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## EMMA MAAYAN FANAR

University of Haifa, Israel

### THE WAY TO THE "WORLD TO COME": SOME THOUGHTS ON ICONOGRAPHY OF TWO UNIQUE NECROPOLISES IN GALILEE

*This paper discusses two unique burial complexes in Galilee, Israel: the Jewish necropolis at Beth Shearim and the Christian necropolis in Shefar'am. The first flourished in the 3rd and 4th centuries of the Christian era, although it probably remained in use until the 6th century. The second necropolis could have been in use throughout the 4th and 5th centuries. The ideas expressed in the illuminated program of the Shefar'am complex seem ideologically connected to those in Beth Shearim. Quite possibly, therefore, the early Christian site was structured as a reflection of Jewish concepts of resurrection and eschatology.*

*Key words:*

*Beth Shearim, Shefar'am, necropolis, iconography, Jewish and Christian concepts of eschatology*

This paper discusses two unique burial complexes in Galilee, Israel: the Jewish necropolis at Beth Shearim <sup>1</sup> and the Christian necropolis in Shefar'am.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Despite its importance, surprisingly little has been written on this necropolis. Apart from archaeological surveys which document the excavations and discuss basic stylistic and iconographic issues, hardly any other research has been undertaken. The last cave was found a relatively long time ago, and since then no excavations have been conducted. B. Mazar, *Beth Shearim I, Report on the Excavations during 1936-40*, Jerusalem, 1973; M. Schwabe and B. Lifshitz, *Beth Shearim II. The Greek Inscriptions*, New Brunswick, 1974; N. Avigad, *Beth Shearim III. Catacombs 12-23. Report on the Excavations during 1953-8*, Jerusalem, 1976. N. Feig, "A New Burial-Cave at Beth She'arim," *Qadmoniot*, vol 20. (1987), 102-105 (Hebrew). The latest general review of the site was published by Z. Safrai, "Beit She'arim – An Important Jewish Settlement in the Galilee," in *'Al 'Atar. Journal of Land of Israel Studies*, vol 8-9. (2001), 44-82 (Hebrew).

2 Although the tombs were first documented in the 19th century, and their uniqueness notwithstanding, they never received serious scholarly attention and no proper excavations have been undertaken. They are contained in C. R. Conder-Henry.H. Kitchener, "Shefa' Amr," in *Survey of Western Palestine*, London, 1881, vol. I, 339-343. Bagatti devotes two short articles to the tombs: B. Bagatti, *Ancient Christian Villages of Galilee*, Jerusalem 2001, 105-114; idem, "Tradizione e Arte a Shefa' Amr in Galilea," *La Terra Santa*, vol 41. (1965), 180-187. The tombs are briefly mentioned by M. Avi-Yona ("Oriental Elements in the Art of Palestine in the Roman



The first flourished in the 3rd and 4th centuries of the Christian era, although it probably remained in use until the 6th century.<sup>3</sup> The second necropolis could have been in use throughout the 4th and 5th centuries. <sup>4</sup>The ideas expressed in the illuminated program of the Shefar'am complex seem ideologically connected to those in Beth Shearim. Quite possibly, therefore, the early Christian site was structured as a reflection of Jewish concepts of resurrection and eschatology.

### **"ALL ISRAELITES HAVE A SHARE IN THE WORLD TO COME" (MISHNAH SANHEDRIN 10:1): EXPRESSIONS OF MESSIANIC HOPE IN BETH SHEARIM**

After the revolt of Bar Kochba, Galilee became a center for Jewish population, and Beth Shearim became one of the important places for refugees from Jerusalem and Judea.<sup>5</sup> In addition, it is mentioned in the Jewish sources as a place where laws of purification were firmly upheld<sup>6</sup> and as the seat of Rabbi Johanan ben Nuri (AD 120-140), one of the most famous Sages from Galilee, who lived and taught there.<sup>7</sup> In the late 2nd century the village became the seat of the Sanhedrin,<sup>8</sup> and Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi, the President of the Sanhedrin,

