CHAPTER THREE

GIFTS FOR THE DEAD: FUNCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF GRAVE GOODS

In 1961, a farmer from the village of Deb'aal discovered a hypogeum while digging a cistern by his house. This hypogeum (T. 29) is one of the few tombs in the region that was left untouched by grave robbers. It yielded a vast array of coffins and grave goods, and provides a unique insight into the customs of placing items with the dead. Figure 23 illustrates the items put in one of the graves of the Deb'aal tomb, a lead sarcophagus placed in a loculus. This chapter analyzes the items that accompanied the dead. Such artifacts were not merely personal belongings given to comfort the dead, or parts of his or her wardrobe. They represent conscious selections of the burying community, and this chapter aims to unravel the meaning behind these choices. Doing so allows us to tie the discussion of grave goods to the themes of this book. What were the main features of mortuary practices in Roman Syria; and what are the patterns of continuity and change? Chapter 2 drew attention to another theme, that of distinctions in the burying community. People were not buried in the same types of tomb or even container. This chapter asks if they were accompanied by similar sets of artifacts.

The first section discusses distributions across the main categories of grave goods, as represented in Figure 23: items of personal adornment and vessels, as well as coins and lamps (not pictured in the image). The second section focuses on the patterns of variation and standardization of grave good assemblages, and traces their placement over tomb types, and over time. Concluding this chapter is a discussion of the possible function of the items in the tombs, in practical and

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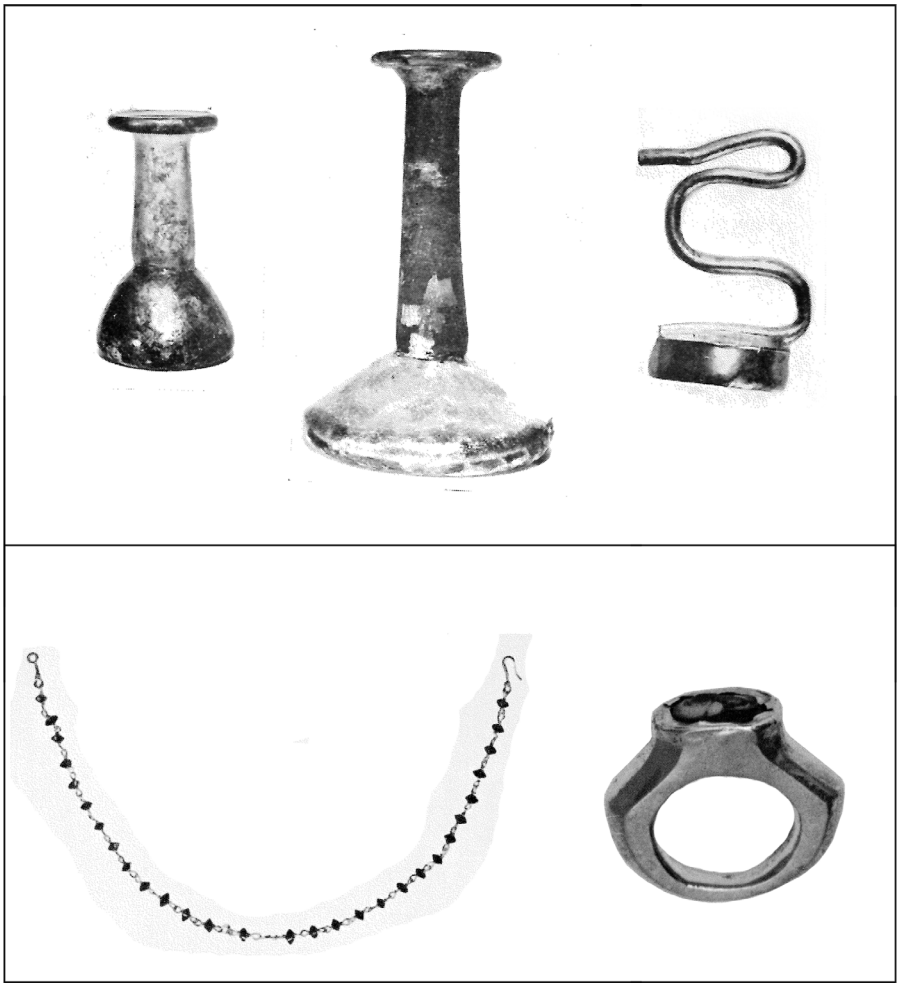

23. Finds from loculus 1a in the hypogeum at Deb'aal (glass vessels, golden earring, golden necklace, golden ring)

in spiritual terms. In many ways, the grave good assemblages illustrate patterns that diverge from those established in Chapter 2. In the selection of gifts for the dead, Syrian communities kept close to older customs.

TYPES OF GRAVE GOODS

Less than a third of the cat. 1 tombs contained artifacts. Most yielded only a handful of items, but this number could vary considerably. One of the fullest graves was a loculus in Tyre, filled with a pair of golden earrings, bracelets of gold and iron, bronze pendants and bells, glass bottles, bronze coins, iron nails, and a terracotta oil lamp, amounting to more than 30 finds (T. 30). The

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items in this tomb reflect the common grave good types across Roman Syria: items of jewelry, clothing fragments, vessels in glass and ceramic, coins, and lamps.

Together, the tombs in the sample yielded close to 9000 artifacts (8871, to be precise). This collection is, however, plagued by various sample problems, and cannot be taken at face value. The most problematic issue is the coarse and short descriptions of many of the items, and the absence of illustrations in the excavation reports. At times, all we learn is that the deceased was accompanied by "vessels" or "jewelry," without any information about the type, material, and number of finds. Rampant grave robbing further impedes the calculation of total numbers. Looters frequently entered (and enter) the tombs to carry off the items reserved for the deceased. Most of the tombs in our sample followed this fate, and we can assume that the amount of grave goods was originally much, much higher. A group of relatively undisturbed tombs provides some insight into these original assemblages. These 46 tombs, excavated at Beirut, Homs, Nawa-tell Umm al-Hauran, Palmyra, and Selenkahiye, yielded 607 finds.[1] The in situ context illustrates that averages of around three artifacts per grave were likely, but that the actual numbers ranged from one to thirty-two per grave. Some deceased, whose graves seemingly were not disturbed, never received goods, at least not any made of materials that preserve in the archaeological record. The dry climate of the Palmyrene desert did preserve some such artifacts, made of textile and basketry. Overall, the assemblages from the undisturbed tombs did not differ significantly from those in other tombs, although they included more rings and golden face covers, and vessels in materials other than glass and pottery, such as bronze and wicker. Such vessels, rings, and golden items were, thus, more likely to have been robbed, decayed, or overlooked.

The publications of Syrian tombs often omit to note the physical and chronological connection of the grave goods with the burials. It remains unclear where the artifacts were placed or discovered, and with which burial they should be associated. This latter point is important, since many of the tombs contained multiple burials. The assemblages from the al-Bass Cemetery in Tyre are a case in point. The tombs here yielded the greatest collection of finds in the sample (6526), deposited sometime between the late 1st and the 5th or 6th c. CE. In the absence of a stratigraphical report and full publication of the finds, it is difficult to link these artifacts to individual burials or

[1] Online Appendix Beirut 1, #1, #2; Online Appendix Homs 1, #1, #3, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, #12, #15, #16, #21; Online Appendix Hauran 1, #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #11, #12, #13, #14, #16, #17, #18, #19, #20, #21, #22, #23, #24; Online Appendix Palmyra 1, #111, #112; Online Appendix Selenkahiye 1, #2, #4, #11, #15, #24, #26, #33, #35, #38, #39, #41, #43, #45.

