

АРХИТЕКТУРА ДРЕВНЕГО
МИРА И СРЕДНИХ ВЕКОВ

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S.V. Tarkhanova

THE “LINTEL” FROM JĀMI ‘AL-SITTĪN IN SHILOH: SOME REMARKS

This brief article focuses on the “lintel” reused in the Abbasid-Mamluk mosque Jāmi ‘al-Sittīn in Shiloh. It is well-documented through archival materials, including drawings and photographs from the late 19th and early 20th century, although the lintel itself was lost by the first half of the 20th century. Some interpretations link it to synagogue art, although E. Klein recently attributed it to the wall of the through-type burial, a tradition typical of pagan culture and found in Shephelah and Samaria. This article presents a broader analysis of the lintel's composition, which includes horned altars, inverted wreaths, and an amphora. It proposes a Syrian origin for the artistic tradition, aligning with the theory of a large migration of pagan populations from Syria and Arabia following the Bar Kochba revolt in 135 C.E.

Keywords: lintel, through-type burial, Pagan art, Shiloh, portable altar, inverted wreath, amphora

C.B. Тарханова

«ДВЕРНАЯ» ПЕРЕМЫЧКА ИЗ МЕЧЕТИ ДЖАМИ АЛЬ-СИТТИН В ШИЛО: НЕКОТОРЫЕ НАБЛЮДЕНИЯ

Эта небольшая статья посвящена интересной детали, которая известна исключительно по архивным материалам (фотографиям и рисункам конца XIX и начала XX в.). Деталь, вторично использованная в позднеисламской мечети Джами аль-Ситтин в Шило в качестве перемычки, была утрачена уже к середине XX в., но продолжает привлекать к себе внимание ученых. В недавней публикации Э. Кляйн атрибутировал данную деталь как декоративную стенку саркофага, целиком вырезанного из камня. Подобный тип захоронений встречается в Шфеле и Самарии; известен он и в самом Шило. В данной статье углубляется и расширяется стилистический анализ композиции детали, состоящий из центрального мотива амфоры, фланкированной парными изображениями алтарей и перевёрнутых венков. Предлагается теория о сиро-аравийском происхождении данной художественной традиции, что коррелируется с теорией о массовой миграции языческого населения Сирии и Аравии после восстания Бар Кохбы в 135 г. н. э. и вытеснения еврейского населения за пределы Иерусалима, Иудеи и Самарии.

Ключевые слова: дверная перемычка, языческое искусство, Шило, мотив алтаря, перевёрнутого венка, амфоры

INTRODUCTION

Among the other Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic artifacts uncovered in Shiloh, one stands out due to its contradictory composition, which has led to numerous different interpretations, including its synagogue derivation. The earliest evidence of the well-known so-called “synagogue” lintel comes from 19th-century engravings (*Wilson* 1881: 226), earlier surveys (fig. 1) (*Clermont-Ganneau* 1896: 299, 300; fig. 189; *Conder and Kitchen* 1882: 369), and from the Brit-

ish Mandate archive (*British Mandate Archive*, SRF_171 (236/236)). In these sources, drawings and photos show the lintel either above the doorway or near the southern wall of double maqam Jāmi ‘al-Sittīn (*Andersen* 1985: 77–81, fig. 25, 26; *Schwartz, Shemesh* 2020: 9, 10 of 19, fig. 2, 3; *Livyatan Ben-Arie* 2021: 32*–34*, fig. 6; *Schwartz, Livyatan-Ben Arie et al.* 2021: 135, 136). Z. Yeivin briefly described and measured the lintel (L 1.65, H 0.55 m, and T 0.17 m; *Yeivin* 1973: 158, 161, 162, plate 26:3), noting that it “was

