights, the oldest findings which were initially attributed to the beginning of the 5th century, would not date to before 460/450 BCE.¹³⁷ In addition, the recent discovery of an anthropoid sarcophagus dated to the second half of the 5th century BCE in Kition (inside the urban area in the locality of Sotiros)

128 The personality of Mazaeus is historically complex: at first he was known as the valiant opponent of the Macedonians in the years when he was satrap of Cilicia and Transeufratène, later he would have become a satrap and defender of Mesopotamia, but he would have opened the doors of Babylon by handing over the city to Alexander without resisting; in the vision of the scholar Mazaeus would have become a symbol of the 'unarmed' surrender of the East to the new Macedonian government, Heckel 2006, pp. 389-393.

129 The study of the monument is based on a thorough review of the stylistic analysis, for the conclusions of which see Corfù 2014, pp. 162-165.

130 Frede 2002, table on page 44.

131 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 49-50, fig. 21, pls. 38: 3, 39: 9-11, 40: 4; Mendel 1912, pp. 201-204, cat. 72 (Ist nr. 372), in the description of the sarcophagus, some unjustified breaks were noted in hardly accessible points of the ovule frieze of the decoration which were interpreted as voluntary.

132 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, p. 50, figg. 22-23, pls. 38: 3, 39: 6-8, 40: 5; Mendel 1912, pp. 205-206, cat. 73 (Ist nr. 373).

133 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 51-54, pls. 38: 1-3, 39: 1-5, 40: 6; Mendel 1912, pp. 206-208, cat. 74 (Ist nr. 371).

134 von Graeve 1970, pp. 33-34.

135 Hermary 2015, p. 206.

136 Frede 2002, p. 87.

137 Hermary 2015, p. 209.

has provided new clues for further researches. The quality of preservation of the meticulously painted details on the figure's head (of a type with long hair and wavy locks on the shoulders)¹³⁸ has highlighted that this iconographic type of hairstyle, hitherto considered feminine, had been misidentified, as this specimen bears unequivocal details of a male beard and moustache.¹³⁹ This information has therefore reopened the question of the identification of the recipient of anthropoid sarcophagus A, VII-11 from Ayaa (FIG. 6: right), which in recent studies had also been attributed to the wife of Bod'aštar, questioning the reliability of the proposed (and widely accepted) reconstructive sequence and inviting reasonable caution in considering such precise identifications as definitive.

A further clarification is necessary about the specific production of clay sarcophagi documented in the Arados region (FIG. 8: right). It is widely believed that these specimens are to be traced back to the initial phase of affirmation of this funerary practice in the area: albeit with fluctuating dating, some recent studies (S. Frede and K. Lembke) have placed this production between 510 and 450 BCE,¹⁴⁰ even if the operational activity of this workshop could be more likely attributed to the timespan around 475-450 BC, on the basis of what has already been stated by previous studies.¹⁴¹

1.3. *The Thecae*

Nevertheless, the schematised sequence of the sarcophagi found in the royal hypogea clearly reveals, that the phenomenon of the adoption of *theca*-type sarcophagi by the local dynasty and the progressive spread of the use of anthropoid sarcophagi in the local necropolises were contemporary phenomena; therefore, it seems useful to include the *thecae* in the overall considerations. *ricetta*,

The practice of defining a cuboid sarcophagus as a *theca*, employing an old-fashioned terminology inspired by Ancient Greek, dates back once again to Ernest Renan. He explicitly uses it to describe the type of sarcophagus found in the hypogea of the Lebanese region, referring to *thecae* in white marble (of a non-local origin) with a hollow cuboid interior and a very low sloping lid, with a slightly sloping shape of the roof.¹⁴² The scholar also highlights the monumental effect of some specimens¹⁴³ as in the case of a *theca* coming from Sidon and currently kept in the Louvre (FIG. 9: top).¹⁴⁴