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and Byzantine Periods," in *Art in Ancient Palestine. Selected Studies Published Originally in the Years 1930-1976*, Jerusalem 1981, vol. II, 50 [first published in *QDAP* vol 13, 130]). More recently Mordechai Mordechai Aviam included their description in his *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee*, Rochester, 2004, 291-295. In my forthcoming article I deal at length with various aspects of the tombs, including their date, study of particular motifs, stylistic and iconographic analysis. In the present article only aspects necessary for the discussion are treated. E. Maayan-Fanar, "Word Incarnated in Stone: Iconography of the Early Christian Rock-cut Tombs in Shefar'am," *Iconographica*, vol 8. (2009), 11-28.

3 Although the necropolis at Beth Shearim flourished from the 3rd to the mid-4th century, archaeological finds confirm that it did not cease to exist as a result of the Gallus revolt (AD 352), as previously suggested by scholars, but continued to function well into the 5th century. Z. Weiss, "Social Aspects in Beth She'arim: Archeological Finds and Talmudic Sources," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine, New York, 1992, 371. Also: F. Vito, "Byzantine Mosaics at Beth She'arim: New Evidence for the History of the Site," *'Atiqot*, vol 28. (1999), 137-141. Evidence of Christian use of the necropolis has also been found. Christian remains were found in the area of Beth Shearim as well as in the surrounding area (Ramat Yishai; Beth Lehem HaGlilit), where remnants of churches, perhaps of the 6th century, were unearthed. M. Aviam, "Christian Galilee in the Byzantine Period," in *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures*, ed. Eric M. Meyers, Winona Lake, Ind., 1999, 285.

4 Maayan-Fanar, "Word Incarnated in Stone."

5 R. N. Longenecker, *Studies in Paul, Exegetical and Theological*, Sheffield, 2004, 201-202.

6 Tosefta Para 5. 6; S. Safrai, "Beth She'arim in Talmudic Literature," *Eretz Israel*, vol 5. (1958/9), 206-207 (Hebrew).

7 Mazar, *Beth Shearim* I, 4; Safrai, "Beit Shearim," 52.

8 *b.Rosh Hashanah* 30a-b; *Genesis Rabbah* 97.



resided there. By the 3rd century a significant number of worthy and affluent people and Sages lived in Beth Shearim, as distinctive features of its synagogue testify.<sup>9</sup> In that period the famous necropolis of Beth Shearim started to flourish and became a central burial place for Jews throughout Palestine and the eastern Diaspora.<sup>10</sup> R. Judah Ha-Nasi was buried in Beth Shearim c. 220 in a special tomb (believed to be in Catacomb 14) which had been prepared for him in advance.<sup>11</sup> His interment there bestowed special importance on this place.

In Jewish sources R. Judah is linked to the most famous figures in Judaism, is called a savior of the nation<sup>12</sup> and in the Babylonian Talmud even identified with the Messiah (bSanhedrin 98b). The association of this particular complex of burials with this important rabbinic figure suggests that his grave imparted sacredness to it. It has even been proposed that R. Judah initiated the project and his circles promoted and regulated it.<sup>13</sup> Many Rabbinic figures, mostly from the circle of the Rabbi, and their families, were buried at the site (Catacombs 1G, 14, 20).<sup>14</sup> As Weiss points out, this attests to their wish to be buried "side by side"<sup>15</sup> The exclusiveness of the cemetery is emphasized by the fact that already during the Rabbi's lifetime the coffin of another famous Rabbinic figure, R. Huna, Head of the Diaspora Jews in Babylon, was brought from afar to be buried most probably in Beth Shearim.<sup>16</sup>

Numerous burial spaces of the necropolis have to be read from the outside in, from the decorated door, whose designs emulate the doors of actual houses, to the inner space of the caves, which is executed as an imitation of real architectural space (fig. 1). In some cases the entrance is marked by the symbol of a Menorah and bears the name of the occupant, generally in Greek (fig. 2).

The architectural designs of the caves' inner spaces are much more invested in than are other types of decorations. These include mainly carvings (many of which are rough and partly unfinished) and designs in red paint made by local

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9 Safrai, "Beit She'arim," 57.