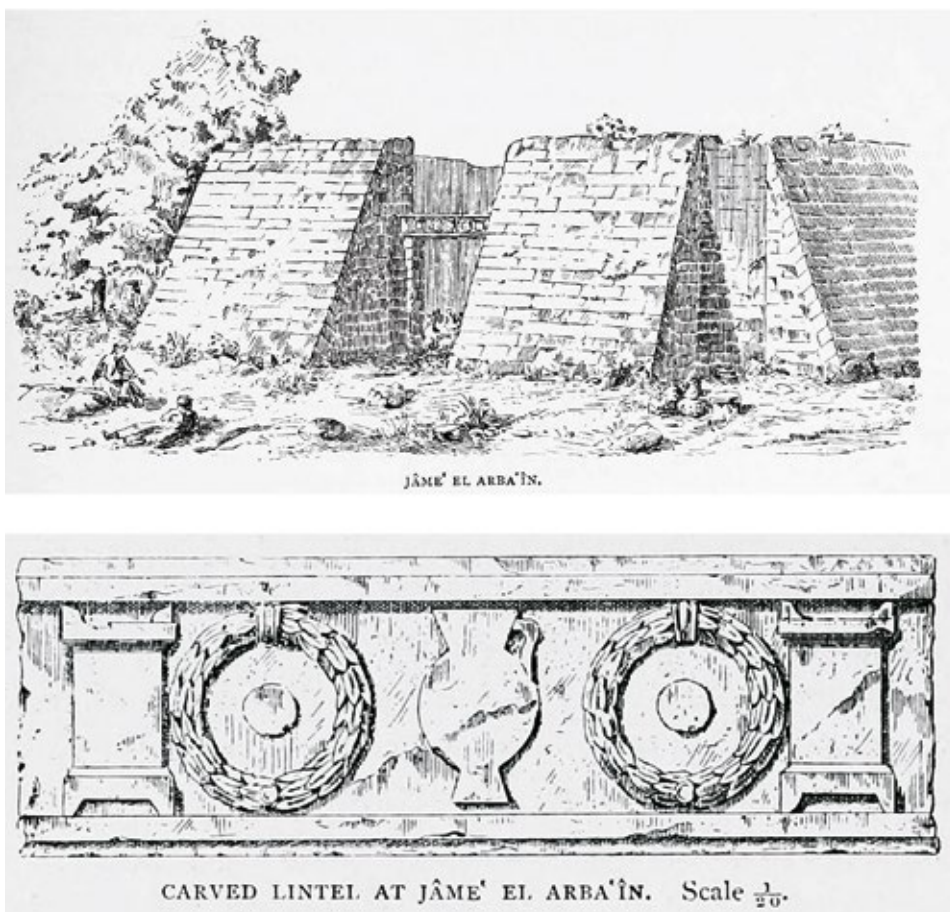


Fig. 1. The late 19th-century drawing of the Jāmi' al-Sittin with the lintel still in situ and the detailed sketch of the lintel itself. From: Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 299, 300

transferred to the museum" (Rockefeller?) (Yeivin 1981: 18). According to Allegre Savariego, the curator of the Rockefeller Museum, no records of its reception have ever been found, and its current location remains unknown. The most verified and detailed drawing of the lintel was created during Clermont-Ganneau's archaeological survey in the late 19th century, based on direct observations while the lintel was still in place (Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 299, 300). The Danish archaeological report also features very accurate drawings and the last known photograph of the lintel in situ. However, by the time Andersen published his report (around 60 years after the Danish expedition's excavations), the lintel had already been lost (fig. 2) (Andersen 1985: 78, 79, fig. 25, 26). Recently, E. Klein conducted a thorough analysis of the form of the lintel and the symbolic meaning behind its deco-

rative design (Klein 2011: 172, 173; Klein 2024: 303, 304), but there is still room for additional interpretations and ideas.

The rectangular lintel was bordered on the top by two receding ledges and on the bottom by a single plain ledge. The composition featured the central amphora with two handles attached to the rim and shoulders; its globular body was fluted up to mid-height. The amphora was flanked by two turned upside-down laurel wreaths tied with ribbons at the top. Inside each wreath were plump four-petaled rosettes. On the sides of the entire scene, two symmetrical horned altars with pointed legs were depicted.