The chronological and geographical proximity of the various types of aforementioned sarcophagi was evident in the analysis of the great hypogeum A of Ayaa (FIG. 11); this mixed presence had been precociously commented upon at the time of the discovery, underlining how the increasing contact of the local dynasts with the Egyptians at the time of the 26th Pharaonic dynasty could have determined the concern for the conservation of the body of the dead and the use of geometric -cuboid- containers made of local material as a funerary

138 Georgiou 2009, pp. 118-123, figg. 3-7. The original presence of polychromy on the sarcophagi was already known and had also been reported for the terracotta specimens from Arados, Frede 2002, pp. 77-78, 81.

139 As clearly pointed out in Hermary 2015, fig. 6. In clear contrast with what is claimed and outlined in the more recent general classification of sarcophagi made by Simone Frede see Frede 2000; Frede 2002. Recently, this "case" has allowed S. Rebecca Martin to effectively address the issue of the gender of the depiction in relation to the gender of the deceased (and the issue of the scholarly attribution of the use of an artefact to a specific gender); Martin 2021, pp. 37-40.

140 Frede 2000, pp. 107-111; Lembke 2001, p. 117. The variable iconography of the individual specimens does not, however, prevent the small group of artefacts from being ascribed to the activity of a single workshop within the span of a generation.

141 Renan 1878; Elayi – Haykal 1996, pp. 110-111.

142 Renan 1864, pp. 423, 427, 448-449.

143 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, p. 180.

144 Renan 1864, p. 427 with drawing; acquired in 1862 by the Louvre (*aile Sully, niveau 0, salle 311*), AO4808 Ph 14, the sarcophagus comes from the south-east necropolis of Sidon, plan by Charles Gaillardot in Renan 1864, pl. 62: *caveau XI, chambre 1*, dated to 450-350 BCE, <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010120374>, accessed on March 22, 2022; identifiable with the drawing by J.-Ch. Geslin (1814-1885) Département des Arts Graphiques: RF32076, *Recto*, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020039842>, accessed on March 22, 2022.

practice.¹⁴⁵ With regard to the *thecae*, the unusual variability of the interior of the container characterised by an anthropomorphic, geometric or regular cuboid shape, the presence or absence of *acroteria* and the different height of the sloping roof of the various documented specimens. Some specific details have been reported concerning a particular large dark stone *theca* found in Ayaa (A, IV-8), namely its different material, its monumental size, its considerable weight, the thickness of the walls, the anthropomorphic shape of the interior¹⁴⁶ and the archaic interlocking device on the lid.¹⁴⁷ The same characteristics were also found on the two Egyptian sarcophagi from the same funerary complex (specimens B and A, I-17; FIG. 5: above and below).¹⁴⁸

It would be almost superfluous to emphasise that the nearly regular geometric shape of the cuboid sarcophagi precedes the spread of anthropoid sarcophagi in Egypt and relates to a tradition dating back to the Bronze Age, from which the examples of Byblos also originated. At the end of the 6th century BCE in Sidon the sarcophagi selected and adopted in royal funerary practices were, as we have already seen, the anthropoid specimens of the type which were prevalent in Egypt at the time. However, in the course of the 5th century BCE, the local production of anthropoid-type specimens stimulated by dynastic customs was subsequently supplanted by the creation of *theca*-type specimens. Few scholars have been interested in this production of sarcophagi,¹⁴⁹ ascribing their possible origin to Cypriot models from the 7th-6th century,¹⁵⁰ although, according to recent studies (as already mentioned above), the dating of this type of production on the island has been more realistically attributed to the mid-5th century BCE.¹⁵¹ In support of the existence of a widespread funerary custom of the use of *thecae* in the Phoenician area, it is also appropriate to recall two other significant finds dating back to the Achaemenid period: firstly a *theca*-type limestone sarcophagus found in the necropolis of Sheikh Zenad (FIG. 10), a site on the coast north of Tripoli near the Syrian-Lebanese border.¹⁵² One Greek marble sarcophagus from Byblos is inscribed with a dedication to Batno'am, mother of the king 'Ozba'al, whose reign has been fixed around 350 BCE on a numismatic basis (FIG. 9: below).¹⁵³ This *theca* was discovered on the site at the surface archaeological level,¹⁵⁴ but thanks to its inscription it was

145 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, p. 179.