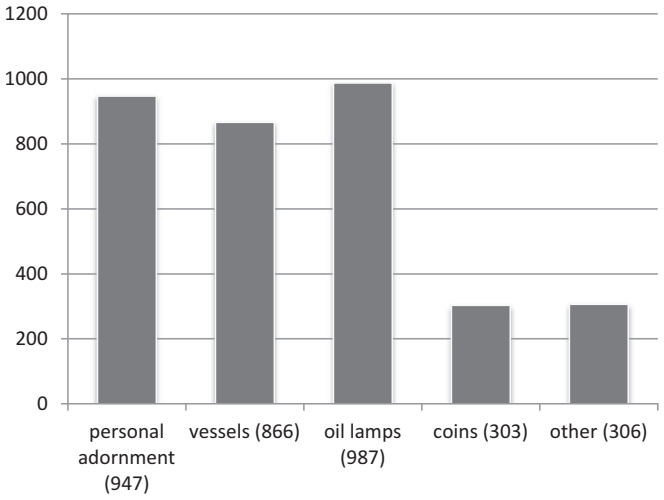
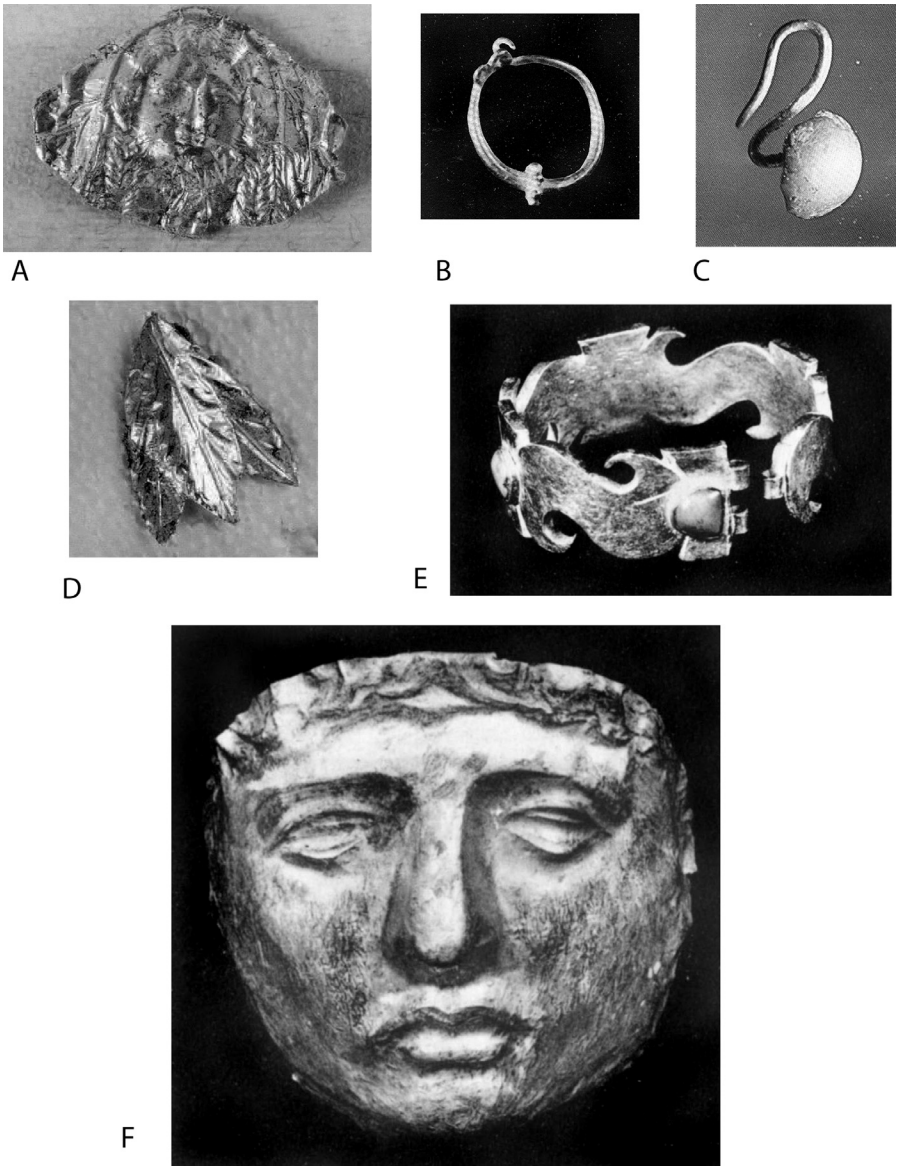


CHART 6. Distribution of grave goods over main categories

date their placement. It remains uncertain whether an object was deposited in the first construction phase, during the next centuries, or in the Byzantine period. Many of the finds from Tyre may thus belong to a period well out of the chronological boundaries of this book.

As a result of the aforementioned limits and untrustworthiness of the data, this book concentrates its discussion of grave goods on those tombs that provide enough reliable information for analysis. The total number of finds was 3409, discovered in 143 tombs.[2] This includes 1064 objects from the al-Bass Cemetery that could be dated more precisely to the Roman period. Tombs from all sites and regions yielded artifacts, except those on the Limestone Plateau. Looters most likely emptied these graves. The discussion that follows divides the finds into four functional types: items of personal adornment (jewelry and clothing), vessels, coins, and lamps. A fifth group includes the unusual, one-of-a-kind items. The breakdown in the categories is represented in Chart 6. As with the discussion of tomb types in the previous chapter, there is a degree of artificiality in these divisions. Coins, for instance, could be worn as jewelry, while amulaic pendants may not necessarily have been items of jewelry. In the concluding section of this chapter, we move away from these functional categories to look at how, as sets and as individual artifacts, grave goods played a role in the funerary ritual.

[2] This number is based on counting collections of beads as a single find, i.e., belonging to a necklace. Collections of iron nails are generally not counted, as they most likely come from wooden sarcophagi. Other elements of wooden coffins, such as hinges and decorative plaques, are also not included. Single iron nails are added to the total number of grave goods, and those belonging to shoes are counted as a single find.



24. Items of personal adornment. A: Gold applique (4 × 3 cm) from Pit 6 (Baalbek-Douris). B: Golden earring from S. 3881 (Complex XXIV, al-Bass Cemetery, Tyre). C: Golden earring from M. 4202-l.2 (Complex XXX, al-Bass Cemetery, Tyre). D: Gold leaf of wreath (3.7 × 2.5 cm) from Pit 6 (Baalbek-Douris). E: Golden bracelet with turquoise inset (2.1 cm high) from Tomb 1 (Homs). F: Golden face-mask (19 × 18 cm) from Tomb 1 (Homs)

Personal Adornment

Earrings in bronze, silver, and gold, and necklaces with beads of various sorts of stone and metal, represent the most regular finds in the graves (Figures 23 and 24). Together with other items of jewelry and pieces of garments, such as

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TABLE 2. *Items of personal adornment*

earring	229	golden mask	2
ring	125	golden wreath	4
bracelet	83	golden headband	2
necklace	115	textile	21
pendant	56	shoe (single)	19
bell	40	textile appliques (set)	5
pin	76	belt buckle	14
amulet	20	button	4
golden face-cover	19	other jewelry	101
gold leaves (set)	12	Total	947

belt buckles and shoes, they form a common category of grave goods (Table 2). When their find location is recorded, they were found on the body, indicating that the deceased wore the jewelry and clothing. The exception was an engraved gold ring found in a wooden box placed next to the deceased in a pit-grave at Nawa-tell Umm al-Hauran (T. 31).

Within the category of personal adornment, earrings were most common. Their proportional number dropped over the centuries. Necklaces and pendants made up the next group, and included bronze and silver bells, which may have been part of a necklace or garment. One example from Tyre was still attached to the silver chain of a necklace. Rings made up 13% of the assemblage, and their number increased after the 2nd c. CE. Some artifacts were identified as amulets or talismans, although the basis for this identification is not always clear. They took the shape of human and animal figurines, bronze inscribed sheets, a stone miniature of Bes, and a miniature glass amphora. Occasionally, sheets of gold covered the eyes and mouth of the deceased. Complete face covers in the form of masks in gold and silver were most common in the 1st c. CE, and particularly in the western part of the province of Syria. Examples come from Baalbek, Beirut, Homs, Deb'aal, and perhaps Tyre. The discovery of gold sheets in tombs at Dura Europos and of a face-mask at Halabiye on the Syrian Euphrates points to similar practices farther east.[3] The dry conditions of Palmyra allowed for the preservation of textiles, and several mummies wrapped in linen, wool, cotton, and silk originated from the tombs. Two buckles from a hypogeum in Hama still had the remains of leather and linen attached.