In a recent publication by E. Klein, a largely persuasive attribution of the lintel was proposed (Klein 2011: 172, 173; Klein 2024: 303, 304). The author observed that the detail was a "lintel" only in second-

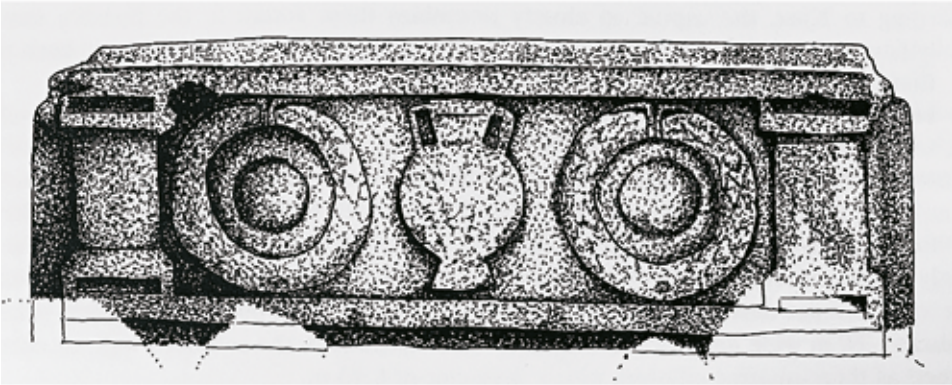
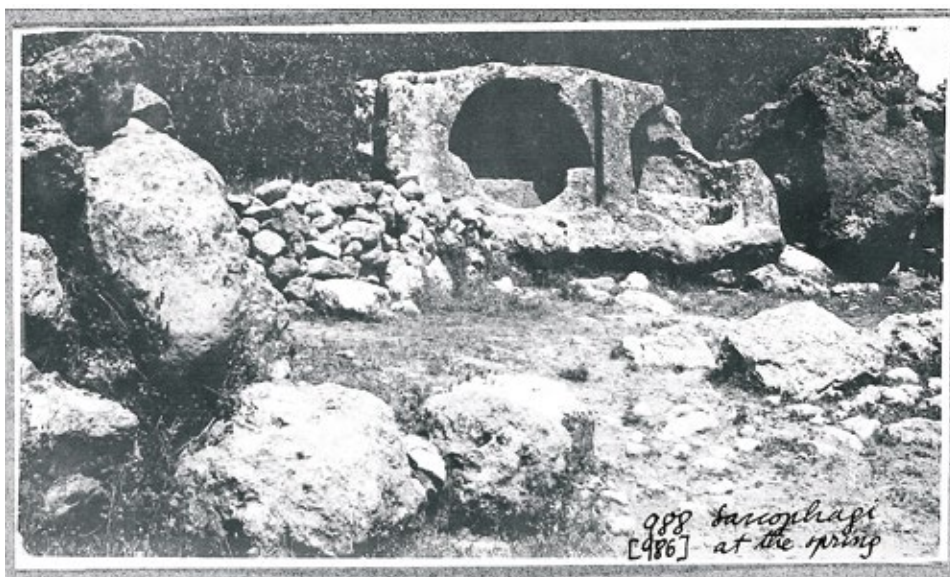


Fig. 2. The archive photo of the lintel in front of the mosque and its drawing (apparently, based on photos); published in the Danish expedition report (Andersen 1985: 78, 79, fig. 25, 26)

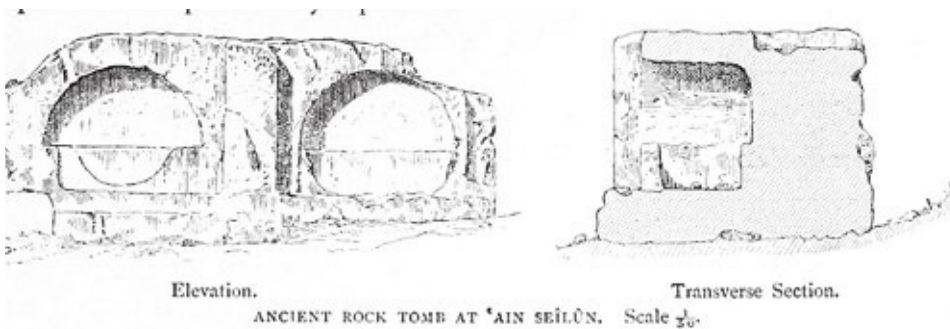
ary use in the Islamic architectural context and that it was too thin compared to the standard lintels used in monumental buildings (it was only 0.17 m thick, according to Yeivin). Based on other parallels, Klein attributed it to the façade wall of the Roman burial trough, which was hewn from the rock somewhere near Tel Shiloh. Notably, the evidence of such trough-like burials with *arcosolia* near Ain Seilun that is in the nearest vicinity of Shiloh, was recorded by Clermont-Ganneau (Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 301) and in the British Mandate Archive (fig. 3). Klein noted