10 I. M. Gafni, "Bringing Deceased from Abroad for Burial in Eretz Israel – On the Origin of the Custom and Its Development," *Cathedra*, vol 4. (1977), 113-120 (Hebrew).

11 *b.Kethuboth* 103b.

12 *Megilah* 11a; M. Holder and H. Goldwurm, *History of the Jewish People*, Vol. 2: *From Yavneh To Pumpedisa*, Brooklyn, New York, Jerusalem, 1986, 86.

13 Safrai, "Beit She'arim," 66; but see T. Rajak, "The Rabbinic Dead and the Diaspora Dead at Beth She'arim," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture I*, ed. by P. Schäfer, Tübingen, 1998, 365 for a different opinion.

14 On the Rabbinic figures in Beth Shearim see L. I. Levine, "The Finds at Beth Shearim and Their Importance for the Study of the Talmudic Period," *Eretz Israel*, vol. 18 (1989), 277-281 (Hebrew).

15 Weiss, "Social Aspects in Beth She'arim," 358ff.

16 *y.Kil.* 32b, *y.Ket.* 35a. Mazar, *Beth Shearim I*, 11, note 35; I. Gafni, Land, *Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity*, Sheffield, 1997, 83-84.





*fig. 1 Beth Shearim Catacomb 1  
(Photo Dror Maayan)*



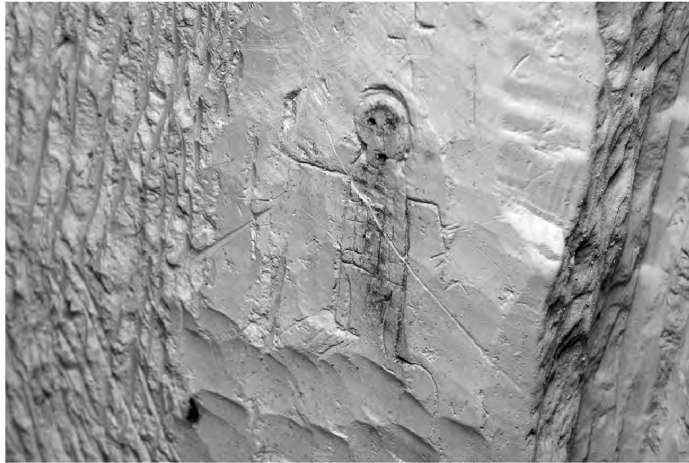
*Fig. 2 Beth Shearim Catacomb 19  
(Photo Dror Maayan)*





workers, as well as chiseled graffiti, left by visitors (figs. 3, 4).

No other known Jewish burial place compares with this one in variety and quantity of symbols and motifs applied. This exclusiveness of the site was



**Fig. 3 Beth Shearim Catacomb 4a**  
*(Photo Dror Maayan)*



**Fig. 4 Beth Shearim Catacomb 4a**  
*(Photo Dror Maayan)*



explained by the Hellenistic-Roman cultural background of the area, and in fact many motifs (among them various animals and even human faces and figures) reflect the common vocabulary used by pagans, Jews and Christians throughout late Antique world.

Other motifs are long rooted in Jewish funeral art. Thus, extensive use of architectural elements, geometric forms and signs and especially rosettes are a long-standing tradition, and can be traced to ossuaries from Jerusalem burial sites of the Second Temple period<sup>17</sup>. By the 3rd century the tradition of secondary burial had disappeared, but the symbols continued to appear in different burial traditions, suggesting an enduring spiritual link with Jerusalem.