Items of personal adornment became less common over time. The number of tombs containing such items was higher in the 1st c. BCE and CE (around 80%) and dropped in subsequent centuries (around 30%). In the later centuries, items of personal adornment also constituted a smaller portion of the entire grave goods assemblage per tomb. In general, we can say little about

[3] Online Appendix Dura Europos 1, 2. Halabiye: Curtis 1995, 229.

distributions across tomb types, as few significant patterns emerged. Tombs in the Euphrates region (Selenkahiye, Dura Europos) and the rural south (Hauran) included items of personal adornment less often than tombs in other regions. Particularly rich and unusual collections came from the pit-graves in Homs and Nawa-tell Umm al-Hauran, where we find, among other things, jewelry with turquoise inlays and silver belt buckles.[4]

Scholars generally interpret items of personal adornment as having an ornamental purpose, decorating the body of the deceased and being worn at the time of burial. It is possible that they held additional, amulaic or magical, functions. In the Near Eastern, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman worlds, precious stones held various magical powers, and the same is true for precious metals. Lead had negative associations, but was also popular for its apotropaic characteristics, as indicated by lead amulets. Amulets served to protect a person from evil and to ensure good health and prosperity. Garments or necklaces tied with bronze bells could have had the purpose of protecting the wearer from evil spirits that fear the sound of metal.[5] The occurrence of masks and face covers in the eastern Mediterranean, Near East, and Egypt has prompted various interpretations, ranging from conservation to protection to solar symbolism.[6] In more general terms, they signal the importance of covering the face, particularly the orifices. Very little is known about magic or the use of apotropaic artifacts in Roman Syria, or about the influence of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman practices. However, a large portion of the items of personal adornment in Syrian graves possibly carried with them magical properties, through either material (precious metal and stone) or function (bell and amulet). We come back to the possible function of these and other items in the tomb in the final sections of this chapter.

Vessels

A glass or ceramic vessel accompanied many of the deceased. They amount to about a fifth of the total assemblage and, before the 2nd or 3rd c. CE, were found in 80% of all tombs with finds. Afterward, the number of tombs with vessels, as well as the number of vessels per tomb, fluctuated. The assemblage included comparable quantities of pottery (437) and glass (392) items, but the chronological distributions of these materials were not the same. In the 1st c. BCE, glass vessels were rare, and a century later, they made up more than half of the assemblage. By the 3rd and 4th c. CE, glass had almost entirely replaced

[4] Online Appendix Hauran 1, #6–24; Online Appendix Homs 1, #3, 7–12, 15–16.
[5] Oettel 2000, 113–114. For a wider discussion of metals, precious stones, and sound, see Luck 2006, 49, 218–220.
[6] Curtis 1976, 1995; Fick 1999; Seyrig 1952b; Theodossiev 1998.

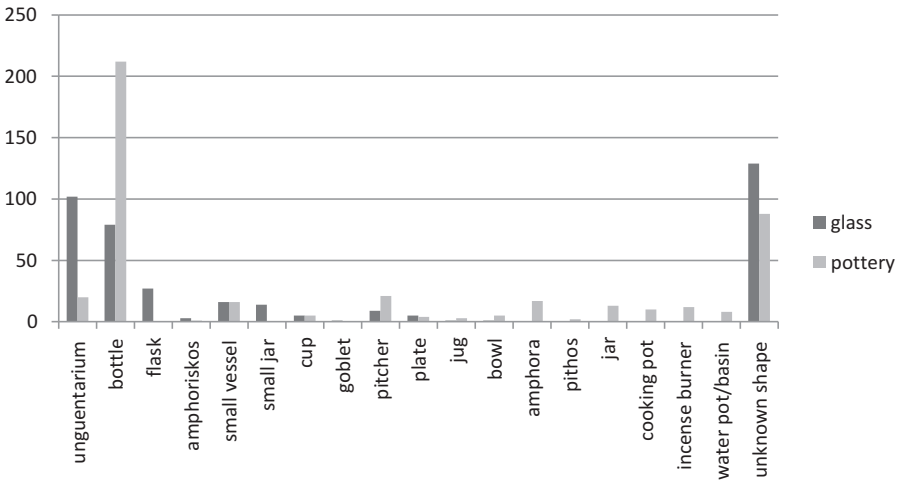


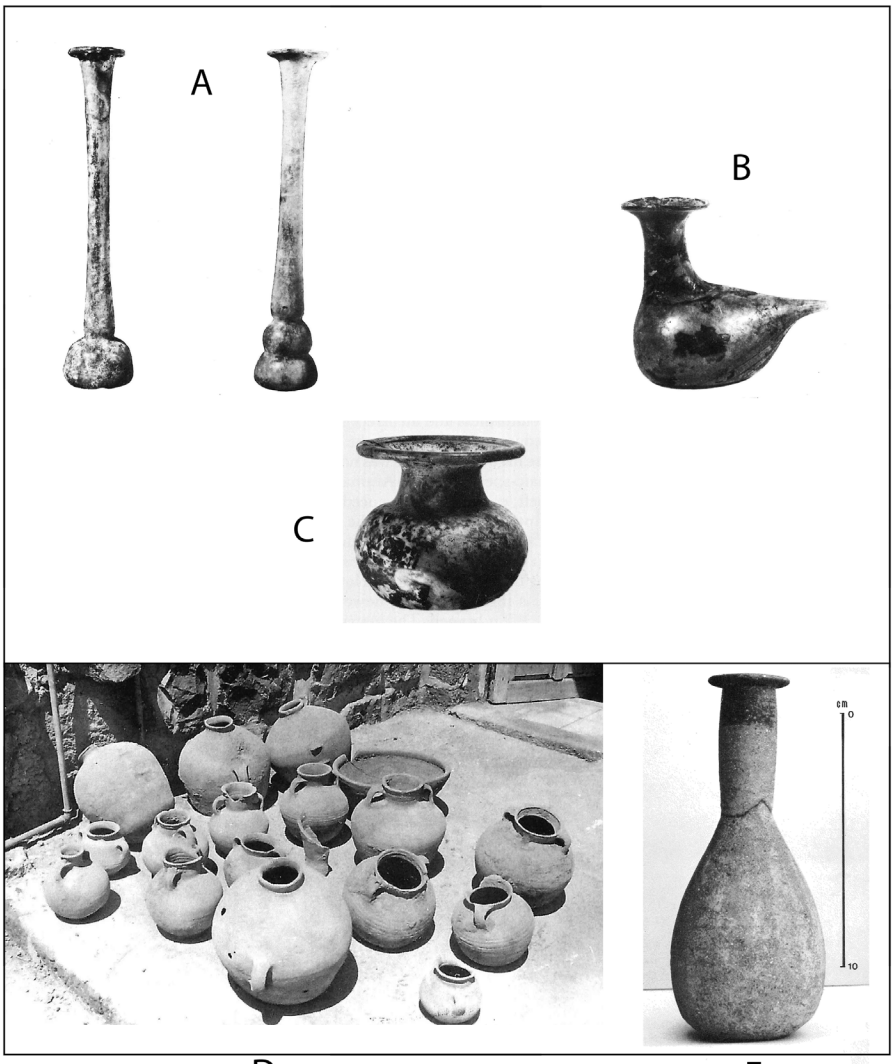
CHART 7. Vessels

pottery. The popularity of glass is likely directly related to the invention of the technique of glass-blowing on the Levantine coast in the middle of the 1st c. BCE, perhaps in Roman Syria.[7] Glass was now produced on a larger scale and was more widely available. Burial grounds close to the possible production sites – Beirut, Tyre – yielded particularly high quantities of glass in relation to pottery. Those farther from the coast, such as at Dura Europos and Palmyra, continued to contain more ceramic vessels. Occasionally, vessels in other materials, such as metal, wood, bone, or basketry, were discovered in the tombs (37 in total).[8]

Chart 7 distinguishes the vessels by functional type (e.g., cups, amphorae, bottles) and material. As a result of the inconsistent terminologies used in the excavation reports and the absence of drawings and images, this categorization remains crude and includes a high number of unknown shapes. It was not possible to standardize the entries in the database according to a single typology. Nevertheless, clear patterns emerge when we look at the types. The majority of the ceramic vessels consisted of small shapes, such as flasks and unguentaria (Figures 23 and 25). In the larger range, pitchers and amphorae were popular. Typical for Palmyrene tombs were plastered (water) pots and incense burners, the latter often made from the base of a broken vessel. In the single tomb types, the pit- and cist-burials, pottery vessels were placed by the body. In the communal tombs, vessels more often stood in front of the loculi, on the floor,

[7] Butcher 2003, 201; Jennings & Abdallah 2001, 237.

[8] Lead (2), bronze/copper (12), silver (2), wood (2), faience (1), bone (1), wicker (2), stone (1), bronze incense burner (1), incense burner unknown material (4), vessel unknown material (9).