that many tombs featuring decorative depictions of amphorae and altars have been discovered in the Land of Israel. He wrote: “In the Sidonian cave in Maresha, the burning altar and two amphorae from both sides of the central burial niche were drawn, symbolizing the stage of the preparation for the burial according to the Greek tradition (Peters and Thiersh 1905¹). Also, in the Cave of Reliefs from the Late Roman period in Horvat Ethri, a similar amphora was carved. In this tomb, an amphora is positioned in the center of the façade wall of the trough, and on the right side

¹ Here and further in quotation, the punctuation of the original publication is preserved.



a



b

Fig. 3. The trough-like burial near Ain Seilun: a — from: British Mandate Archive, SRF_171 (236/236); b — (Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 301)

of it, an incense-burning altar was carved. The tomb was used by the Pagan population that inhabited the site during this period (Zissu and Ganor 2009). The similar amphora and the additional motif, resembling the altar in shape, were engraved on the trough of the *arcosolia* tomb, dated to the beginning of the Byzantine period, which was discovered in Horvat Tannim in the Jewish Shephelah and used by the Christian population (Zissu 2000: 95, 96)² (Klein 2011: 172, 173; Klein 2024: 303, 304). Urns (or amphorae) flanked by two snakes were depicted on the facades of the troughs in the Roman tomb, named

“Cave of Urns” in Horvat Burgin (Zissu *et al.* 2013: 45, fig. 11). Based on these and other observations, Klein concluded that the repertoire and technique of the relief decoration on the trough wall in question belonged to the tomb, which was used by the Pagan (not Samaritan, Jewish, or Christian) population during the Middle/Late Roman period. Many other *arcosolia* tombs with hewn troughs, without or with decoration, are known from the sites in Samaria, Shephelah, and Judea. Among these tombs, might be mentioned the tombs with the undecorated troughs in Roman rock-hewn cist tombs in Khirbet Hamad

² Among these tombs with the decorated troughs, might be mentioned the tombs with the undecorated troughs in Roman rock-hewn cist tombs in Khirbet Hamad (Conder, Kitchener 1882: 333, 334 (Khirbet el Fakhakhir); Dar 1986: 40). The lateral wall of the *arcosolia* of one of these tombs is adorned with the relief torch.



Fig. 4. The trough-type burial in Khirbet Hamad. Photos S. Tarkhanova

(Conder, Kitchener 1882: 333, 334 (Khūrbet el Fakhākhīr); Dar 1986: 40). The lateral wall of the *arcosolia* of one of these tombs is adorned with the relief torch (fig. 4–6).

To the best of my knowledge, there are no exact parallels for the composition of the Shiloh lintel under consideration, neither in the burial nor in the ceremoni-

al contexts of the Roman period; however, its' motifs provide a firm basis for its identification and symbolic interpretation. There are three main patterns: amphora, wreaths, and portable altars, and as Klein had shown, they were often depicted together. However, each of them retained its symbolic meaning and underwent its own artistic and religious



Fig. 5. The trough-type burial in Khirbet Hamad with the relief torch. Photos S. Tarkhanova

development. The patterns will be analyzed sequentially.