Yet another group of symbols seems to emerge after the destruction of the Temple, and by the 3rd century it had spread with the Jews throughout the Roman Empire. This is a small group of particularly Jewish symbols which represent liturgical objects: the Torah Ark (usually open and filled with scrolls), a Menorah (fig. 5, 6, 9), the lulav (fig. 7), the ethrog and more. In Beth Shearim definite prevalence is given to the Menorah, which appears separately in numerous shapes and with different numbers of branches. The Menorah<sup>18</sup> marks tombs and burial spaces as Jewish, functioning first and foremost "as a visual marker of Jewish identity."<sup>19</sup>

An open Torah Ark with scrolls flanked with Menorot is sketched twice on stones sealing kokhim a and b in room 1, hall M, one of the earliest halls in Catacomb 1 (fig. 8).<sup>20</sup> This combination (with or without additional holy articles) is well attested in the Diaspora, especially in Jewish catacombs in Rome, depicted on walls and various objects as well as supplementing funeral inscriptions.<sup>21</sup> Often these symbols appear just as rough sketches, marked by poor execution and lack of symmetry. A question arises as to the incongruity of their visual appearance and the necessity of their presence in Jewish burial context.

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17 L.Y. Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel*, Jerusalem, 1994. P. Figueras, "Jewish and Christian Beliefs on Life after Death in the Light of the Ossuary Decoration," PhD Thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1974.

18 There are countless studies on the *Menorah*, for which various interpretations have been proposed. Among them are V. A. Klagsbald, "The Menorah as Symbol: Its Meaning and Origin in Early Jewish Art," *Jewish Art*, vol 12/13. (1986-7), 126-134. R. Hachlili, *The Menorah, the Ancient Seven-Armed Candelabrum: Origin, Form and Significance*, Leiden, 2001. S. Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology*, Cambridge, 2005, 146-164.

19 Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World*, 123.

20 Mazar, *Beth Shearim I*, 110-113.

21 E. Revel-Neher, *L'arche d'alliance dans l'art juif et Chrétien du second au dixième siècles*, Paris, 1984, figs. 17-25; L. V. Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome. Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, Leiden, New York, Köln, 1995, 50-99.





*Fig. 5 Beth Shearim Catacomb 3e  
(Photo Dror Maayan)*



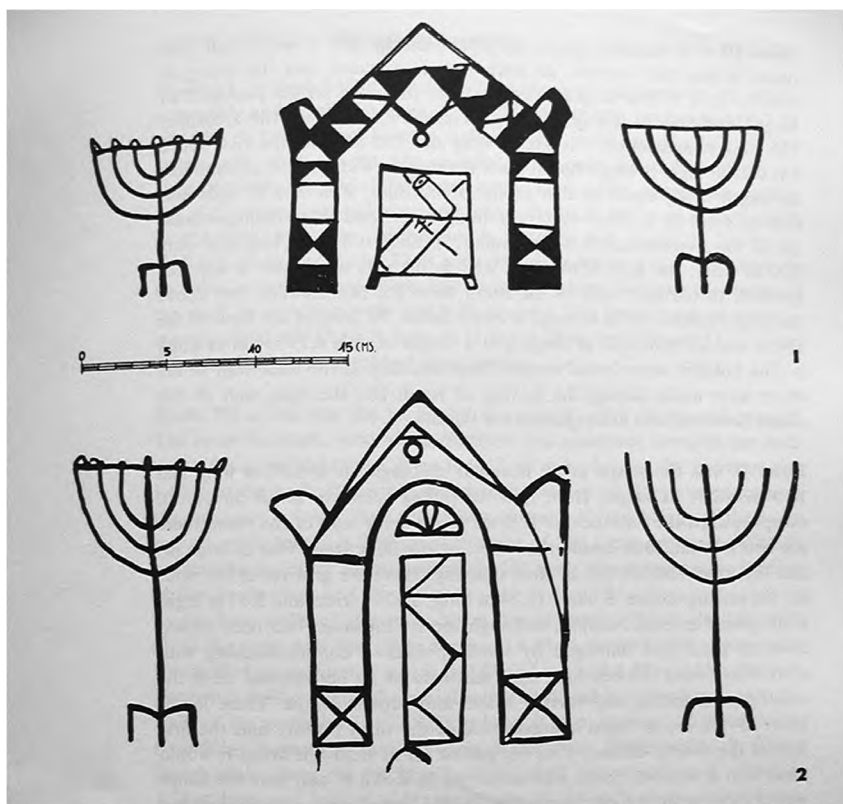
*Fig. 6 Beth Shearim Catacomb 4a  
(Photo Dror Maayan)*



