

PLANT MOTIFS ON JEWISH OSSUARIES AND SARCOPHAGI IN PALESTINE IN THE LATE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD: THEIR IDENTIFICATION, SOCIOLOGY AND SIGNIFICANCE

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by

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Biblical Studies

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASOR: American Schools of Oriental Research

BASOR: Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research

BA: Biblical Archaeology

BAIAS: Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society

BAR: Biblical Archaeology Review

BASOR: Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research

BDB: Brown, F., Driver, S., and Briggs, C., Hebrew and English Lexicon

BHS: Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia

EB: Economic Botany

IE: Eretz Israel

IEJ: Israel Exploration Journal

IES: Israel Exploration Society

JAS: Journal of Archaeological Science

LA: Liber Annus Studii Biblici Franciscani

NRSV: New Revised Standard Version

PEQ: Palestine Exploration Quarterly

PEQSt.: Palestine Exploration Quarterly Statement

PEF: Palestine Exploration Fund

QDAP: Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine

RB: Revue Biblique

INTRODUCTION

There are significant but seriously different interpretations of the ornament on the Jerusalem ossuaries. E. R. Goodenough, in his eight volumes on Jewish and pagan symbols (1953 - 58), interpreted ossuary motifs as living, religious symbols of hope in another life, whilst Bagatti and Testa (1958, 1962) interpreted them as religious symbols of Judaeo-Christians. L. Y. Rahmani (1968, 1982 and 1994) has claimed them to be pure decoration with no symbolic significance at all; he is concerned mainly with schematized representations of architectural motifs found on tombs of this period, and believes the plant motifs are based simply on flowers and trees growing or planted near the tombs. Pau Figueras (1983), whilst less radical than these scholars, still believes that art and symbolism are inseparable.¹ More recently (2001), two articles in learned journals, by Eyal Regev and Steven Fine, have concentrated on the sociological significance of "individualisation" rather than choice of motifs.²

This paper begins (Chapter 1) by attempting to *identify* the whole range of *plant* motifs on ossuaries which, oddly, have never before been systematically investigated and identified. Some specialised botanical knowledge is necessary,³ but the stylised nature of much of the ornament has made this a difficult task. Chapter 2 examines the nature of the ossuary, its context within the tomb, and the religious, ideological and sociological implications of its use, before similar motifs found in non-funerary Jewish contexts are identified in Chapter 3, thus raising further questions about their significance. Chapter 4 seeks to locate possible external influences on the development of Jewish funerary art. In the light of all this evidence, Chapter 5 addresses the question of symbolic interpretation of plant motifs, considering further evidence from biblical and apocryphal texts and the possible use of Dionysiac imagery on ossuaries and sarcophagi, to conclude that, through a process of acculturation, a 'type of symbolism', which is not necessarily religious (that is, related to a system of beliefs about God), may be inherent in the motifs.

¹ E.R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, I: *The Archaeological Evidence from Palestine* (New York, 1953); *Jewish Symbols*, III, *Illustrations* (1954); IV, *The Problem of Method. Symbols from Jewish Cult* (1954); V-VI, *Fish, Bread and Wine* (1956); VII-VIII, *Pagan Symbols in Judaism* (1958).

B. Bagatti, 'Scoperta di un cimitero giudeo-cristiano al "Dominus Flevit"', *LA* (1952-3), 148-184.

E. Testa, *Il Simbolismo dei Giudeo-Cristiani* (Gerusalemme, 1962).

L.Y. Rahmani, 'Jerusalem's Tomb Monuments on Jewish Ossuaries', *IEJ*, 18 (1968), 220-225; *Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs*, IV, *BA*, 45 (1982), pp. 109-19; *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel* (Jerusalem, 1994); 'Ossuaries and Ossilegium (Bone-Gathering) in the Late Second Temple Period', in Geva (Ed), *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed* (1994a), 191-205.

P. Figueras, *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries* (Leiden, 1983).

² E. Regev, 'The Individualistic Meaning of Jewish Ossuaries: A Socio-Anthropological Perspective on Burial Practice', *PEQ*, 133 (2001), 39-49.

S. Fine, *BAR*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (2001).

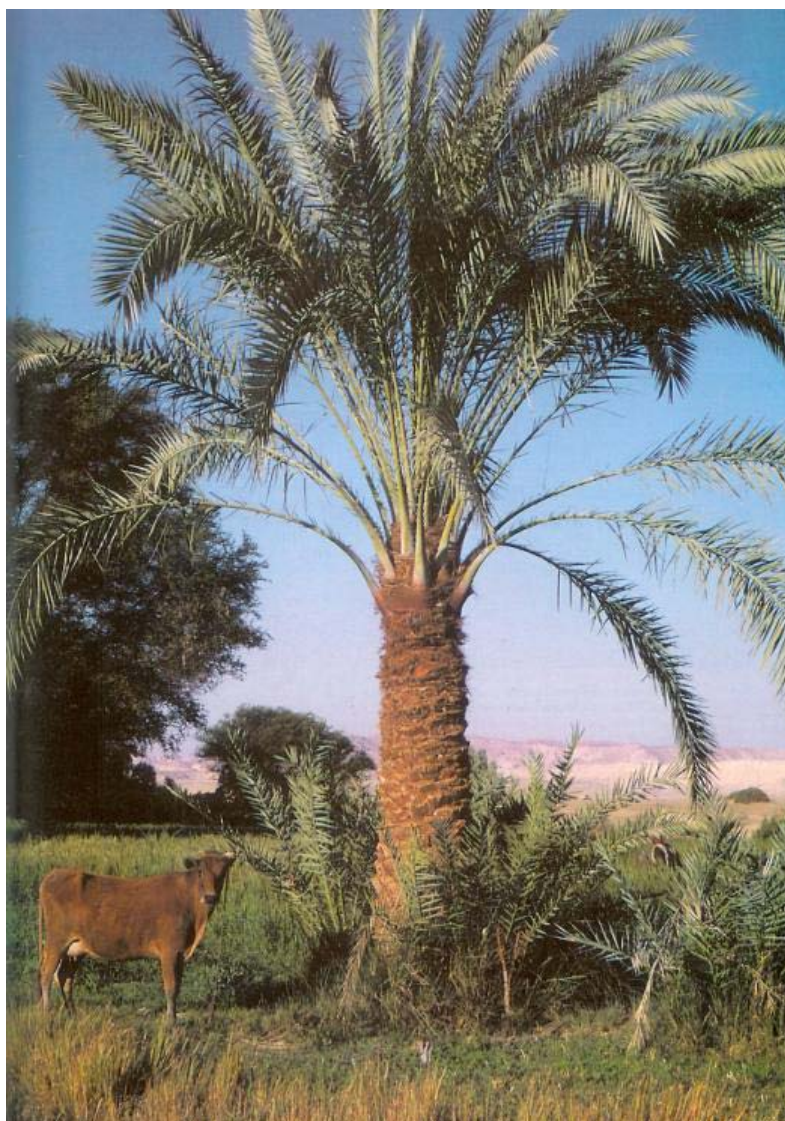
³ The author has a degree in Botany and experience in botanical field and laboratory work.

CHAPTER 1

PLANT SPECIES⁴

1. Phoenix dactylifera L(innaeus) Date Palm (Heb. תמר).

The mature tree has a single, straight, unbranched trunk and a terminal cluster of large pinnate leaves⁵ with a stout midrib; a leaf, up to six metres long, resembles a feather. The main means of propagation is by suckers⁶ at the base of the parent tree; the new tree can be transplanted and has no visible trunk. The plump, oval fruits are borne in clusters. These features are strikingly illustrated in **Figs. 1 and 2.**⁷



**Fig. 1: Phoenix dactylifera L.
Date Palm**

⁴ Plate numbers refer to pictures of artefacts (including ossuaries and sarcophagi,) and architecture; all other illustrations are referred to as figures. The numbering is continuous throughout the paper.

⁵ *Pinnate*: “a leaf composed of more than three leaflets arranged in two rows along a common stalk or rachis”, Clapham et al., Flora of the British Isles (1962), p. 1208.

⁶ *Sucker*: “a shoot arising adventitiously from a root of a tree or shrub often at some distance from the main stem”, Clapham et al. (1962), p. 1211.

⁷ **Fig. 1** from F. Nigel Hepper, Illustrated Encyclopedia of Bible Plants (1992), p. 119. **Fig. 2** Trees and Fruits of the Holy Land (Dr. J. P. Kane’s (JPK) postcard collection).

Plant Motifs on Jewish Ossuaries and Sarcophagi in Palestine in the Late Second Temple Period



Palm tree cultivation was centred in the Coastal Plain and the Jordan Valley. Jericho, En Gedi, Zoar and Elath were once famous for date palm groves. Nigel Hepper has noted⁸ that the altitude of 700 metres (2,300ft.) at Jerusalem makes it unlikely that these sub-tropical palms were grown there for fruit; even in the hill country they produced such poor fruit that the Talmud forbade its use as an offering for first-fruits, which had to come from less elevated sites such as Jericho, "city of palm trees" (2 Chron. 28: 15). However, the reference to the use of palm branches to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem (Jn. 12: 13), suggests they were certainly planted in Jerusalem by that time. Today, they grow well in sheltered parts of Jerusalem.

Fig. 2. Dates

An ossuary lid (**Plates 1, 1a, 1b, 1c**)⁹ bears two free-hand Date Palm trees, apparently on plinths, and three sets of three branches. The branches are the suckers growing from what must probably be identified as a stylised 'root' rather than a 'plinth' at the base of each parent tree. This is confirmed by the reduction of the leaves and suckers of the trees to schematic lines compared with the central, naturalistic whole leaves of the 'rootless' central plant. The tendrils of the central plant are an anomaly for which no botanical explanation can be offered.



Plate 1

⁸ Hepper (1992), p. 117.

⁹ Ossuary lid from the White Fathers' Collection: Dr. JPK's slide collection.



Plate 1a



Plate 1b

Plant Motifs on Jewish Ossuaries and Sarcophagi in Palestine in the Late Second Temple Period



Plate 1c

Another ossuary (**Plates 2, 2a**)¹⁰ shows stylised ‘trees’ scratched onto the front face of the ossuary using compasses. These are tentatively identified as *Phoenix dactylifera*, the Date Palm, based on the single, straight, unbranched trunk with a stylized crown or canopy above and stylized roots below, clearly visible in the detail of the upper panel shown in **Plate 2a**.



Plate 2



Plate 2a

Each crown is formed by two sets of semi-circles, one ascending and one descending. Avi-Yonah suggests, convincingly, that the ascending circles represent the top of the palm with upright leaves, whilst

¹⁰ From Dr. JPK's slide collection.

the lower ones are descending. This is confirmed in the central motif of an ossuary (**Plate 3**)¹¹ where ascending branches are indicated by curved lines above descending branches which are represented by straight lines. Roots mirror descending branches.

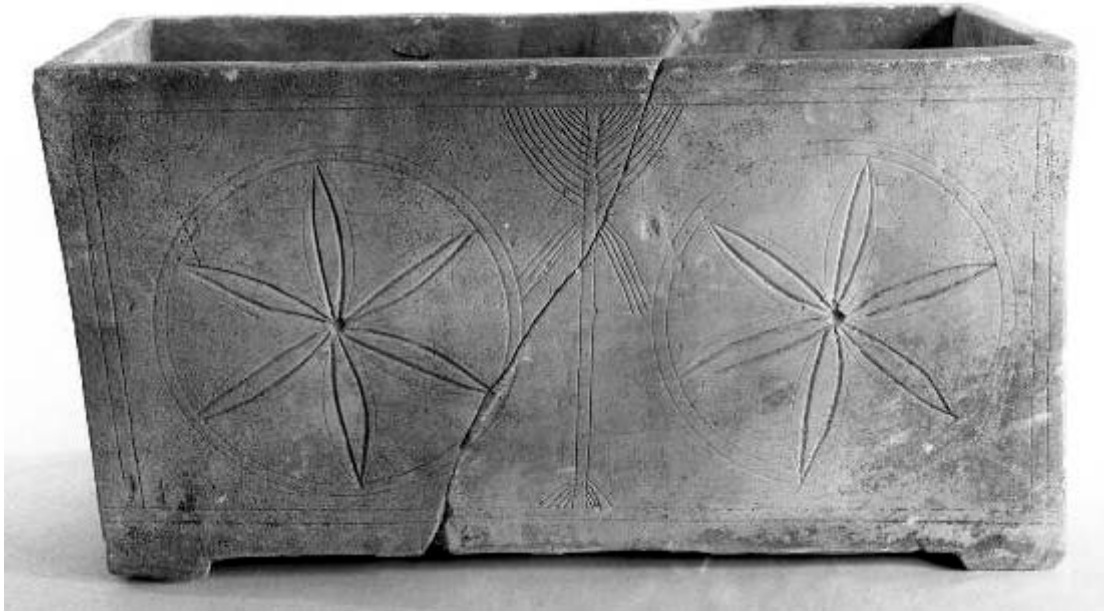


Plate 3: Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

He furnishes parallels to these conventions with a late Bronze Age vase from Tell Far'a illustrated in **Fig. 3**¹², and **Fig. 4** which shows palm trees with roots displayed from pottery from Tell el 'Ajjul.¹³ Comparison with Yoav Waisel's stylized drawing of *Phoenix dactylifera* in **Fig 5** (also showing bunches of dates)¹⁴ clarifies the point.



Fig. 3

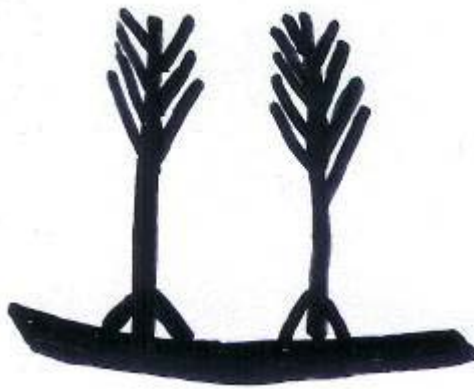


Fig.4



Fig. 5

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- ¹¹ L. Y. Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries* (1994), No.842, Pl.127. See more palm motifs: Rahmani *Catalogue* (1994): Nos. 69; 115; 127; 160; 210; 226; 231; 234; 307; 347; 457; 473; 643; 695; 761; 842.
- ¹² Author's drawing, after J. L. Starkey and L. Harding, *Beth Pelet*, Vol. II, Pl. LXIII, No. 41, cited in M. Avi-Yonah, 'Oriental Elements' (1942-50), in *Art in Ancient Palestine, Selected Studies* (1981), p. 75.
- ¹³ Author's drawing, after Petrie, *Ancient Gaza*, Vol. III, Pl. XLI, 7, cited in M. Avi-Yonah, *Art in Ancient Palestine* (1981), pp. 75-76.
- ¹⁴ Y. Waisel and A. Alon, *Trees of the Land of Israel* (1980), p. 75.

Plant Motifs on Jewish Ossuaries and Sarcophagi in Palestine in the Late Second Temple Period

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Waisel, Yoav and Alon, Azaria, Trees of the Land of Israel, (Division of Ecology: Tel Aviv University, 1980) pp. 74-76.

Zohary, Michael, in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol II (Abingdon Press: New York, 1962), pp. 287-88.

2. Olea europea L., Olive (Heb. זית).

The olive tree has a broad trunk with a crown of four to six branches bearing clusters of twigs. Its evergreen leaves are opposite, narrow and pointed, and flower buds develop among leaves on the previous year's wood. The fruit is an oval drupe.¹⁵ (**Figs. 6, 7 and 8**).¹⁶



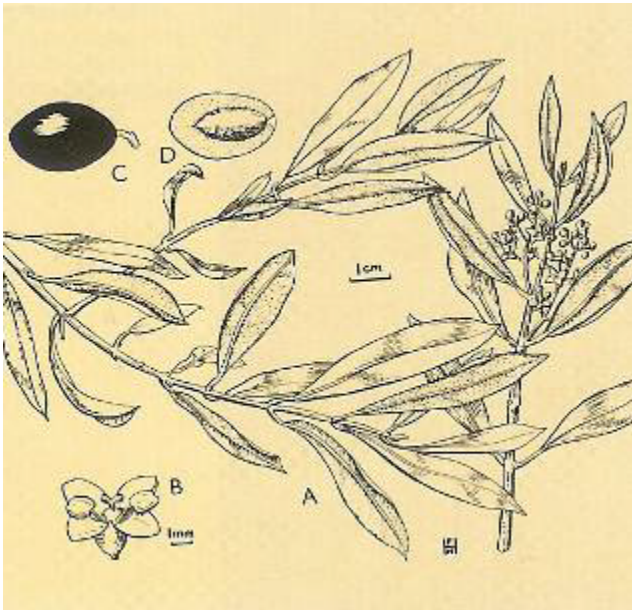
Fig. 6. Olive fruits and growth habit



Fig. 7. Olive

¹⁵ *Drupe*: fleshy fruit with one or more seeds within a stony layer. Clapham et al. (1962), p. 1204.

¹⁶ **Fig. 6:** Dr. JPK's postcard collection; **Fig. 7:** Waisel (1980), p. 69; **Fig. 8:** Hepper (1992) p. 104.



The early importance of the olive tree is indicated both by the archaeological record¹⁷ and by words attributed to Moses at the ‘Return’ (Deut. 8: 7-8):

“Yahweh...is bringing you into... a land of wheat and barley... of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey”.

Place names at Jerusalem associated with olive cultivation include הר־הזיתים (the Mount of Olives) and גת־שמן (Gethsemane), meaning ‘oil press’ (Mt. 14: 32).

Fig. 8. Olive

An ossuary (**Plate 4**)¹⁸ with three vertical olive leaf branches, is identified by the narrow, sharply pointed, pinnate leaves, sparsely arranged. Between them are two rosettes each standing on a stepped platform. A pair of tendrils, each terminating in a fleur-de-lys, emerges from both rosettes. The small holes visible between the leaves might indicate the flower buds already mentioned (**Fig. 7**).



Plate 4

¹⁷ Nili Liphshitz et al., ‘The Beginning of Olive (*Olea europaea*) Cultivation in the Old World: A Reassessment’, JAS 18 (1991), 441-43: The frequent occurrence of olive timber and stones together with the first appearance of olive oil installations, pottery oil lamps and pottery oil containers imply the intensive existence of olive trees and oil industry in Israel from the early Bronze Age.

¹⁸ This lid of this ossuary is shown in **Plate 1, p. 7**.

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However, other ossuaries with a similar motif have these holes wrongly spaced for such an interpretation. More probably it is the craftsman's method of stabilizing the point of the compasses (**Plate 5**).¹⁹

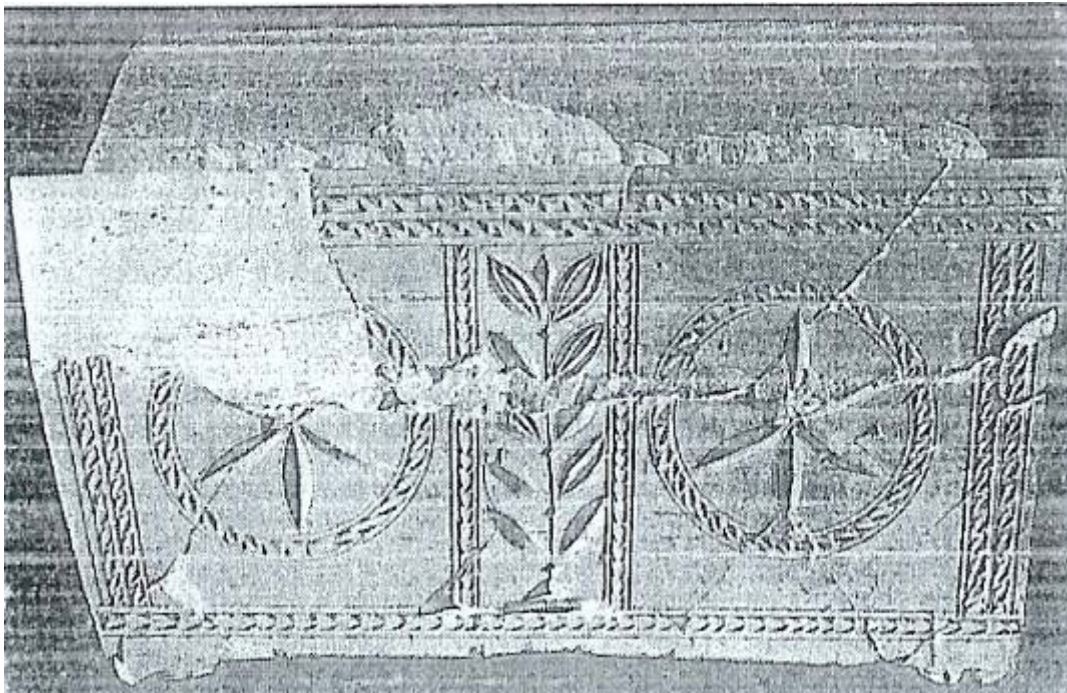


Plate 5: Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority

The two vertical branches of the ossuary shown in **Plate 6**²⁰ are also olive, but they are anomalous in having additional horizontal leaves.



Plate 6

¹⁹ Rahmani, *Catalogue* (1994), No. 404.

See also Nos. 14; 112; 162; 163; 206; 255; 265; 282; 313; 325; 337; 350; 377; 404; 428; 451; 494; 583; 618; 619; 694; 718; 809; 870; 893 for more olive motifs.

²⁰ **Plates 6, 7, 8, 9, 9a:** Dr. JPK's collection.

Rahmani has commented that these vertical strips vary from pairs of leaves without spacing (**Fig. 9**) to pairs with wide spacing (**Fig. 10**, but sometimes considerably wider) and even free, patterned adaptations (**Fig. 11**).²¹



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

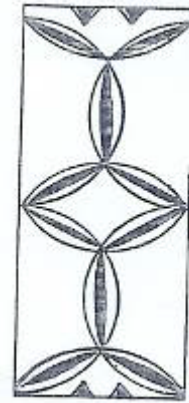


Fig. 11

Rahmani has confused the labelling of some of his figures regarding ‘branches’, making the reading of the text problematic.²²

Plates 7, 8 illustrate varying usage of leaf strips (**Plate 7**, olive; **Plate 8**, olive/laurel). The second example also has a bedding motif. Rahmani does not identify the botanical genus; Figueras suggests palmette



Plate 7

²¹ Rahmani, *Catalogue* (1994), Figs. 86, 87, 90, p. 42.

²² Rahmani, *Catalogue* (1994), p. 42: No. 252 = Fig. 90, **not Fig. 88**; No. 27 = Fig. 88, **not Fig. 89**; No. 45 = Fig. 89, **not Fig. 90**.

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Plate 8

The identification as olive is confirmed by another ossuary (**Plates 9, 9a**) showing, instead of rosettes, a motif composed of eight olive leaf sprays with eyelets in between and stylized bedding.²³



Plate 9

²³ A similar motif of six olive leaf sprays ornaments the front face of the main sarcophagus at Sanhedriya Tomb 7. It suggests work by the same hand.