AMPHORA

Amphora, as a decorative and symbolic motif, was common in Greco-Roman and Late Antique cultures, crossing Pagan, Je-

wish, and Christian traditions. As Klein pointed out, amphorae played an important role in funeral rites in the Greco-Roman tradition: "...the real amphorae were used in the Macedonian tombs for the ablution of the deceased before the burial... Furthermore, amphorae were used to hold the ashes of the deceased after cremation in An-



Fig. 6. The trough-type burial in Khirbet Burgin with relief decoration on the wall. Photo S. Tarkhanova

cient Greece. In the 4th-5th centuries BCE, amphorae served as tombstones marking the location of the tomb at the Classical cemetery" (Klein 2011: 173). In Roman-period burials, including inhumation tombs, images of amphorae continued to be used (Kloner 2009: 73, 74, after Klein 2011: 173).

The depiction of different types of amphorae and kraters in Jewish art from the Second Temple period to Late Antiquity was thoroughly analyzed by R. Gersht and P. Gendelman. The amphora on the Shiloh lintel belonged to the type of the "globular amphora" (Gersht, Gendelman 2016: 152, 153). The depictions of such amphorae appeared on the mosaic floor in the synagogue attached to the house of Leontis in Beth Shean (Gersht, Gendelman 2016: fig. 8.13), on the lintels in the synagogues in Qasrin (Hachlili 1988: 216, fig. 53a; Hachlili 2013: 85, 86, fig. V-8) and Eshtemoa (Goodenough 1953-1968, 1: 235; 3: fig. 613), on the pilasters of the Torah Shrine in Umm el-Qanatir (fig. 7) (Ben David et al. 2006: 114, 115; Hachlili 2013: 194-196, fig. IV-51), on the stone from the Ein Gedi synagogue (Peleg 2007: 326, 327, fig. 9.3.3, photo 9.3.4)³. Additionally, globular amphorae



Fig. 7. The decorative amphora of the pilaster of the Torah Shrine in the Umm el-Qanatir synagogue in the Golan. Photo S. Tarkhanova

³ These samples of amphorae are mentioned after Gersht and Gendelman (Gersht, Gendelman 2016: 152).



Fig. 8. Lintels: a — the tomb in Kefr Beita (Goodenough 1953–1968, 1: 85; 3: fig. 36); b — the dwelling (?) in Mamshit. After: M. Salzberger (photo)

decorated ossuaries and furniture elements of the Second Temple period, such as stone tables in the Jerusalem Jewish Quarters and the famous stone table recently discovered in the Magdala synagogue (Gersht, Gendelman 2016: 152, 153)⁴. Pair of amphorae with the ivy tendrils stretching from them flanked the central pattern of the wreath on the lintels found in the Nawa synagogue (Goodenough 1953–1968, 1: 236; 3: fig. 619, 620).

Amphorae were very frequently used in the Greco-Roman funeral art, and the row of samples might be endless. Here the lintel of the Roman tomb at Khirbet Kefr Beita might be mentioned as mostly close to the lintel under the question by its composition: it is decorated with the pair of wreaths flanked by two amphoras (fig. 8, a) (Goode-

nough 1953–1968, 1: 85; 3: fig. 36, after Conder and Kitchener 1881 (II): 239).

ALTAR

As Klein notes, “the patterns of the altar are also found in funeral art, where they represent the preparation phase for the burial ceremony. During this phase, the body was washed and placed on the *kline* for a week, and around the *kline* of the deceased, incense was burned over the altars (Toynbee 1971: 44, 45, fig. 9)” (Klein 2011: 173)⁵.

A pair of horned altars on the lintel from Shiloh implies the Pagan character of the element. Many versions of such altars were constructed from masonry stones in front of temples, carved as monolithic portable pieces, or cast in bronze, as depicted in various artistic techniques (Il-Ghariyeh; Butler

⁴ During the Byzantine period, globular amphorae were frequently used in the compositions of the ecclesiastical mosaics and furniture (Gersht, Gendelman 2016: 169), but this is beyond the chronological frames of the stylistic analysis of the lintel from Shiloh.

⁵ Clermont-Ganneau referred to the *terra sigillata* vase found at Via Dolorosa in one of the cavities, on which among the other pagan patterns, the altars were stamped (Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 300; Clermont-Ganneau 1899: 69–71).



