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Journal of Roman Archaeology 37 (2024), 395–405
doi:10.1017/S1047759424000175

Where Have All the Myths Gone? Demythologization on Roman Sarcophagi

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ALLEN, M. 2022. *The Death of Myth on Roman Sarcophagi: Allegory and Visual Narrative in the Late Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 278 pages, ISBN 978-1-316-51091-9.

Mythological sarcophagi are doubtlessly among the most appealing and most studied artefacts of Roman funerary culture. They are also at the center of Mont Allen's new book, but instead of studying their iconography or topology, he focuses on the end of myth on Roman sarcophagi in the mid-3rd c. CE. He re-evaluates the concept of *Entmythologisierung* – translated as "demythologization" – first introduced into sarcophagus studies by Friedrich Gerke in his 1940 monograph on Early Christian sarcophagi of

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the pre-Constantinian period.[1] Allen (A.) describes the phenomenon as "the abandonment, roughly midway through the third century, of mythological images in favor of purely 'mythless' scenes" (20) or "the extinction of mythological imagery on Roman sarcophagi" (22). He approaches the topic by reviewing and meticulously "debunking" hypotheses from previous research on the disappearance of myth on Roman sarcophagi. This is what most of the book is dedicated to (1–166), while he presents his own views on the subject only in the two penultimate chapters (167–214). A coda discusses the successors of pagan myth on Christian sarcophagi (215–41). A. confines his considerations largely to frieze sarcophagi manufactured in the city of Rome.

In an extensive introduction (1–49), A. sets the scene by sketching out the phenomenon on the basis of several sarcophagi. He then reviews the current state of research and gives a short overview of the production of pagan sarcophagi in Rome from the beginning of the *Hauptproduktion* around 120 CE to the end of "mainstream pagan production" (40) in the 4th c. CE.

In the following five chapters, A. discusses different hypotheses from previous research concerning the reasons for demythologization on sarcophagi, all of which he refutes as unconvincing. In chapter 1 ("Myth a casualty of Christianity"), A. first attacks the assumption, brought forward by Gerhardt Rodenwaldt in 1921 and 1943,[2] that sarcophagi with "religiously neutral iconography" (30) became popular with the rise of Christianity, because they could be used by pagans and Christians alike. Christians presumably bought these "neutral" coffins in such significant numbers that they permanently altered the repertoire of sarcophagi produced in the metropolitan workshops. Among other valid arguments against this hypothesis, A. reconstructs that only about 35,000–40,000 individuals in the city of Rome, a mere 4 percent of the population, identified as Christian around the mid-3rd c. CE. The majority of these early Christians will not have had the financial means to afford a marble sarcophagus with relief decoration for their burial (65–67). In addition, A. raises the sensible question of why Christians should have chosen "neutral" instead of Christianized decorations, when by 270/290 CE, workshops already produced sarcophagi with Christian scenes such as the story of Jonah. A. refutes the possibility of deliberate neutrality in order not to be recognized as Christian and so to avoid persecution, since sarcophagi were hidden away inside tombs, as he presumes (71–72). The rise in mythless sarcophagi must therefore rely on a shift in pagan, not Christian demand.

In chapter 2 ("Bucolic sarcophagi and elite retreat"), A. discusses bucolic images, which became the single most popular sarcophagus iconography in the 3rd-c. CE.[3] He tackles a more recent argument by Henning Wrede, who, in his book on senatorial sarcophagi, argued that some senators, after they were excluded from most public offices under the Tetrarchy, retreated to their country estates and glorified this alternative lifestyle on their coffins.[4] A. reasonably criticizes Wrede for only discussing senatorial burials, as bucolic sarcophagi were obviously not an exclusively senatorial phenomenon (note one of the most prominent examples of this genre, the sarcophagus of the equestrian procurator of the Ludus Magnus in Rome, Iulius Achilleus, now in Rome's Museo Nazionale Romano

[1] Gerke 1940.

[2] Rodenwaldt 1921–22; Rodenwaldt 1943.

[3] A topic also discussed in an article by the same author: Allen 2018.