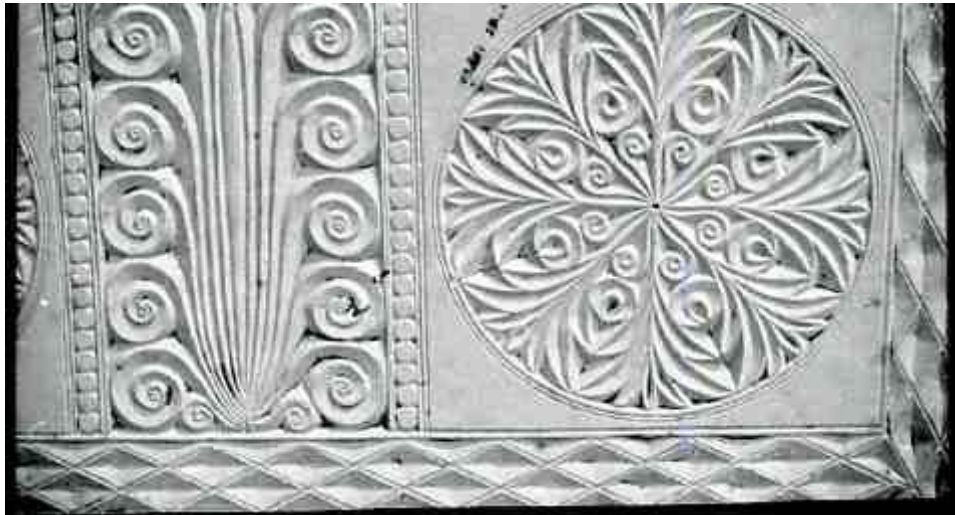


Plate 9a

One may compare this with the olive leaf decoration, identified by eminent botanist Asaph Goor, on a frieze from the synagogue at Kfar Bar'am in Northern Galilee (3rd-4th centuries CE, **Plate 10**).²⁴ A similar motif on one end-face of an ossuary (**Plate 11**)²⁵ is interpreted by Rahmani as olive-tree branches and fruit.



Plate 10

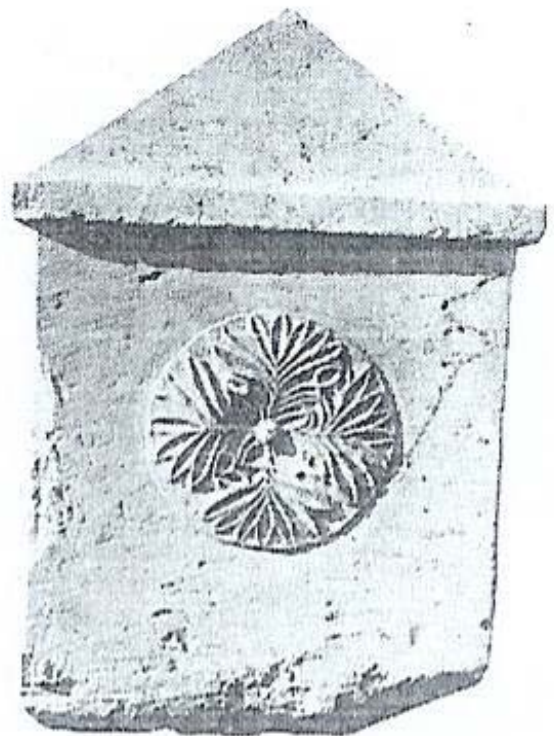


Plate 11: Courtesy of Israel
Antiquities Authority

²⁴ Picture from Asaph Goor's private collection, reproduced in Asaph Goor and Max Nurock, Fruits of the Holy Land (1968), p. 114.

²⁵ Rahmani, Catalogue (1994), p. 78; No. 13L (Plate 2).

References:

Fauna and Flora (1972), p. 156.

Goor, Asaph and Nurock, Max, Fruits of the Holy Land (Israel Universities Press: Jerusalem, London, New York, 1968).

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Rahmani, L.Y., Catalogue (1994), p. 42.

Waisel, Y. and Alon, A., (1980), p. 69.

3. *Lilium candidum*, L. Madonna Lily (Heb. שושן).

The large, funnel-shaped solitary flower has six petals, a long, three-lobed stigma²⁶ and large, dorsifixed anthers.²⁷ The lanceolate²⁸ leaves, alternate or whorled,²⁹ are borne on the aerial part of the stem (Fig. 13).³⁰

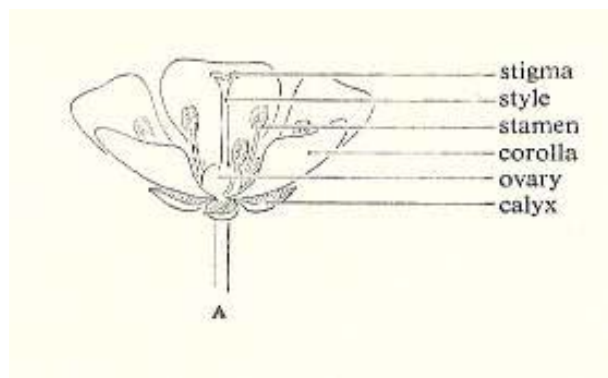


Fig. 12. Flower parts



Fig. 13. *L. candidum*: Madonna lily

Lilium candidum is the only lily native in Palestine but is found only in Upper Galilee and on Mount Carmel, in dense woodland or damp shady holes; the latter, found among Jerusalem's rock-cut tombs, would have provided a suitable habitat for the wild variety in Jerusalem. It was probably cultivated in antiquity for its beauty and perfume;³¹ The Mishna supports this for Jerusalem, specifically mentioning

²⁶ *Stigma*: the surface that receives pollen grains. See **Fig. 12**. From Clapham et al. (1962), Fig. 87A, p. 1200.

²⁷ *Dorsifixed*: anthers attached by the back.

²⁸ *Lanceolate*: long and narrow.

²⁹ *Whorl*: several leaves arising at the same level.

³⁰ **Fig. 13**: Hepper (1992), p. 47. Fig. 12: Clapham et al., Flora (1962), Glossary Fig. 87A, p. 1200.

³¹ J. Feliks, The Plant World of the Bible (Tel Aviv, 1957), pp. 234-38, cited in Rahmani, Catalogue (1994), p. 50.

lilies.³² Ascertaining distribution of lily species from biblical evidence is confounded by lack of botanical and ecological knowledge, resulting in mistranslations of שושן (lily) and חבצלת (rose) as lilies, roses, hyacinths, tulips, daffodils and other species.³³ The lily on these ossuaries (**Plates 12, 12a, 13, 13a, 14**)³⁴ is *L. candidum*, an identification based on its three distinctive petals, representing the full complement of six, and its prominent stamens.

A frequent stylised form (**Plates. 12, 12a**), shows three petals with two stamens represented as broken lines topped by triangular shaped 'anthers'. There may be five symmetrically arranged (whorled) leaves

represented at its base, or the top two might represent leaves and the lower three roots, since some varieties produce roots both from the base of the bulb and from the stem base. It is suggested that the broken line forming the stem may indicate its foreshortening since the lily is a tall plant whose full height cannot be represented here, resulting in a 'top-heavy' appearance.



Plate 12



Plate 12a

³² M. Toh 3: 7, cited in Rahmani, *Catalogue* (1994), p. 48.

³³ Zohary, (1962), p. 295 cites evidence from the Talmud and elsewhere that the name שושן is not specific and may indicate the blossom of any plant with 'showy' flowers: שושנה של ורד, 'the blossom of the rose'.

³⁴ Dr. JPK's collection.



Plate 13

The central motif of another ossuary (**Pls. 13, 13a**) has three petals and two large anthers (the latter unmentioned by Rahmani and Figueras),³⁵ but a fluted column replaces the stem. This, combined with the broad frame of vine scroll, leaves and grapes, indicate a classicising Greco-Roman style on which has been imposed the artisan's local artistic stamp.



Plate 13a



Plate 14

Plate 14 shows a 'lily type' central motif, possibly based on the leaved branch, the lily, or a combination of these.³⁶ However, it might represent one of the other 'showy' plants common in Palestine then as now. It should be noted that the central stylized motif of the earlier ossuary (**Plate 6**) also represents a 'lily type' with base leaves; it has three petals (the central one very narrow), and the two carved areas in between may represent anthers.³⁷

³⁵ Rahmani, *Catalogue* (1994), No. 600, Plate 86; P. Figueras, *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries* (1983), p. 53. **Plates 13, 13a, 14**: Dr. JPK's collection.

³⁶ Rahmani, *Catalogue* (1994), p. 42.

³⁷ See also Rahmani, *Catalogue* (1994), Nos. 163; 195; 298; 341; 375; 410; 411; 431; 482; 587; 600; 643; 816; 817.



Fig. 14

That the artisan had some botanical knowledge of the ‘lily type’ is seen in **Fig. 14**, depicting an anatomical longitudinal section through a flower to show its botanical parts.³⁸ However, much of the detail is inaccurate and confusing. The central oblong structure is non-botanical (or perhaps an attempt to represent the female ovary containing ovules?); the two bifurcated filaments which resemble stigmas are anomalous since they are freestanding and seemingly unconnected to an ovary (See **Fig. 12, p. 17** for flower structure showing the stigma, style and ovary as the female unit of reproduction); the lobed structures in the foreground may represent the shorter stemmed anthers of some species.

References:

Clapham et al. (1962), pp. 969-70, 1200-1212.

Figueras, P., Decorated Jewish Ossuaries (Brill: Leiden, 1983).

Hepper, F. N., (1992) p. 46-7.

Rahmani, L.Y., Catalogue (1994) pp. 42, 50.

Zohary, M., in The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. II (Abingdon Press: New York, 1962) p. 295.

www.botany.com

www.thefreedictionary.com

4. Acanthus sp.³⁹

Several species have long, narrow spiky leaves arranged in a rosette form,⁴⁰ although those of *A. mollis* are broader with blunt tips. With their characteristic bedding leaves, the whole resembles a cup (**Figs. 15-18**).⁴¹



Fig. 15. Acanthus



Fig. 16. A. spinosus

³⁸ Rahmani, Catalogue (1994), diagram of central motif of No. 57, p. 50 (Fig. 124).

³⁹ ‘Sp.’ means that the actual species cannot be identified. The ‘genus’ is Acanthus.

⁴⁰ *Rosette*: in botanical terms this means leaves emerging from around the circumference of the stem.

⁴¹ **Fig. 15**: A.Danin: Flora of Israel section of the University Botanical Gardens, Jerusalem, website; **Fig. 16**: Bryn Bowles of West Harptree Nursery, Bath; **Fig. 17**: Kurt Stuber, Icon 50 in ‘Index of 4000 Botanical Images’; **Fig. 18**: ‘robsplants’.



Fig. 17. *A. montanus*



Fig. 18. *A. mollis*

Acanthus, an evergreen shrub native to the Mediterranean area, was the dominant ornament of the Corinthian capital in Greek art. With Hellenisation of the east, its form, rarely corresponding to a particular plant species, was subsumed into eastern art.

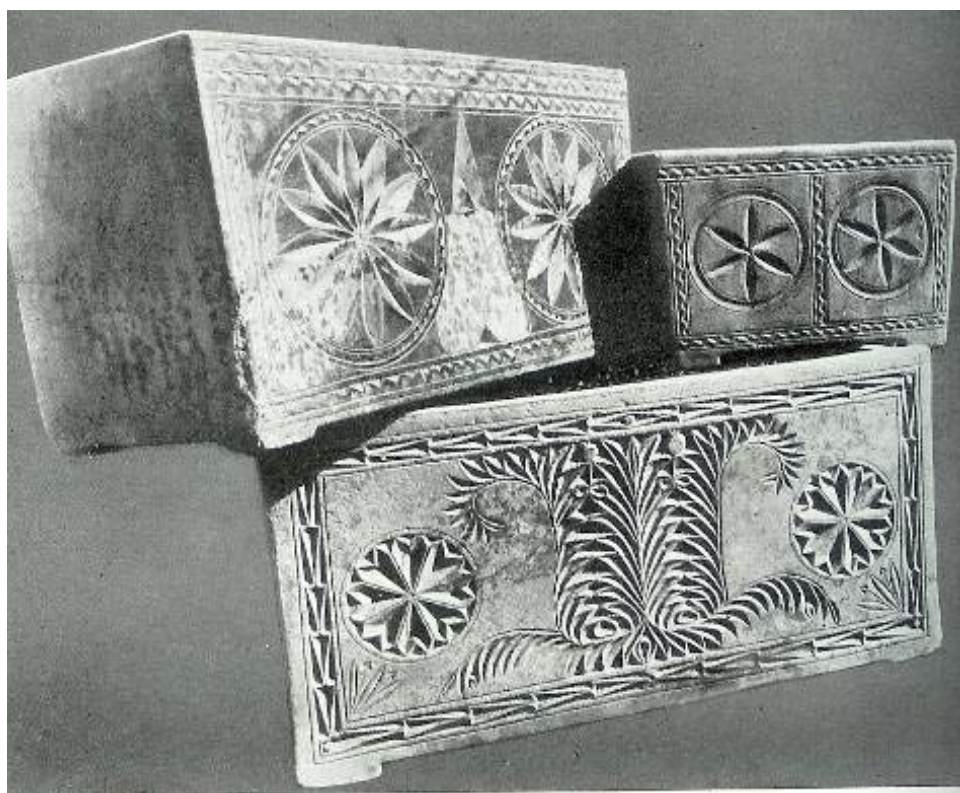


Plate 15. Nicanor ossuary

The lower ossuary (Nicanor ossuary) of **Plate 15**⁴² bears a striking central plant motif clearly identifiable as Acanthus sp. by its sharply pointed leaves (as *A. syriacus*), its bedding leaves contributing to its distinctive cup-shape. Rahmani notes that the branches are similar to olive, but he overlooks the exaggerated spikiness of some leaves. The motif lies between two eight-petal rosettes, and tiny pomegranates can be seen among its leaves. In each lower corner is a small trifoliate plant motif with stylized flower, and the whole is contained in a geometric framing motif.

⁴² C. Watzinger, *Denkmäler Palästinas II* (1935), Tafel 30 (Photo: PEF)

The acanthus motif is rare on Jewish ossuaries, sarcophagi and tomb facades; but the similarity in tympanum decoration of the tomb facades of Jehoshaphat (1st century BCE, **Plate 16**) and Sanhedriya 14 (1st century CE, **Plates 17, 17a**)⁴³ in Jerusalem provides an excellent example of how the execution of this motif changed with time.



Plate 16. Pediment: Tomb of Jehoshaphat

The acanthus leaf cup (above) is in strong relief and its central leaf unusually transformed into a 'lyra' shape with an upright, straight, central, stylised leaf. A broad, stylised scroll emerging from either side of the cup encloses stylised leaves and a variety of naturalistic fruits, including pomegranates and ethrog; combining stylised and naturalistic motifs was a characteristic of late Hellenistic Alexandrian art.



**Plate 17. Centre of Pediment
of Sanhedriya 14**



By contrast, the central leaf of the acanthus cup of the Sanhedriya 14 pediment (**Plates 17, 17a**) is naturalistic, and the stylised scroll encloses fruits, leaves and flowers in naturalistic form. Whilst the late Hellenistic Alexandrian combination of stylised acanthus cup, scroll and naturalistic plant motifs is evident, Watzinger notes⁴⁴ its conversion into the Jewish 'Flächenstil' (carving in a flat plane).

Plate 17a Central Detail

⁴³ Dr. JPK's collection.

⁴⁴ Watzinger (1935), pp. 63-64.

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A sarcophagus from Herod's Family Tomb (**Plate 18, Fig. 19**)⁴⁵ bears a stylised vine scroll enclosing a rosette in each twist, emerging from a stylized acanthus cup set on a pedestal. Watzinger comments on its "stylized lifelessness," reminiscent of neo-attic composition at the end of the 1st century BCE.⁴⁶ The broken lid of a lost sarcophagus (bottom **Fig. 19**) bears a chip-carved scroll emerging from an acanthus cup similar to that on the pediment of Sanhedriya 14.



Plate 18

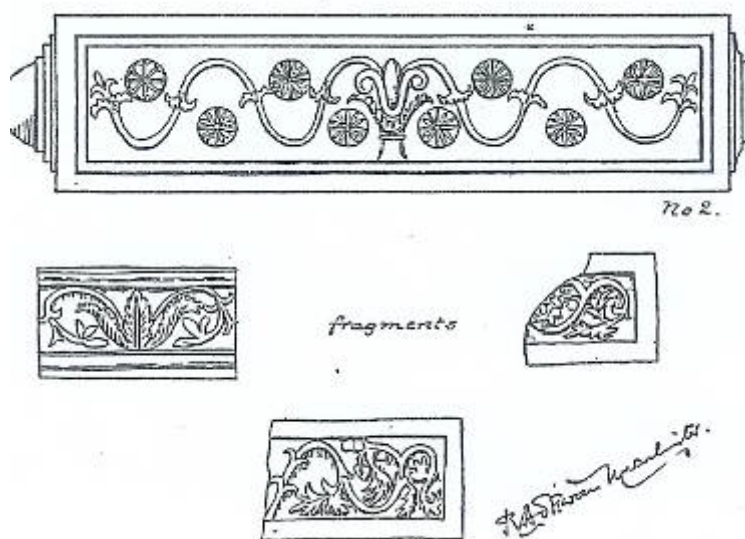


Fig. 19

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www.botanic.co.il/a/picshow
<http://caliban.mpiz-koeln.mpg.de>

⁴⁵ Watzinger (1935), Tafel 29, Abb. 67 (Photo PEF).

⁴⁶ Watzinger (1935), pp. 68-70 (Drawing PEF).

5. **Pinus halepensis**. Aleppo/Jerusalem Pine. Mill. (Heb. עץ־שמן).

A conifer with erect trunk and spreading branches, its leaves or needles are arranged in bundles of two or three, and its globular female cones are about 7.5cm. (3 in.) long (**Fig. 20**).⁴⁷ It is native to Palestine and covers areas of Mount Carmel, Samaria and Gilead, with remnants preserved in Galilee and Judea, areas of soft limestone required for its growth. עץ־שמן is usually mistranslated as olive wood or wild olive in the Bible, conflicting with contexts in which the name is mentioned, for geographical or botanical reasons.⁴⁸ Because Aleppo pine was a prodigious producer of resin it was known as the oil tree, disregarded by Bible translators.⁴⁹



Fig. 20. *Pinus halepensis*

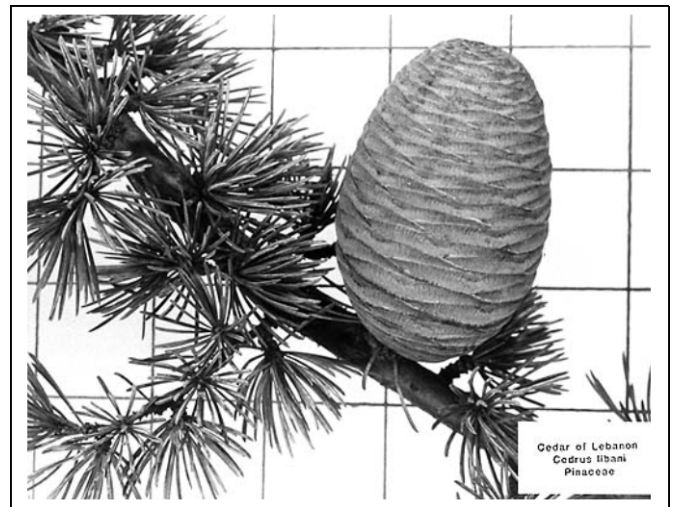


Fig. 21. *Cedrus libani*

An image of Cedar of Lebanon is included here for comparison (**Fig. 21**).⁵⁰ Its needles are clustered (10-15) and crowded on spurs or alternate on leading twigs. Its cones are barrel-shaped with a flat top and measure up to 11cm. (4.5in.) long, 6cm. (2.5in.) wide.⁵¹ It never grew in Palestine but its timber was imported.

⁴⁷ Waisel (1980) p. 77

⁴⁸ Zohary (1962), pp. 293, 299; L. Stager 'The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel', BASOR, 260 (1985), p. 4.

⁴⁹ L. Stager (1985): he notes it was pine, not olive wood, used in Solomon's temple for doors, doorjambs and two carved cherubims (1 Kings 6: 31-35), p. 28.

⁵⁰ Brockman Memorial Tree Tour © 1997, University of Washington (www.washington.edu/home/treetour/lcedar.html).

⁵¹ www.enature.com/fieldguide/showspeciesLSH

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Ossuary No.1 from Dominus Flevit (DF) (**Plate 19**)⁵² is richly ornamented on the front and lid with a variety of fruits and leaves, some wrongly identified by Bagatti.



Plate 19. No. 1 ossuary (front), Dominus Flevit

The scroll below the rope moulding of the Dominus Flevit lid (**Plate DFL 20: detail, from right to left**) shows an acanthus cup, a florette and two cones, identified as cedar by Bagatti. However, these cones are more globular with pointed tips than barrel-shaped and flat topped, and at the left hand side of the lid (**Plate DFL 29**) is a second pointed cone with its bundle of needles similar in form to Aleppo pine; Bagatti mistakenly identifies this as a palm spray. Further pine cones alongside needles are visible in the left-hand rosette (**Plate 19**) and in more detail in **Plate 36, p. 41**. Jerusalem's artisans would know the form of this tree growing locally, rather than the cedar, known only by its imported timber.

⁵² Bagatti classifies it as a sarcophagus in *Gli Scavi del "Dominus Flevit"* Parte I (1958), 45-9. However, its outside length measurement is only 3ft. 9in., suitable only for a child, as were most others in the group, which is odd. It is of soft limestone, used mainly for ossuaries.
Plates 19, 20: Dr. JPK's collection



Plate 20. Ossuary No.1, DFL

References

- Bagatti, P.B. and Milik, J.T., Gli Scavi del "Dominus Flevit" Parte I (Jerusalem, 1958), 45-9.
Fauna and Flora (1972), pp. 162-63.
Stager, L.E., 'The Archaeology of the family in Ancient Israel', BASOR, 260 (1985), p. 4.
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Walker, Winifred, All the Plants of the Bible (Lutterworth Press: London, 1958), p. 52.
www.enature.com/fieldguide/showspeciesLSH
www.washington.edu/home/treetour/lcedar.html
Zohary, M., Vol. II (1962), pp. 292, 299.

6. Hedera helix L. Ivy.

Ivy is an evergreen climber using its roots. Its simple, alternate leaves are leathery with visible veins, and each is borne on a short stem. Leaf shape varies from 3-lobed with a heart-shaped base to 5-lobed on climbing stems, to oval or rhomboidal on flowering branches. The fruit is berry-like, borne on an umbrella-shaped inflorescence (flowering branch) (Figs.22-24).⁵³ It is native to Palestine.

⁵³ Fig. 22: Photo by Forest and Kim Starr (US Geological Survey). Figs. 23, 24: author's own photographs.



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

Continuing the identification of species on the DF lid (**Plate DFL 21**), Bagatti comments on more leaves like the acanthus, yet what is visible is a small fruit like an olive, and two distinctive, stylized, heart-shaped ivy leaves with pronounced midrib. Above the rope moulding is a complete scroll of ivy leaves, common in Jerusalem funerary art; it is found on the sarcophagus from the tomb of Helene.⁵⁴



Plate DFL 21. Part of ossuary lid

The ossuary of **Plate 22**⁵⁵ bears two curved ivy leaf branches with characteristic leaves and growth habit. The 'tendrils' at the base of each branch probably represent the climbing roots. The central motif is a complex of leaf forms framed by a scroll with tendrils, and the whole flanked by fluted columns with capitals containing roundels. Another ossuary (**Plate 23**)⁵⁶ has, between the rosettes, stylized plants with

⁵⁴ Bagatti (1958), pp. 45-9.

⁵⁵ Dr. JPK's collection.