146 As already mentioned, this singular appearance of the sarcophagus interior is also a distinctive feature in the "Sarcophagus of the Satrap" (A, VI-16) and seems to indicate an oriental owner aware of elements of Egyptian funerary ideology.

147 The shape of the edges of the lid and of the container recalls the particular closure system of the sarcophagi in Byblos.

148 The amphibolite sarcophagi produced in Egypt have similar characteristics, particularly in the regular and rounded shape of the interior and in the closing system with interlocking edge, Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 180-181, tavv. 41: I; 43: 3. The text clearly expressed a regret for having abandoned the six *thecae* of white marble found in the hypogeum of Ayaa (A, I-2; A, V-10; A, VII-12; A, VI-13 / 15) and the heavy dark stone *theca* (A, IV-8); no further details are present in the rich academic bibliography which follows.

149 Elayi 1988, pp. 297-299.

150 Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 184-185; G. Georgiou has suggested a dating of the 7th-6th cent. BCE for a local type of *theca* that rests on large cubic feet, which can be interpreted 'functionally' as supports to avoid direct contact with the humidity of the hypogea, caused by the porosity of the rock, as well as 'artistically', as they are modelled to imitate a banquet *klimè*, Georgiou 2009, pp. 115-116, fig. 2.

151 Hermary 2015, p. 209.

152 The sarcophagus lid is equipped with a recessed system, in order to adhere better to the closure of the container; on the short side it is decorated in relief with the representation of a leaning crescent moon superimposed on a globe; on the upper face it features two protruding ashlar sockets, above one of which a cup for offerings has been created. Such a distinctive detail would presuppose a context of a hypogeum suited for ritual purposes, although the documented sepulchre does not allow for it, Brossé – de la Bassetière – Pottier 1926, pp. 193-197, tavv. 38-39. The Sheikh Zenad site and its area have been subject of a research programme that has provided data on its chronological development in Bartl 2007/08.

153 G.F. Hill determines the reign of king 'Ozba'al in the timespan between the revolt of the satraps and the reign of Ainel/Enylos, the local ruler deposed by Alexander the Great, the silver coin series issued under his rule has been specifically dated to 350 BCE, Hill 1910, pp. lxvi-lxviii, 95, pl. XI: 12-15.

154 Dunand 1937, tavv. 28: 5; 33 (inscription); 151: 1142 (*alabastron*); Dunand 1939, pp. 30-31, n. 1142; KAI 11; Jidejian 2004, pp. 180-181; Sader 2015, p. 68, fig. 4; Sader 2019, pp. 216-217, fig. 5.21.

possible to trace its provenance from a royal burial (not identified during the works) and date it to the first half of the 4th century BCE;¹⁵⁵ currently it represents the only preserved example of a *theca* surely destined for a member of a local Phoenician dynasty.

As underlined before, in the case of the anthropoid sarcophagi, also for the *techae* the presumed Parian origin of the marble, and the presence of some *techa* and anthropoid sarcophagi in the area of the Greek islands (at Samos and Paros)¹⁵⁶ evoked in order to sustain the hypothesis of the plausible location of a workshop in Paros; the “Hellenocentric” approach to the subject led to the inclusion of the sarcophagi with figurative reliefs from Phoenicia also in studies dedicated to “Greek” sarcophagi attributed to the archaic and classical period,¹⁵⁷ in spite of the complete absence of analogous similar and contemporary documents from Greek centres.