[4] Wrede 2001.

[13–14, fig. 5, 80]) (78–81). The question of whether senatorial sarcophagi perhaps served as models for members of other social classes who wanted to partake in the aristocratic ideal of *otium* and villa life, is not considered by A., though. Instead, he appropriately observes that bucolic images on sarcophagi were not realistic depictions of 3rd-c. CE country estates, since most of them feature neither plantations nor herds of cattle as attested for Italian landscapes (82–89). The picture of Roman *villae* evoked on these bucolic sarcophagi was clearly an ideal that heavily relied on Greek literary and iconographic models (94–96). This phenomenon is not limited to bucolic sarcophagi, though, because all "real life" sarcophagus imagery is idealized, as A. himself points out later, nor does it contradict Wrede's hypothesis.

Next, in chapter 3, "Refuge from the third-century crisis," A. scrutinizes the hypothesis that bucolic, seasonal, and philosophical themes became popular on sarcophagi because they offered a refuge from the crisis of the 3rd c. CE. His starting point is arguments brought forward by Paul Zanker and Björn Christian Ewald especially in regard to sarcophagi depicting philosophers.[5] Building on examples from the Hellenistic period up to the 1920s, A. demonstrates that different kinds of artistic expression, both tranquil and violent images, have been used to explain diametrically opposed phenomena, concluding that there doesn't seem to be a predictable correlation between the political situation of a period and its imagery (99–101). He goes on to argue that according to the high number of sarcophagi produced in the 3rd c. CE, the crisis does not seem to have had any significant economic effect on the upper classes, the customers of the sarcophagus workshops. Significantly, A. points out that it was obviously not the wish for tranquil images that was crucial to the choice of motifs on sarcophagi in the 3rd c. CE because it would have been easily possible to develop mythological images focusing on pastoral and idyllic episodes, but instead the customers of sarcophagus workshops opted for an omission of myth altogether (104–7).

In chapter 4, "Culture, status, and rising populism," A. considers the possible influence that a rising popular sentiment in the 3rd c. CE, presumably favoring iconographies from real life, could have had on the decline of mythological imagery on sarcophagi. This idea of popular art, a so-called "Volkskunst," has previously been discussed by Gerke and Rodenwaldt.[6] A. includes more recent arguments that bucolic sarcophagi were mostly popular among people with less classical education, and that classical education and thus mythological imagery were generally in decline in the 3rd c. CE.[7] However, philosophers and portrait figures with scrolls are often combined with bucolic figures on strigillated coffins, as A. argues, even though these somewhat simpler sarcophagi might be associated with patrons who were less well-off economically (120–21). As Stine Birk – whom A. does not cite in this context – has most convincingly demonstrated, displaying one's education was among the main concerns of sarcophagus portraits in the 3rd c. CE.[8] But most importantly, A. points out that mythological images lost their popularity only on sarcophagi, not in other media. In the domestic sphere – in wall paintings and mosaics,[9]

5 Ewald 1999; Zanker and Ewald 2004.

6 Gerke 1940; Rodenwaldt 1921–22; Rodenwaldt 1940.

7 Zanker and Ewald 2004; Zanker 2005; Raeck 1992.

8 Birk 2013, 73–94.

9 Cf. Muth 2001.

table ware, or textiles – mythological motifs continued to flourish (122–25). One only has to recall prominent examples, such as the large wall painting, interpreted as either the return of Proserpina from the Underworld or Venus Marina, in the nymphaeum of the Domus under Ss. Giovanni e Paulo in Rome (second half of the 3rd c. CE), Late Antique silver vessels like the Achilles Plate from Augusta Raurica (mid-4th c. CE), or Late Antique Egyptian textiles such as the famous Dionysian wall hanging in Riggisberg (first half of the 4th c. CE) or "Sabina's shawl" in the Louvre, featuring Apollo and Daphne, Diana, Bellerophon slaying the Chimera, and other Classical mythological figures (340–440 CE),[10] to realize that demythologization was a phenomenon specifically restricted to the funerary realm. This even applies to the provinces, as A. discusses using the example of Pannonia. In the north-western provinces of Noricum and Pannonia, mythological images were especially popular on sarcophagi and other funerary monuments, which often displayed a special interest in gruesome myths, less favored in Rome, such as Marsyas being skinned by Apollo or Hektor's body being dragged by Achilles.[11] It is especially noteworthy that A. tackles this regional phenomenon, albeit briefly, since it has not been studied in synthesis so far and deserves much more attention than A. can devote to it in this context. A. notes an analogous – though slightly delayed – development from mythological images to more neutral decoration with generic figures on Pannonian sarcophagi in the late 3rd c. CE, while mythological images continue in the houses (125–29).