⁵⁶ Rahmani, *Catalogue* (1994), No. 427, Plate 62.

net-like roots; the single stem and two branches bear stylized ivy leaves. The artisans' expression of this motif obviously varied greatly.⁵⁷



Plate 22

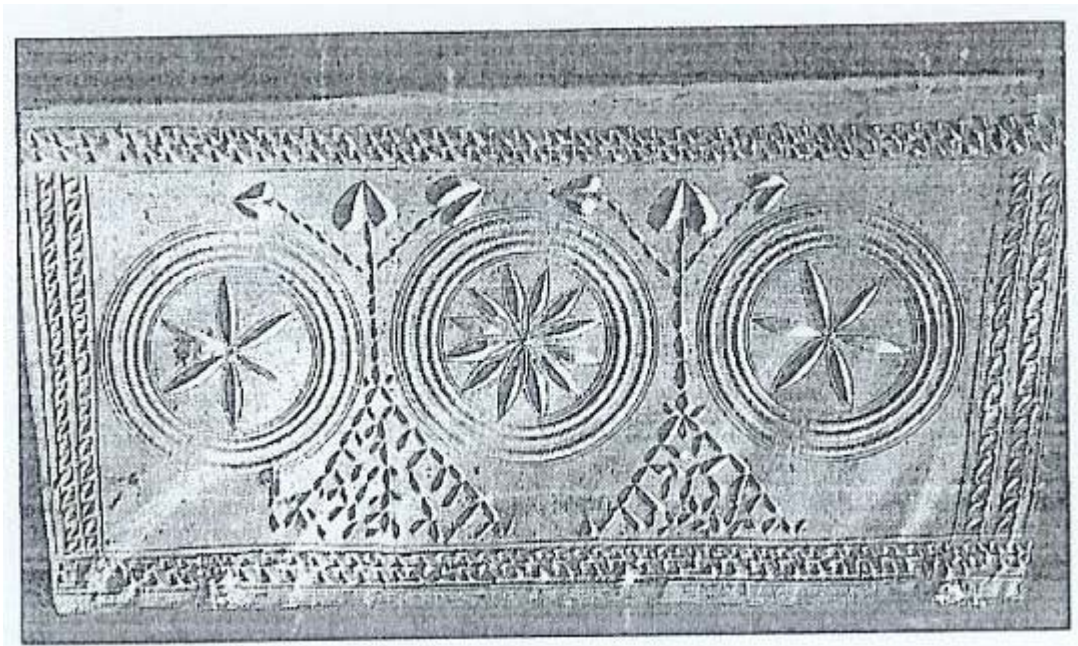


Plate 23: Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority

References

Rahmani, Catalogue (1994), p. 173.

Walker, W. (1958), p. 104.

⁵⁷ See also Rahmani, Catalogue (1994): Nos. 06; 45; 245; 262; 296; 335; 427; 513; 643; 717; 810.

7. *Vitis vinifera* L. Grape vine (Heb. גפן).

The vine is a shrub with long trailing branches bearing thread-like tendrils for climbing. Its 5-lobed, alternate leaves are rounded in outline with heart-shaped base. Each flower cluster and tendril arises opposite a leaf. The arrangement of the fruit in overlapped bunches on the branch gives a lobed effect (Figs. 25, 26).⁵⁸

Its economic and cultural importance is indicated by the archaeological record,⁵⁹ the citing of vine, grape and wine numerous times in the Bible, and evidence from extra-biblical texts; for example, Josephus speaking about Gennesareth:

“The kings of all the fruit trees, the vine and the fig, yield their fruits for nine continuous months of the year”.⁶⁰

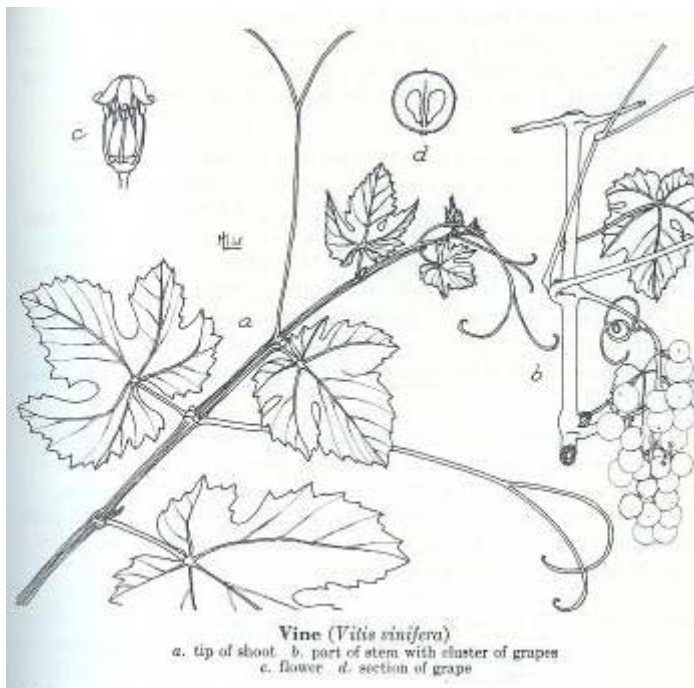


Fig. 25

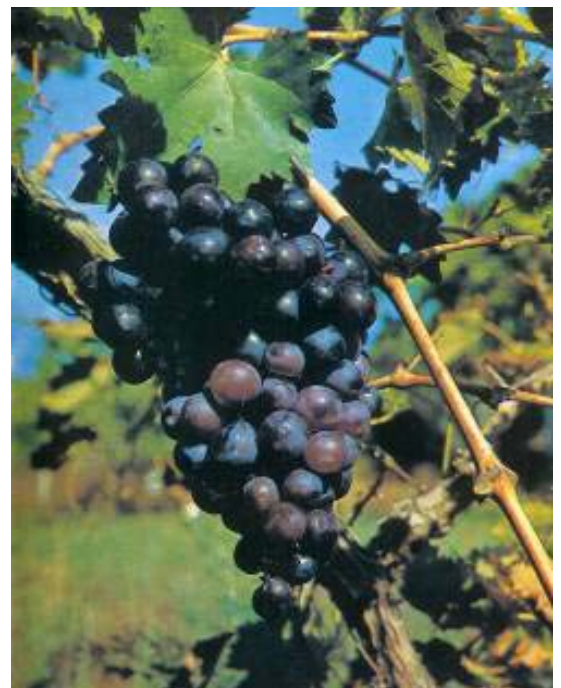


Fig. 26

Grape and vine decoration is uncommon on ossuaries, but a chip-carved ossuary (**Plate 24**)⁶¹ with gabled lid has a broad frieze with a vine scroll, tendrils and alternating single grape clusters and vine leaves arising from the scroll; a palmette is at the centre, and rosettes, lilies, palmettes and zig-zag framing complete the ornament.

⁵⁸ Fig. 25: *Fauna and Flora* (1972), p. 189; Fig. 26: Dr. JPK's postcard collection.

⁵⁹ A. Goor, *EB*, 20 (1966), p. 46. Earliest archaeobotanical evidence: seeds from early Bronze Age and Iron Age levels at Jericho and Lachish.

⁶⁰ Josephus, *Wars III*, 10, 8, cited in A. Goor, *Fruits of the Holy Land* (1968), p. 28.

⁶¹ *Land der Bibel*: Schätze aus dem Bible Lands Museum (1997), p. 101.

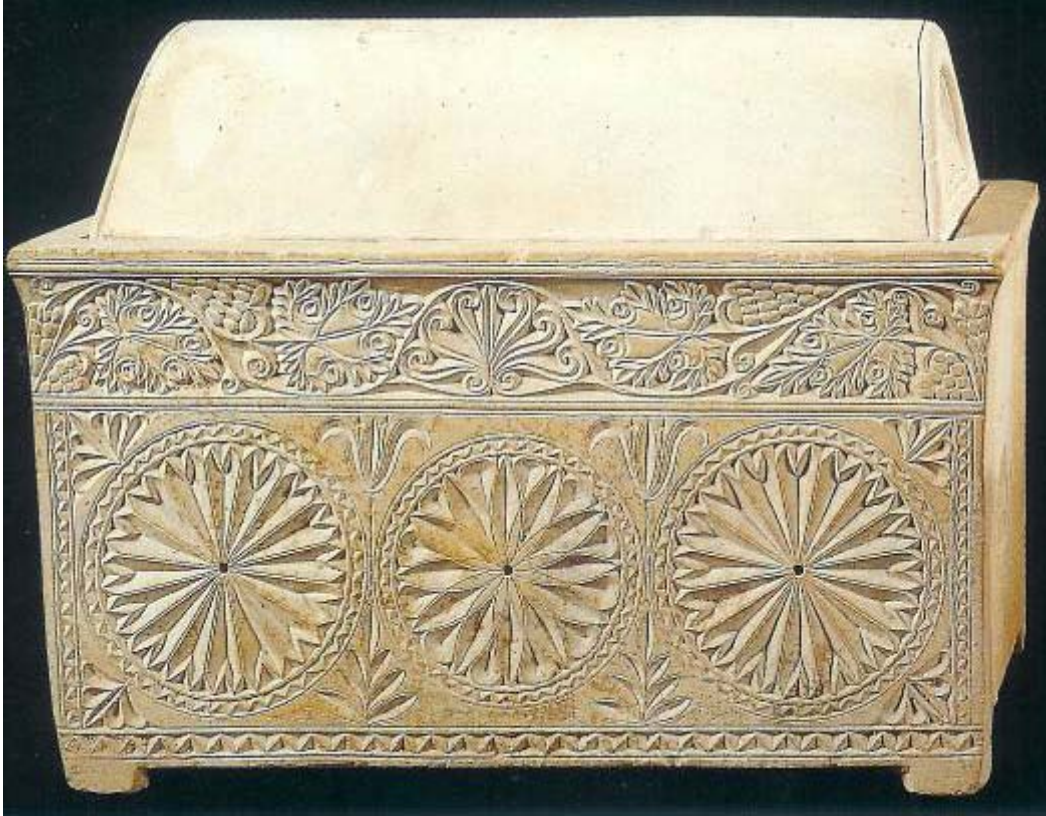


Plate 24: Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

The leaves and grapes are displayed unnaturally, in a horizontal plane, a feature also seen in **Plates 13, 13a, p. 19** and is possibly derived from Egyptian and Assyrian prototypes.⁶²

An exaggerated three-lobed (tri-lobate) bunch of grapes appears with naturalistic lyra-shaped acanthus cups and garlands on the lower, Doric frieze of Queen Helene's Tomb⁶³ (**Plate 25**).



Plate 25

⁶² Avi-Yonah (1981), p. 69.

⁶³ New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land (1993), p. 751: the Tomb of Queen Helene of Adiabene was mistaken for the Tomb of the Kings of Judah by F. de Saulcy (1863) and it retains the latter name. **Plate 25**: Dr. JPK's collection.

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Plate DFL 26 displays the three-lobed bunch of grapes, but more challenging is the identification of the central lower motif said to be bananas by Bagatti. Possibly it represents the huge, renowned, Hebron grapes, already suggested by Sussman⁶⁴ for the distinctive right-hand motif of the Mount Scopus ossuary (**Plate 27**, also showing vine leaves and small clusters of grapes on the lid).⁶⁵



Tri-lobate bunch
of Hebron grapes?

Tri-lobate bunch
of standard grapes

Plate DFL 26

The elongated form is clearly deliberate on this superb ossuary (**Plate 27**), and is clearly contrasted with the matching bunch of standard grapes. These elongated fruits are indeed twice the size of the standard ones.



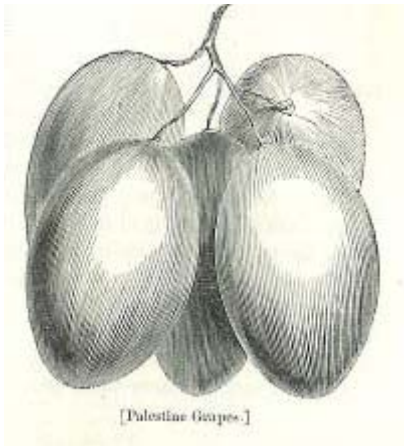
Tri-lobate bunch of
Hebron grapes?

Tri-lobate bunch of
standard grapes

**Plate 27 Ossuary 1.
Mount Scopus**

⁶⁴ V. Sussman, 'A Jewish Burial Cave on Mount Scopus', in Geva (Ed), Ancient Jerusalem Revealed (IES: 1994), p. 228.

⁶⁵ **Plate 27** = Plate VIIc in Geva (Ed), Ancient Jerusalem Revealed (IES: 1994).



**Fig. 27. Hebron Grapes:
life-size**

John Kitto furnishes a copy of a cut (from Laborde), to demonstrate the extraordinary natural size of some Palestinian grapes, citing amusing eye-witness information from Hebron of grapes “as large as one’s thumb” and clusters of 10-12 lbs in weight (**Fig. 27**). This seems to be supported by Num.13: 23, Moses’ spies arrival in Hebron: “And they came to the Wadi Eschol, and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of ‘grapes’, and they carried it on a pole between two of them”.⁶⁶ Certainly the large size and the tri-lobate form (in three groups of four ‘grapes’) of the DF cluster strengthen the argument, and a recent Hebron cluster confirms this (**Fig. 28**).⁶⁷ However, against it are the seemingly pointed tips of individual ‘grapes’ on the ossuaries (a feature also untypical of dates).



Fig. 28.

However, some commentators recognise that there is a difficulty in translating זמורה in Num.13: 23, and have suggested bananas instead, although they are never mentioned in the Bible or the Mishna.⁶⁸ The ancestor of the banana was termed ‘muz’ or ‘muzi’ (of Sanskrit origin) in 1st century CE literature, and Asaph Goor speculates that Pliny’s description of the banana as a denizen of India (in his 1st century CE Historia Naturalis) might be based on his personal experience of it in Palestine where it may well have been under cultivation in the 1st century BCE.⁶⁹ Goor also suggests that old Hebrew writers speaking of it familiarly in Midrashim and the Babylonian Talmud is evidence that the banana was long since widely known and prized: “The bridegroom sanctifies the bride with a ‘muz’ (rhizome)”, stressing the worth of the banana in nuptial matters.⁷⁰

It has also been noted⁷¹ that the species names, *sapientum* and *paradisiaca* were applied to the banana in the belief that the banana was the ‘forbidden fruit’ of the ‘tree of knowledge of good and evil’ in the Garden of Eden, and classical tradition has it that the spies brought back bananas. However, they are not mentioned in scripture and there is

certainly no special Hebrew word for them in those early times. It is all highly speculative; the evidence to date indicates these motifs on the Dominus Flevit and Mount Scopus ossuaries are Hebron grapes.

References

Fauna and Flora (1972), p. 189.

Goor, Asaph, EB 20 (1966), p. 46.

Goor, Asaph, The Fruits of the Holy Land (Israel Universities Press, 1968), pp. 28, 27-74.

⁶⁶ J. Kitto, History of Palestine, Vol II (1844), p. CCCXXIX-X. The picture (**Fig. 27**) is reproduced to scale here.

⁶⁷ jrshotel.com

⁶⁸ Fauna and Flora (1972), p.191. Israel’s modern banana is the *Musa cavendishii*, introduced in the 19th century.

⁶⁹ A.Goor (1968), p. 271, 273-4.

⁷⁰ Kiddushim, 52b, cited in A. Goor (1968), p. 274.

⁷¹ Masters in J. Lindley, The Treasury of Botany (1884), cited in Moldenke, Plants of the Bible (1952), p. 243.

Plant Motifs on Jewish Ossuaries and Sarcophagi in Palestine in the Late Second Temple Period

Kitto, J., History of Palestine, Vol II MDCCCXLIV (1844), p. CCCXXIX (329).

Land der Bibel: Schätze aus dem Israel Museum (Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Kunsthistorisches Museum: Vienna, 1997/98). No. 149, p. 101.

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Mon, M., The Tombs of the Kings (Hebrew, Tel Aviv, 1947), JPK translated notes from pp. 46-50.

Rahmani, Catalogue (1994), No. 427, Plate 62.

Stern, Ephraim (Ed), The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land (IES and Carta: Jerusalem, New York, London, 1993)

Sussman, V., 'A Jewish Burial Cave on Mount Scopus', in Geva (Ed), Ancient Jerusalem Revealed (IES: Jerusalem, 1994), p. 228.

8. Ficus carica L. Fig (Heb. תאנה).



The fig has coarse, 3 or 5-lobed rounded leaves, heart-shaped at the base with large fruit, borne singly (**Figs. 29 - 31**) and was known to be cultivated in Palestine from ancient times from biblical and extra-biblical evidence.⁷² Figs were eaten fresh, dried or pressed, and remnants were found at Masada.

Fig. 29



Fig. 30



Fig. 31

⁷² Including: Judg. 9: 10-11 (Jotham's parable); Deut. 8: 8 (one of fruits with which Israel was blessed); Jer. 24: 1-10 (parable of ripe/overripe figs likened to Judah in captivity/remaining in Jerusalem).

Josephus (Jewish War III, 519) speaks of a fertile area: "for ten months without intermission it supplies those kings of fruits, the grape and the fig", Fauna and Flora (1972), p. 119, and **Fig. 29; Figs 30 – 31**: Author's photographs.



Fig. 32

Rahmani identifies the central motif found only on this one ossuary (**Plates 28 – 30**)⁷³ as fig leaves and fruit whose prominent position suggests they may represent a family emblem, possibly alluding to a name based on the word תאנה 'fig'.⁷⁴

Unfortunately, the pictures of this ossuary in the catalogue do not present clear detail and, whilst in the drawing of the central motif (**Fig. 32**) the fruit could possibly be considered 'fig-like' (dried figs?), personal inspection of this ossuary makes this identification most unlikely. The leaves of this half rosette are not remotely fig-like but rather resemble a cluster of stylized, perhaps olive, leaves (compare with **Plates 9a and 11, p. 16**) with coarsely-hewn fruit (unidentifiable, but possibly olives by association with the adjoining strip of olive-like leaves on either side seen in **Plates 28 - 30**). If this is not fig, then it begs the question of why the fig is not represented on ossuaries.



Plate 28

⁷³ Author's photographs, taken courtesy of the IAA at Beth Shemesh. See also Rahmani Catalogue (1994): No. 742F and 742F (detail), Plate 106.

⁷⁴ Rahmani Catalogue (1994), p. 44.

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Plate 29

The outermost strips of leaves seen in **Plates 28** and **30** are different in appearance: the individual leaves have a more complex outline than those of the inner strips and are more sparsely arranged, with crudely outlined fruits borne on short stalks emerging from the stem. These have the appearance of myrtle branches whose leaves may be alternate, opposite or arranged in threes.



Plate 30

References

Fauna and Flora (1972), p. 119.

Hepper, F. N. (1992), p. 110.

Josephus, Flavius, The Jewish War III (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass.; Heinemann: London, 1927), p. 519.

Zohary, M., Interpreter's Dictionary, Vol. II (1962), p. 286.

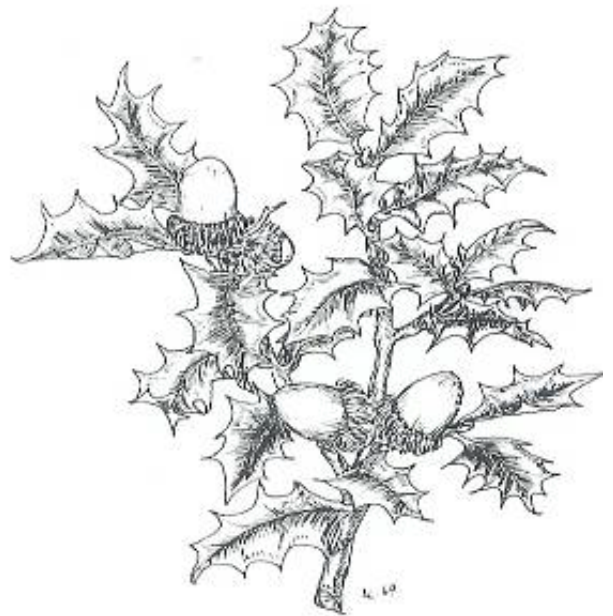
9. Quercus ithaburensis Boiss. Tabor oak⁷⁵ (Heb. אלון).

This is a broad-leaved deciduous tree with leathery, oblong, serrated leaves terminating in thin points, each leaf borne on a short stalk, and with large acorns whose cups bear recurved scales (**Fig. 33**)⁷⁶; it grows at lower altitudes, in Lower Galilee, Carmel and east of the River Jordan. A remnant is a 'sacred forest' of the Dan Valley.⁷⁷

An evergreen species is *Q. coccifera* (**Fig. 34**)⁷⁸, Kermes oak, a tree with short-stemmed oval, spiny-toothed leaves, and acorn cups with recurved, prickly scales. It grows on the hills of Upper Galilee and Gilead. Many leaf variations make oak classification difficult and scholars disagree on which particular species are referred to in the Hebrew Bible. A place name derived from the oak tree is biblical אלון בכות, the oak of weeping, under which Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, was buried Gen.35: 8).



**Fig. 33. *Quercus ithaburensis*.
Tabor Oak**



**Fig. 34. *Quercus coccifera*.
Kermes Oak**

⁷⁵ Also known as *Q. macroleois* and *Q. aegilops* (Hepper, 1992, p. 34).

⁷⁶ **Fig. 33:** Hepper (1992) p. 33.

⁷⁷ Zohary, (1962), p. 299.

⁷⁸ **Fig. 34:** Fauna and Flora (1972) p. 155.

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Plate DFL 31

The motif (bottom left of **Plate DFL 31**) is to be tentatively identified as Tabor oak on the basis of its leaf shape with serrated, rather than spiny, edges and pointed tips. Bagatti identified the 'oak' acorn, not mentioning the leaves. Oak leaves and acorns are not seen on other ossuaries.

References

Bagatti, P. B. and Milik, J. T. (1958) 45-69.

BHS

Hepper, F.N. (1994), pp. 33-34.

NRSV

Fauna and Flora (1972), pp. 154-6.

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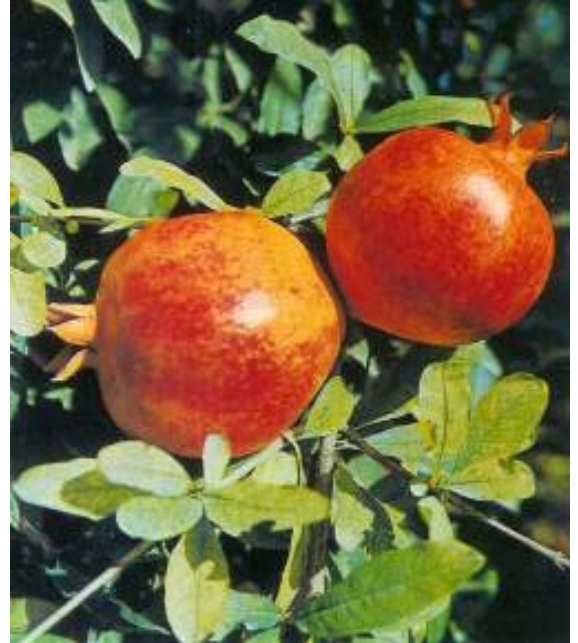
Walker, W. (1958), pp. 150-51.

Zohary, M. (1962), pp. 294, 299.

10. Punica granatum L. Pomegranate (Heb. רמון).⁷⁹

This is a small, deciduous tree with oblong to lanceolate leaves and a large fruit, hanging downwards, crowned with a persistent, enlarged calyx.⁸⁰ Its antiquity is based on archaeobotanical,⁸¹ biblical⁸² and extra-biblical textual evidence.⁸³ The Mishna records it: "... a man goes down to his plantation and sees...a pomegranate that is ripe....These are the first fruits" (Bikkurim 3, 1). Many places are named after it, such as רמון אן.