25. Vessels. A: Two glass unguentaria from M. 837–l.12 (Complex XII, al-Bass Cemetery, Tyre. B: Glass vessel from M.4888–l.2 (Complex XXXIII, al-Bass Cemetery, Tyre). C: Glass jar from Tomb GXV (Hama). D: Pottery from pit-graves (Shahbā). E: Pottery bottle from Tomb 19 (Apamea)

or on benches in the central area of the tomb. Clear distinctions thus emerge, relative to the type of tomb.

Compared to the pottery, the glass assemblage covered a smaller range of functional types. The majority consisted of small vessels designed to hold scented liquids, creams, and make-up. The unguentarium or long-necked bottle was the preferred shape. Glass bottles often stood by the feet of the deceased and, less frequently, close to other parts of the body. Although some were found in the central areas of communal tombs, it is not certain whether this was their

original placement or the result of later disturbances. In Palmyra, glass cups were discovered in a plastered basin in the main room of a hypogeum (T. 32). No evidence exists elsewhere for the intentional placement of glass outside the burial spots, i.e., outside the loculus or coffin in the communal tomb. With regards to placement and type-range, therefore, differences existed between pottery and glass vessels.

Occasionally, graves yielded vessels in other materials: bronze, silver, lead, faience wood, bone, and basketry. Single tombs, and in particular pit-graves, held the highest numbers of such vessels. Tombs constructed after the 2nd c. CE no longer appear to have contained such items. In fact, we can detect a degree of standardization in the vessel assemblage, where small glass shapes became the dominant vessel type. Tombs with unusual assemblages, such as the storage vessels in a hypogeum at Djel el-'Amed (T. 33) and cooking pits, tablewares, and storage amphorae in a pit-grave in Shahbā (T. 34), were early in date. In the 2nd or 3rd c. CE, the range of materials and types of vessel in the Roman tombs decreased.

The discussion of the purpose of vessels in tombs varies for each functional category. The largest group from the assemblage can be characterized as containers of valuable liquids and unguents, such as perfumes or scented oils, creams, and make-up. This identification is primarily based on the shape: small and closed forms, such as bottles and unguentaria. Residue analyses of similar vessels found outside Syria confirm that they held oils, moisturizing creams or skin balms, white and reddish facial powders, ochre, and compounds associated with myrrh and incense.[9] The contents of these vessels can therefore be interpreted as luxury substances and personal cosmetics. They may also have been related to ritual activities, as perfumed oils played a role in the anointment of the body that occurred after death. The reasons for the presence of these items in a grave are rarely investigated. Adornment and embalmment of the body were directed at preservation, cosmetic beautification, purification, and possibly pacification of the spirit of the deceased.[10] Perhaps the bottles in the graves were the remnants of these activities. Perfumes could also be offered as part of the funeral, as discussed later.

A small collection of vessels, around 11%, was related to food preparation, serving, and dining. Such vessels were usually ceramic, and were more popular

[9] See, for instance, Anderson-Stojanović 1987; Khalil 2001; Pérez-Arantegui et al. 1996; Ribechini et al. 2008; Sachet 2010; Welcomme et al. 2006.

[10] See articles in Dudley & Rowell 1993. See also Green 2008, 159, 163. The connection between precious perfumed liquids in small vessels and the practice of anointment was also mentioned in the New Testament (Mark 14:3–9). See for instance Dalley 1993, 29; Fappas 2011; and Lucian *On Mourning* (Luc. Luct.). Anointment was also connected to healing practices and offerings. Luck (2006, 218) notes that pleasant scents were thought to have scared of evil spirits. For Scheid (1984, 120), they masked the smell of the corruptible dead.

in communal tombs. Scholars connect grave goods associated with food to two ritual practices: banquets and offerings. Tomb-side banquets are well known from Roman Italy and occurred during the funeral and yearly commemorative festivals. As discussed in Chapter 5, however, there is little direct evidence for funerary banquets inside or next to tombs. The second interpretation was perhaps more current. The vessels could hold offerings to the deceased and to divinities associated with death. Offers of sacrificial meat, vegetables, and fruit, as well as libations of milk, honey, perfumes, water, and wine, are attested in literary and archaeological sources across the Roman and Greek world. Incense could also function as an offering, and the burning of incense was connected to religious ceremonies. Here, we have sources closer to home, mentioning the burning of incense at funerals in the Levant. Some authors point to the fact that incense would clear the stench of decomposition more effectively than perfume in closed bottles, and that smoke may have had magical properties.[11] Syrian tombs yielded several incense burners.

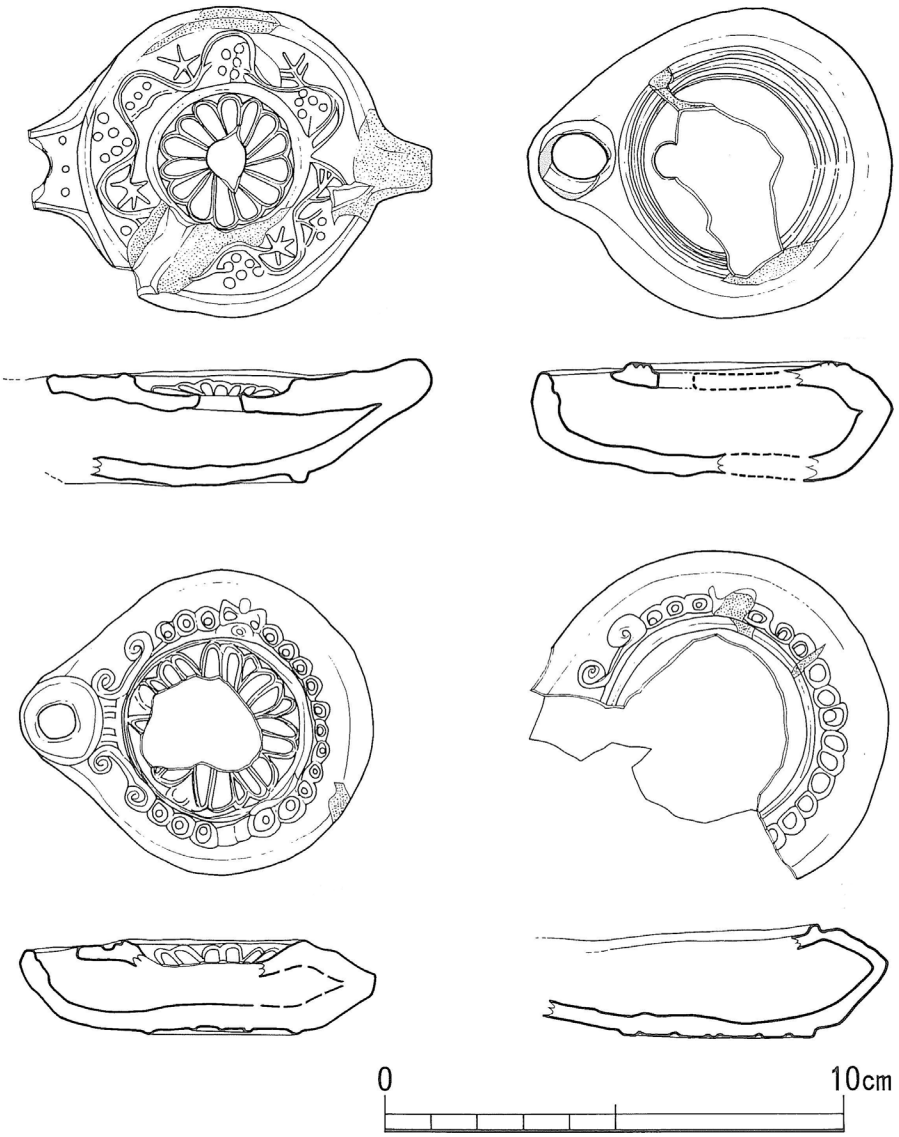
Lamps

Terracotta oil lamps constituted the largest group of grave goods in terms of total numbers, but came only from a relatively small group of tombs (Figure 26). Some contained large amounts, such as a hypogeum at Hama with 123 lamps (T. 35) and the Tomb of Yarhai in Palmyra with 259 examples (T. 36). In fact, more than half of the lamps in the assemblage originated from only four tombs. This type of grave good was, therefore, far less common than vessels and jewelry. The number of tombs with lamps remained relatively stable until the 4th c. CE, when it appears to have declined. The quantity of lamps per tomb grew over time, reaching its peak in the 3rd c. CE. Most lamps were ceramic; one bronze example originated from Nawa-tell Umm al-Hauran, and three made out of glass from graves in Tyre. The production of glass lamps was possibly a late (4th c. CE) development.[12]

Some lamps were placed in single tombs, but the majority originated from various locations in the communal tombs, predominantly from hypogea. Many stood inside a loculus, whereas others were discovered in the central areas of the tomb, such as the main chamber or side-niches (cf., Figure 37). Good evidence comes from Palmyrene hypogea, where lamps were placed on the floors, platforms, inside a water vessel, in front of loculi, on top of pit-graves in the floor, in front of funerary sculpture, and in used and unused loculi.