Finally, A. turns to the hypothesis that an increasing interest in displaying social status and prestige led to new, more performative and ephemeral forms of representation in the 3rd c. CE.[12] Since myths were too ambiguous, this desire for representation resulted in a preference for real-life scenes. A. refutes this line of argument on two grounds. First, he points out that other types of sarcophagus iconography, which became increasingly popular in the 3rd c. CE, such as the seasons, bucolic images, or philosophers, were even less suitable for displaying prestige and power (137–38) – a convincing argument, although I would exclude the images of philosophers from the equation, as time for study and a higher education was only available to a chosen few and thus a marker for social status in itself.[13] Second, A. argues that sarcophagi were not visible to a greater public but tucked away inside tombs and thus generally not suitable for a prestigious display. Otherwise, A. proposes that one must expect "a more expanded viewership inside the tombs than normally assumed" (135). However, it seems difficult to imagine a greater number of visitors entering the tomb and contemplating the sarcophagus decoration in the 3rd c. CE. In this period, burial chambers of family tombs were often cramped and made an untidy impression after they had filled up over decades, sarcophagi standing one in front of the other,

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[10] Domus under Ss. Giovanni e Paolo: Englen et al. 2004, 16–17. Wall hanging Riggisberg: Willers and Niekamp 2015. "Sabina's shawl": "Châle de Sabine," https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010048723 (accessed 22 December 2023). On mythological images on Late Antique silver, see Leader-Newby 2004, 123–71, on the Achilles-Plate, especially 125–30.

[11] Achilles and Hektor: Pilipović 2006; Nagy 2012, 102–4 no. 107–8; "1068 Schleifung Hektors," F. and O. Harl, *Ubi Erat Lupa*, http://lupa.at/1068 (accessed 22 December 2023). Marsyas: "824 Sarkophag mit mythologischen Reliefs," F. and O. Harl, *Ubi Erat Lupa*, http://lupa.at/824 (accessed 22 December 2023). For a general overview on mythological images on funerary monuments in Noricum, see Walde 2005, 96–157. For Pannonian sarcophagi, see the various contributions by Erwin Pochmarski, for example, Pochmarski 2014 (with further literature).

[12] Zanker and Ewald 2004; Borg 2007.

[13] Compare Birk 2013, 76.

their reliefs and inscriptions not fully visible. Sarcophagi decorated with reliefs could also be buried underneath the floor or concealed behind walls or in masonry boxes inside the burial chambers, so that they were not visible to visitors, and this practice seems to become more popular over the course of the 3rd c. CE.[14] In addition, there are almost no installations for any kind of funerary cult directly at the sarcophagi inside the tombs. In tombs for cremation burials from the 1st c. CE, installations for funerary meals were integrated into the burial chambers directly next to the urns, as in some columbaria in Ostia, and lids of terracotta *ollae* could easily be removed for libations. Tombs with sarcophagi, however, lack this immediate proximity of funerary rites at the burials.[15] Based on this evidence, I have proposed elsewhere, in my research concerning the set-up of sarcophagi in the city of Rome and its environs, that sarcophagi were perhaps mostly appreciated at a different moment in the funerary ritual, perhaps during the procession transporting them to the tomb, or during the burial itself. This consideration, of course, leads to further questions: When sarcophagi were placed in niches or buried in the ground, how must we envisage the actual handling of these heavy stone containers, which probably required some kinds of appliances or ephemeral installations? We must assume that many stone sarcophagi already stood inside the tomb at the time of the actual burial. Sarcophagi inscribed *vivus/a fecit*, acquired during the lifetime of their owners, hint at this procedure. Was the corpse then placed into the sarcophagus that was already standing at its intended place in the burial chamber during the funeral? Although no stone coffins have been found in domestic contexts, it might also be worth considering whether they (or models/drawings of them) might have been displayed during the lying-in-state of the deceased in a semi-public space in the house.[16] Independently of a possible larger audience for the sarcophagus reliefs, the fact that one could afford a tomb and a marble coffin to go inside was already display of prestige and status enough, no matter how the casket itself was decorated.