The lower central motif of the DF lid (**Plate DFL 32**) is clearly a pomegranate with its leaves.



**Fig. 35. *Punica granatum* L.
Pomegranate**



Plate DFL 32

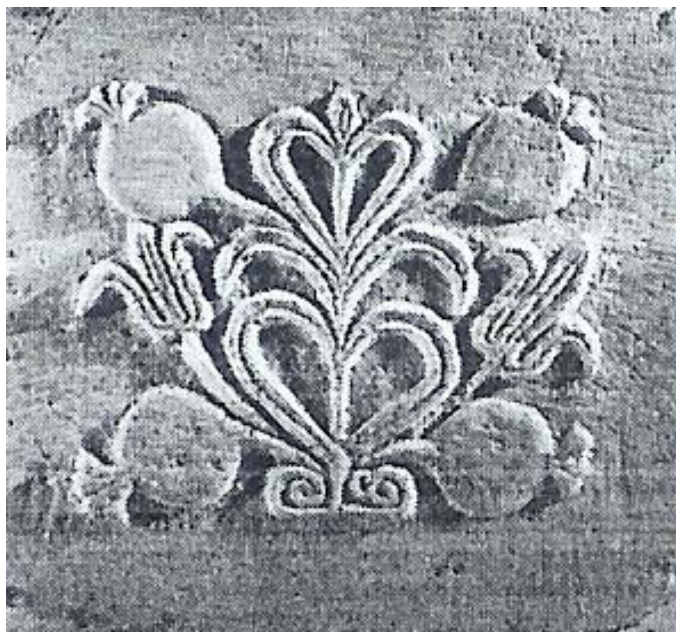
⁷⁹ **Fig. 35:** Dr. JPK's postcard collection.

⁸⁰ *Calyx*: the sepals as a whole. See Appendix, Clapham et al (1962).

⁸¹ For example, remains of pomegranates preserved in Bronze Age levels at Gezer, Jericho, and Arad: Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (1979), p. 172. A. Goor (1968), p. 70.

⁸² It is frequently mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Its flowers and fruits decorated priestly robes and Solomon's Temple: *Ex. 39: 24-26; 1Kings 7: 18, 20*, for example.

⁸³ The Harris Papyrus (period of Ramesses II) states that the Egyptians imported pomegranates from Palestine, Goor (1968), p. 71.



The end face of a hard limestone, relief-carved ossuary shows two pairs of pomegranates emerging from an unusual central palmette, flanked by lilies between the upper and lower pomegranates.⁸⁴ The motif is known on tomb facades and on some sarcophagi.⁸⁵

Plate 33:
Courtesy of the Israel
Antiquities Authority

References

Bagatti, P. B. and Milik, J. T. (1958) 45-69.

BHS

Borowski, Oded, Agriculture in Iron Age Israel (1979), p. 172.

Goor, Asaph (1968) 70-88.

NRSV

11. Citrus medica L. Citron: Variety Etrog (Heb. אתרוג).

The citron is an evergreen shrub with ovate or elliptical leaves. The fruit is variable in form: large, ovoid, ellipsoid or cone-shaped, with a nipple. Its rind can be rough, knobbed or furrowed (**Fig. 36**)⁸⁶. It is not native to Palestine, but its importance is attested by archaeology⁸⁷ and the traditional Jewish belief that פרי עץ הדר in Lev. 23: 40, often translated ‘fruit of goodly (ornamental/beautiful) trees,’ is the etrog, glorifying it, along with the palm, at the Feast of Tabernacles.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Rahmani, Catalogue (1994), No. 308L, Plate 44 and p. 148. See also Nos. 60; 181; 209; 758. Pomegranates are uncommon on ossuaries.

⁸⁵ For example, on the pediment of Jehoshaphat and Sanhedriya 14, both on the lower frieze and a sarcophagus lid of the Tomb of Helene (Kings).

⁸⁶ Hepper (1992), p. 121.

⁸⁷ It appears on coins, mosaics and other artefacts of the Second Temple period.

⁸⁸ “On the first day you shall take the fruit of ‘majestic trees’, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days” (Lev. 23: 40). NRSV. A. Goor (1968), 152-81.



The etrog is seen on the lower left-hand motif of the ossuary lid (**Plate DFL 32, p. 38**), which Bagatti did not identify, on the pediments of Jehoshaphat (**Plate 34**⁸⁹ – see also **Plate 16, p. 22**) and Sanhedriya 14 (**Plate 35**)⁹⁰, the lower frieze of the Tomb of Helene, the sarcophagus lid from Helene's tomb, and elsewhere.

Fig. 36

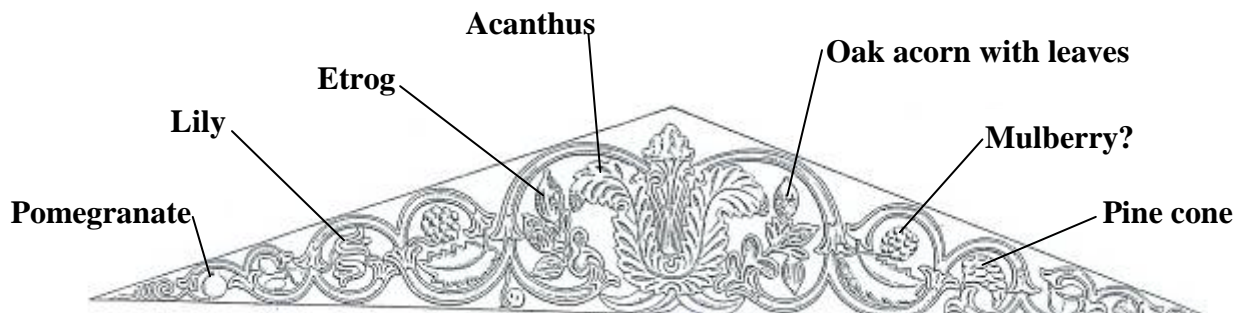


Plate 34. Reconstruction of Jehoshaphat pediment



Plate 35. Sanhedriya 14

⁸⁹ **Plate 34** = Image 77, p. 135 in N. Avigad, Ancient Monuments in the Kidron Valley (1954).

⁹⁰ Dr. JPK's collection.

References

Avigad, Nahman, Ancient Monuments in the Kidron Valley (Bialik Institute, Jerusalem: 1954).

BHS

Brown, Driver, Briggs, BDB Hebrew and English Lexicon (Mass: 1906).

Goor. Asaph, Fruits of the Holy Land (1968), 152-81.

NRSV.

12. Taraxacum sp. Dandelion. Bitter Herbs (Heb. מרורים).

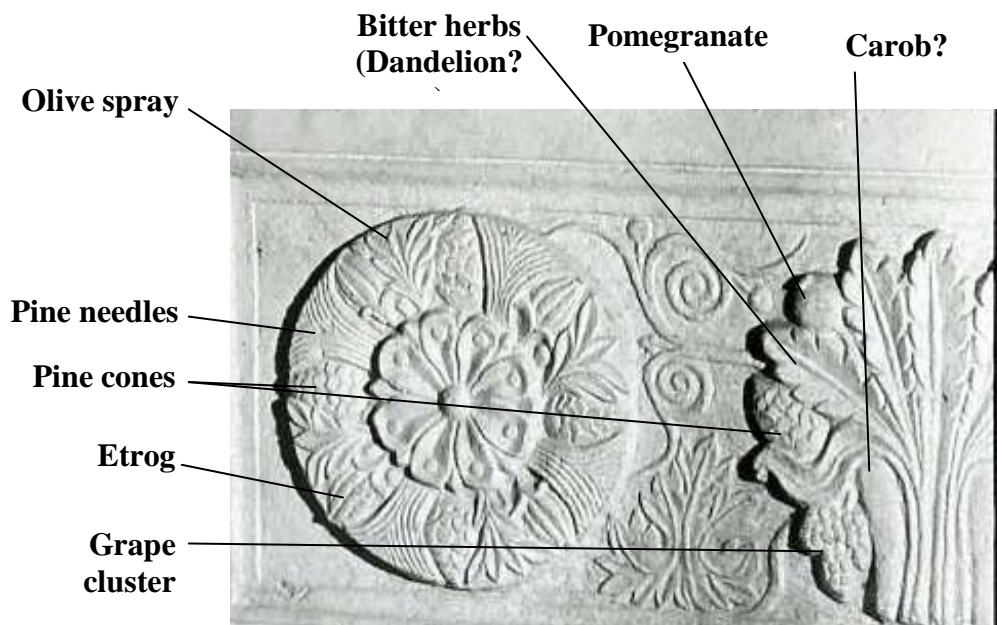


Fig. 37. T. vulgare

This is a robust plant whose narrowly oblong leaves, with variously toothed or cut margins, are arranged in rosette form (**Fig. 37**)⁹¹. It is one of many plants comprising bitter herbs. It is restricted to moist, hilly regions of Palestine and can be bought in bundles in Arab markets today.⁹² Bitter herbs are known from the Bible as a garnish in connection with Passover instructions (Ex. 12: 8).⁹³

The sheaf of leaves on the front face of the DF ossuary (**Plate 36**; see also **Plate 19, p. 25**)⁹⁴, unidentified by Bagatti and Milik, are tentatively identified as *Taraxacum* sp. based on leaf shape with cut margins (which may be stylized) and the suggestion of a rosette arrangement. The lowest leaf, which is narrower and curved, may represent a different plant. The leaves are interspersed with grapes, cones and pomegranates. The wreath contains several species already identified elsewhere.

Plate 36.
DF ossuary:
Front detail



⁹¹ Fauna and Flora (1972), p. 99.

⁹² N. Hepper (1994), p. 130.

⁹³ "They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs" (Ex. 12: 8); see also Num. 9: 11: cited in Fauna and Flora (1972), p. 98.

⁹⁴ Dr. JPK's collection.

13. Ceratonia siliqua L. Carob. (Gk. Keration).



The carob tree has leathery pinnate leaves and long, broad pods (**Fig. 38**)⁹⁵ and is common in Galilee and the Plain of Sharon. It was, and still is, important as cattle fodder, thought to be the husks eaten by the swine in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15: 16), yet also traditionally valued as food by the Jews especially at times of shortage.⁹⁶ It is proposed that the long objects between the sheaf of bitter herbs and the grapes (**Plate 36**) are carobs by their shape.

Fig. 38. Carob



A representation of carobs on a mosaic floor strengthens this view (**Plate. 37**).⁹⁷

Plate 37 Carob mosaic

Similar motifs on the front of the Mount Scopus ossuary (**Plate 27, p. 31** including lid, and **Plate 38**, an enlargement) may also be tentatively identified as carob. Both Sussman and Rahmani suggest acanthus for the central leaf sprays; however, these leaves are pinnate (leaflets arranged along a common stalk) whereas acanthus leaves are whole. These resemble olive leaf sprays with olive fruits at their tips.



Olive fruit?

Olive branches

Tri-lobate bunch of
Hebron grapes?

Carobs?

Tri-lobate bunch of
standard grapes

Plate 38

⁹⁵ W.H. Groser, Scripture Natural History I (1895), Frontispiece, p. 107.

⁹⁶ Hepper (1992), pp. 123-4; Goor (1968), p. 262.

⁹⁷ Mosaic floor of a Nabatean settlement at Mamshit (Kurnub), Negev: Mamshit Archaeological Expedition, Jerusalem, in Goor (1968), p. 258.

References

Goor, A (1968), pp. 255-67.

Groser, W.H., Scripture Natural History I: The Trees and Plants Mentioned in the Bible (Religious Tract Society: London, 1895), Frontispiece, p. 107.

Hepper (1992), pp. 123-5

14. Laurus nobilis L. Laurel (Heb. אֶרֶן).



Laurel is an evergreen tree with oval, pointed leaves and small olive-shaped berries (**Fig. 39**). It is native to Palestine, and is part of the forests and maquis.⁹⁸ Botanists and linguists argue about its existence in the Bible.⁹⁹ Garlands of laurel traditionally signified victory in war or contests for the Greeks and Romans.

Fig. 39. Laurel

Garlands or wreaths are rare on tomb facades, but appear on end faces of some ossuaries such as No. 1 DF (**Plate 39**).¹⁰⁰

Its right-hand end-face has a laurel crown or garland tied at the base with a knot and ribbon loop and enclosing a 'whirling wheel' of laurel leaves and berries. Another ossuary (**Plate 40**)¹⁰¹ shows a wreath/garland, possibly laurel, tied at the top with a filet whose tips end inside the wreath.

⁹⁸ *Maquis*: evergreen thicket woodland: Hepper (1992), p. 23. **Fig. 39**: Otto Wilhelm Thomé, Flora von Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz, 1885, Gera, Germany (Kurt Stueber Source: <http://www.BioLib.de>).

⁹⁹ Some commentators translate אֶרֶן in Is. 44: 14, about a carpenter planting אֶרֶן then using it for fuel and making idols, as 'pine', 'fir tree', 'ash' or 'cedar'. For linguistic reasons, Low (Die flora der Juden [1922-34], reprint 1967, 4 vols.) prefers 'laurel'; M. Zohary agrees (Flora Palaestina (Jerusalem: 1966-86) 8 vols.

¹⁰⁰ **Plate 39** = Plate 24. 2 in M. Avi-Yonah (1981), P. M. Piccirillo.

¹⁰¹ Rahmani, Catalogue (1994), No. 206L, Plate 28 and p. 125.



Plate 39



Plate 40: Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority

References

- Hepper, F.N. [1992], p. 23.
Avi-Yonah, M. (1981), Pl. 24:2.
Rahmani, Catalogue (1994), No. 206L, and p. 125.
Fauna and Flora (1972), pp. 133-4
Goor, A.
Waisel, Y. and Alon, A. (1980), pp. 60-61.
Zohary, M. (1962), p. 293.
Fig. 39: Kurt Stueber Source www.BioLib.de

15. Myrtus communis L. Myrtle (Heb. הדס).

Myrtle is an evergreen, much-branched shrub with oval to lanceolate leaves which are alternate, opposite or arranged in threes; its fruits, on long stalks, are berries.¹⁰² It is native to Palestine¹⁰³ and fits geographically with the context of Neh. 8: 15: “Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths...,”¹⁰⁴ a practice still observed for the Feast of Tabernacles.¹⁰⁵ Myrtle, like laurel, was used in wreaths or garlands by Greeks and Romans.

¹⁰² **Fig. 40:** Author’s own photograph; **Fig. 41:** Waisel and Alon (1980), p. 67; **Fig. 42:** Pamela Tyers.

¹⁰³ It grows today on Mount Carmel and in Galilee, but has been found in Samaria and near Jerusalem.

¹⁰⁴ Zohary (1962), p. 293. See also Is. 41: 19; 55: 13; Zech. 1: 8, 10-11.

¹⁰⁵ Hepper (1992), p. 26.



Fig. 40 Myrtle



Fig. 41 Myrtle



Fig. 42: Myrtle with fruit

Many of the fruits already identified in this study are found on a semi-cylindrical sarcophagus lid (**Plate 41**)¹⁰⁶ found in the Tomb of Helene. An acanthus scroll arises from a small cup and winds around the edges and across the centre, enclosing mixed naturalistic blossoms, leaves and fruits. Two panels edged with rope moulding, contain two rows of lanceolate leaves, arranged in threes, identified here as myrtle leaves, tied at the base, each with fruit.¹⁰⁷ It should be noted that stylized forms of olive, laurel/bay and myrtle leaves cannot always be distinguished from one another. Eva Wilson suggests that the **context** of a leaf border, certainly in Greek ornament, might be a better guide to identifying a leaf rather than its shape. For example, “Leaves and berries in a leaf design in association with Athena would be interpreted as olive, while in architectural ornament, overlapping leaves covering a convex moulding are known as bay-leaf whatever their shape”.¹⁰⁸ This lid is now in the Louvre, Paris, and needs to be published properly.

¹⁰⁶ F. de Saulcy, *Narrative of a Journey* (1853), p. 119.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. **Plate 71, p. 69** (Palmyra lintel fragment).

¹⁰⁸ Eva Wilson, *8000 Years of Ornament* (London: 1994), p. 132.

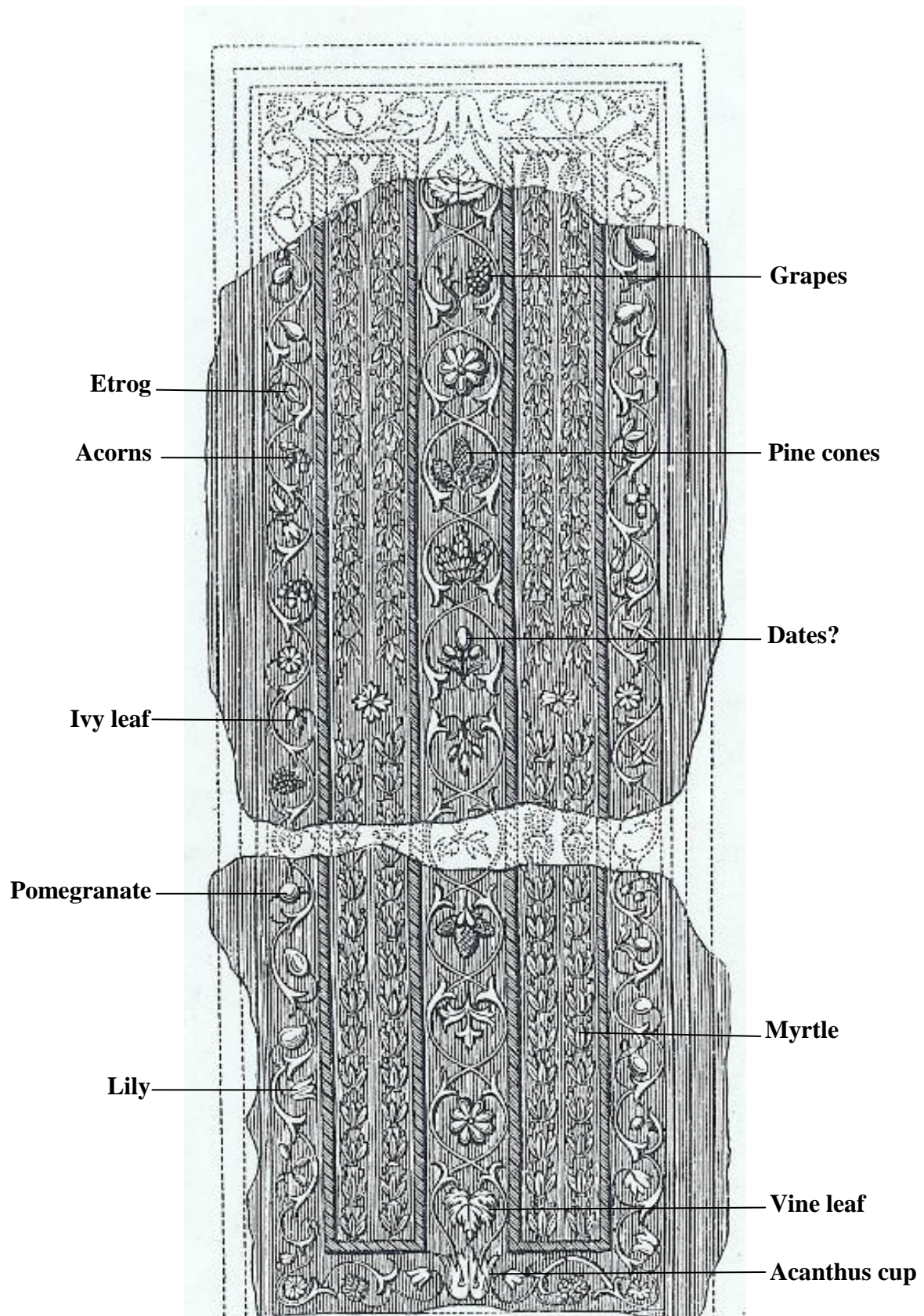


Plate 41. Lid from the Tomb of Helene

References

- De Saulcy, F. Narrative of a Journey Round the Dead Sea and in the Bible Lands in 1850 and 1851 (Richard Bentley: London, 1853).
- Waisel, Y., and Alon, A. (1980), p. 67.
- Watzinger, C., Denkmaler Palastinas II (1935).
- Zohary (1962), p. 293.
- Hepper (1994), p. 26.

16. Rosettes.

The predominant ossuary design is the rosette, with the number of petals being six or its multiples if compass-designed, or four and its multiples if done with a ruler. There is a great diversity of form, some highly stylized, others more naturalistic as illustrated on this relief-carved ossuary in the style of a sarcophagus (**Plate 42**).¹⁰⁹ Several common plant species native to Palestine are suggested as models for such rosettes on the basis of petal shape and flower form (**Figs. 43-46**)¹¹⁰: wind-flower, flax and crowfoot.



Plate 42

¹⁰⁹ Dr. JPK's collection.

¹¹⁰ Augusta A. Temple, Flowers and Trees of Palestine (London: SPCK, 1929): **Fig. 43**: Plate opposite title page; **Fig. 44**: Plate 3; **Fig. 45**: Plate 1; **Fig. 46**: Plate 18. Photographs by K. Marian Reynolds.



Fig. 43

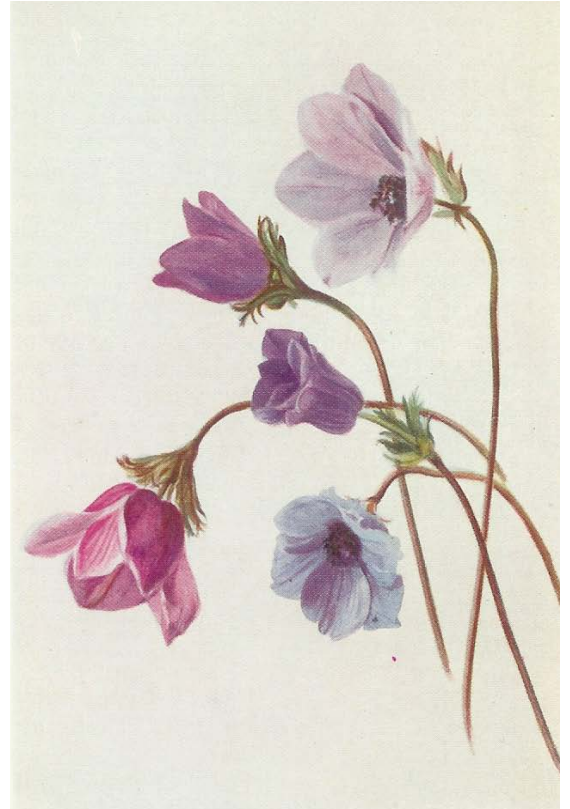


Fig. 44



Fig. 45



Fig. 46

CHAPTER 2

THE FUNCTION OF OSSUARIES

Significance (of the plant motifs) is associated with context, necessitating a closer examination of the nature of an ossuary and the context in which it is found. Ossuaries are small stone chests, used for gathering bones (ossilegium) from primary burials of one or more (related) corpses indicated by inscriptions in Hebrew or Greek, interred in a Jewish family tomb in the late Second Temple period (probably c. 20 BCE to 70 CE, mostly at Jerusalem). They resemble household chests, with flat, gabled or rounded lids, common in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea areas from Greek to Roman times.¹¹¹ Their dimensions were determined by bone size: the length by the length of the limb bones and the width by the pelvis and skull, and by numbers of bones depending on age and number of skeletons to be interred.