The function of oil lamps in tombs is understudied, rather surprisingly given their preponderance. It is often assumed that they were used to light the dark

[11] Luck 2006, 480–481. See also Green 2008, 165 and Levison 2002.
[12] O'Hea 1993.



26. Terracotta lamps from Tomb C (Palmyra)

tombs or symbolically referred to darkness.[13] This leaves unanswered why they were left behind in the tomb. The evidence from Roman Syria does not confirm a common interpretation that the lamps lit funerary meals that took place in the tombs. Or rather, those tombs with pottery related to banquets did not necessarily also contain lamps. The placement of lamps in the communal areas

[13] Scheid (1984) has connected the use of lamps during a Roman funeral to reference to the night, an inversion of reality that happens at the time of death and funeral. In his argument, much of the funerary ritual reverses regular practices, and lights refer to the night, the opposite of the day, and place the mourners in an opposite place when compared to regular people.

of the larger tombs does suggest that they functioned as part of the tomb furniture, to be lit when a funeral or other activities took place. Yet only a portion was placed in these areas, and many originated from locations that were barely accessible after burial had taken place. One would have to dig out the pit-grave or jar-burial, or remove the closing slabs of sarcophagi and loculi, to retrieve the oil lamp for a later funeral.

Coins

Coins were fairly uncommon in the early Roman assemblages. Their numbers jumped in the 2nd or 3rd CE, with a heavy concentration in the 3rd c. CE. This chronological distribution primarily reflects patterns in the al-Bass Cemetery in Tyre, which yielded more than half (59%) of all coins. Without the Tyrian tomb, coin finds were more equally distributed over the Roman centuries. They appear to have been less common in single tombs such as cists and pits, and none of the jar-burials yielded examples from this find category. Most coins were bronze issues; gold, silver, billon, and gilded bronze examples were rare.[14] The mints, although rarely recorded, included local production centers such as Tyre and Palmyra, as well as imperial mints. The non-bronze coins stem mostly from Tyrian tombs, but silver may have been popular more extensively on the Levantine coast.

Very little information is available about the find spots of coins. A few examples were found in or near the skull; two other coins were discovered close to the chest and in or near the hand of the deceased. A collection of thirteen examples lay between the legs of an individual in a tomb at Selenkahiye (T. 37). The dominant interpretation in Classical studies links the placement of coins in tombs, particularly those put in the mouth of the deceased, to a belief in Charon's crossing and Greek mythology of the underworld. Stevens has pointed out that coins in graves should be placed in a wider interpretative framework than just influence from Greek beliefs, and the Syrian examples support this statement. Only a few were found in the mouth of the deceased, and examples from Achaemenid tombs in Kamid el-Loz in the Beqa' Valley indicate that the placement of coins on the body was part of an older tradition. Stevens ties the deposition of coins in tombs in the eastern and western Mediterranean to the religious-magical significance of coins, based on the intrinsic value and potency of money.[15] As we have already seen in the section on jewelry, metal may also have held magical qualities. In Roman Syria, furthermore, some coins were worn as jewelry, as evidenced by suspension holes.

[14] Bronze: 192; silver: 33; gold: 13; billon: 11. The material of the remainder was not published.

[15] Stevens 1991. Van Andringa et al. (2013, 923) interpreted coins in tombs in Pompeii as helping fix the dead in the next world. Kamid el-Loz: Oettel 2000, 110. More examples from the Achaemenid period are listed in Nunn 2001, 402.

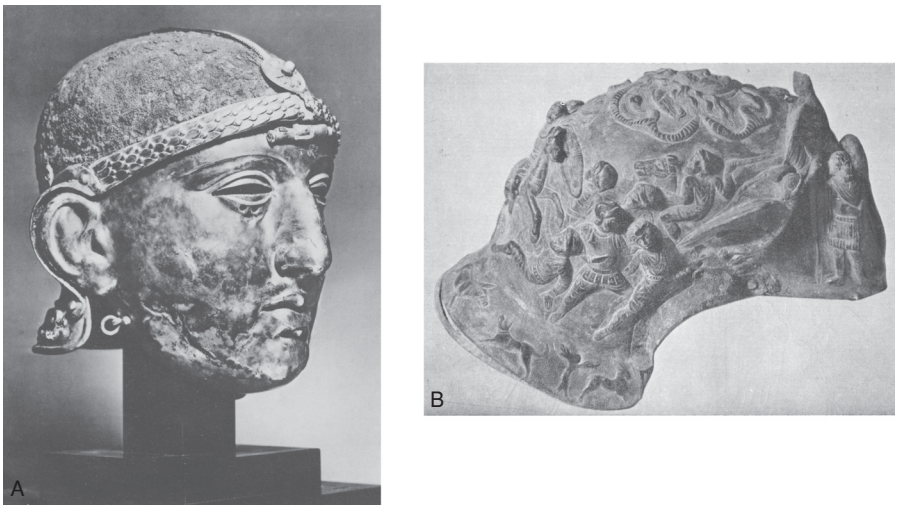
TABLE 3. *Miscellaneous finds*

spindle whorl/loomweight	22	bronze weight	1
bronze/copper mirror	6	bronze prism	1
bronze medical tools	6	bronze tripod	1
bronze ladle	1	bronze musical instrument	1
bronze spatula	2	sculpture	1
bronze needle	1	terracotta figurine	5
spoon	5	bone comb	3
iron strigiles	1	ivory fish	9
iron knife	4	flute	2
iron scissors	1	nail	33
iron arrow head	2	bronze object	46
lance	4	iron object	42
umbo	2	lead object	9
sword	3	silver object	1
bronze dagger	3	bone object	7
bronze helmet	2	glass object	23
silver helmet	1	wooden object	2
cuirass	1	stone object	17
mortar/pestle	3	shell	12
wetstone	1	pottery object	2
lead curse tablets/envelopes	4	unknown material	12
bronze key	1	Total	306

Other Finds

The remainder of the grave goods in the Syrian tombs consisted of unidentifiable objects, such as fragments of bronze or glass, and objects that were rare or even unique. In this latter group, several functional categories can be distinguished (Table 3, Figure 27). Spinning implements included spindle whorls and loom weights in a variety of materials. Other tools, such as spoons and spatula, are listed in Table 3, many of which came from pit-graves in the Hauran. The same tombs, together with the pit-graves from Homs, also yielded most examples of armor and weaponry. Finds in this category date to the 1st and/or 2nd c. CE. A particularly spectacular example comes in the form of a silver helmet with a face-mask attached, weighing over 2 kg (T. 38). The helmets found in these tombs, as well as some of the other bronze parts, were likely part of military parade gear (see p. 134).

The next group can be considered magic in nature. Four folded lead envelopes were found in Beirut, and a possible fifth originated from Tyre. These examples have not been opened, but possibly served as curse tablets. Similar envelopes and tablets inscribed with curses and prayers come from several sites in the Levant. According to Heintz, they were buried in the grave of a person who had experienced an untimely or violent death and whose ghost was roaming without finding peace. These spirits could perform the task inscribed



27. Miscellaneous finds. A: Silver/iron helmet and mask from Tomb 1 (Homs). B: Bronze helmet from Tomb 1 (Nawā-tell Umm el-Haurān)

on the tablet. Curse tablets were often excavated in graves close to a circus, possibly placed there to condemn the racers and their horses on the racetrack.[16] Both the cemeteries of Beirut and Tyre lay in the vicinity of a circus. Metal nails may also have carried magic properties. Usually, nails were remnants of wooden coffins or shoes, but occasionally, they occurred alone or in a pair. In this light, Walbank's remark on the use of nails in graves in Roman Corinth is interesting. She comments that nails could have held magical significance and that the presence of an iron nail in 2nd c. CE graves was regarded as a means of protection against the supernatural. This practice was also attested in earlier times in Greece.[17] The fact that six tombs with single nails were found at the military colony of Jebel Khalid may provide evidence for a particularly Greek practice in Hellenistic Syria.[18] Figurines or miniature sculpture form another group, and shells were placed in graves at Si', Hama, and Palmyra.