In the last chapter of his literature review (chapter 5, "Myth abstracted from narrative to symbol"), A. discusses a slightly different perception of the term "demythologization," occasionally found in previous research: a "deformation or abstraction of myth, in which central figures are increasingly abstracted out of their narrative mooring to serve as stand-alone symbols, leading first to fragmentation, then dissolution, of the mythic context" (140). Various levels of this phenomenon range from the reduction of narrative iconography to a single scene from the myth, for example on Adonis sarcophagi, to singling out certain figures or mythological groups, for example on strigillated sarcophagi (142–43). In his rather lengthy response, A.'s most significant argument is his comparison with mythological statues such as Laocoön and his sons attacked by snakes, which in themselves were singled-out moments from the mythological narrative but would not seriously be considered as demythologized (160). In this context, A. points to the noteworthy link between statues in the round and mythological figures in sarcophagus reliefs, which often reflect famous statue types and, through the addition of bases, were even meant to be understood as depictions of such statues (161–63).

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14 Meinecke 2012; Meinecke 2013, 40–41; Meinecke 2014, 70–75, 142, 148–49.

15 Meinecke 2013, 38–39, 45; Meinecke 2014, 139–43.

16 Meinecke 2013, 39–42, 45; Meinecke 2014, 143–44, 149.

In Chapters 6 and 7, A. finally delves into his own impression of demythologization. These are by far the strongest chapters of the book. In chapter 6 ("Distinguishing the mythological: function and form"), A. stresses at length and with numerous examples that mythological iconography and scenes of real life were interchangeable options on Roman sarcophagi. As A. already argued earlier, bucolic and so-called biographical depictions on sarcophagi were just as idealized and allegorical as mythological images (167–80). Unsurprisingly, lion hunts, for instance, do not show an actual episode from the deceased's lifetime, and real-life scenes such as marriages were enhanced by allegorical figures. More important are A.'s observations on the difference in manufacturing techniques between portrait heads on sarcophagi and the surrounding relief (180–95), a topic which he already explored in his convincing contribution to the proceedings of the *Flesheaters* symposium (2009) at Berkeley.[17] As is well known, portrait heads, especially in the 3rd c. CE, look stylistically different than the rest of the relief, a phenomenon often explained in terms of the notion that they were possibly added later on pre-fabricated pieces and presumably carved by different sculptors.[18] A. sharply observes that this stylistic difference is created by a complete absence of drilling in the sarcophagus portraits, while in surrounding figures, including mortal ancillary figures in real-life scenes, the drill is heavily used in the 3rd c. CE. This especially applies to the hair, which in the portrait heads is simply carved, while surrounding figures have heavily drilled, often idealized coiffures. These "contrasting visual effects of chisel and drill," according to A., became "semiotic markers" (184) which isolated the portrait from the surrounding relief and avoided ambiguity in the identification of the deceased. The differentiation in carving techniques highlighted the "differences in status between mythic and non-mythic figures," which "paled in comparison to the special status of the deceased" (195).