1.4. *The Depositions*

A long series of studies has prioritised a technical, stylistic, and morphological analysis of the production of Phoenician anthropoid sarcophagi but has almost always neglected the investigation of funerary practices and of the method of deposition indicated by these containers. As already mentioned, the choice of a burial lying on the back departs from the prevailing practices in this cultural area, which feature depositions of the body on the side or the alternative practice of cremation.¹⁵⁸ The scarcity of textual sources relating to Phoenician funerary practices in the Iron Age juxtaposed by complex and detailed archaeological documentation, even if a type of royal tomb with an underground chamber dug in the rocky subsoil (known in various districts of the territory) has been restricted chronologically to the Achaemenid period.¹⁵⁹ Some scholars have stressed the contribution of strong cultural factors, evident in the Egyptian tradition influencing the religious sphere.¹⁶⁰ The investigations and archaeological studies cited so far have clarified this general picture, indicating that the presence of burials in dorsal *decubitus* inside sarcophagi in the Sidonian area at the end of the 6th century BCE corresponds to the on-going introduction of a foreign (Egyptian) funerary custom, which is limited to the local dynastic class.

However, burial in monumental stone sarcophagi according to Egyptian custom, is by no means unrelated to practices documented in the region, as observed in the case of Ahiiram of Byblos, ascribable to the 10th century, and is part of a local tradition dating back to the Middle Bronze Age, which seems to continue up to the Late Bronze Age. The documentation seems to confirm that this peculiarity originated from a funeral custom which was exclusively reserved for the dynasts of Byblos. This was due to the specifically strong link of the local government with the ideology of pharaonic power and the profound religious/political value ascribed to the perpetuity of the physical presence of the sovereign, evident in the interest in preserving the remains of the deceased. As already stressed, the origin of the use of the sarcophagus in Egyptian culture was precisely linked to the issue of a long-lasting preservation of its bodily integrity.¹⁶¹

155 Salles 1994, pp. 58, 61.

156 Boehlau 1898; Schilardi 1973; Schilardi 1986; Hitzl 1991; Frede 2000; even if an in-depth study of the data from the Greek islands and the Anatolian coast should be studied elsewhere.

157 I. Hitzl in her analysis also examines the specimens from Byblos including the Ahiiram sarcophagus; Hitzl 1991, pp. 19-23, 73-79, 146-148, 156-159.

158 Salles 1994; Jidejian 1995; Jidejian 2004; Sader 2015; Sader 2019.

159 Sader 2019, pp. 219-221.

160 Sader 2015, p. 63. In her study H.M. Dixon otherwise has suggested the possibility to interpret the use of an Egyptian-style sarcophagus «as an appropriately luxurious housing for the body of a king»; Dixon 2013, p. 158.

161 «To combat disintegration due to natural causes the Egyptians, at least as early as the Second Dynasty, developed the process of mummification, at first merely the application of preservative salts, later a complicated taxidermic operation. To protect the body from damage wrought by evil spirits, by the malevolent forces of nature, and by the ever-prevalent tomb robber, it was ringed about with magical spells, encased in sturdy coffins and stone sarcophagi, and buried deep beneath massive tomb monument, the passage of which were closed by ponderous stone blockings, or hidden away in a secret cache deep in the western cliffs»: Hayes 1990a, p. 79.

In the analysed documentation there are other signs leading directly to specific aspects which may be linked to Egyptian funerary practice, namely the presence of sycamore wood boards inside the sarcophagi on which the remains of the deceased were probably stretched out and fixed with metal split pins;¹⁶² the presence of wood as well as these metal elements has been reported in the sarcophagi of Magharat ‘Abloun.¹⁶³ Similar findings are attested in the anthropoid sarcophagi in the necropolis of Ayaa and in the area of Tartous, and have been connected with the Egyptian practice of placing the sarcophagus in a vertical position during the mummification procedure¹⁶⁴ and the need to stabilise the remains contained therein.¹⁶⁵ The thorny issue of mummification in the Phoenician area has often been avoided or simply touched upon by scholars,¹⁶⁶ although there is knowledge of an epigraphic quote on an Achaemenid sarcophagus that mentions the use of aromatic gum-resins for this purpose.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, recurring clues pointing to a presumed preservative treatment of the bodies of the deceased, including the extraordinary conservation of the body of the king Tabnit in Sidon¹⁶⁸ and the presence of plant fibre bandages in the necropolis of Ayaa, have provided plausible documentary support to the thesis of a Phoenician practice of the embalming of the body of the dead, and in particular of that of sovereigns.¹⁶⁹