Most are made from a local soft limestone (*ka'akule* or *nari*), easy to decorate using either an incised or chip-carving technique, but some are made from hard limestone (reddish *mizzi yahudi* or whitish *meleke*), requiring more skill for chip-carving and therefore more expensive, and usually carved in relief. Incised decoration often accompanies a red or yellow wash on the face. The ornamental filling of all available space (*horror vacui*) suggests to Rahmani unsophisticated taste, but to Avi-Yonah, an orientalisising style.¹¹² An amazing variety of motifs, from straight lines, arcs and circles using ruler and compass, to architecture and plant forms, vary artistically from the singularly beautiful to the crude. Most ossuaries were left plain and were found, together with decorated ossuaries or sarcophagi, in both rich and poorer tombs. Sarcophagi accommodated the intact corpse not the dismembered bones. That of a child may be as small as an ossuary, but can be distinguished by its hard stone and relief ornament. Most hard-stone 'sarcophagi' are much too small to be anything other than particularly expensive ossuaries. Jerusalem ossuaries and sarcophagi are from the same period, and decorative evidence sometimes indicates the hand of a particular artisan or workshop.

Rock-cut tombs for Jewish family burial were in use from the 2nd century BCE to the 3rd century CE, whilst the beginning of ossilegium, dates from probably c. 20 BCE, borne out by ossuary finds in the tombs together with pottery and oil lamps dating from King Herod's reign (37–4BCE). Tombs containing only earlier pottery lack ossuaries. Their use was dramatically reduced following the wars with the Romans (70 CE and 135 CE) when many Jews were killed or dispersed. They do not appear to have been used in Jerusalem after 70 CE, although some use persisted into the 2nd or even 3rd centuries CE in other Jewish centres. About 700 excavated tombs lie within a 3km radius of Jerusalem, to the north, east and south, outside the ancient city limits, some identified in **Fig. 47**.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Rahmani, *Catalogue* (1994), pp. 3-5.

¹¹² Rahmani, *Catalogue* (1994), pp. 3-8.

¹¹³ Author's drawing, after Ephraim Stern (Ed), *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Vol. 2 (1993), p. 748.

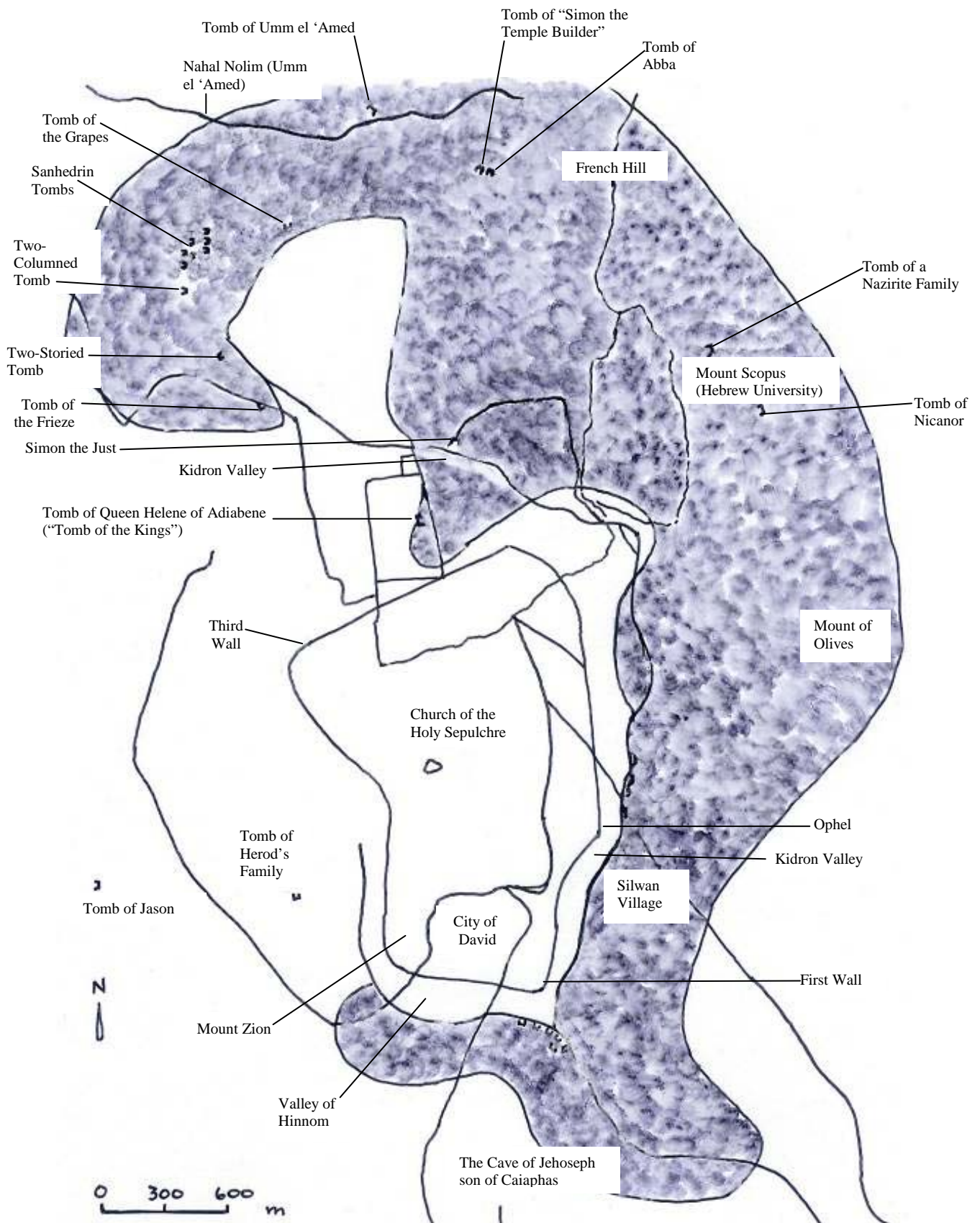


Fig.47. Map of Jerusalem Cemeteries and Tombs, Second Temple Period

Plant Motifs on Jewish Ossuaries and Sarcophagi in Palestine in the Late Second Temple Period

Characteristically, a tomb featured a forecourt, sometimes lined with benches in a monumental tomb;¹¹⁴ a vestibule leading to the tomb entrance (c. 0.75m. high by 0.5m. wide) with a shaped slab door (or, rarely, a rolling stone) for a good fit; a central square-cut chamber with a central pit to allow standing room, and often side chambers. Horizontal, vaulted burial shafts (*loculi/kokhim*), average measurement 2m. long by 1m. high and 0.5m. wide, and grooved at their opening to receive a slab closing stone, were hewn into each of the three walls. Some chambers had *arcosolia* or burial benches cut into the walls, and in Sanhedriya 7, two *arcosolia* had been cut into troughs forming fixed sarcophagi, once covered with a slab. These features are illustrated in **Fig. 48 and Plates 43-45**.¹¹⁵ Ossuaries were placed on the benches or in the *loculi*.

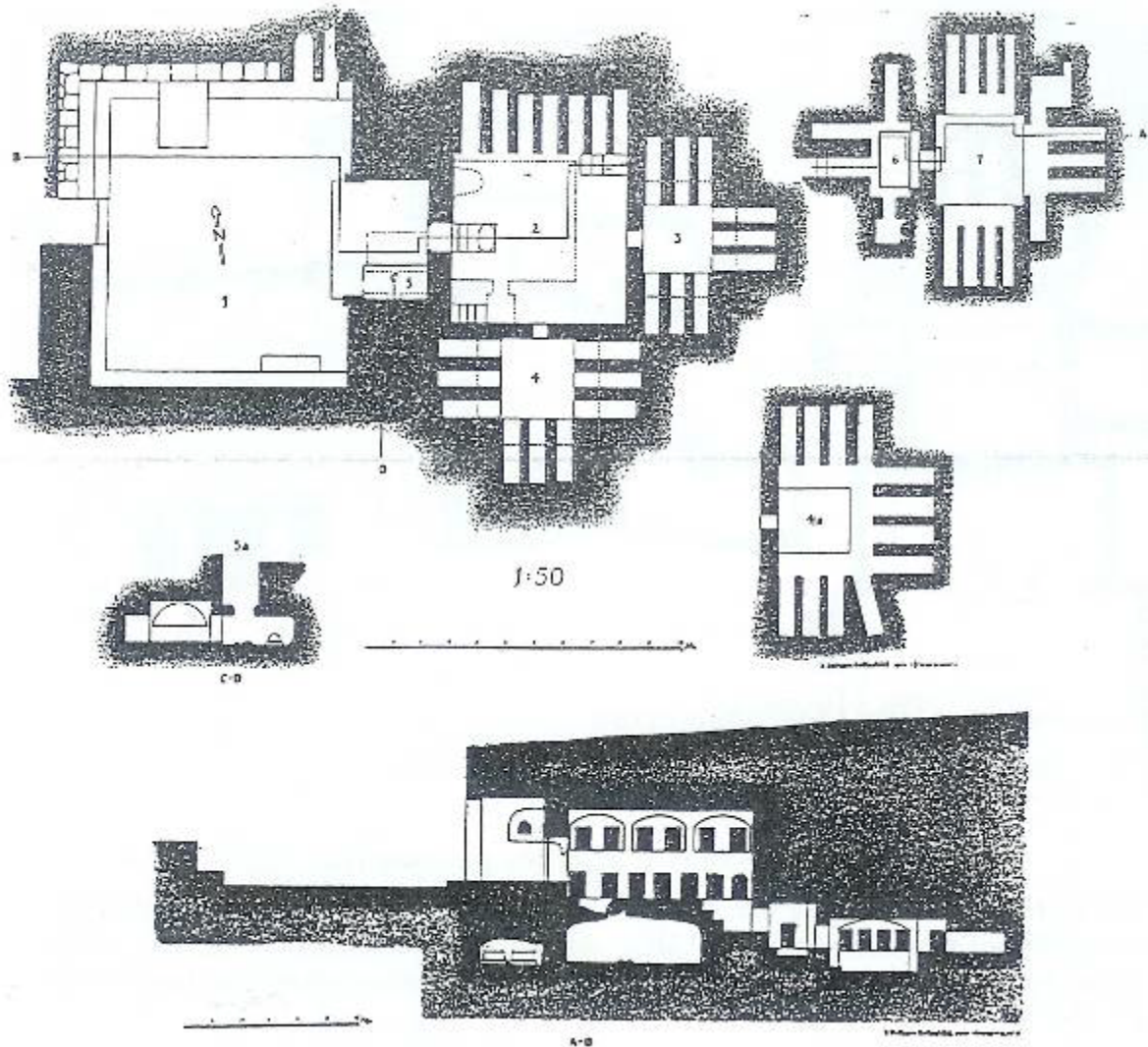


Fig. 48. Plan and sections of Sanhedriya Tomb 14

- ¹¹⁴ Sanhedriya 14; Tomb of Helene (Kings). The courtyard was probably used for mourning and memorial services similar to the 'eulogy place' or 'house' mentioned in Jewish sources (b. Bava Bathra 100b), cited in R. Hachlili, 'Jewish funerary customs during the Second Temple period, in the light of excavations at the Jericho necropolis', *PEQ* 115 (1983), p. 112.
- ¹¹⁵ **Fig.48:** Sanhedriya plan: L.Y. Rahmani, 'Jewish Rock-cut tombs in Jerusalem', *Atiqot* Vol. III (1961), p. 97. **Plates 43 and 44:** J. Rothschild, 'The Tombs of Sanhedria', *PEQ* (1952) 23-38; **Plate 43** = Plate 7, Fig. 1; **Plate 44** = Plate 8, Fig. 2. **Plate 45:** JPK's collection.

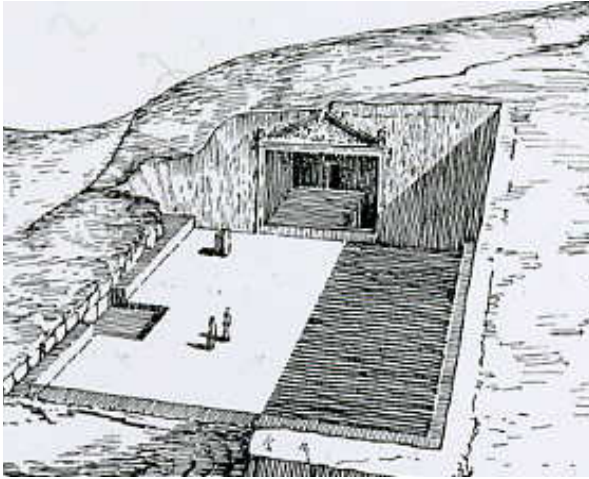


Plate 43. Sanhedriya 14: forecourt, façade, vestibule, entrance. Reconstruction



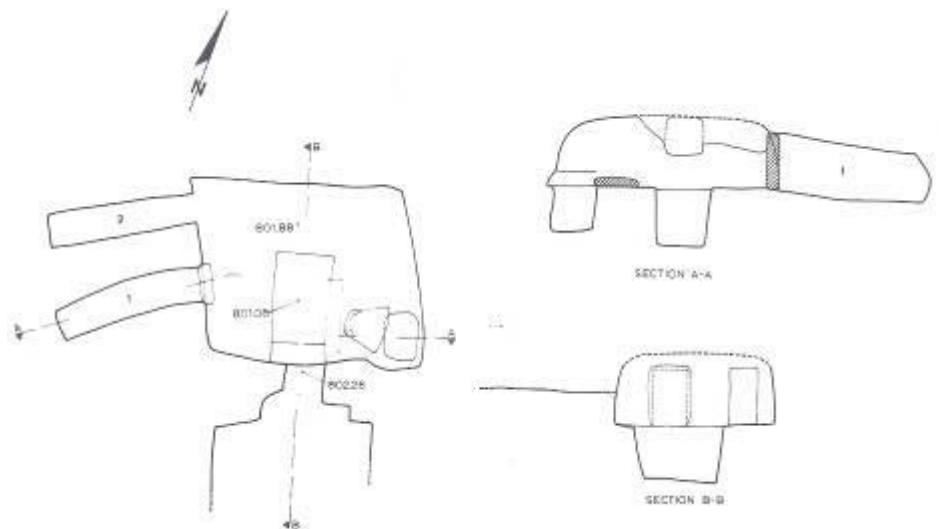
Plate 44. Sanhedriya 7: reconstructed chamber with rock-cut arcosolia sarcophagi



Plate 45. Sanhedriya 7: facade

Many tombs are much smaller and simpler; for example, expertly cut tombs 1 and 6 at French Hill suggest professional carving whilst the less skilfully executed tomb 3 indicates family involvement (**Fig. 49**).¹¹⁶

Fig. 49. French Hill Herodian Tomb 3: Plan and Sections



¹¹⁶ James F. Strange, 'Late Hellenistic and Herodian Ossuary Tombs at French Hill, Jerusalem', *BASOR*, No. 219 (1975). **Fig. 49** = Fig. 5 Tomb 3 Plan and Section, p. 45.

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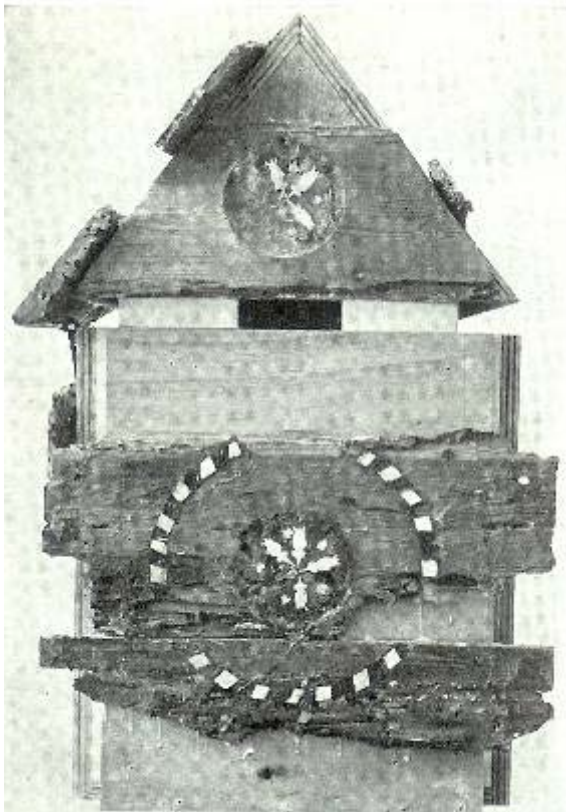


Plate 46. Inlaid wooden coffin

Whilst no wooden coffins have been found in Jerusalem, evidence from Jericho is of primary burials in wooden coffins (Sycamore, Christ-thorn and Cypress, and possibly using iron nails) placed in loculi (1st century BCE), post-dated by secondary burials in similar limestone ossuaries to those found in Jerusalem, evidenced by finds and stratigraphy.¹¹⁷ However, in various En Gedi tombs, primary burial in a wooden coffin (the dominant mode) or on the tomb floor was accompanied by secondary burial in large wooden coffins or in ossuaries with no chronological division.¹¹⁸ A comparative timber analysis identifies similar local species as at Jericho, although two 'En Gedi coffins were of highly esteemed (imported) Cedar, suggesting to Liphshitz the occupants' possible higher social ranking.¹¹⁹

The burial caves in Nahal David revealed a most interesting wooden coffin covered with a gabled lid and inlaid with bone and various woods in a pattern of circles, rosettes and pomegranates (**Plate. 46**). Inside was a cup, a wooden bowl and a plaited basket containing rinds of two pomegranates and shells of two walnuts.¹²⁰

Archaeological evidence of ossilegium accords with literary evidence; for example, Rabbi Eleazar bar Zadok, in *Semahot* 12. 9, describes secondary burial in detail:

"Thus spoke my father at the time of his death: 'My son, bury me first in a niche. In the course of time, collect my bones and put them in an ossuary; but do not gather them with your own hands'. And thus did I attend him: Johanan entered, collected the bones, and spread a sheet over them. I then came in, rent my clothes for them, and sprinkled dried herbs over them. Just as he attended his father, so I attended him".

Earlier periods had been dominated by collective secondary burial in a charnel; by the Hellenistic period, the Iron Age benches for primary burial hewn along the wall, with former burials underneath in a communal charnel, were replaced by arcossolia and loculi as described.¹²¹ However, Kloner has argued (in his unpublished doctoral thesis in Hebrew) for klinai (couches) rather than bench arcossolia which he claims did not appear in Jerusalem until the 1st century CE.

Whether the use of Jewish ossuaries derived from religious belief is hotly debated. Rahmani, with some support from others,¹²² believes ossilegium was used to facilitate physical resurrection after expiation of

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- ¹¹⁷ R. Hachlili, 'Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis', *PEQ* 115 (1983) 109-32.
- ¹¹⁸ G. Hadas, 'Nine tombs of the Second Temple period at 'En Gedi'', *Atiqot*, Vol. XXIV (1994) 1-8. Chronology was based on access to the two types of burial in the loculi.
- ¹¹⁹ N. Liphshitz, 'Timber Analysis of En Gedi Wooden Coffins: A Comparative Study', *Atiqot* XXVIII (1996) 93-7.
- ¹²⁰ N. Avigad, 'Expedition A', *IEJ*, Vol. 12 (1962), pp. 181-3; **Plate 46** = Plate 22.
- ¹²¹ Rahmani, 'Jewish Ossuaries', in Rimon, Ofra, *Purity broke out in Israel: The Reuben and Edith Hecht Museum Catalogue No. 9*, (Haifa, 1994b).
- ¹²² Figueras, 'Jewish Ossuaries and Secondary Burial', *Immanuel* 19 (1984) 42-57; Hachlili, *Jewish Ornamental Ossuaries*, cited in B. McCane (2003), p. 59.

sins through decomposition of the flesh of the corpse during its year in the primary burial place of the tomb. He cites passages in Maccabees linking personal resurrection with righteous conduct and the necessity for expiation of sin for resurrection (2 Macc. 7; 12: 38-45 and 14: 46),¹²³ which was the view of Pharisees based on Hasidim ideas of the Hasmonean period, but rejected by the Sadducees. Rahmani notes Josephus' claim that the Pharisaic view was widely accepted among the populace¹²⁴ and quotes rabbinic sources to strengthen his argument; for example, a passage in the Jerusalem Talmud Mo'ed Katan:¹²⁵

And further said Rabbi Meir: "A man collects the bones of his father and mother, because it is a gladness unto him.... when the flesh had decayed, they collected the bones and buried them in an ossuary. That day (the son) kept (again) full mourning rites, but the following day he was glad, because his forebears rested from judgment".

Steven Fine¹²⁶ criticises this use of later rabbinic literature as being too far removed from the practice of ossilegium, and claims Pharisaic belief in resurrection in 1st century Jerusalem may not have been widespread; the possible use of ossuaries by Sadducees would support this. He cites the ossuary inscribed "Joseph Son of Caiaphas," possibly the Sadducean High Priest, and the ossuary inscribed "Yehohanah daughter of Yehohanan, son of Thophlos", a high priest. Instead, he links ossuary use with an increase in prosperity during Herod's reconstruction of Jerusalem and its temple, allowing transformation of burial practices, linking it with the possibility of a growing sense of the individual's place within society, especially the family. Rahmani himself has noted the appearance and subsequent disappearance of a stone vessel industry corresponding to the dates of ossuary use.¹²⁷

Eyal Regev raises further difficulties with Rahmani's theory: that Jewish belief in resurrection emerged a century earlier (as 2 and 4 Macc) and that, after 70 CE, when ossuary use diminished, belief in resurrection and atonement grew during the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods; that some ossuaries contained several family members, whilst other bones were left dispersed in niches and on the cave floor. He cites Ezek. 37: 1 – 2, where raised bones had been scattered in the valley, so that expiation for sin could be achieved in a secondary burial in a depository and, indeed, a person might be raised from the dead from an ossuary, a sarcophagus or a coffin. He concludes there is no connection between these religious beliefs and burial in an ossuary.¹²⁸ On the basis of sociological and anthropological studies, Regev proposes, like Fine, that ossuaries indicate individualisation, but takes it further. Just as material culture is used to construct a person's identity in life, so individual ossilegium designated a special mark of identity, denied in collective bone gathering. Individualistic characteristics of ossuaries are represented by inscriptions and biographical details (family relations, self-identity through the eyes of his/her family).¹²⁹

¹²³ 2 Macc. 7 concerns the martyrdom of seven brothers who obey the law rather than the king and assert their belief in bodily resurrection; in 2 Macc. 12: 38-45 expiation for sinners required a sin offering for them to achieve bodily resurrection; 2 Macc. 14: 46 links an elder's suffering with his belief in resurrection:

"with his blood now completely drained from him, he tore out his entrails, took them in both hands and hurled them at the crowd, calling upon the Lord of life and spirit to give them back to him again. This was the manner of his death." Rahmani, 'Jewish Ossuaries', in Rimon (1994) p. 30.

¹²⁴ Antiquities 18: 17

¹²⁵ TJ MK 80c, cited in Rahmani, Catalogue (1994), p. 54. See also M. Sanh. 6: 5-6. B.T., Sanh. 47b; Sem. 12: 7. 9.

¹²⁶ S. Fine, BAR, Vol. 27, No. 4 (2001), p. 41.

¹²⁷ Rahmani, 'Stone vessels in the late Second Temple period,' in Rimon (1994c), p. 26.

¹²⁸ E. Regev, 'The Individualistic Meaning of Jewish Ossuaries: A Socio-Anthropological Perspective on Burial Practice', PEQ 133 (2001), p. 41.

¹²⁹ E. Regev (2001), pp. 43-4.