A. waits until the conclusion (Chapter 7: "Conclusion: myth, history, and the desire for proximity") to share his own explanation for the abandonment of myth on sarcophagi. He presents demythologization as part of a larger phenomenon that was not limited to mythological images, but rather concerned historical figures in general. True historical figures are seldom depicted on sarcophagi. The only securely identified examples are two philosophers, Diogenes and Socrates, on the short sides of two Muse sarcophagi from the mid-Antonine period in Paris and Malibu (198–200, figs. 59–60).[19] Several other images on sarcophagi from the 3rd c. CE have been interpreted as Hesiod – not mentioned by A. – and Homer, again significantly often appearing on the short sides of the caskets, but in these cases the identifications are much less obvious and hence are disputed (198–99).[20] Instead, generic, anonymous philosophers feature prominently on 3rd-c. coffins. A. postulates a correlation between historical figures and mythological ones, who were also principally viewed as coming from a distant past and equally ceased to be popular as a sarcophagus decoration. He ascribes this declining interest in an identification of the deceased with figures from the past to a growing urge among 3rd-c. families for greater proximity to their departed, "a desire to negate the distance – both spatial and temporal, corporeal and chronological – separating the dead from the living" (207). To

[17] Allen 2019, 97–111.

[18] Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 611–14.

[19] Ewald 1999, 84–86, 90, 135–36 no. A1, A2, pl. 1, 2,3.

[20] Ewald 1999, 87–89, 137 no. A6, pl. 5,4; 144 no. A20, pl. 16.1; 142 no. A16, pl. 15,3; 200 no. G7, pl. 85,3.

avoid any distance between those who had passed away and their bereaved, both biographical scenes and generic, timeless images such as shepherds, the cycle of the seasons, and nameless philosophers gained popularity. A. convincingly links this notion to Jochen Griesbach's research on the relation of villas to their cemeteries. Already at the turn of the 1st to the 2nd c. CE, Griesbach observed a tendency to move the graves of deceased relatives – often in the shape of temple tombs – and their funerary cult to the vicinity of suburban villas, which he interprets as an expression of devotion and the family's emotional bond with their deceased. In the latter part of the 3rd c. CE, around the Tetrarchic period, the distance between the world of the living and the world of the dead seems to dissolve completely as graves are integrated into suburban residential structures.[21] Sarcophagi without mythological figures, A. concludes, likewise "offered the family a new relationship of immediacy […] to their departed" (207). This hypothesis adds an exciting new perspective to the discussion of demythologization on sarcophagi that is worth considering – despite its weak spot, which is that it is based on a very small number of sarcophagi with depictions of historical philosophers. Astonishingly, A. doesn't take other genres from the funerary realm, such as the tombs' interior decoration and inventory, into consideration, where similar developments strengthen his argument. In her survey of wall painting, stucco, and mosaics in tombs in the city of Rome, Francisca Feraudi-Gruénais observed a similar decline in mythological scenes, which, after a crescendo in the second half of the 2nd c. CE, are no longer attested after the beginning of the 3rd c. CE.[22] A. mentions mythological portrait statues, which likewise ceased to exist around 250 CE (211–13), neglecting to remind us, though, that they, too, were mostly funerary sculptures.[23] In homes, on the contrary, depicting myths created no problems, simply because there were no dead around (207–9).

This positive turn in the perception of demythologization could have been a perfect ending for the monograph. Instead, A. adds another chapter in which he discusses how Christian sarcophagi fit into the picture (Chapter 8, "Myth revived: temporality and the afterlife"). Formally, biblical stories occupy the same spaces as mythological images on frieze sarcophagi, yet functionally, they served a totally different purpose. As A. explains, Christian "myths" (217 and following pages) no longer praise the deceased's individual values or lament loss but are instead a proclamation of faith and hope for "future union and eternal communion with these figures of myth" (217–20, 226). To emphasize his point that Christian sarcophagi were prospective, while mythological sarcophagi were predominantly retrospective, A. briefly delves into the question of Roman notions of afterlife (220–26). Basically, A. refutes that pagan sarcophagi focus on any kind of prospective afterlife and "visualize some imagined postmortem state in the future" (224). Sarcophagi with doors are dismissed as evidence due to their scarcity and because they offer "only vague, open-ended invitations to *wonder* about the afterlife" (224); Dionysiac sarcophagi are interpreted as an image of the deceased enjoying "everything that life had to offer" (225); and seasons sarcophagi are reduced to the family's promise to continuously bring gifts to the grave (225).[24] No matter what one makes of the