*Fig. 7 Beth Shearim Catacomb 18  
(Photo Dror Maayan)*



Objects essential in Jewish liturgical life organized around the Ark of Torah with scrolls emphasize a core of Jewish faith. In the funeral context in particular, they seem to function as a stamp or a sign of Jewish identity not only in this world but in the “world to come,” a sign of clear distinction between Jews and the others. Being Jewish ensures resurrection of these particular dead, for “All Israelites have a share in the world to come” (Sanhedrin 10:1). These signs would be especially significant to separate Jews from gentiles in the Land of Israel, and even more so beyond the Land of Israel.<sup>22</sup> Their quality of execution seems to be secondary to their purpose.



*Fig. 8 Beth Shearim Catacomb 1M*

22 H. J. Leon, “Symbolic Representations in the Jewish Catacombs of Rome,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol 69.2. (1949), 87-90.



Such eschatological implications are expressed even more clearly in the 4th-century wall-painting in Jewish catacomb in Villa Torlonia in Rome.<sup>23</sup> One of its arcosolia is decorated with an open Ark housing Torah scrolls and flanked with sun and moon, two Menorot and other holy articles.<sup>24</sup> All the motifs appear on a background of varied coloring, imparting a sense of unification. The sun and moon, as well as the Parochet drawn back to unveil the group of objects, bestow on the vessels used in contemporary synagogues an additional, Messianic, level of interpretation connected with the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple.<sup>25</sup> In this and other examples of funerary art the Torah scrolls inside the ark constitute the composition's focal point and function as a mediator between past and future. The Torah scrolls have become central in Jewish life and are the most precious holy objects in the synagogue.<sup>26</sup> Paraphrasing the words of Peter Schäfer, after the destruction of the Temple and the expulsion from Jerusalem the harmony between heaven and earth was no longer achieved by practicing a cult but by implementing the Torah.<sup>27</sup> The Messianic future is accessible through study of Torah; therefore emphasis on the scrolls per se in the funeral context signifies the role of Torah in the place of the individual in the world to come (Sotah 49a). Personal salvation, however, depends on the redemption of the entire nation, which can be achieved with the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

The belief in resurrection is clearly expressed in Beth Shearim. A graffiti inscription written in Greek, "Good luck in your resurrection,"<sup>28</sup> is found in Catacomb 20, most probably written by a visitor to all the dead.<sup>29</sup> This inscription

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23 The Villa Torlonia Catacomb complex was in use from the 1st century AD, not the 3rd-4th centuries AD as is still generally supposed. L. V Rutgers, "Radiocarbon Dates from the Jewish Catacombs of Rome," *Radiocarbon*, vol 44.2. (2002), 541–547.

24 S. Fine, "Jewish Art and Biblical Exegesis in the Greco-Roman World," in J. Spier, *Picturing the Bible. The Earliest Christian Art* [exhibition catalog Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth], New Haven and London, 2007, fig. 25.

25 Isaiah 30:26; b.Sanhedrin 91b: "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days". It is no difficulty: the latter refers to the Messianic era, the former to the world to come."

26 E. M. Meyers, "The Torah Shrine in the Ancient Synagogue. Another Look at the Evidence," in *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue*, ed. Steven Fine, London, New York, 1999, 206-207.

27 P. Schäfer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World*, London New York, 2003, 166.

28 The inscription is a novelty and it is its earliest use in Jewish-Greek epigraphy. Schwabe and Lifshitz, *Beth Shearim II*, no. 194, 85-86; Senzo Magakubo, "Investigation into Jewish Concepts of Afterlife in the Beth She'arim Greek Inscriptions," PhD thesis, Duke University, 1974, 156-158.

29 Avigad, *Beth Shearim III*, 95, 100.



also reveals contemplation of who will be raised and belief in divine judgment.<sup>30</sup> More inscriptions refer to the place and fate of the soul in the world to come, and its immortality.<sup>31</sup> The conception of reward for the righteous and punishment for the impious, as well as the question of who merits resurrection, as well as its timing and contingency on the coming of the Messiah, are discussed in the Rabbinic sources on various occasions.<sup>32</sup> Belief in Resurrection and its linkage to the coming of the Messiah was probably even more widespread as a popular belief.