1.5. *Final Considerations*

Studies on Phoenician anthropoid sarcophagi have clarified how their use was adopted under the cultural influence of the Egyptian funerary tradition introduced in the Near East at the behest of a group of powerful and wealthy recipients.

162 The use of mats or a funeral bed to arrange the remains of the dead is documented in the eastern Syrian and Mesopotamian area, but there is no evidence of any use of specific body bandages. In this regard see Felli 2015, pp. 114-115.

163 Traces of wood and nails with a (split pin) ring were found inside a *theca* sarcophagus placed in pit 6 of the Hypogeum IX, excavated at the edge of the rocky ridge in the south-east area of the necropolis of Sidon, in Renan 1864, p. 449, plan in pl. 62: *caveau IX: fosse 6*.

164 During the long Egyptian process of bandaging the mummy it was fastened to a wooden board (generally of sycamore wood) with the outermost bandages, which facilitated transport and allowed the sarcophagus to be placed vertically upright (with the mummy inside) during the mouth opening ceremony, Leca 1976, p. 89; Elayi – Haykal 1996, p. 78. The presence of a gold plate on the mouth of the deceased, which is recurrent in the Egyptian practice, is also mentioned in the Batno’am inscription, Sader 2015, p. 60, fig. 4.

165 Similar findings are reported in Sidon in Egyptian sarcophagus B destined for Tabnit, in Frede 2000, cat. I.1.1; and in the unfinished sarcophagus A, 1-17 attributed to ‘Amm’āstart, in Frede 2000, cat. I.1.3. In Tartous, remains of a sycamore plank are documented in various anthropoid sarcophagi, in Frede 2000, cat. II.15 (associated with three bronze split pins); Frede 2000, cat. II.17; Schäfer 2002, pp. 159-160, tavv. 48: c-d, 49: a-b. The use of a wooden board to fix the body is reported not only for anthropoid sarcophagi but also for the architectural ones; traces of fabrics with the application of gold are mentioned in reference to the “Sarcophagus of the Satrap” and the “Sarcophagus of Alexander”, in Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, pp. 43-46, 61; and are interpreted as a hinting to and supporting the hypothesis of mummification in Schäfer 2002, p. 175.

166 In her analysis of the “Phoenician Mortuary Practice” H.M. Dixon addresses this topic and states that a conservation treatment of the deceased was introduced in the Achaemenid phase, even if the scholar tends more correctly to differentiate this process from the true Egyptian mummification of the body; Dixon 2013, pp. 547-553.

167 The probable mummification of the deceased has been proposed in three cases in the royal necropolis of Sidon, Sader 2015, p. 62; for the text from Byblos, which mentions products for embalming see Starcky 1969; Cross 1979; Sader 2015, p. 60; Sader 2019, pp. 216, 222.

168 At the time of discovery, the king’s body was still immersed in a liquid that had kept it intact. A similar case has been documented for a marble *theca* sarcophagus with an anthropoid interior found in Dahr el ‘Aouq, on the hills north-west of Sidon. The discovery of the body of a girl fixed on a wooden board and immersed in a preservative liquid has been reported in Macridy 1904, pp. 556-560.