21 Griesbach 2007, 144–51.

22 Feraudi-Gruénais 2001, 167–86.

23 Wrede 1981, 131–39.

24 See already Kranz 1984, 169, 174–75 on personifications of the seasons bringing gifts to the tomb.

prospective interpretations that have been brought forward for all these sarcophagus iconographies and are, of course, subject to debate,[25] the topic of the afterlife is way too complex to be dealt with marginally, in just a few pages. But mostly, it is upsetting that A. refutes a possible prospective reading of certain images on the scarcity of the evidence – he mentions about 30 sarcophagi with doors (224), and there might well be many more, as doors are mostly found on seasons sarcophagi and strigillated coffins, the latter not yet collected in a corpus, as is well known[26] – while he bases his own major hypothesis of the book on exactly *two* known sarcophagus images which, in addition, are only found on the short sides of the containers. A. would have done well to simply omit this addendum on Christian sarcophagi in order to strengthen his conclusions. Worth considering are his final observations on carving techniques on Early Christian sarcophagi (231–41).[27] As he notes, on 4th-c. CE Christian sarcophagi with portraits, the drill often isn't used at all on the sarcophagus reliefs, a feature which he characterizes as specific to Christian art. Although he presents a lot of convincing examples, you only have to browse through Manuela Studer-Karlen's monograph on portraits on Early Christian sarcophagi – not consulted by A. – to see that this technical distinction does not always apply.[28] On the famous sarcophagus of the "two brothers" in the Museo Pio Cristiano in Rome, the portraits in the central *clipeus* are not drilled, while Christ's curly hair on the surrounding relief in particular is marked by drilling, and on another sarcophagus in the Vatican, both the coiffures of the married couple in the *clipeus* and the hair and garments of the surrounding figures are drilled, to name just a few of the exceptions (or are they the exceptions proving the rule?).[29] Nevertheless, these differences in the manufacturing process are a topic for further exploration, and A. deserves credit for bringing them to the table. Where it applies, A. interprets the equality between real-life and heavenly characters achieved through carving techniques as a visualization of the Christian promise to raise the faithful into the divine sphere postmortem.

The text is supplemented by an extensive bibliography and two indexes. The almost exhaustive bibliography demonstrates A.'s expertise in Roman sarcophagus studies as well as his thorough and careful research into the topic of demythologization. Only very few titles which would have provided further arguments could be recommended as an addition: apart from the already mentioned monographs by Feraudi-Gruénais and Studer-Karlen, Jutta Dresken-Weiland's book *Bild, Grab und Wort: Untersuchungen zu Jenseitsvorstellungen von Christen des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts* would have contributed a relevant interpretation for the depiction of scenes from St. Peter's life on Early Christian sarcophagi, a question A. briefly dwells on in connection with the Christian "myths" (219–20).[30] Dresken-Weiland convincingly explains the popularity of these scenes, which are frequently and almost exclusively found on urban Roman sarcophagi while they are

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25 Kranz (1984, 177) interprets the personifications of the seasons as "vielfältig ausdeutbares Symbol der Apotheose"; for the whole discussion on the various interpretations of seasons sarcophagi, see Kranz 1984, 162–77.

26 Seasons sarcophagi: Kranz 1984, 186–89 nos. 9, 16, 19–20, pl. 4.1, 15.1–3, and 224 no. 149, pl. 67.1. Strigillated sarcophagi: Huskinson 2015, 82–83; Meinecke 2020, 668.

27 See also Allen 2019, 112–19.

28 Studer-Karlen 2012.

29 Studer-Karlen 2012, 24, fig. 14; 68, fig. 58.

30 Feraudi-Gruénais 2001; Studer-Karlen 2012; Dresken-Weiland 2010.

absent in catacomb painting, by the urge of Christian upper-class patrons to relate to the founder and leading figure of Rome's Christian community.[31] An index of objects, cited by city and museum, as well as a general index of terms and names facilitate the use of the book.