All the above observations bring us to a discussion of one of the most intriguing and unusual expressions of Messianic hopes and beliefs in Beth Shearim cave 4a, room 7, dated to the second half of the 3rd century (figs. 9-12).<sup>33</sup>



*Fig. 9 Beth Shearim Catacomb 4a*  
(Photo Dror Maayan)

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30 P.W. van der Horst, *The Ancient Jewish Epithaphs. An ntroductory survey of a Millenium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 BCE-700CE)*, Kampen, 1991, 114-126 (for Beth Shearim esp. 118-122). Jewish sources present various conceptions on belief and disbelief in resurrection, reward for the righteous and condemnation of the impious. The polemics is reflected in Talmudic discourse, although belief in resurrection and judgment is expressed there strongly. Figueras, "Jewish and Christian Beliefs on Life after Death," 97-101. See also Magakubo, "Investigation into Jewish Concepts of Afterlife," 70-150.

31 Magakubo, "Investigation into Jewish Concepts of Afterlife," 158-173.

32 On different points of view on this question see Figueras, "Jewish and Christian Beliefs on Life after Death," 95-96.

33 Mazar, *Beth Shearim I*, 171.





*Fig. 10 Beth Shearim Catacomb 4a*  
(Photo Dror Maayan)

According to the inscription in its main hall, cave 4a is an extended family burial (perhaps used for several generations) which belonged to a certain "Leontius the Banker" and his sons from Palmyra.<sup>34</sup> It has seven rooms, each seeming to belong to a small family unit.

Room 7 is framed on the ceiling with decorated motifs in red paint, composing an organic architectural unit (fig. 10).<sup>35</sup> The ornament frames two monumental tombs, each containing of a single burial, and an arcosolium in the back wall decorated with geometric patterns in red. Between the tombs is a structure shaped like an altar, but it may function as a step to the arcosolium. Above are two lions: one (facing the altar) made in high relief, the other (facing the opposite direction) sketched in red.

The monumental tombs are ornate, with a triple façade that includes holy vessels and a human figure. Unfortunately the figure's head is lost so it cannot be identified for sure.<sup>36</sup>

The façades are not identical. Five steps lead to the closed door placed

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34 Schwabe and Lifshitz, *Beth Shearim II*, no, 92.

35 For detailed description see Mazar, *Beth Shearim I*, 175-179.

36 Elisheva Revel proposes identifying the figure as Abraham sacrificing Isaac. Revel-Neher, *L'arche d'alliance*, 91-92.



under the conch in the center of the left façade (fig. 11), while a Menorah occupies the center of the right façade (fig. 12). On top of the two right columns of the left façade is a standing figure of a lion facing the conch. The absence of such a figure above the columns on the left emphasizes the asymmetry of the image. A rampant lion appears on top of the two right columns of the right façade.

The burial, its ornamentation and epigraphy raise questions concerning the



*Fig. 11 Beth Shearim Catacomb  
4a room 7 left-hand sarcophagus  
(Photo Dror Maayan)*



*Fig. 12 Beth Shearim Catacomb  
4a room 7 right-hand sarcophagus  
(Photo Dror Maayan)*

owners' status, identity, hopes and beliefs. The key to many riddles depends on the ability to view the space as a unit and to treat its sculptural carvings as a part of the overall message or messages. This is a complex discussion, which I undertake separately.<sup>37</sup> In this article I would like to concentrate on the carved façades on the front sides of the two hewn sarcophagi, and on the eschatological hopes that emerge from its decorative program as a whole.