Plant Motifs on Jewish Ossuaries and Sarcophagi in Palestine in the Late Second Temple Period

Byron McCane, too, believes this death ritual was cultural, symbolically expressing beliefs and practices that were important in life.¹³⁰ He believes that increasing Hellenism influencing local culture made Jews creative in preserving their Jewish identity,¹³¹ an idea worth pursuing.

These new theories are exciting and convincing, yet caution is needed in dismissing Rahmani's arguments. For example, it is recognized by many scholars that later rabbinical sages can offer valuable insight into traditional Jewish mores passed down the centuries. Similarly, the use of ossilegium by Sadducees may simply mean they adopted this practice without subscribing to the belief, a possibility conceded by Regev,¹³² whilst the sudden decline in ossuary use after 70 CE was surely related to the mass killing of many Jews in the revolt and the dispersion of the remainder. The debate remains open.

¹³⁰ B. McCane, Roll Back the Stone: Death and Burial in the World of Jesus (2003), p. 28.

¹³¹ B. McCane (2003), p. 46.

¹³² E. Regev (2001), p. 41.

CHAPTER 3

ROSETTES AND FLORAL MOTIFS IN NON-FUNERARY CONTEXTS

The significance of using specific floral motifs in a funerary context is complicated by their appearance in domestic situations in all strata of Jewish life. Examples from destruction layers of Jerusalem (70CE) and Masada (73CE) and the Herodian Temple Mount will highlight some startling similarities.

1. Mosaic floors:

The compass-formed ‘rug’ mosaic (**Plate 47**) from the bathroom of the ‘palatial mansion’, Jerusalem, a 6-point rosette in black and red with crossways petals encircling it, is identical to rosettes found on some ossuaries.



Plate 47



Plate 48

Plate 48 shows a fine mosaic with a square frame of an intertwined fret pattern enclosing a circular frame with a guilloche pattern. It has pomegranate motifs in the corners. The centre had contained a large rosette.

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A multi-coloured mosaic pavement, found elsewhere in the Jewish quarter (**Plate 49**), has a complex rosette within a square frame within which are angled patterns with denticulate ends resembling the Greek letter gamma.¹³³ ‘Gammadiae’ are typical Roman ornament, possibly symbolical. A similar arrangement of rosette with gammas (and ivy leaves) is found on a Jerusalem ossuary of the same period (**Plate 50**).¹³⁴



Plate 49

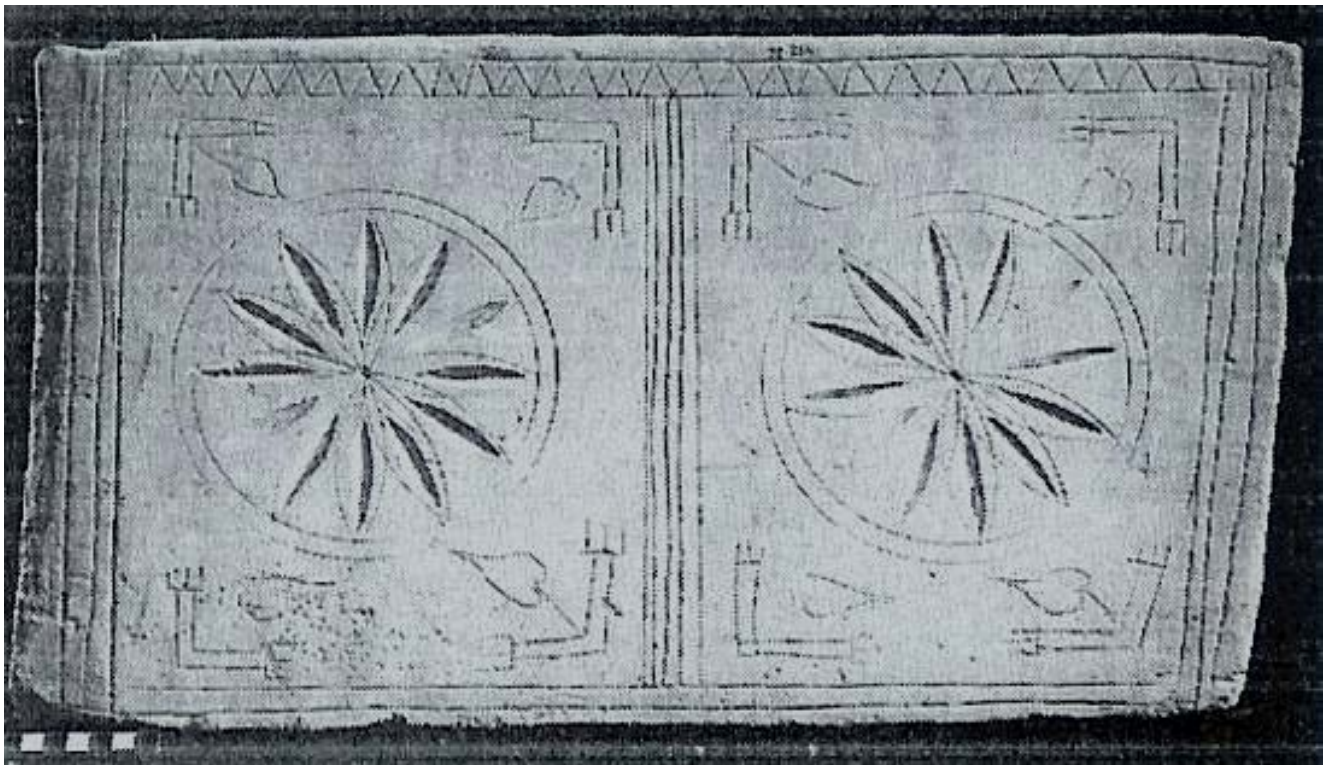


Plate 50: Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority

¹³³ N. Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (1984). **Plate 47** = 162; **Plate 48** = 109, p. 115; **Plate 49** = 164, p. 155.

¹³⁴ Rahmani, *Catalogue* (1994), No. 43, Plate 7.

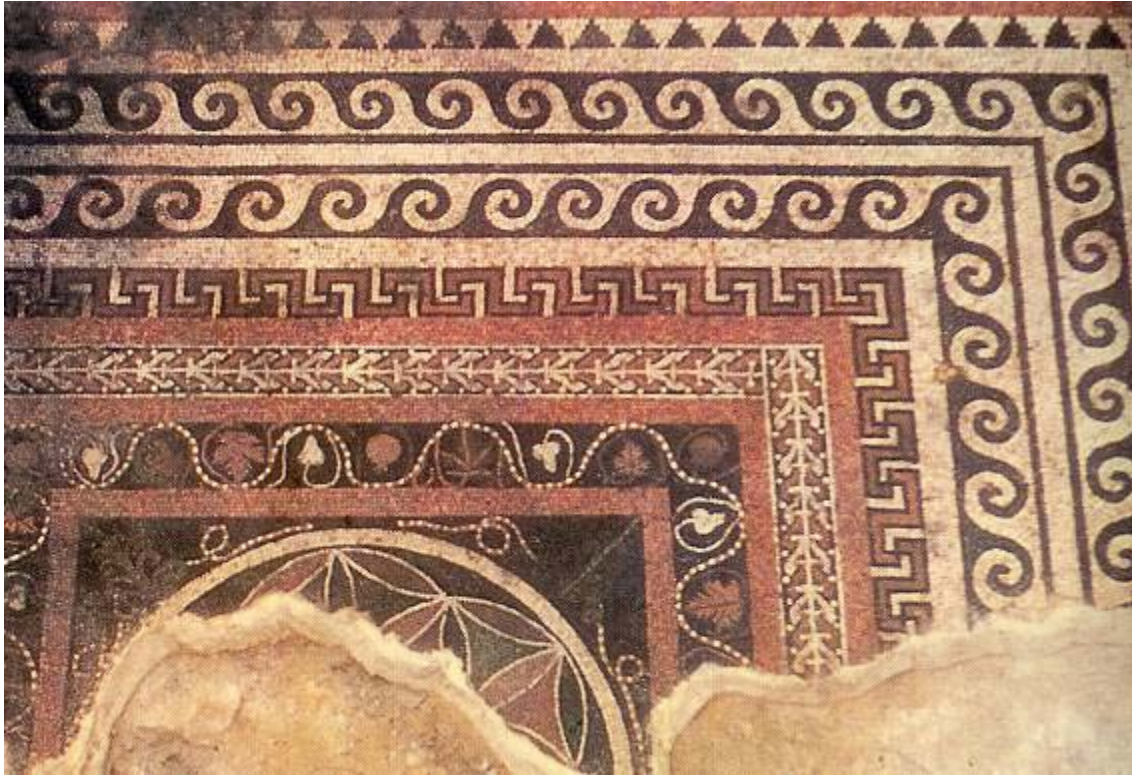


Plate 51

A beautiful mosaic floor (**Plate 51**) in the western palace at Masada combines Hellenistic geometric design with motifs prominent in Jewish art. Yadin identifies stylised olive branches,¹³⁵ but this border panel, with its small fruits and ties at the leaf bases (**Plate 52**) could be laurel or even myrtle as on the lid of the sarcophagus in the Tomb of Queen Helene, although here the leaves are in pairs rather than in threes (myrtle naturally exhibits both forms). This mosaic also exhibits a stylised vine scroll with vine leaves, three-lobed bunches of grapes, and pomegranates, as well as palmettes.



Plate 52: Detail of border panel

¹³⁵ Y. Yadin, *Masada: Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand* (1966), p. 119. **Plate 51** = 13a Western Palace mosaic pavement, Oecus 456; **Plate 52** = 13c Detail of Room 456 pavement: from G. Foerster, 'Art and Architecture', *Masada V* (IES: 1995).



Plate 53

A striking mosaic floor in a corridor leading to the bathroom at Masada (**Plate 53**)¹³⁶ has a geometric design with a splendid eight petal rosette at its centre, executed in unusual colours, again reminiscent of many ossuaries.

2. Stone tables: These discoveries were made in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem; fragments of tables were found in the 'mansion', a house next door and the 'burnt house'.

One form is a rectangular table top with floral ornamentation on up to three of its edges and a single central leg (with a depression into which fits a projection from the underside of the table top), chip-carved or incised like ossuaries on hard limestone, white chalk or bituminous chalk.¹³⁷ The other form is a smaller round table with three wooden legs, now perished.¹³⁸ Only a few are known so far, as compared with hundreds of ossuaries.

The tabletop shown in **Plate 54.1** has a stylised leaf pattern, similar to that on several ossuaries, and is probably olive.¹³⁹ The leaves next to the rosette lack a central vein. Indeed, the appearance of this motif is strikingly similar to that of the ossuary shown in **Plates 28 – 30** of **Ch. 1** (p. 28 ff). However, there are no fruits emerging from the outer leaf strip here on the table top, and the central motif is a rosette, not leaves and fruits. Its leg has a capital in the Doric style, although top and leg were found in different areas.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ **Plate 53** = 14 Western Palace Mosaic, from Masada V (IES, 1995).

¹³⁷ Yitzhak Magen, The Stone vessel Industry in the Second Temple period (2002), 101-110.

¹³⁸ Avigad, (1984), pp. 106-7.

¹³⁹ See **Plate 7, Ch. 1, p. 14**.

¹⁴⁰ Avigad, (1984), p. 68.

The rosette is known on surviving tabletops (**Plate 54.2**) as on ossuaries.

The 'laurel sprig' (**Plate 54. 3**) identified by Avigad, has a form very similar to that of 'myrtle' panels identified on the sarcophagus lid from Queen Helene's tomb (**Ch.1, Plate 41, p. 46**) and from the Palmyrene fragment (**Ch. 4, Plate 71, p. 69**), but without berries. It may be myrtle.

On another tabletop, apart from the unusual 'fish' motif (**Plate 54. 4**), a lily is visible, a motif familiar on ossuaries.¹⁴¹



Plate 54: 1-4

¹⁴¹ **Plate 54** = 185: Avigad (1984), p. 169

Plant Motifs on Jewish Ossuaries and Sarcophagi in Palestine in the Late Second Temple Period

3. Glassware and pottery:

A glass pitcher (**Plate 55**)¹⁴² shows a frieze of palmettes, known on ossuaries, around its shoulder. Red painted floral motifs decorate painted bowls (**Plate 56**)¹⁴³ found in the 'mansion'. The right-hand lower plate may have an outer ring of stylized laurel leaves, an inner ring of laurel fruits and a central cluster of similar fruits; the left-hand bowl, three olive branches.



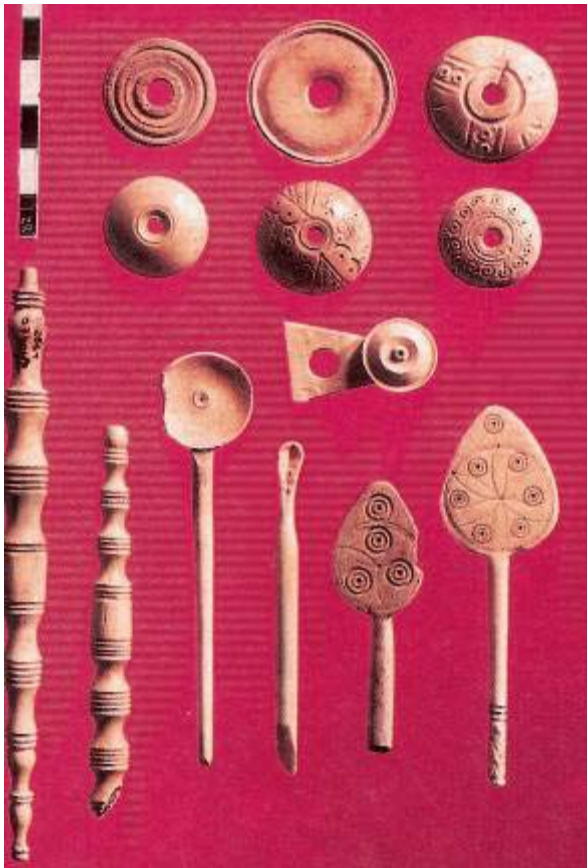
Plate 55



Plate 56

¹⁴² Avigad (1984), p. 108; **Plate 55** = 95 & 96. The glass pitcher, made by Ennion, was distorted in the heat of the fire.

¹⁴³ Avigad (1984), p. 179; **Plate 56** = 201.



4. Miscellaneous items:

Three and six petal rosettes on Jerusalem bone cosmetics spoons (**Plate 57**)¹⁴⁴ are again reminiscent of those on Jerusalem ossuaries.

Plate 57

4.Monumental architecture:

This Corinthian capital (**Plate 58**)¹⁴⁵ has smooth, stylized acanthus leaves with carved 'lily' scrolls at the centre and compares favourably with capitals from the 1st century CE Tomb of Queen Helene of Adiabene.

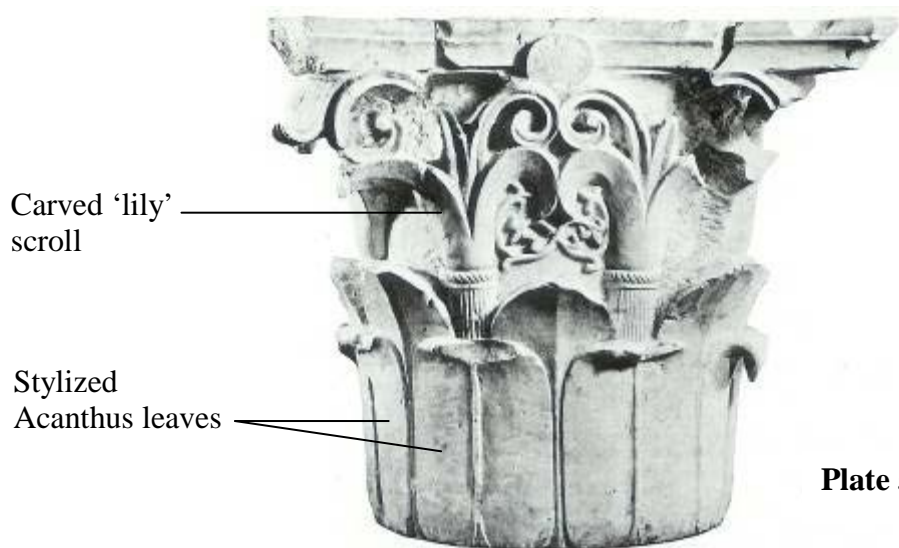


Plate 58

¹⁴⁴ **Plate 57** = 236, Avigad (1984), p. 198.

¹⁴⁵ **Plate 58** = 157, Avigad (1984), p. 151. This well preserved Corinthian capital and two drums from a column were found in the Upper City in an area dated by coins to the First Revolt (70 CE).

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Similarly, at Masada, a Corinthian capital with volutes and palmette decoration was found on the lower terrace of the palace-villa (**Plate 59**).¹⁴⁶

Plate 59

5. Architectural frescoes:

An exciting find hidden under plaster in the 'palatial mansion' was a fresco showing Ionic columns bearing a schematic Doric frieze influenced by architectural frescoes of the 'second style' in Pompei.¹⁴⁷ The stylised decoration of this painted frieze (**Plate 60**)¹⁴⁸ is of a scroll with volutes, heart-shaped leaves or fruits and palmettes.



Plate 60

¹⁴⁶ **Plate 59:** Corinthian Capital 2, Banqueting Hall, from Masada V (IES, 1995).

¹⁴⁷ '*First*' style: stucco work imitating ashlar in relief ; '*second*' style: colourful wall paintings. The reverse exists here: walls and ceiling were decorated with stucco covering up earlier painted plaster: Avigad (1984), p. 103.

¹⁴⁸ **Plate 60** = 106, Avigad (1984), p. 114.

The fruits of a fresco fragment (**Plate 61**) are correctly identified by Avigad as naturalistic pomegranates and foliage. However, identical fruits and leaves on a similar fragment (**Plate 62**) are wrongly identified as 'apples' and foliage.¹⁴⁹ Wild specimens were not found in Palestine, and the fruit of the wild apple (Heb. תפוח) is, in any case, rather small.¹⁵⁰ Hepper notes that the identity of the fruit known as תפוח by the Hebrews¹⁵¹ is still in doubt. In most English versions it is translated as 'apple' because it corresponds closely to the Arabic *tuffah*, but the New English Bible calls it apricot; however, it is uncertain whether apples or apricots were known in biblical times.¹⁵²

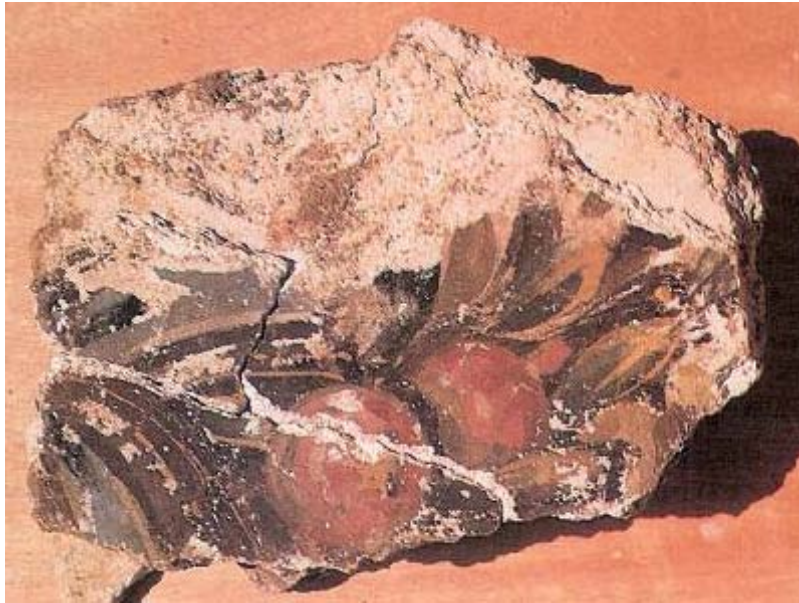


Plate 61



Plate 62

¹⁴⁹ **Plate 61** = 166; **Plate 62** = 167, Avigad (1984), p. 157

¹⁵⁰ *Fauna and Flora* (1972), pp. 92-3.

¹⁵¹ See (*Prov.* 25: 11; *Song of Solomon* 2: 3, 5; 7: 8; 8: 5)

¹⁵² Hepper (1992), p. 118.

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Wall paintings were also found at Masada, and **Plate 63**¹⁵³ shows a stylized palm tree, a rare representation in this palace.

Plate 63

6. Coins:¹⁵⁴



Plate 64



Plate 65

These shekels of the First Revolt (**Plate 64**)¹⁵⁵ show pomegranates and assorted cups, also found on ossuaries (Pomegranates: see **Plate 15**, p. 21; **Pl. DFL 32**, p. 38; **Pl. 33**, p. 39; **Pl. DF 36**, p. 41. Cup: see **Plate 67**, p. 66). The 'Judaea Capta' coin (**Plate 65**)¹⁵⁶, commemorating Roman victory after the Second Revolt, shows Judaea seated mourning under a palm tree and indicates Roman recognition of the palm's continued importance for Jews.

¹⁵³ Author's drawing, after Foerster, *Masada V* (1995): Fig. 36. Room 15. Painted plaster. Vultures supported on stems.

¹⁵⁴ Many coins pertaining to our period have been found at Masada and in Jerusalem, including shekels and half-shekels of the years of the First Revolt.

¹⁵⁵ **Plate 64** = Fig. 229: Avigad (1984), p. 195.

¹⁵⁶ **Plate 65**: Erich Lessing in H. Shanks, *Jerusalem: An Archaeological Biography* (1995), p. 214.

7. Jewish oil lamps:



Varda Sussman has noted that imported Hellenistic oil lamps bearing the human image prompted the production of alternative types of oil lamps ornamented with specifically Jewish motifs "which may reflect their significant domestic and cultic role in the Jewish customs concerning death".¹⁵⁷ Whilst Herodian oil lamps found in tombs are mostly plain, a new decorated style (*Darom* lamps)¹⁵⁸, dating from 70 CE to the end of the Bar-Kochba Revolt of 135CE, indicates there was no gap in Jewish art following the destruction of the Second Temple, the motifs on the oil lamps and those on the ossuaries indicating a close relationship between them.¹⁵⁹ **Plate 66** illustrates the type of floral decoration on many lamps and includes an amphora, also found on some ossuaries (**Plate 67**).¹⁶⁰

Plate 66



Plate 67

¹⁵⁷ V. Sussman, *Ornamented Jewish Oil lamps* (1982), p. 14.

¹⁵⁸ *Darom* means 'South' since most are from Beth Guvrin in Southern Judea: Sussman (1982), p. x.

¹⁵⁹ Sussman (1982), pp. 14-15. Herodian lamps: wheel made, with a wide, bow-shaped nozzle, broad, flat shoulder and finished by knife-paring.

¹⁶⁰ **Plate 66**: Photo-plate 48, p. 48 of Sussman, (1982). See also Lamp No. 22, p. 40: two pomegranates hanging below leaves of a lily – comparable with pomegranates and lily on the ossuary shown in **Plate 33, Ch. 1, p. 39**, and a vast range of other examples. **Plate 67**: Dr. JPK's collection.

8. The Temple Mount:

Several domes at the Double Gate on the Temple Mount have survived and show intricate geometric and floral designs (**Plate 68**).¹⁶¹ The vine scroll, grapes, leaves, palmettes, acanthus and rosettes are all typical of the Jewish style found on tomb facades, sarcophagi and ossuaries. The similarity between the central olive leaf spray motifs of this northern dome and that displayed on the ossuaries shown in **Plates 9, 9a** and **11** as well as on the synagogue frieze at Kfar Bar'am (**Plate 10**) is notable (Ch. 1, pp. 15 – 16).