This book is a pleasant read, it is extremely well written, and the arguments are easy to follow. A. brilliantly paraphrases his arguments again and again and continuously adds further examples which makes his message very clear and comprehensible. The didactical and methodological nature of his approach makes especially the first five chapters ideal for teaching, to demonstrate critical literature review or to put certain hypotheses from previous research into perspective. The continuous paraphrasing makes the text a bit lengthy at times, though, and inevitably leads to repetition. A.'s main arguments are elaborated several times in different chapters, wherever they serve his line of thought. For example, the fact that mythological images continued in other genres while disappearing in the funerary realm is brought forward in chapters 2 (81), 4 (123–25), and 5 (148, 165–66), upper-class buyers are evoked in chapters 3 (102–3) and 4 (114–17), and that sarcophagi were not visible inside the tomb serves as an argument in chapters 1 (71–72), 3 (103–4), and 4 (135). Consequently, the undeniably valid arguments tend to wear off, becoming almost banal as the book progresses. The persuasive points A. makes throughout the book would have benefitted from a more concise and focused presentation of his arguments.

Nevertheless, A. makes some very valid and important observations in this monograph, which offer food for thought for the field of sarcophagus studies. In particular, his hypothesis on spatial and temporal proximity should be taken into consideration as a possible influence on the disappearance of myth on sarcophagi in the 3rd c. CE. Ultimately, the many contradictions that A. uncovers in his monograph concerning the use of myth in different contexts, the proximity of the dead, and the afterlife once again reveal the great variety and enormous freedom in expressing personal beliefs, values, and preferences beyond social norms inside the tomb that make Roman funerary culture such a special field of study, enabling so many insights into Roman thought that literary sources cannot provide.[32] There may well be a grain of truth in all the hypotheses which A. rejects in his book, and the motivation for choosing a sarcophagus without mythological images may have been different for each individual customer. In his monograph, A. adds further significant arguments to the complex and doubtlessly multifaceted phenomenon of demythologization on Roman sarcophagi.

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[31] Dresken-Weiland 2010, 144–46.

[32] As S. Birk 2013 – for me, still one of the most innovative and thought-provoking studies on Roman sarcophagi in recent years – has brilliantly shown.

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Journal of Roman Archaeology 37 (2024), 405–407
doi:10.1017/S1047759424000187

William Gell's Pompeii

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DESSALES, H. 2019. *Recueils de William Gell. Pompéi publiée et inédite 1801–1829*. Paris: Hermann Éditeurs. Pp. 434. ISBN 9791037002129.

The first three decades of the 19th c. were transformational for the appreciation of classical antiquity in Britain. The Napoleonic Wars had a profound impact on art history as much else. In Athens, the British Ambassador, Lord Elgin, competed with his French counterpart to appropriate the marble sculptures of the Parthenon, and endured the stinging rebukes of Lord Byron. At the same time, the topographer Sir William Gell endured a milder barb from Byron for his hasty survey of the Troad: "coxcomb Gell," though in later editions he was merely "classic Gell." In the first two decades of the century, Gell, like his friend and collaborator Edward Dodwell, worked in Greece and Turkey, publishing in their watercolors invaluable records of the state of classical antiquities. Up to 1815, Italy was under French control, making it less open to British travelers, and benefitting from the rich campaign of excavations at Pompeii driven by Queen Caroline Murat. With the end of French control, Gell shifted his attention to Italy and produced a series of topographic volumes both on Rome and its environs and, most famously, on Pompeii. It was Gell's volumes on Pompeii, the first covering the excavations of 1817–1819, the second those subsequent to 1819, that did more than any other serious publication to open up Pompeii to a broader public, inspiring along the way Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii.*

Gell then is a familiar figure in the history of Pompeian studies. Yet, despite his numerous publications, it emerges that much of his work is unpublished. In 1998, a young French Pompeianist, Hélène Dessales, made a brilliant discovery in the Bibliothèque de l'Institut national de l'histoire de l'art in Paris of two anonymous volumes of drawings, entitled *Pompeii Published 1819* and *Pompeii Unpublished*, which she identified as being by William Gell, confirming her identification by comparison to a dossier of Gell drawings

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