Unlike the Via Torlonia image, which adorns a single burial (and is repeated

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<sup>37</sup> Emma Maayan-Fanar, "Preliminary Thoughts on Beth Shearim: from Memoria to Eschatology" (in preparation).





at least once in connection with another burial), suggesting relevance of the message for particular deceased persons, the pictorial elements are intentionally made as a single space to be grasped as a unit encompassing all the dead in the room. The burial space of an everlasting house merges here with another house,<sup>38</sup> the house of God. The façades play an important role in this arrangement. Being almost three-dimensional because of the carving technique, they provide visual association with real objects. Those may refer to the Torah Ark and Menorah which stood in contemporary synagogues.<sup>39</sup> By the 3rd century the sanctity of the Temple had been conveyed to the synagogue as *Miqdash me'at* (substitute for the Temple).<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the whole arrangement of holy implements in the burial room transforms the place into a vision of the Temple, the tombs being an inseparable part. This is even more evident considering that the Shrine at the center of the façade on the left-hand sarcophagus appears with its doors closed, reinforcing its association with the Ark of the Covenant whose contents cannot be seen. Although common in synagogue art from the 3rd to the 7th century, the closed façade remains a unique example in Jewish funerary art, where usually an open Ark with scrolls is depicted.

This symbolism can be reinforced by the likely connection between sculptural relief in the cave and the painted panel above the Torah shrine in the Dura Europos synagogue (fig. 13). In Dura the façade is flanked by a huge Menorah, a lulav and an ethrog on the left, and the Binding of Isaac on the right. The presence of the Aqedah reinforces the symbolical connection between the promise made to Abraham in the past and its realization in the future through the rebuilding of the Temple. Mount Moriah, where the Aqedah took place, was identified with Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where the two Temples were built

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38 Tomb as a house: Eccl. 12:5; Is. 23:16, Jub. 36:1-2, and in various Jewish epitaphs. Jerusalem as "the unique house of God" (Syb.Orac, III, 776). The paradise of the righteous is like New Jerusalem (Midrash Tanhuma B:13). Figueras, "Jewish and Christian Beliefs on Life after Death," 128-129

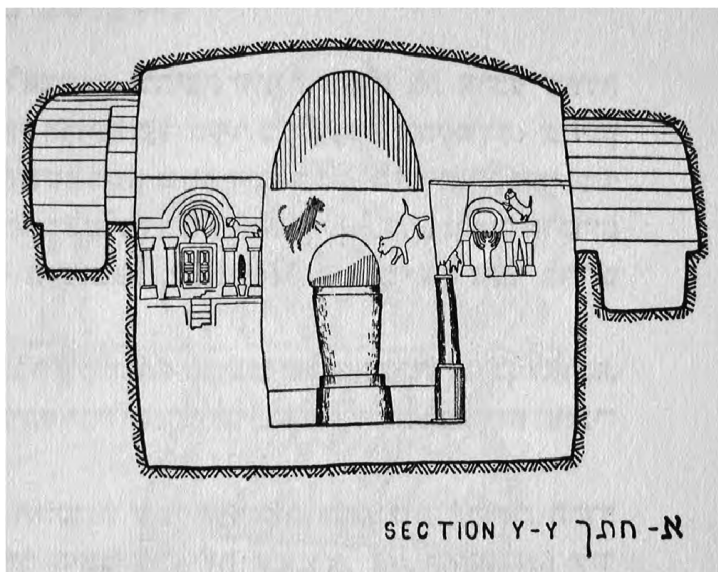
39 S. Fine, "Art and the Liturgical Context of the Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic," in *Galilee: Confluence of Cultures. Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Galilee*, ed. Eric Meyers, Winona Lake, Ind., 1999), 227-237; R. Hachlili, "The Niche and the Ark in Ancient Synagogues," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, vol 223. (Oct., 1976), 43-53.

40 b.Megilah 29a. S. Fine, "From Meeting House to Sacred Realm: Holiness and the Ancient Synagogue," in *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World*, ed. Steven Fine, Oxford and New York, 1996; L. I. Levine, "The Nature and Origin of the Palestinian Synagogue Reconsidered," *JBL*, vol 115. 3. (1996), 425-448; L. I Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue, The First Thousand Years*, New Heaven and London, 2005, 193-206; H. Schreckenberg and K. Schubert, "The Holiness of the Synagogue and its Figurative Decoration" in *Jewish Historiography and Iconography in Early and Medieval Christianity*, Assen, Minneapolis, 1992, 161-163.