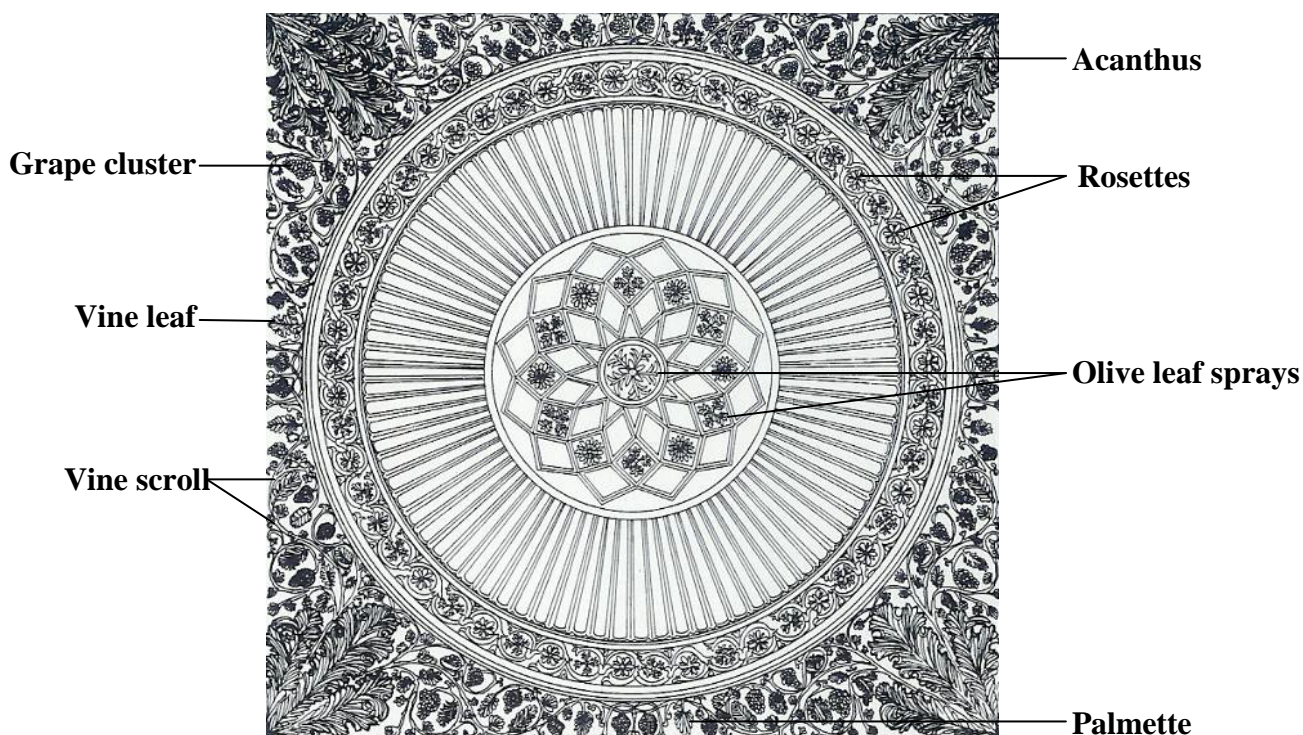


Plate 68



This stone fragment, showing a fine, intricate design of scroll, vine leaves, lilies and rosettes, probably fell from the Royal Stoa, an immense columnar hall, praised by Josephus as a “structure more worthy of description than any other under the sun”.¹⁶²

Plate 69

¹⁶¹ **Plate 68:** Nathaniel Ritmeyer, drawing of extant northern dome, in Shanks, (1995), p. 145.

¹⁶² *Antiquities*, 15.11.5, cited in Shanks (1995), p. 152. **Plate 69:** Stone fragment from the foot of the southern wall of the Herodian Temple Mount, Meir Ben-Dov, in Shanks (1995), p. 151.

CHAPTER 4

FOREIGN INFLUENCES ON JEWISH FLORAL ART

Palmyra

From the illustrations thus far, it is clear that the *mixing* of plant motifs is a typical feature of both funerary and domestic Jewish art in this period. Studies of contemporary neighbouring areas¹⁶³ have shown that artistic parallels can be drawn, which may have been significant in developing Jewish art in Jerusalem. Palmyra,¹⁶⁴ has distinctive examples of vine scrolls and mixed fruit from monumental remains.¹⁶⁵ A finely executed vine scroll with deeply carved leaves and three-lobed clusters of grapes is displayed parallel to the spectator, tendrils occupying the background to appease the 'horror vacui' (**Plate 70**), also noted by Avi-Yonah.¹⁶⁶

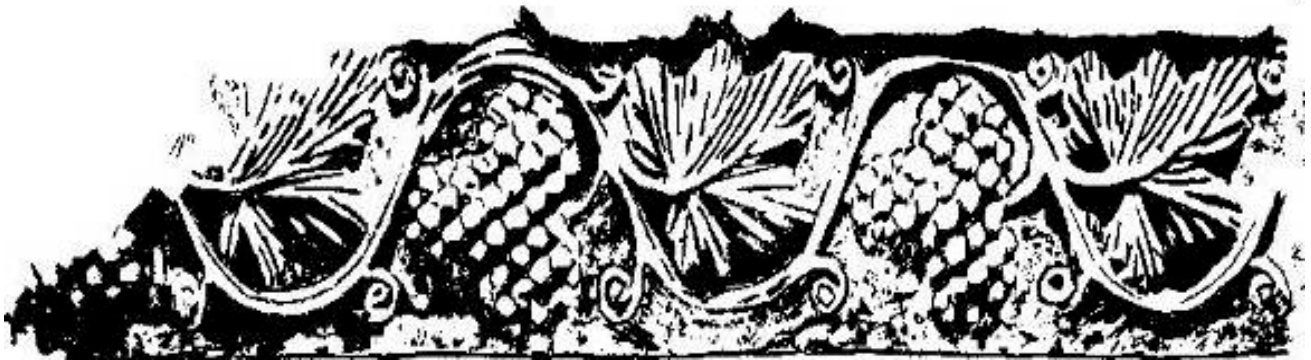


Plate 70

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- ¹⁶³ H. Seyrig, 'Ornamenta Palmyrena Antiquiora', 64-115, in *Antiquites Syriennes*, Troisiemme Serie (1946); R. Amy et H. Seyrig, *Recherches dans La Necropole de Palmyre* (1936); M. Avi-Yonah, 'Oriental Elements in the Art of Palestine in the Roman and Byzantine Periods' (1942-50), in Vols X, XIII, XIV of *QDAP*; Avi-Yonah, *Oriental Art in Roman Palestine* (1961). Both in Avi-Yonah, *Art in Ancient Palestine: Selected Studies* (1981).
- ¹⁶⁴ Palmyra: in the desert country between Syria and Mesopotamia. It came to be an important trading centre in the first century BCE before coming under Roman control in the first century CE (Chris Scarre, *Chronicle of the Roman Emperors* (1995), p. 180. It is the site of the Temple of Bel (reign of Tiberius): H. Seyrig (1946), p. 64.
- ¹⁶⁵ **Plates 70, 71, 73:** Author's drawings of fragments from Foundation T (a deposit found 'sealed' beneath the Bel temple), dated later 1st century BCE/early 1st century CE. **Plate 72:** Author's drawing of a fragment of the same stone, composition and style. See also H. Seyrig (1946), pp. 64-68, 88.
- ¹⁶⁶ Seyrig (1946), p. 72; Avi-Yonah (1981) p. 141.

Plant Motifs on Jewish Ossuaries and Sarcophagi in Palestine in the Late Second Temple Period

Particularly interesting features of a lintel fragment (**Plate 71**) are the vine scroll with strongly veined leaves and trilobate clusters of grapes, and the torus of overlapping stylized leaves whose anomalous leaf arrangement defies identification. It is called a 'strip of leaves' by Seyrig, yet he identifies a similar strip as 'laurel' elsewhere.¹⁶⁷ It is probably laurel (though it does resemble a stylized palm trunk).¹⁶⁸ Again, the strip of small bouquets, each one knotted to the tail of the next and each made up of three leaves and two berries between them, is probably myrtle as on the sarcophagus lid from the tomb of Helene (see **Ch. 1, Plate 41, p. 46**), and not laurel as identified by Seyrig¹⁶⁹ whose identifications are inconsistent.

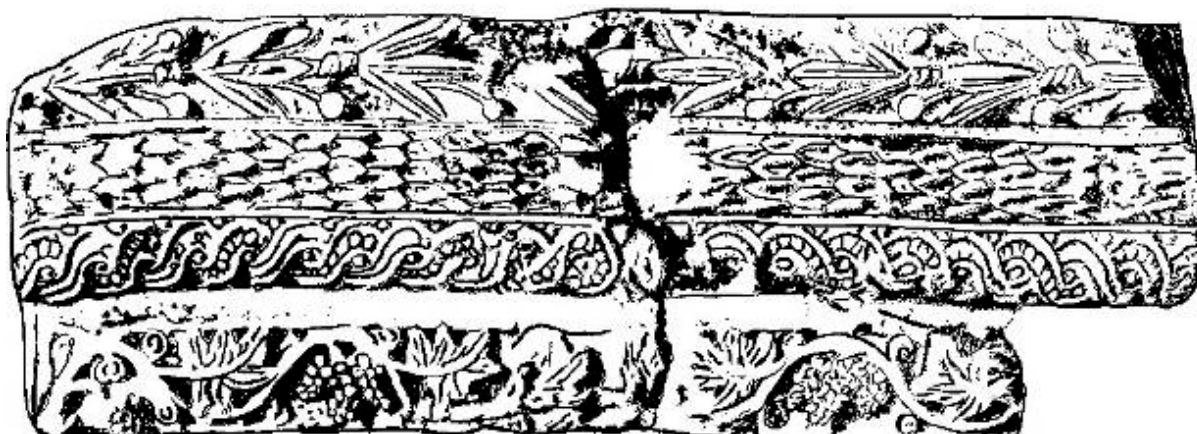


Plate 71



Plate 72



Plate 73

Another fragment (**Plate 72**) combines an acanthus scroll and berries resembling mulberries. The black mulberry, *Morus nigra*, may be the sycamine tree of the NT ([Luke 17:6](#)), possibly introduced into Palestine from Iran and cultivated for its fruits, although it may not have arrived before 200CE. Its fruits turn from black to deep crimson (**Fig. 50**).¹⁷⁰ **Plate 73** shows a composite scroll bearing mulberry fruits, a 'winding flower' (Seyrig), probably lily, a calyx (cup) with two emerging berries, and an eight-petal rosette,¹⁷¹ the whole a mixture of flowers and fruits typical of Jewish funerary and domestic art. However, the absence of mulberry in Jewish art suggest Jewish artisans were selective in adding to their choice of local plants.

¹⁶⁷ Seyrig (1946).

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Palm-shaped corner columns, in Egyptian tradition, at the Symposium tent of Ptolemy II at Alexandria: reconstruction, in T. Webster, *Hellenistic Art* (1966), p. 67.

¹⁶⁹ Seyrig (1946), p. 72

¹⁷⁰ Hepper (1992), p. 120. **Fig. 50**: Author's photograph.

¹⁷¹ Seyrig (1946), p. 88.



Fig. 50. Morus nigra: Black Mulberry

The Nabataean Kingdom



Plate 74

Glueck's study into the trade and development of agriculture in the Nabataean Kingdom of the latter centuries BCE into CE reveals that the grape and vine leaf motif was commonly employed in architectural and ceramic decoration.¹⁷² A bust of Atargatis (Artemis) (**Plate 74**),¹⁷³ flanked by side panels decorated with vine and leaf, pomegranate, etrog and fig motifs, presents her as goddess of foliage and fruit.

¹⁷² N. Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan* (1940), p. 178.

¹⁷³ N. Glueck (1940), p. 180; **Plate 74**: at Qasr edh-Dherih, p. 183.



Plate 75

At Petra, a floral capital (**Plate 75**)¹⁷⁴ exhibits classical acanthus motifs, a scroll and mixed fruits (mulberry? and other fruits) emerging from calices, while a head of Dusares-Dionysus (**Plate 76**)¹⁷⁵ is ornamented with ribbon, vine leaves and small fruits (grapes?), with a pine cone to the left.



Plate 76

Dusares was a Nabataean god identified with Dionysus, a Greek god, at Petra. Such acculturation is significant in assessing the use of particular motifs such as the vine, grapes and cup on Jewish ossuaries and sarcophagi. The many indications of a close relationship between the civilisation of the Nabataeans

¹⁷⁴ From the Khasneh: lower order, northernmost capital = PL. 42c, in J. McKenzie, *The Architecture of Petra* (1990). It is related to Alexandrian Corinthian capitals but with florals in place of the helices (p. 185) and it could be as early as 96/92 BCE (p. 51).

¹⁷⁵ Head of Dionysos = PL. 62a, in McKenzie (1990).

and their contemporaries in the ancient near East between the first two centuries BCE and first two centuries CE indicate that their artistic influence cannot be ruled out.

Avi-Yonah believes Jewish art was influenced through Sadducean aristocrats, faithful to their religion and therefore spiritually opposed to total Hellenisation, having empathy with the upper classes of oriental faiths of neighbouring countries and so following artistic developments in the 'Fertile Crescent', where there was coming and going between Judaea and Mesopotamia via Palmyra.¹⁷⁶ He traces the origin of the six-point, chip-carved 'all-over' rosette to Assyria and Mesopotamia, the conventionalised bunch of grapes and vine leaf to Egyptian and Assyrian prototypes, and notes that Egyptian paintings exhibit the trilobate bunch of grapes.¹⁷⁷ However, he has not looked at possibilities from the West. It should also be noted that there is a known background in classical art for rosettes.

The Ara Pacis and Pergamon

The Ara pacis (altar of peace) in Rome, dedicated in 9 BCE to the Pax Augusta, is a complex network of stylised floral ornament,¹⁷⁸ associated with ideas of abundance and fruitfulness to evoke the blessings of Pax Augusta.¹⁷⁹ However, the floral friezes are not just stylised acanthus tendrils and blossoms, but include recognisable botanical species such as laurel, ivy, vines and grapes, oak leaves, poppies and rose (Plates 77 - 79: North floral frieze).¹⁸⁰



Plate 77. Detail: Ivy (top) and Laurel



Plate 78. Detail: Ivy

¹⁷⁶ M. Avi-Yonah (1981), pp. 144-45.

¹⁷⁷ Avi-Yonah (1981), pp. 136-9, 69-70.

¹⁷⁸ David Castriota, *The Ara Pacis Augustae* (1995), p. 3. It is often dismissed by scholars as purely decorative with no significance compared to the figural or anthropomorphic representation.

¹⁷⁹ L'Orange, *Ara Pacis Augustae. La Zona Floreale*, 7-16, cited in Castriota (1995), p. 5.

¹⁸⁰ **Plate 77** = Fig.10; **Plate 78** = Fig. 11; **Plate 79** = Fig. 14, in Castriota (1995).

Plant Motifs on Jewish Ossuaries and Sarcophagi in Palestine in the Late Second Temple Period

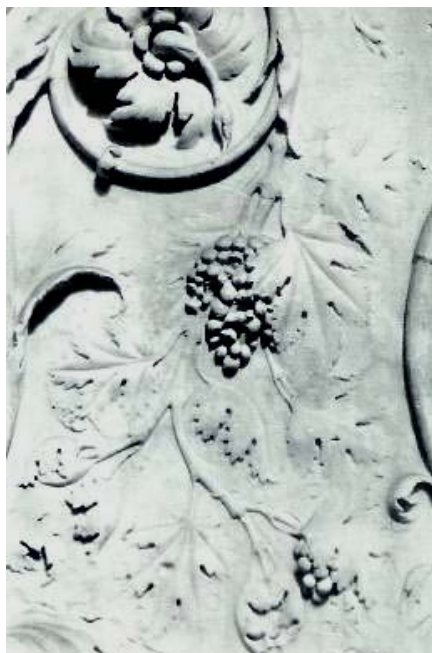


Plate 79. Detail: Grapevine

This was not an Augustan innovation; it can be paralleled in a series of marble reliefs at 2nd century BCE Pergamon in the Great Altar (**Plate 80**)¹⁸¹ showing a central stalk growing from an acanthus calyx to emit three pairs of branches with leafy acanthus foliage. The formalised tendril matrix has naturalistic plants and fruits, some labelled here.¹⁸²

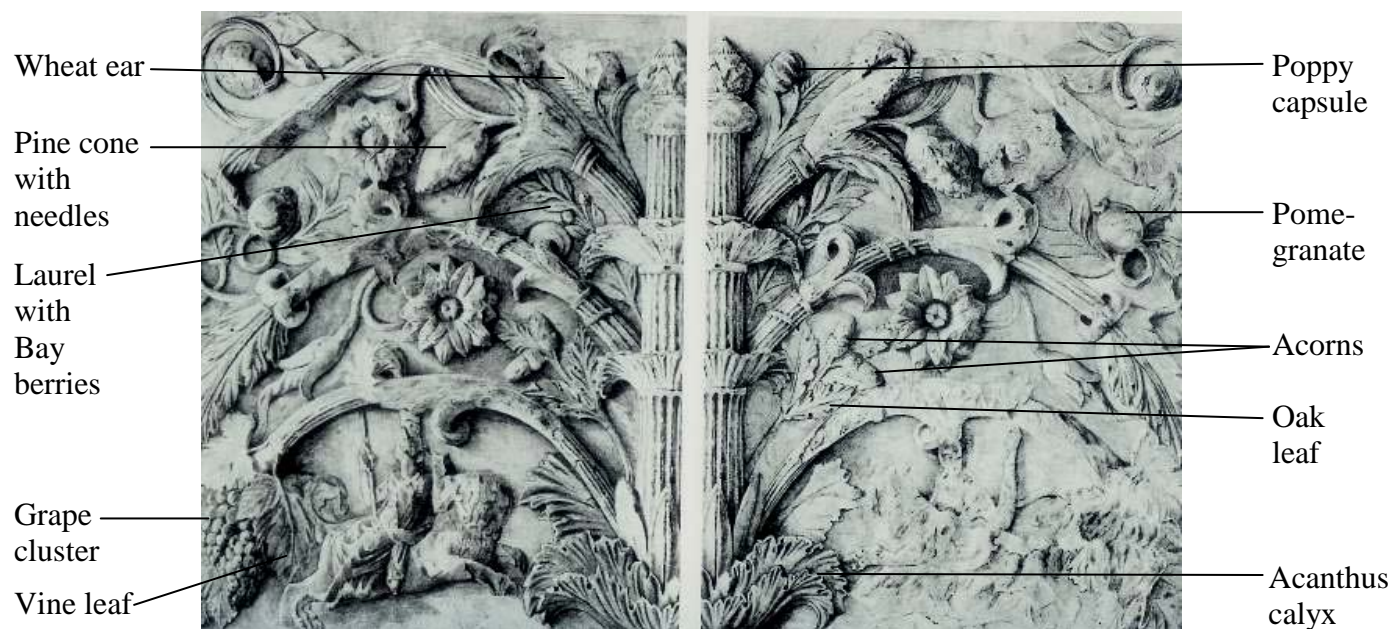


Plate 80. Pergamene slab

¹⁸¹ Castriota (1995), **Plate 80** = Fig. 48 b (after Winter, *Altertumer von Pergamon*, VII, Taf. XL, 1908.

¹⁸² Castriota (1995), pp. 14-15. A similar array of real plants and fruits, including tri-lobate grape clusters, are found on other Pergamene fragmentary reliefs.

David Castriota outlines the concept of 'Numen Mixtum' ('mingled divinity') of Apollo and Dionysus, related to the theme of peace, their reciprocity involving the interchange of their vegetal attributes, the laurel and the ivy,¹⁸³ illustrated in **Plate 77** (Ara pacis), following the precedent of the Pergamene altar slabs. Whilst these monuments are a long way from Jerusalem, it is reasonable to suppose that mixed floral ornament, characteristic of 'numen mixtum', found its way into the Jewish artist's repertoire via the Hellenisers of Palestine; the artisans selected from this iconography of the Hellenistic and Roman world, adding local plants, for use both in Jewish funerary art, particularly on ossuaries and sarcophagi as noted, and in domestic situations. Whether any symbolism attaches to their use is the final question to be addressed.

183 Castriota (1995), p. 107

CHAPTER 5

CAN FLORAL MOTIFS ON OSSUARIES AND SARCOPHAGI BE INTERPRETED SYMBOLICALLY?

In considering this question, it is first necessary to ask what is understood by the term ‘symbol’. The Oxford dictionary defines it as: **1** “a thing conventionally regarded as typifying, representing, or recalling something, especially an idea or quality (*white is a symbol of purity*). **2** a mark or character taken as the conventional sign of some object, idea, function, or process, eg. the letters standing for the chemical elements or the characters in musical notation”.¹⁸⁴ So, for something to be conventionally regarded as typifying something else, that ‘something’ needs to be recognizable – then one can argue for it being a constant representation of a specific symbolism. But it has been demonstrated that, whilst some plant motifs on ossuaries and sarcophagi are clearly recognizable, others are so stylized as to be unidentifiable, suggesting that if the artist actually intended *not* to identify the motifs, then perhaps there is an argument for a different type of symbolism. It is obvious that for symbolism to work, the symbols must be shared between the artisan and his customer (the deceased’s relatives); some people may have seen certain representations as symbolic, others not.

Three extreme views of symbolism on Jewish ossuaries were mentioned briefly in the introduction. That of Bagatti and Testa, who claimed that because of purity laws ossuary use must have belonged to a Jewish sect that didn’t uphold such laws, such as the Jewish Christians, is rightly widely refuted in light of so much evidence to the contrary and will not be discussed here. But in what follows it will be demonstrated that Rahmani’s realistic interpretation – that there is no symbolism, and the plants just represent what was growing or planted in the tomb garden – is limited, whilst if one discards Goodenough’s symbolic interpretation (symbolism in everything!), one is in danger of throwing out the baby with the bath water. A fourth, more balanced view, is that of Figueras, who promotes the notion that art and symbolism are inseparable.

In considering the evidence thus far, it is immediately obvious that the appearance in domestic situations and on contemporary Jewish architecture of many floral motifs found on Jewish ossuaries and sarcophagi is seemingly incompatible with their funerary symbolism of the afterlife, since anything associated with death was deemed unclean. Yet, as Sussman notes, some of these motifs symbolise the several major Jewish festivals (the vine, figs, dates and olive fruits). Even those of more neutral significance for Jews but found in pagan cultures, such as olive and laurel branches, are noted for symbolising victory and peace, while ivy is associated with the cult of Bacchus (Gk. Dionysus).¹⁸⁵ The rosette, a universal motif which developed independently in different places and at different times, often stylized and purely decorative,¹⁸⁶ has also borne astral and apotropaic significance in many contexts and periods.¹⁸⁷ In light of this, just three areas will be explored to ascertain grounds for a ‘type of symbolism’ inherent in these motifs, a type based on symbolism more or less as defined by Goodenough in the words of Ovid: “Crede mihi; plus est, quam quod videatur, imago” – “Believe me; the image is more than what is apparent”, rather than Rahmani’s interpretation of ‘symbol’ relying on there being a consistent system of symbolic

¹⁸⁴ R. E. Allen (ed) The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (Eighth edition, 1991), p. 1235.

¹⁸⁵ V. Sussman (1982), p. 27.

¹⁸⁶ Eva Wilkinson (London, 1994), p. 165. See also Avi Yonah, ‘Oriental Elements’ in Art in Ancient Palestine (1981), p. 95ff.