Pit-graves, hypogea, and particularly funerary enclosures included more finds from this category than the other tomb types. Enclosures and pits also contained a higher number of these finds relative to other finds, resulting in more idiosyncratic assemblages. Several sites had unique finds. The funerary enclosures in Tyre, for instance, included two small bronze prisms, a bronze key, weights, an eggshell encased in lead sheet, a mortar and pestle, and a glass loom weight.

[16] Heintz 1998, 337–342. See also Luck 2006, 48–49; Wilburn 2012, 238. On the discovery of a curse tablet from the area of the circus at Beirut, see Jidejian 1993, 108–111. Bodel (2001, 23) points out that lead was used because of the negative connotations of the properties of this material.

[17] Corinth: Walbank 2002, 277. Greece: Kurtz & Boardman 1971, 216.

[18] Littleton & Frohlich 2002; Jackson & Littleton 2002.

The pit- and cist-graves at Nawa-tell Umm al-Hauran held spoons, medical sets, weapons, a set of strigiles, ivory fish with Latin numbers and Greek letters, and possible fragments of a musical instrument. The cat. 2 tombs of Dura Europos, of possible Roman date, yielded iron arrowheads, decorated bone plates, bronze mirrors, and bone combs.

GRAVE GOOD ASSEMBLAGES IN SPACE AND TIME

The distribution of artifacts in the tombs of Roman Syria shows that people were not buried with similar sets of grave goods. A relatively undisturbed funerary enclosure in Beirut illustrates this point neatly. This tomb (T. 39) contained eleven niches, each with multiple compartments stacked on top of one another. Of these, twenty-three were excavated, and sixteen were empty of grave goods upon discovery. Several showed signs of later disturbance and may have been looted. However, the closing slabs of at least seven of the empty compartments were still in their original location. People in these graves were likely intentionally buried without accompanying artifacts. The remaining six compartments contained two or three finds on average (range of one to six). The collection consisted of items of jewelry (seven), glass vessels (four), and coins (six). One grave held the skeleton of a young adult with a glass unguentarium placed at the feet. The others contained more than one individual, and here again variation appears. Three adults were buried in a single compartment, but grave goods accompanied only one of them: three coins and glass vessels. A particularly full grave with nine individuals placed on top of one another yielded only three earrings and the same amount of coins. Highly valuable finds come from one primary adult burial, with a gold ring discovered by the right hand and a golden face-mask near skull. In sum, in this tomb complex in Beirut, people were buried with or without grave goods, and when they did receive gifts, variation existed in their number, type, and placement. Our data suggest that this pattern repeats itself in the other tombs of the province.

Certain artifacts were often found together, such as vessels and coins. Items of personal adornment often appeared with vessels and coins or unusual artifacts. The frequency of these combinations, however, was only slightly higher than that of other combinations. In other words, strong overarching trends in combinations of grave good types were absent. People in Roman Syria never received homogeneous sets of objects.

Distinctions in the Burying Communities

The variation in grave good assemblages, however, was not random, and it is possible to detect central principles guiding the selection of grave goods. This becomes most visible when we move from the level of individual graves to

distributions across time and space. There was a slight increase in the number of tombs containing finds in the 1st c. CE, and this trend continued in the 2nd–3rd c. CE. The average of eight objects per burial spot in the 1st c. BCE–1st c. CE, on the other hand, decreased to around three in the later periods. In other words, over time, more graves contained finds, but they contained fewer of them. The variability in quantities of artifacts per grave possibly also declined, as indicated by the fact that before the 2nd or 3rd c. CE, the numbers of finds per burial spot varied more than after this period, when the majority included between one and four grave goods. The earliest tombs contained few coins and glass vessels, and high quantities of items of personal adornment and pottery. In the 1st c. CE, glass vessels and lamps grew in numbers. A century later, the number of lamps and glass vessels had further increased, as had the quantity of coins. Tombs of the 2nd c. CE yielded the greatest variation in artifacts. Afterward, the supremacy of glass over other vessel materials and the diminishing of vessel shapes led to a reduction in diversity. These distributions tell us a number of things. Over time, more burials contained finds, and these assemblages were smaller in size and more similar in range. This standardization may have been a feature in particular of urban cemeteries. Rural tombs generally displayed greater variation in artifact collections.

Regional trends are apparent when comparing the assemblages in the tombs on the Levantine coast and those from inland sites. We have already mentioned that glass was predominant in the coastal areas, and reached the hinterland more slowly. Typical for the Levantine coast were (silver) coins, figurines, and perhaps lead curse tablets. Away from the coast, the assemblages become irregular and diverse, as can be seen in the collections of Hama, Homs, the Hauran, and Palmyra. Otherwise, few regional distinctions emerge from the sample, and the types of grave goods are fairly similar across the Syrian province. This is not to say that within the categories strong regional preferences are apparent, e.g., with certain types of hooped earrings or long-neck bottles restricted to particular regions. The incomplete nature of the data prohibits such analyses at this moment. It remains unclear whether the pronounced regionalism characterizing funerary architecture of the first centuries CE, discussed in the previous chapter, also involved the gifts for the dead.

Certain tomb types yielded high-number finds: cist-graves, funerary enclosures, jar-burials, tower-tombs with hypogea, and tumuli. Again, it is difficult to assess the significance of these patterns. Lacking inscriptions, tumuli, cist-graves, and jar-burials were dated primarily on the basis of grave goods, meaning that those with artifacts were more likely to be included in the cat. 1 assemblage. The funerary enclosures in Tyre were used for reburial on a greater scale than tombs elsewhere, potentially increasing the number of finds with each burial. All tomb types included artifacts from each category, but there are some distinctions. The most common types, hypogea and pit-graves, included relatively few

items of personal adornment, and more vessels and artifacts from the "other" category. This vessel collection also included a wider range of shapes. Funerary enclosures stand out in their high quantities of coins, vessels, and unusual artifacts. Perhaps we can conclude that people buried in the less common tomb shapes, and in particular the large tombs, received richer and more standardized artifact collections. However, it cannot be ascertained whether this represents a true pattern or reflects excavation and publication biases inherent in the sample.

More robust patterns arise from the comparison between single and communal tombs. We have already seen in the previous chapter that spatial concepts and levels of monumentality and elaboration varied between the two types. Distinctive practices with regards to grave goods indicate that this was not only a matter of architecture. The single tombs contained on average five to six artifacts. Compared to communal tombs, they held fewer of the common objects (personal adornment, coins, and lamps) and more unique items and vessels, especially those made of ceramic and other materials. Grave goods were placed with the burial inside the grave, with the exception of two pit-graves at Nawa-tell Umm al-Hauran, where objects were positioned inside the pit on top of the basalt slabs closing the smaller burial pit (T. 40, 41).

The loculi, pits, or coffins in communal tombs included 6.2 artifacts per burial spot. This number is distorted by the full graves in the al-Bass Cemetery of Tyre. Without the Tyrian tombs, the average in communal graves was 4.3 grave goods per burial spot. Communal tombs often had finds from each category, and the assemblages appeared less idiosyncratic than in single tombs. More items in precious metals and stones originated from the communal tombs. The placement of grave goods, in particular, points to an important distinction between the two tomb types. Artifacts in communal tombs were either located in a burial spot, such as a loculus or sarcophagus, or placed in the central areas, in front of a loculus, by the entrance, or in side rooms. Lamps were most frequently found outside the grave, which one would expect, due to their function. Yet vessels, jewelry, coins, and other finds also originated from find locations outside the burial spots. Undisturbed tombs in Palmyra suggests that this positioning was intentional and not (always) the result of later disturbances. The placement of finds in communal tomb suggests that they played more varied roles in mortuary practices when compared to the grave goods in single tombs, which almost always accompanied the body. We will return to this issue in the discussion of ritual practices.