Fig. 9. The lintel of the Nabatean sanctuary in Khirbet edh-Darikh. Photo S. Tarkhanova

1920: 136, ill. 114; *Rosenthal-Heginbottom* 2008: 12*–14*). The altars were frequently used in the architectural decoration of Roman edifices in Northern Syria, Southern Hauran (*Butler* 1920: 26, 27, 87), Trans-Jordan, and Negev. Altars were typically depicted near amphorae, votive columns, torches, anthropomorphic or zoomorphic images, floral or geometric patterns, and other similar features.

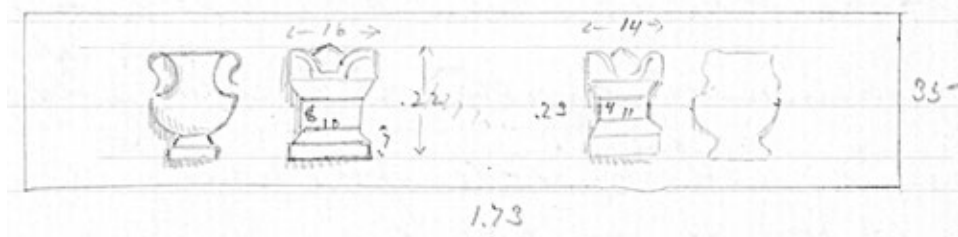
The lintels with the variative depiction of the horned altars are known in the Land of Israel, Trans-Jordan, but mainly in Syria. The Nabataean lintel from the burial cave in Oboda was adorned with solar and lunar symbols which were depicted on both sides of the horned altar, with two columns placed on the lateral sides (*Patrich* 1990: 94, ill. 32; *Negev* 1997: 20, fig. 11; 85, photo 120; *Rosenthal-Heginbottom* 2008: 11*, 12*, fig. 4). Another Nabataean lintel found in Mamshit in Building XII, L432 was adorned with the depictions of the horned altar, rosette, face of the deity (?) within the arched pattern (temple?) and a wreath (fig. 8, b) (*Negev* 1988: 86, no. 50; *Rosenthal-Heginbottom* 2008: 11*, 12*, fig. 5). The composition of the Mamshit lintel is untypically asym-

metrical, and the style of the carving is rather plain; the depiction of the altar is unfinished (the sketching-out lines made by ruler are preserved). A series of decorative reliefs (lintels, ashlars) found near the Nabataean sanctuary in Khirbet edh-Darikh feature variations of the same decorative patterns (altars, torches, kraters, etc.), finely carved in a realistic manner (fig. 9: personal survey, unpublished; for general information, see *Dentzer-Feydy* 1990). In Ribah the lintel with the depictions of two symmetrical horned altars and the wreath between them was found near the church of St. Isaiya (fig. 10, a) (*Piccirillo* 1980: 58, fig. 46). On the Syrian lintel from Sameh sanctuary, the pairs of altars and amphorae are preserved, while the central image is defaced (fig. 10, b) (*Butler* 1920: 87, ill. 67⁶). The lintel from Sa'adeh (a house or mausoleum?) (fig. 10, c) (*Butler* 1920: 136, ill. 115; *Goodenough* 1953–1968, 3: fig. 290) featured an amphora flanked by two altars and two votive Ionic columns. In Khirbet il-Bardhon, half of the preserved lintel is adorned with an altar, wreath, and geometric circumference (*Butler* 1920: 26, 27, ill. 17). In Arâk il-Emîr the lintel or wall of the burial trough (the drawing wasn't described) is

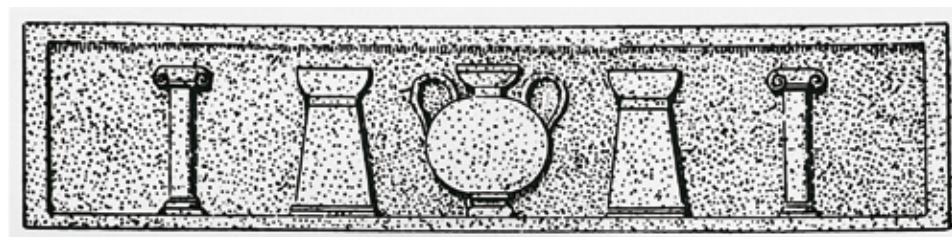
⁶ Digital archive of the H. Butler's expedition to Syria (Princeton Expeditions to Syria (1899, 1904–1905, 1909); Butler: Bosra to Umm idj-Djimal, 1904–1905); BSY_FB_29-72-a. URL: <https://fromthepage.com/vrprinceton/butler-field-books/bsy-fb-29/display/25179652>