169 Traces of fabrics are cited in the case of Egyptian anthropoid sarcophagus A, I-17 (traditionally attributed to ‘Amm’āstart), interpreted as being intended for bandaging the body in Hamdy Bey – Reinach 1892, p. 83; the anthropological analysis clearly highlighted a treatment aimed at preserving Tabnit’s body in Chantre 1892, pp. 402-405, fig. 97; Jidejian 1995, p. 244, figures on p. 245; S. Grallert describes the specimen in Frede 2000, pp. 65-68; Müller 2002, p. 185.

A precise origin of this phenomenon has been recognised in the documented presence of Egyptian anthropoid sarcophagi in Sidon which were reused in the tombs by local rulers in the last quarter of the 6th century BCE. This specific occasion can be interpreted as the adoption by the ruling dynasty of the model of the deposition in dorsal *decubitus* within sarcophagi, which subsequently spread throughout the region in the aristocratic and merchant classes, probably for reasons of prestige or distinction, lasting for about two centuries and ending in the last quarter of the 4th century BCE.

In the present discussion we have tried to reiterate how the phenomenon of emulation of pharaonic funerary ideology is not found only in the late period in Sidon, but overlapped with pre-existing ideological elements and aligned with the local tradition of Byblos rulers continuously throughout the Iron Age.¹⁷⁰ During the Achaemenid period in Sidon, the illustrious example provided by local rulers resulted in the start of the production of anthropoid sarcophagi by local *ateliers* and over time it was accompanied by the creation of characteristic *theca* specimens.

Due to lack of archaeological evidence, the location of these workshops is an open problem: the material used to carve most of the sarcophagi, Greek insular marble, unequivocally leads back to Paros and to the possible role of foreigners residents¹⁷¹ as intermediaries for this production; on the other hand, the use of different materials among which materials, like terracotta or locally available stones, represents a clue to locate a workshop activity in the Arados area (and in Cyprus); moreover, the large number of sarcophagi found in and around Sidon allows us to realistically presume the presence of an *atelier*, characterized but the marble's quality, in this specific area.

The beginning of the production of the anthropoid sarcophagi of the series discussed above follows the requests of the reigning dynasty of Sidon, and the idea probably starting from a commission entrusted to a workshop (of sculptors probably from Paros, or who have a link with this island) who “translated” this idea into the marble: the monumental character, the decoration, the diffusion and the “non-canonical” style of the specimens compared with the Greek artistic context show that this production should be considered an artistic class peculiar to the Phoenician culture.

The anthropoid sarcophagi (but also the cuboid ones with an anthropoid interior) were surely made by artisans specialized in working marble, but their conception and conformation lead back to Egyptian artistic forms; the rich Phoenician clients must have had full responsibility in the selection and approval of these “prestigious” products, intended for use within their family tombs inside partially accessible hypogea.¹⁷²

This Near Eastern phenomenon of emulation also seems to fully share the feature of care for the integrity of the body with Egyptian ideology, so much that, according to a plausible hypothesis, it manifested in the embalming/mummification of the dead (see previous § 1.4), even if the different conservation technique, compared to the pharaonic practice (for the exclusive use of substances without recourse to alteration of the body of the deceased through the removal of inner parts), crossed with the epigraphic evidences, seem to prove once again an innovative emulation of an “exogenous” practice.

In conclusion, this extensive examination of the documentation has highlighted different modes and dynamics that testify close intercultural relations between the eastern area and Egypt over the millennia from the Middle Bronze to the Achaemenid period through differentiated historical phenomena. From the as-

170 The hypogea have documented cultural links and direct contacts with Pharaonic Egypt that date back to the Middle and Late Bronze Age; at the beginning of the Iron Age, the local king Ahiram shared this funerary practice, but, at the end of the period, in the first half of the 4th century, Batno'am, mother of the king 'Ozba'al, was also laid in a marble *theca* sarcophagus (perhaps with a gold plate on the mouth, a specific detail that seems to testify a vivid local reminiscence of the Egyptian funerary ritual).