Inside the communal tombs, possible distinctions emerge between modes of burial. The loculi of the al-Bass Cemetery contained fewer items of personal adornment and more lamps and pottery vessels compared to the sarcophagus burials in the same funerary enclosures. In Beirut (Bey 104), loculi that were filled with terracotta coffins held the highest quantity of finds per buried

individual, and on average more jewelry. The same pattern emerged from the Deb'aal hypogeum, where the sarcophagi placed in the loculi contained above-average quantities, particularly of jewelry and coins (T. 29, Figure 23). If one can take these patterns as representative for the province, or at least the Levant, it follows that within communal tombs, sarcophagus burials yielded the highest numbers of artifacts, particularly items of jewelry and, perhaps, coins.

Pre-Roman Customs

The patterns just described appear to have strayed little from older practices. Pre-Roman tombs yielded similar finds and find categories. They point to high degrees of continuity in the principles guiding the selection of gifts to accompany the dead (Table 4). Hellenistic and Parthian graves usually contained between two and four finds. The placement of these items by the body or in the central room of communal tombs was similar to practices of the subsequent centuries. Coins and lamps were uncommon in Hellenistic tombs, but coin finds increased in the Parthian period. Examples come from eastern Syria and Mesopotamia.[19] The most pronounced difference was the lack of glass artifacts. As indicated, this was probably related to the fact that a new technology developed in the 1st c. BCE increased the availability of glass in the Roman period. Later (1st–2nd c. CE), Parthian tombs at Dura Europos and Tell Sheikh Hamad did include vessels in blown glass, indicating that the popularity of this material crossed the imperial borders. In western Syria, small bottles designed to hold valuable liquids also dominated the earlier pottery shapes, indicating that the introduction of glass here signaled not a functional change, but a change in material. Kitchen and storage wares were found more frequently at inland sites such as Dura Europos and Palmyra. As we have seen, this trend possibly continued in the Roman period, until the mid–late 3rd c. CE.

Gold, a frequent occurrence in the Roman tombs, was almost completely absent from the Hellenistic assemblage. The Parthian tombs of the 1st and 2nd c. CE did include gold beads, pendants, face covers, and earrings. Starting in the 1st c. CE, therefore, gold turned up in tombs more often, both in the Syrian province and in Parthian territory. With the exception of one bead in a tomb in Tell Kazel, no lead objects were found in the Hellenistic and Parthian tombs, and the same was perhaps true for ivory. Parthian graves included a wide range of vessel materials: basketry, bronze, silver, wood, and bone and numerous pre-Roman tombs yielded alabaster vessels. Thus far, Roman graves have not yielded alabaster vessels.

[19] Abu Qubur: Gasche 1996; Gasche et al. 1989, 1991, 5–6; Warburton 1989, 14. Nimrud: Oates & Oates 1958. Nineveh: Curtis 1976. Seleucia-on-the-Tigris: Hopkins 1972; Valtz 1986; Yeivin 1933. Sheikh Hamad: Novák 2000.

TABLE 4. *Finds in Hellenistic-Parthian tombs*

	Beirut (59)	Dura Europos (615)	Jebel Khalid (38)	Jebleh (26)	Palmyra (147)	Tell Kazel (48)	Tell Sheikh Hamad (531)
earring (209)	2	39	3	2	30	2	131
bracelet (70)	1	18	1		11	7	32
ring (160)	2	122	1		7	2	26
pin (35)	1	7	1		1	4	21
amulet (2)					1		1
necklace (112)	4	32	3	2	9	6	56
pendant (70)	1	41			2		26
bells (17)		33			2		27
gold leaves (17)		17					
other jewelry (16)	2	9			2		3
textile appliques (3)		3					
textile (27)		21			2		4
belt buckle (9)		4			2		3
button (18)		10					8
glass small bottle (70)		58				2	10
glass goblet (2)		1			1		
glass plate (2)							2
glass pitcher (2)				1			1
glass bowl (2)				1			1
glass unknown shape (3)				2		1	
pottery small bottle (43)	4	12	4	3	10	7	3
pottery plate (8)	2				6		
pottery cup (5)	1				2		2
pottery jug/jar (46)	1	32			9	4	
pottery pitcher (18)		15		2		1	
pottery bowl (28)		11		1	7	5	4
pottery amphora (30)		16	3			2	9
pottery pithos (2)							2
pottery unknown shape (44)	8	28					8
bronze/copper vessel (4)		4					
silver vessel (2)		2					
bone vessel (2)		1			1		
alabaster vessel (15)	2	9			4		
basketry (4)		2					2
bronze coin (7)			1		2		4
silver coin (8)		7					1
coin unknown material (8)		2			6		
oillamp (29)	8			10	11		
bronze lamp (1)		1					
spindle implements (8)	1			1			6
spoon (2)					1		1
iron knife (9)		1			2		6
bronze spatula (20)		10					10
iron arrow head (10)					4		6
weapon (13)							13
iron dagger (2)					1		1
tc figurine (5)	2	1		1			1
bronze/copper mirror (21)		17			3		1
single nail (11)	1		6				4
unknown material/type (168)	16	29	15		8	5	95

These patterns tell us that the grave good assemblages remained fairly similar to those in the Roman area between the Hellenistic and Parthian periods, although the latter yielded more diverse materials. This observation stands in sharp contrast with the developments in funerary architecture discussed in Chapter 2. The introduction of new tomb shapes and an increasing elaboration of the funerary space, often visible to the public, resulted in cemeteries that looked profoundly different from their predecessors and from burial grounds across the border in Parthian territory. By the 2nd c. CE, a whole range of new shapes and decorative forms filled the Syrian cemeteries. Yet, how people were buried, and the items that were chosen to accompany the deceased, continued to adhere to long-standing traditions. The changes that did occur, such as the introduction of glass and the increase in popularity of gold items, were not restricted to Roman territory but extended into the Parthian lands. Concepts of space transformed cemeteries of the province, yet the functions of grave goods, in magic practices, embalming, and offerings, crossed the imperial boundaries. It is to these roles that we turn next.

DISCUSSION: GIFT EXCHANGES WITH THE DEAD

Parker Pearson has pointed out that grave goods were not simply personal trappings, but items bound up in gift exchanges with the dead.[20] In this concluding section, I discuss these exchanges and the possible reasons for placement of these artifacts in the tombs. Many items in the assemblage were valuable, either made of precious and rare materials or holding expensive content. Small numbers of luxury items, thus, accompanied the dead. Occasionally, imported items entered the graves. The glassware was probably produced on the Lebanese coast and exported to the hinterland. Pottery vessels and lamps, when recorded, were produced locally, on in nearby regions such as Eastern Turkey and the Southern Levant. Incense and silk in the Palmyrene tombs were foreign materials, as were the precious metals and stones throughout the province. Items in these materials did not seem to have been solely produced for the funerary context. Jewelry and garments could be worn during life, and incense was burnt during non-funerary rituals. The same held true for the other grave goods: the vessels, coins, and lamps could have been used before ending up in the grave. It is, of course, possible that within the categories certain items were reserved for funerary purposes, e.g., a particular shape of glass vessel for the anointment of the dead or a distinct iconography for funerary lamps. Data for such a study are currently not available. At this stage, we can only identify three groups of artifacts that were (presumably) made exclusively for placement in a tomb, each of which was rare: face covers, shrouds, and curse tablets. This last group

[20] Parker Pearson 2008 [1999], 85.

should probably not be considered grave goods per se, as they could be placed in the graves by anyone, not just individuals involved in the funeral. The lead envelopes found in a grave in Beirut were 15 cm above floor level, indicating that they were placed in the fill after the last burial took place (T. 42). Thus, save these three exceptions, there was no specialized market for the production of grave goods. This stands in sharp contrast, again, with the tomb architecture discussed in Chapter 2, where a whole industry was dedicated to the production of funerary materials such as stelae, portraits, and coffins.

On the Function of Grave Goods

Why were objects placed in the tomb? Studies of grave goods often describe them in purely functional terms: jewelry adorned the body, perfumes hid the stench of rotting human remains, and lamps lit the dark, underground spaces. Yet, the conscious selection and deliberate placement of these finds in tombs begs for more in-depth explanations. Why would lamps be placed in single tombs and inside burial spots where they would not be accessible or of use to light the tomb? Perfumes in a bottle with a long narrow neck probably did little to keep away unwanted smells. Why leave these items behind in the tomb after the funeral? The burial rituals to which the grave goods pertained are discussed in Chapter 5, in conjunction with information from the architecture and epigraphy. This section concentrates on the artifacts and reconstructs the possible reasons for their placement in the tomb. In doing so, it places question marks after commonly heard but rarely proven assessments of the role of grave goods.