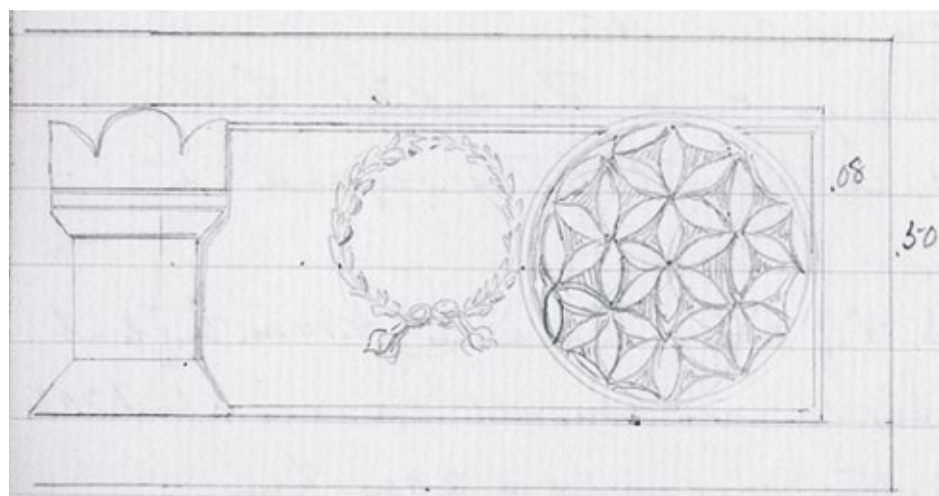
a



b



c



d

Fig. 10. Lintels: a — Reused in one of the houses in Rihab (modern Jordan) (From: Piccirillo 1980: 58, fig. 46); b — Sameh sanctuary (Butler 1920: 87, ill. 67); c — House or mausoleum in Sa'adeh (Goodenough 1953–1968, 3: fig. 290); d — Arāk il-Emir (Digital Butler's archive)



Fig. 11. Depiction of the altar in the scene "Sacrifice of Abraham" on the right spandrel of the Torah Arch (Goodenough 1953–1968, 11: pl. III)

adorned with the relief horned altar, wreath and geometric rosette with the grid of interlaced patterns (fig. 10, d) (Butler's archive)⁷. Apparently, the unpreserved half of the lin-

tel contained symmetrical decorative patterns. In Kharab Shems, the lintel displayed solar and lunar symbols in the middle, flanked by bullheads and wreaths (Butler 1920: 322, ill. 359).

On the other hand, depictions of altars are also found in the simultaneous Jewish art. For example, free-standing altars were depicted at the frescoed scenes of Dura Europos synagogue (244 CE) in various scenes: altar in the scene "Sacrifice of Abraham" on the right spandrel of the Torah Arch (fig. 11) (Goodenough 1953–1968, 9: 65; 11: pl. III), two incense altars inside the interior of the pagan temple in the scene "The Ark versus Paganism" (Goodenough 1953–1968, 10: 74; Goodenough 1953–1968, 11: pl. XIII), and altars in the scenes "The Failure of the Sacrifice to Baal" and "Sacrifice of Elijah" (Goodenough 1953–1968, 10: 150, 156; Goodenough 1953–1968, 11: pl. XV–XVI). Interestingly, the foundation of the masonry-built incense altar was traced in the first synagogue in Dura Europos (between 165–200 CE; Goodenough 1953–1968, 9: 26). Thus, the depiction of the altars in the Roman period could appear not only in the Pagan, but also in the Jewish context.

