

The relative chronology of tomb façades in Early Roman Jerusalem and power displays by the élite

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In the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman periods Jerusalem experienced prosperity and expansion. Even when the city lost to Caesarea in A.D. 6 its status as the provincial capital of Judaea, it maintained its prominent economic and religious position. Monumental construction projects on the Temple Mount and in the Upper City financed by King Herod and the Hasmonean kings before him, described by Flavius Josephus, generated a livelihood for a large number of stone-cutters, transporters, masons and builders, as well as architects and engineers, and may have resulted in the establishment of one or more schools of artists specializing in the carving of architectural decoration, artists who were hired to decorate Hasmonaeen and Herodian structures, as well as private dwellings and the tombs of the élite. It is the funerary art of Jerusalem, its tomb façades, ossuaries and sarcophagi, that preserve most of the examples of this art today. This paper considers in particular tomb façades and the artistic development and changes in fashion of stone decoration. Since most of the tombs of the Second Temple period around Jerusalem with decorated façades were looted in antiquity, few can be dated by their contents and have been dated only generally between the second half of the 2nd c. B.C. and the destruction of the city in A.D. 70 by their interior plans.¹ I suggest that the details of the carvings and their style, as well as of the repertoire of motifs used, facilitate a more precise relative dating of the tombs and a timeline for their evolution. First I will present the different types of decorated tomb façades preserved within the Jerusalem necropoleis. Then I will examine in greater detail the few tombs that are assigned clear dates. Next I will compare the decoration of earlier tombs with later ones to show the existence of several trends over time. These changes in composition and the style of carving aid the reconstruction of a relative chronology, while reflecting aspects of the lives of the élite prior to A.D. 70.

In his book on Nabataean architecture, E. Netzer proposed a chronological typology for tomb façades at Petra.² Underlying this typology was the assumption that there existed a linear development of increasing complexity of the composition of the façades. In this respect Netzer followed earlier work.³ By contrast, J. McKenzie's work on tombs with

1 For general discussions on the Jerusalem necropolis (listed latest to earliest), see A. Kloner and B. Zissu, *The necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple period* (Leuven 2007); R. Hachlili, *Jewish funerary customs, practices and rites in the Second Temple period* (Leiden 2005); J. Fedak, *Monumental tombs of the Hellenistic age: a study of selected tombs from the Pre-Classical to the Early Imperial era* (Toronto 1990) 140-48; N. Avigad, "The tombs of Jerusalem," in M. Avi Yonah and E. Stern (edd.), *Encyclopedia of archaeological excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem 1976) 627-41, and id., "The rock-carved façades of the Jerusalem necropolis," *IEJ* 1 (1950-51) 96-106.

2 E. Netzer, *Nabatäische Architektur — Insbesondere Gräber und Tempel* (Mainz 2003) 13-36 and 39-47, fig. 53.

3 E.g., R. E. Brünnow and A. von Domaszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia I* (Strasburg 1904) 137-91. A. Negev ("The Nabatean necropolis at Egra," *RBibl* 83 [1976] 203-36) pointed out that Brünnow and Domaszewski's chronological classification of the tomb façades in Petra does not correspond well with their presence in Meda'in Saleh, where all 28 tombs of different types are dated, according to inscriptions, between 1 B.C. and A.D. 72. A. Schmidt-Colinet ("Nabatäische Felsarchitektur," *BjB* 180 [1980] 226-29) suggested that the classification of the tomb façades in Petra does not carry chronological but rather socio-economic implications, and that the different