171 Hitzl 1991, p. 147.

172 The topic of the visit or access to the necropolises has been rarely investigated by the researchers: the relationship between the choice of the elite to build hidden family tombs, generally underground, in peripheral areas of the territory and the need to flaunt a large availability of economic resources should perhaps be carefully explored in further research.

assessment of the presence of anthropoid sarcophagi in the Levant region, a phenomenon of emulation of the funerary tradition focused on preserving the bodily integrity of the deceased clearly emerged, in agreement with the opinions emerging from the studies on the Phoenician funerary practice.¹⁷³

In the Phoenician area of Sidon, a specific episode of appropriation/importation of Egyptian anthropoid sarcophagi at the end of the 6th century BCE led to the start of a new widespread dynamic of adoption of this funerary practice, testifying an emulative relationship according to the mode of “formal and aesthetic translation” through a local taste that strongly evokes Hellenic art (making a modern critical elaboration of the dynamics of the phenomenon complex).

Furthermore, the distribution of the sarcophagi in the various centres of Phoenicia is very interesting: apart from Arados and Sidon, the small number of finds from the regions of Byblos, Beirut and Tyre is truly significant;¹⁷⁴ this phenomenon seems to be culturally associated with the two areas in which the finds are concentrated. However, the use of anthropoid and *thecae* sarcophagi spreads during the 5th and the final decades of the 4th century.

The scientific debate has questioned the factors that have determined the sudden arrest of this artistic production in the years following the dating of the spectacular Alexander sarcophagus (assigned to the first part of the last quarter of the 4th century BCE, see § above), without finding a shared solution: the decline in the attestations was often vaguely attributed to a change in artistic taste, determined by this “transition” historical period.

In this analysis of the phenomenon, we have tried to keep an interpretative point of view with a methodological approach not exclusively bound to the stylistic factor which, as we have seen, has often been used as the basis of studies aimed at defining a chronological typology, but which also led to further (perhaps misleading) interpretative problems regarding the commissioning of the artefacts and the identity of the craftsmen.

Following a personal line of thought regarding this artistic production, focused on the factor of imitation of the dynastic example (and therefore placing the emphasis on the particular interests of the Phoenician patrons), we believe that, together with the advent of the Macedonians, an element to be taken into serious consideration is the interruption of the local dynastic lines in the coastal centres (which substantially represented the only areas of partial -but vital- autonomy allowed by the Achaemenid empire to subsist on the borders of its boundless extension).

In Phoenicia, at the end of the 4th century, after the Achaemenid phase which was based on a dynamic structure of apparent competitive balance between the various centres where local prestige played a great role inside the great Empire, with a clear caesura, a long phase opens up characterized by military clashes among the *diadochi*¹⁷⁵ in order to define a new arrangement of the entire eastern area: the period between the battles of Gaza in 312 BCE and of Ipsos in 301 BCE a long succession of conflicts between the Phoenician coast and the Greek islands, for the control of Cyprus and Rhodes.

The state of continuous military tension during this phase must have generated an imbalance in the commercial activities of the coastal cities, traditionally based on trade interchange, and it seems quite reasonable to assume that in this situation of political uncertainty the very basis of the prestige that constituted the fundamental factor for that dynamic imitation of funerary customs had failed; the local dynasties had indeed lost power but also, and above all, attractiveness.

173 For details see Dixon 2013, pp. 198-202.

174 For the sarcophagi whose provenance can be traced back to these centres see Frede 2000.

175 This timespan corresponds to years of bitter strife between Antigonus I Monophthalmus and his son Demetrius I Poliorcetes, against Ptolemy I Soter, Seleucus I Nicator, Lysimachus and Cassander.

Ultimately, our analysis of the scientific documentation has highlighted different historical modes and dynamics that testify the continuous presence in the social upper classes (holding authority and wealth) of a strong cultural and ideological attraction (and openness) towards Egyptian culture in the Levant, traceable over a very long period of time.

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