The analysis starts by addressing the exact location of grave goods in the tomb, and unfortunately this contextual information is not abundant. The grave goods appear to concentrate in two areas of the tomb: inside the burial spot and in the central areas. In the burial spots, most artifacts were placed on or near the body. Jewelry, coins, and clothing lay on the body, and glass vessels stood by the feet. Garments and jewelry were likely worn at the time of burial, and the other finds put by the body in the coffin, loculus, or single tomb shortly after burial. These items, therefore, were associated with the funeral, or more generally, with the period between the moment of death and the sealing of the grave. There is little stratigraphic evidence that graves were opened for the addition of new artifacts. This is less obvious for the objects in the central area of the communal tombs, which could have been deposited at the time of burial or at an earlier or later stage. The time of placement of these artifacts cannot be determined with any accuracy.

Who owned these objects? Scholars often assume that many of the finds were personal belongings of the deceased, in particular the items of jewelry, clothing, and unusual artifacts such as weapons, figurines, tools, and spinning implements.

There is, however, little to reconstruct ownership, and these objects could also have been gifts from others, or purchased for the occasion of the funeral. Two artifacts in the Syrian assemblage carried a personal name: a gold bracelet in Beirut was inscribed "Claudia Procla," and a bottle in a tomb at Dura Europos was painted with "Gadda, son of…" in Palmyrene Aramaic (T. 43, 44). More items with inscriptions remain unpublished.[21] Yet, even in these cases, it remains uncertain the issue of ownership cannot be resolved easily.

An often heard explanation is that the deceased needed certain items during a transitional phase or while residing in the afterlife. In the absence of a textual or visual record of an afterlife, this remains speculative. In fact, even when artifacts can be related to concepts of afterlife, such as the coin for Charon, their actual function in the grave is open to various and perhaps locally specific interpretations. Concepts of afterlife also do not explain the placement of objects outside the burial spot, where they were not associated with a single individual. In such cases, it remains unclear who would need such objects, and when. Perhaps some objects were polluted due to their involvement in funerary rites. Pollution concepts were discussed in Chapter 1, when considering the emphasis on extramural burial. Pollution could affect not only the corpses and participants but also the artifacts used in the funeral. This would explain the abandonment in the tomb of lamps and embalmment and banqueting/offering vessels. Such items could not be taken back to the house, as they were now polluted. Perhaps we can extend such interpretations even to personal belongings, such as garments, jewelry, and some of the idiosyncratic finds such as a comb or flute. Their association with the deceased individual rendered them unfit to be worn or used by others. They had to be removed from the sphere of the living and symbolically killed, in order to achieve purification for the living. At this stage, however, such an interpretation has to remain speculative.

Despite the difficulties in interpreting grave goods, the assemblages in Syrian graves refer to two ritual practices: protection through magic and beautification and the provision of offerings. Many items, especially those placed on or close to the body, may have had magical properties. Dalley notes that in older Mesopotamian funerary rituals, ointments served both as toilette and as a means of pacification of the spirit, to ensure it would not come back to haunt the living.[22] The items in Syrian tombs related to embalming, dressing

[21] These include a golden ring with precious stone in which a chariot and Greek name were engraved (Online Appendix Hauran 1, #8), a lamp with engraved bottom (Online Appendix Tyre 1, #13), an inscribed golden ring (Online Appendix Tyre 1, #23), a golden ring with Greek engraving (Online Appendix Deb'aal 1), an engraved bead of black stone (Online Appendix Palmyra 1, #26), a golden ring with engraving of a royal bust (Online Appendix Homs 1, #3), and a storage jar with a painted text on top of a pit-grave (Online Appendix Selenkahiye 1, #7).

[22] Dalley 1993, 29.

up, and application of make-up may have served not only to make the body presentable during the final stages of the funerary ritual but also to appease the soul. The practice of placing lead curse tablets in tombs points to a belief in spirits roaming the grave fields, who could be summoned to carry out curses. The magic items, thus, may have served a dual role of protecting the deceased and shielding the living from unquiet spirits.

A small group of items was associated with offerings of liquids and incense: plastered water pots, incense burners, and sacrificial ladles or simpula. Both in Rome and closer by in the Nabataean world, perfumed oils could be offered as well.[23] Plenty of evidence exists for such items in Syrian tombs. Objects in tombs may have been remnants from the ritual of offering that took place inside. In this case, it was not the object itself, but its contents (oil, incense, water) that were the primary reason for placement in the grave. There is no evidence for offerings of sacrificial meat or plant products. Here, it should be said that botanical and faunal remains were rarely sampled in Syrian tombs, save a few exceptions.[24] In Chapter 5, we connect the evidence for offerings to the spatial configuration of the tomb and discuss the possible recipients for these gifts.

Other than a focus on adorning and protecting the body and placement of offerings, there are no single purposes for the grave goods. This can be seen from the fact that the assemblages were highly diverse, even in the tombs that were never robbed. The grave goods do not point to internalized practices. Perhaps this changed over time, when artifact assemblages became more standardized and more common. Although it is hard to say what it was, perhaps a stronger coherence emerged in the role of artifacts in the tomb. In any case, we should resist the temptation to seek a singular purpose for the objects, which may have been adorning and at the same time protective, and may have served both as offerings to the dead and reminders that the family had performed the correct rituals.[25]

Funerary Rituals in Space and Time

Chapter 2 directed attention to several distinctive practices in the spatial configuration of tombs. To some extent, these are also reflected by the grave good

[23] Sachet 2010. Liquid offerings of perfume in Pompeii: Van Andringa et al. 2013, 921. Wine is also mentioned in relation to (non-funerary) libations in the context of Palmyra and Dura Europos (Kaizer 2002, 190–191).

[24] One bottle in the hypogeum of Djel el-'Amed reportedly held grains (Online Appendix Tyre 1, #2), and one grave in Selenkahiye contained a long bone of a large mammal (Online Appendix Selenkahiye 1, #34). Two hypogea in Hama yielded bones of sheep, fowl, horses, and oxen (Online Appendix Hama 1, #11, #15). It is uncertain whether these were original deposits or the results of later usage of the tombs as animal pens and garbage dumps.

[25] Cf., Van Andringa et al. 2013, 921–922.

assemblages. Take, for instance, the intense variety in types of tomb and modes of burial. This variation also prevailed in the grave good assemblages, and people were buried with different assemblages. Others were never accompanied by objects. We have already seen a distinction between communal and single tombs. Communal tombs rose in popularity in the Roman period, and it was particularly in the context of these that a greater elaboration of and energy expenditure on funerary architecture occurred. The analysis of grave good assemblages indicates that communal tombs yielded more valuable finds when compared to single tombs, although the differences are not very pronounced. Within the communal tombs, sarcophagus burial contained the richest assemblages. The placement of finds both in- and outside the burial spots in the communal tombs signifies that the grave goods performed more and different roles than in the single tombs, likely pertaining to different rituals. Although we cannot say that these rituals did not take place in the context of single tombs as well, it is clear that they did not take place *at* the tombs. The analysis of the space and the gifts in single and communal tombs suggest distinctive ritual practices, an argument that is further developed when we discuss who is buried in the next chapter.

The selections of grave goods also changed little from earlier customs, and instead stress continuity in mortuary practices from the Hellenistic and Parthian periods to the Roman era. Although it is difficult to discuss changes over time within the grave good categories, the pre-Roman assemblages point to similar ritual practices. In other words, if protection, beautification, and offering explain the placement of artifacts in the Roman tombs, these were also important in older traditions.

The composition of the grave good assemblages did not remain stable throughout the Roman centuries. The quantities of jewelry decreased after the 1st c. CE, around the same time as the tombs contained more coins. Perhaps coins took over some of the symbolic functions of jewelry, in terms of both valuable metal and magical or protective properties. Vessels connected to food preparation, serving, and dining seem to disappear in the 3rd c. CE. The associated rituals, therefore, no longer took place in the tomb. To come back to Parker Pearson's statement at the beginning of this section, gift exchanges with the dead, as revealed by grave good assemblages in the tombs of Roman Syria, involved the need for adornment and protection of the deceased body, as well as the presentation of offerings. The items were part of a series of ritual activities that took place in the tomb, and may have involved offerings to the deceased. Chapter 5 discusses these ritual practices by combining the collection of artifacts with epigraphic and spatial evidence. First, however, we turn to the occupants of the graves in Chapter 4.