¹⁸⁷ See especially Avi Yonah, ‘Oriental Elements’ (1981), p. 104ff.

meanings for ornamental motifs, precluded by the random combining and use of motifs on ossuaries.¹⁸⁸ The first area to consider is the traditional symbolism of plants from scripture; the second, the concept of the 'Tree of Life' from scripture and apocryphal literature; and the third, Dionysiac imagery symbolising a blessed afterlife.

1. Traditional symbolism of plants from scripture.

There is a rich biblical tradition of plant imagery in its narratives, law codes, prophetic literature, parables and other genres, some of which would have circulated at least orally, becoming part of Jewish tradition. A few examples are given here.

Olive, vine and fig appear over again in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament as images of beauty, wealth and prosperity. The olive is a symbol of beauty (Hos. 14: 6)¹⁸⁹ and of continuity (Ps. 128: 3)¹⁹⁰ for when it is cut down, it sprouts up around the stump; it symbolises superiority and divine blessing (Judg. 9: 8 - 9),¹⁹¹ beauty and freshness (Jer. 11: 16)¹⁹² and peace (Gen. 8: 11).¹⁹³ Olive oil is used for anointing the body (Deut. 28: 40), and treatment of wounds (Is. 1: 6). Paul in Rom. 11: 17-24 compares Israel to a cultivated olive tree, a symbol of spiritual richness.¹⁹⁴

The restful shade of the vine and fig is proverbial of peace, happiness, security, wealth and plenty (1 Kings 4: 25).¹⁹⁵ A whole chapter of Jeremiah dwells upon the fig that distinguishes between good and evil (Jer. 24: 1-10; 29: 17). Vine and grapes symbolise peace, fertility and prosperity and are emblematic of the nation.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, the many Jewish examples of the tri-lobate bunch of grapes described in this paper suggests that they are reproducing the famous golden vinestock in the Second Temple.¹⁹⁷

The pomegranate is a symbol of sanctity, fertility and abundance. Asaph Goor notes that its appearance on coins,¹⁹⁸ the Temple and robes and regalia of Jewish priesthood (Ex. 39: 24-26 and 1 Kings 7: 18, 20, for example) indicate its national significance, possibly influenced by legends and neighbouring practices which saw the pomegranate as the Tree of life. This may be the origin of the figurative appearance of pomegranates in early Christian art to typify hope of everlasting life.¹⁹⁹

¹⁸⁸ Goodenough, Jewish Symbols (1988), p. 40; Rahmani, Catalogue (1994), p. 26.

¹⁸⁹ Referring to Israel: "His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive tree", Hos. 14: 6.

¹⁹⁰ ... "your children will be like olive shoots around your table". See also Is. 11: 1, cited in O. Borowski, Agriculture in Iron Age Israel (1979), p. 175.

¹⁹¹ This is the Jotham parable where the olive is the first to be asked to reign over the other trees.

¹⁹² "The Lord once called you 'A green olive tree, fair with goodly fruit'".

¹⁹³ "And the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth". Footnotes 191-193: quotations cited in Zohary (1962), Notes 5-7, p. 287.

¹⁹⁴ Hepper (1992), p. 105. See also that it was used in cultic life as an offering in Ps. 104: 15 and Job 24: 11. It was also used for anointing prophets (1 Kings 19: 16), kings (Judg. 9: 8), priests (Ex. 28: 41) and the Tabernacle and its vessels (Ex. 29: 36), cited in Borowski (1979), p. 181.

¹⁹⁵ "...Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon" (1 Kings 4: 25), cited in A. Goor, EB, 90, (1965), 124 - 135.

¹⁹⁶ Goor (1965), p. 125.

¹⁹⁷ Josephus, Antiquities XV, 11, 3, cited in Avi-Yonah (1981), p. 71.

¹⁹⁸ Hepper (1992), p. 116, comments that a silver half shekel from first Jewish revolt of 66-70CE (**Plate 64, p. 65**) bears on the reverse a stem with 3 pomegranates encircled by the inscription "Jerusalem the Holy".

¹⁹⁹ Goor (1968), pp. 72-3.

Plant Motifs on Jewish Ossuaries and Sarcophagi in Palestine in the Late Second Temple Period

In classical mythology, myrtle was a symbol of heroism and immortality, but for the Hebrews it typified peace and thanksgiving. With the etrog, palm leaf and willow branches, it is one of the 'four kinds' used by Jews in the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 8: 15).²⁰⁰

The righteous are compared to the palm tree (Ps. 92: 12), symbolism recognized by the Romans in depicting defeated Judaea weeping under a palm tree on coins following the Second Revolt (See **Plate 65, p. 65**).

The oak symbolised might and grandeur (Amos 2: 9); long life (Is. 6: 13) and was connected with sacrificial offering (Hos. 4: 13). Under its shade, the dead of the beloved were buried (Gen. 35: 8).²⁰¹

Such symbolism, central to the theology of the biblical writers, was surely part of at least the oral tradition of Second Temple Jews.

2. The 'Tree of Life'

Figueras briefly examines this concept in terms of man's understanding of trees and plants as fundamental to sustaining bodily life, such that in death he requires the fruit of a tree to secure everlasting life. Just as a seed 'dies' in the earth to produce new growth, so human bones "blossom like flowers" symbolizing resurrection. He suggests plant motifs on ossuaries may indicate belief in paradisaical happiness after death, everlasting life, and divine salvation.²⁰² His reference lists (from Old Testament, Apocryphal Literature, New Testament, Judaism, Early Christians, Eastern Religions, Greece and Rome) merely comprise brief abstracts but indicate that there is much to investigate here, an area for future research. The following example clearly demonstrates imagery of the tree of life.²⁰³

Gen. 2 describes Adam living on the fruits of the trees in the garden planted by God in Eden. Having eaten the forbidden fruit from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" he is denied the fruit of the tree of life (immortality: Gen. 3: 22).²⁰⁴ The tree of everlasting life is thus the image or symbol of the blessed immortality, which God had intended for Adam, which his rebellion frustrated. In the apocalyptic and Jewish writings of the Hasmonean and Roman periods this denouement is reversed for the righteous elect.

Michael Knibb connects 1 Enoch directly to Gen. Chapters 2-3 and dates it to the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE.²⁰⁵ The righteous Enoch, in his vision, visits the seven mountains of the north-west (chapters 17-19 and again chapters 21-25) where the tallest peak holds the throne of God, his judgment-seat at the end of days: 24. 4:

²⁰⁰ Hepper (1992), p. 186.

²⁰¹ "Yet I destroyed the Amorite before them....and who was as strong as oaks" (Amos 2: 9); "Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump" (Is. 6: 13); "They sacrifice....and make offerings....under oak, poplar and terebinth" (Hos. 4: 13); "And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So it was called Allon-bacuth" (oak of weeping) (Gen. 38: 5), all cited in M. Zohary (1962), p. 294.

²⁰² P. Figueras, Decorated Jewish Ossuaries (1983), pp. 93-4.

²⁰³ From lecture notes (JPK).

²⁰⁴ "Then the Lord God said, 'See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'" (Gen. 3: 22).

²⁰⁵ M. A. Knibb, 'The Ethiopic Book of Enoch', in M. de Yonge (Ed), Outside the Old Testament: Cambridge Commentaries on Writings of the Jewish and Christian World 200 BC – AD 200, 4 (1985), pp. 26-30. The original Semitic composition survives in fragmentary Greek and complete Ethiopic versions. Many Aramaic fragments were found at Qumran.

"And the throne was encircled by fragrant trees. And one of the trees was scented with a scent such as I had never known, a fragrance beyond all others. Its leaves, blossoms and wood shall never wither. Its fruit is beautiful, and is as **the date palm**".

The angel Michael interprets for Enoch: 25. 4 – 6:

"No mortal may touch the tree... till the day of judgment. (Then) it will be given up to the righteous.... By its fruit life will be granted to the elect. It shall be transplanted to the... temple of the Lord... They shall enter the holy dwelling. And the fragrance of the tree shall be in their bones, and they shall live a long life upon this earth as did their fathers... No sorrow or pain... shall afflict them".

Beyond the mountains to the east and further north, Enoch saw in his vision further mountains, gardens and trees. They included aloes with fruit like almonds (31. 2), nard, cinnamon and peppers. He passed far eastwards into the garden of righteousness (Eden) where there were "many large trees, fragrantly scented, most beautiful" (32. 3), and most notably: 32. 3 – 4:

"... the tree of Wisdom (of the knowledge of good and evil: 32. 6). It is like the carob tree with most beautiful fruit like grape clusters; and it has a penetrating fragrance".

Similar imagery of the tree of life is found extensively in other Old Testament pseudepigrapha and different images are also used.²⁰⁶



Plate 81

Palm branches are common on ossuaries. This one (**Plate 1**)²⁰⁷ bears many irregular sized circles, the largest encircled by a garland of palm leaves, and upright, hand-executed palm sprays. Could this have represented the 'Tree of Life'?

²⁰⁶ Figueras (1983), pp. 94-5.

²⁰⁷ Dr. JPK's collection.

3. Dionysiac imagery



Plate 82

Avi-Yonah proposes that the inspiration for using local symbolic fruits like the vine and pomegranate seems to have come from the desert fringe where Dushara Dionysos was worshipped.²⁰⁸ Dionysus, god of wine, gave hope of immortality, and had associations with funerary art from early times.

A bronze krater (c. 320BCE) (**Plate 82**), a bowl used for mixing wine and water at the Greek Symposion (drinking party of the dead, the social festivity which provided an image for the blissful afterlife in Greek iconography), is decorated with fruited ivy around the neck and includes figures of Dionysus, maenads and satyrs on the shoulder; this krater was used for cremated ashes. The family of the dead person must have had some such belief in immortality to place his ashes in such a krater.²⁰⁹



Plate 83

Plate 83²¹⁰ illustrates the child Dionysus holding a rosette and standing in the vine-clad nymphs' cave, the origin of the artificial bower with trailing stems of either vine with leaves or grapes or of fruited ivy or both, painted on the wall of the men's dining room, used for the symposia. Outside, a garden, roofed with branches of myrtle, laurel and many different flowers, provided wreaths for banqueters, and a flower-littered banqueting hall floor, a divine meadow, to evoke a blissful afterlife.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ M. Avi-Yonah (1981), p. 143. **Ch.4: Plate 76, p. 71** is evidence of this worship.

²⁰⁹ T.B.L. Webster, *Hellenistic Art* (1967), pp. 20-21; **Plate 82** = Plate 1, p. 21: Bronze krater from Dherveni (Photo supplied by N. Kontos, Athens). Such decoration was common from at least the early 6th century BCE.

²¹⁰ Webster (1967), **Plate 83** = Plate 22, p. 78: Plastic vase from the Athenian Agora c. 300-275 (Photo by N. Kontos, Athens).

²¹¹ Webster (1966), p. 66.

Conclusions

Clearly, there are various traditions of symbolism, local and foreign, from which Jewish artisans could draw for their artistic inspiration. On the one hand, motifs derived from biblical or eschatological literature or Dionysiac imagery (including mixed floral ornament, grapes and a cup) might reflect a wish for a joyful, peaceful and prosperous afterlife for the deceased. Figueras has claimed that the very fact of secondary burial conveys this sentiment, making decoration unnecessary as was usually the case, yet decoration would be additional evidence of that wish and would provide consolation for the living who instigated it.²¹² Hence, the use of familiar plant motifs from everyday life, symbols of a life of prosperity, would be appropriate in representing a blessed afterlife and could even reiterate an individual's status as prosperous and successful. Indeed, the ornament of Jerusalem rectangular tabletops, used for feasting, is replicated on many ossuaries, as indicated, suggesting a possible wish for a bountiful afterlife for the deceased. On the other hand, this ornament might simply reflect the need to preserve the Jewish identity of the person,²¹³ their character or standing in life (peace-loving, righteous, strong, heroic, beautiful, faithful), through the eyes of their family, unconnected to notions of an afterlife, but appropriating traditional symbols.

Rahmani's outright rejection of Goodenough's association of the 'cup' and 'vine' with a Dionysiac origin is hasty, since evidence presented above from Greek and Roman art indicates this is a possibility.²¹⁴ This mythology of a banquet of celebration in the after-life may have impinged on Jewish thought, yet it may simply be the borrowing of a fashionable iconography without adopting the original ideology or mythology. From the 2nd century CE onwards, Dionysiac imagery is standard on Roman sarcophagi; whilst this *cannot have influenced* earlier use of Dionysiac symbols, it *may reflect* their earlier use. Rahmani's opinion that ornamentation on ossuaries and sarcophagi originates in "one single source.....the tombs of Jerusalem's acropolis, their courtyards, gates, monuments, the trees and flowers seen outside them, and views of the tomb inside,"²¹⁵ is therefore questionable.

The widespread use of the rosette on ossuaries suggests a possible religious meaning, and Figueras notes that it may have retained something of its original astral symbolism as well as a possible apotropaic role, further evidenced by its appearance as graffito on a sarcophagus from Beth She'arim.²¹⁶ Indeed, it has even been suggested that on ossuaries, stars or flowers (where the rosette and star are thought to be interchangeable and similar in meaning in Herodian times) represent angelic beings, either to protect the dead on their way from earth to heaven, or to welcome them in heaven.²¹⁷ However, specific symbolism describing particular realities deduced from other contexts cannot be applied here automatically.

What is happening regarding both floral and other ossuary decoration is acculturation by the Jews: selecting iconography from the Roman and Hellenic world and incorporating it into their own style, adding local motifs accordingly. For Jewish art of this period, symbolic representation is difficult to establish because of the biblical prohibition about making graven images. Figueras makes the valid point

²¹² Figueras (1983), p. 84.

²¹³ See Fine, Regev, and McCane in Ch. 2.

²¹⁴ Goodenough had claimed (Jewish Symbols V, Fish, Bread and Wine, 1956, p. 100) that 'cups', including the acanthus motif and amphorae seen on some ossuaries with vines and grape clusters were frequently depicted in funerary ornamentation indicating "an eschatological implication of such (symbolic) drinking", cited in L.Y. Rachmani (1994), p. 43.

²¹⁵ Rahmani, Abstract, p.XII, , unpublished abstract of doctoral dissertation in Hebrew (Jerusalem, 1997), cited in Figueras (1983), p. 78.

²¹⁶ Avigad, 'Excavations at Beth She'arim', 1955, EI 5 (1958) 171-88 (Hebrew), pl. ט, cited in Figueras, p. 41.

²¹⁷ John Wilkinson, 'Stone Tables in Herodian Jerusalem', BAIAS 12 (1993-4), pp. 11, 13.

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that throughout history to the present day, art has served to evoke meaning in the eye of the beholder, so that a consistent system of symbolic meanings is not required. So when he speaks of early Christian art in Rome soon after our period as being "neither merely decorative nor concretely symbolic, but evocative of transcendent realities, believed in and expected by Christians", this interpretation of 'symbol' is perfectly acceptable.²¹⁸

It is only during the late 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries CE that attitudes change towards the representation of living beings, evidenced by the Galilean synagogues and the necropolis of Beth She'arim. By the Byzantine period, Jewish symbols befitting Rahmani's interpretation regularly appear in synagogues; for example, the menorah, shofar, lulab, ethrog and incense shovel.²¹⁹ Levine suggests it may have been in response to the rise of Christianity with its Christian buildings in the 4th century CE, forcing Jews to produce "tangible representations of their own unique symbols;"²²⁰ in other words, a system of particular Jewish representations which consistently express fixed and specific symbols. Certainly, the discovery in Byzantine synagogues of mosaic floors representing Helios, Zodiac signs and the four seasons suggests strong symbolism, possibly developed when rabbinic Judaism came into its own so that there was no longer a threat to the autonomy of Jewish religion, resulting in the re-interpretation of Greek symbols in terms of Jewish festivals and seasons.

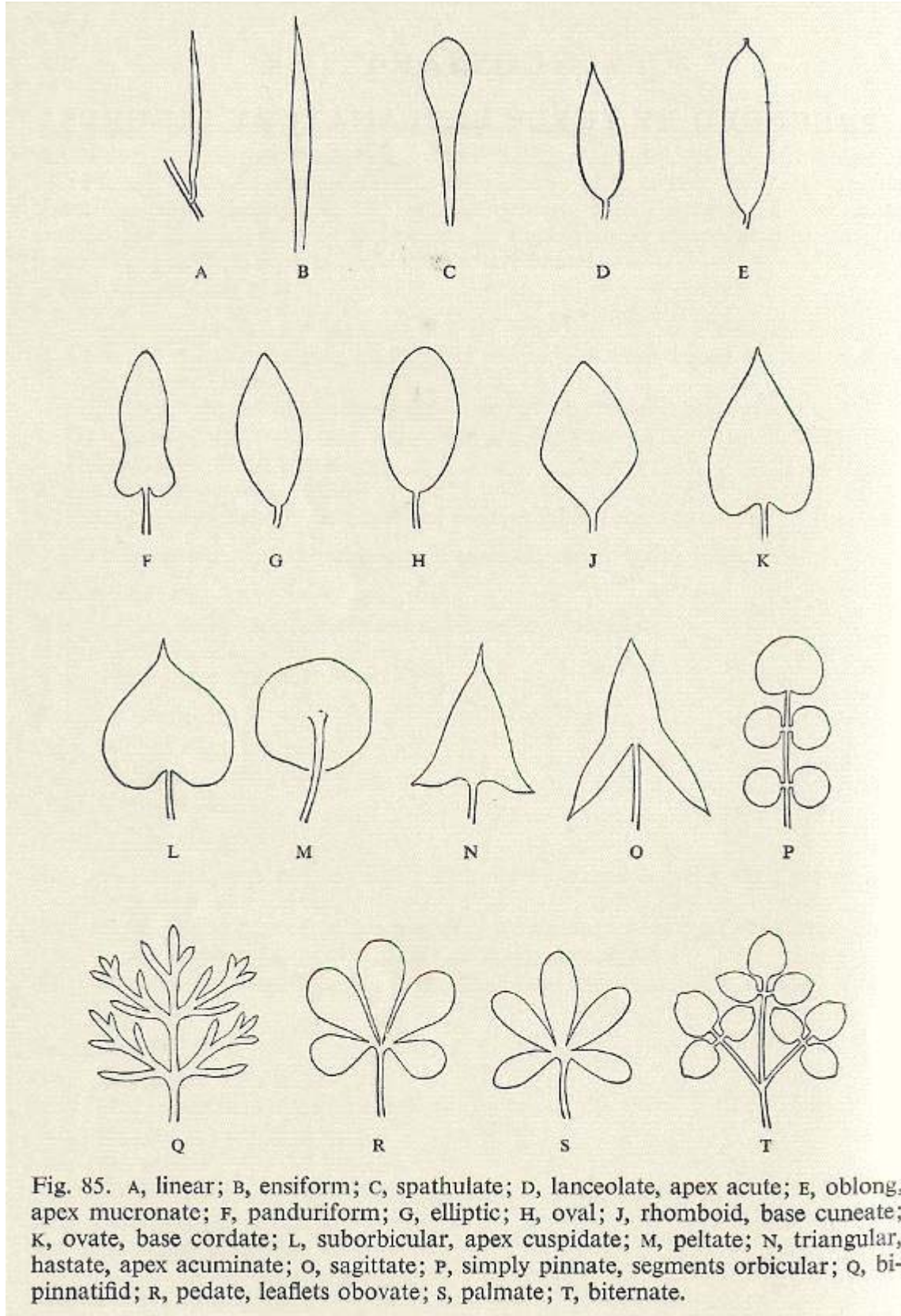
²¹⁸ Figueras (1983), p. 86.

²¹⁹ Lee I. Levine (Ed), Ancient Synagogues Revealed (1981), p. 7

²²⁰ Levine (1981), p. 8.

APPENDIX

Glossary from Clapham, Tutin and Warburg, Flora of the British Isles (1962)



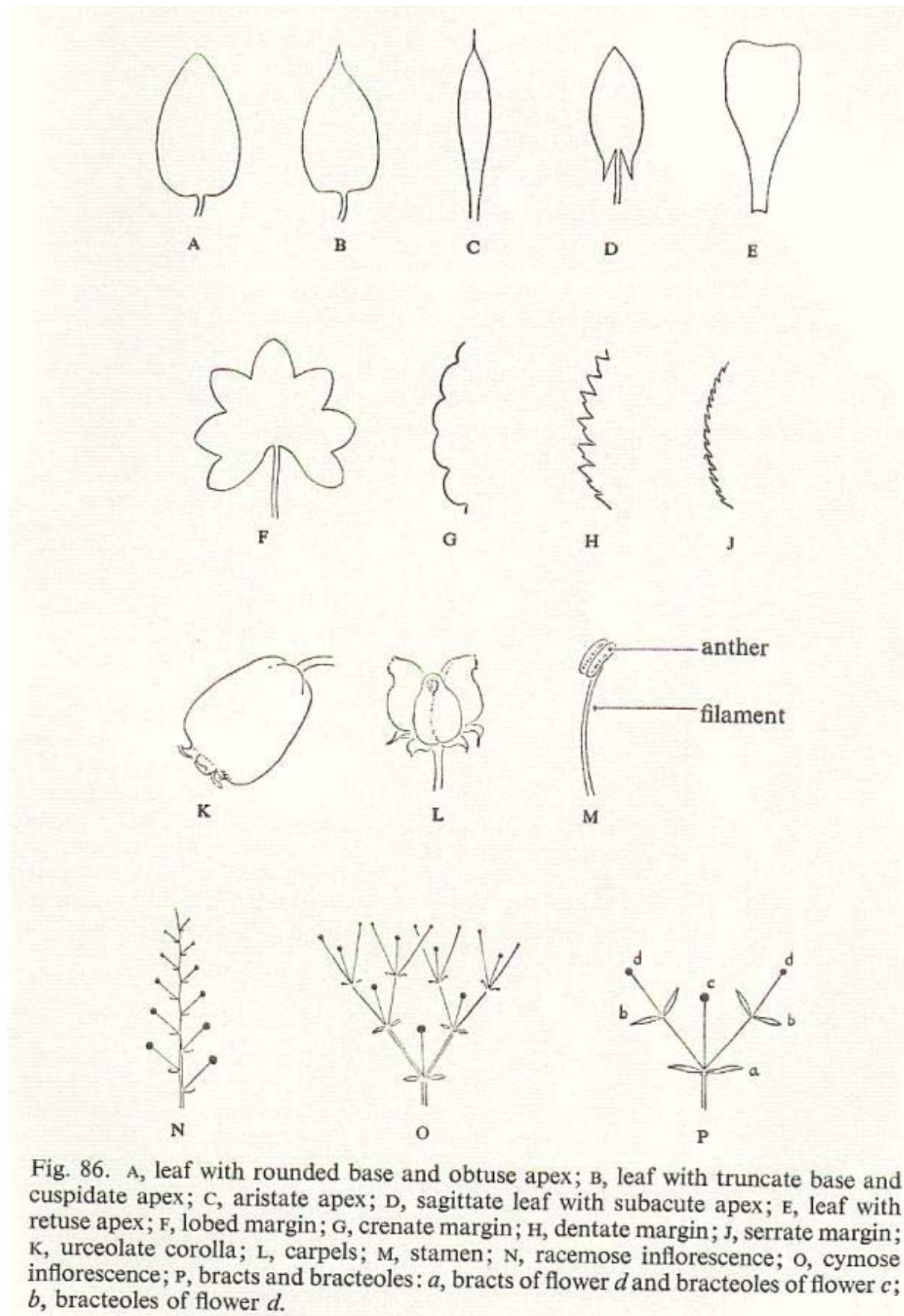


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