WREATH

The motif of the wreath was frequently used for the decoration of Greco-Roman sarcophagi, symbolizing eternal life and glory (Hachlili 1988: 318, after Klein 2011: 173; Klein 2024: 304). The row of the samples

⁷ Digital archive of the H. Butler's expedition to Syria (Princeton Expeditions to Syria (1899, 1904–1905, 1909); Butler Notes: Second Expedition in Syria, 1904); BSY_FB_18_015back. URL: <https://fromthepage.com/vrprinceton/butler-field-books/bsy-fb-18/display/25178617>



Fig. 12. Ossuary in the Rockefeller museum collection. The lateral wall is decorated with the inverted wreath. Photos S. Tarkhanova

spread all over the Near Eastern world might be endless, so only one peculiar feature of the wreaths at the lintel in Shiloh will be specified and analyzed.

The wreaths on the lintel in Shiloh have an unusual position of their branches: they are turned upside down and tied with the ribbon at the tops, not at the bottoms (Clermont-Ganneau convincingly depicted this feature). This type of inverted wreath is rare and was typically used in a funeral context⁸, while the regular type of wreath was used in any other context glorifying life. Some Jewish ossuaries dated to the Roman period and found in Jerusalem feature such wreaths (fig. 12, 13) (*Rahmani* 1994: 91, pl. 10: 60:R; 125, 126, pl. 28: 206:L). The friezes of some Early Roman tombs in Jerusalem were adorned with a row of inverted wreaths (*Peleg-Barkat* 2015: 95, 96, fig. 16; 103, fig. 23; *Zissu, Kloner* 2007: 517, fig. 13). Also, the inverted wreath was carved on the pilaster of the Great Temple in Petra (1st–2nd century CE; *Joukowsky* 2018: 336–338, fig. 17.12), on the walls of the sarcophagi in Si' (Butler's archive⁹; *De Jong* 2017: 49, fig. 14), on the stele from Assos (dated to ca. 166 CE; *Yegül* 2014: 208, fig. 10), and on the wall of the tomb of C. Calventius Quietus in Pompeii (1st century CE; *Lamp* 2013: 138, fig. 45). The inversed wreath was a symbol of a deceased, glory that passed away (*Rogić et al.* 2012: 343, 344). Mostly vivid and clear proof of this idea comes from the relief decoration of the sarcophagi from Tyr, on which the body of the deceased in the surroundings of the mourners was lying under the inverted wreath (*Seyrig* 1940: 120–122, pl. XIX).

CONCLUSIONS

These observations on the lintel from Shiloh can't be considered complete, but they lead us to assume its' definitely Middle/Late Roman dating, a funeral context, and a Pagan character. The series of artistic parallels connects the type of the trough burial and the decorative composition con-



Fig. 13. Ossuary in the Rockefeller museum collection. The lateral wall is decorated with the inverted wreath. Photo S. Tarkhanova

sisting of altars, vases, and wreaths mainly with the Arabian and Syrian hinterlands. This substantiates the theory that after approximately a century after the Bar Kochba revolt (135 CE), when the Jewish population was exiled from Jerusalem and Judea, Shiloh was repopulated by Pagan inhabitants from Syria, Phoenicia, and Arabia (*Klein* 2011: 321, 322; *Klein* 2010). They have established the ritual site, as in some other places in the Land of Israel in the same period (*Schwartz, Shemesh* 2019: 6), and brought their own ritual and artistic traditions. The burial with the decorative trough was only one of the features and phenomena of the Pagan settlement of urban type, established in Shiloh during this period.

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⁸ The earliest depictions of the inversed wreaths are known from the Ancient Lucanian funeral frescos presented in the Museo archeologico nazionale in Paestum (4th century BCE) (Wikimedia Commons).

⁹ Digital archive of the H. Butler's expedition to Syria (Princeton Expeditions to Syria (1899, 1904–1905, 1909); Butler: Bosra to Umm idj-Djimal, 1904–1905; BSY_FB_29–21-a, Page 55 of 165). URL: <https://fromthepage.com/vrprinceton/butler-field-books/bsy-fb-29/display/25179553>

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