*Fig. 13 Dura Europos Synagogue  
western wall Torah niche*



*Fig. 14 Beth Shearim Catacomb 4a  
room 7 drawing*



and the Messianic Temple will be built.<sup>41</sup> The panel is placed above the Torah niche, stressing special role of the Torah as a present mediator between past and future. In the same way, the carvings in the burial room in Beth Shearim present a symbolic link with Jerusalem, where the Temple will be restored and the dead resurrected.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the entire space between the two tombs resembles the reversed image of the Torah niche in Dura, the only difference being that the image of the façade was depicted twice to fit the space requirements (fig. 13 cf. fig. 14).<sup>43</sup> The two monuments are roughly contemporary. The Palmyrene origin of the cave owners also points in this direction, and even suggests common pictorial sources of influence.<sup>44</sup>

The location of Beth Shearim within borders of the Land of Israel affords the site an additional level of sacredness and an even firmer link to Jerusalem.<sup>45</sup> Beth Shearim could substitute the Mount of Olives at a time when entry to Jerusalem was forbidden to Jews.<sup>46</sup> To be buried in the Land of Israel meant to

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41 K. Weitsmann and H. Kessler, *The Frescoes of Dura Europos and Christian Art*, Washington D.C., 1990, 155-157; Z. Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue*, Jerusalem, 2005, 228-231

42 Figueras, “Jewish and Christian Beliefs on Life after Death,” 96-97

43 The identification of the figure near the *Menorah* as Abraham is plausible and may reinforce a connection between the Dura frescoes and the Beth Shearim carvings. However, it does not seem that there was enough space for two figures between the columns of the façade. The confusion may be explained by the two-stage damage to the corner of the sarcophagus. First, a big slab was detached from its upper left corner, and then secondary damage occurred. The latter may confuse the viewer since it changed the shape of the extreme column of the façade, making it look like an altar. However, a close examination of the photograph taken in the 1930s, and comparing it to the current state of the tomb (after 1995 and after recent restorations), make it clear that the base of the extreme column is identical to other columns of the same façade. Therefore it can be suggested that a sole figure is depicted between the two columns, not the whole scene. Nevertheless, the identification of this figure does not impair the overall interpretation of the cave in eschatological terms.

44 Some other artistic expressions in Beth Shearim lead directly to Palmyre iconographically and stylistically, and testify not only to the appreciation and adaptation of particular motifs but to the work of Palmyrene artists per se. Dura had an important Palmyrene colony, whose first evidence goes back to the 1st century BC. Palmyrian sculptors produced statues for Palmyrene as well as other inhabitants of Dura, although, as pointed by Dirven, they shared a common style but differed in religious content. L. Dirven, *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos. A Study of Religious Interaction in Roman Syria*, Leiden, 1999.

45 The practice of bringing Diaspora dead to be buried in the Land of Israel can be linked to R. Judah; it became widespread in the 3rd century (Gafni, “Bringing Deceased,” 113-120). Beth Shearim was not the only cemetery in the Land of Israel where Diaspora Jews were buried—there were also in Jaffa and Tiberias, for example. On the other hand, the borders of the Land of Israel “stretched up to the Euphrates river” according to the 3rd-century Babylonian sage Samuel. In a later period the borders were “stretched” even farther by the Babylonians. See discussions on these matters in Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora*, 89-95.

46 G. Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land, Palestine in the 4th century*,



be resurrected first, with the coming of the Messiah.<sup>47</sup> It was considered one of the highest virtues, regarded as forgiveness for sin and equal to being "buried under the altar."<sup>48</sup>

The prevalence of the lion, a prominent Jewish messianic symbol,<sup>49</sup> specifically unites belief in resurrection, messianic hopes, and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Lions carved in stone are found on blocks connected to the Torah Shrine in Galilee<sup>50</sup> and Golan<sup>51</sup> synagogues. In Palestinian synagogue mosaic lions are depicted in close proximity to the Torah Ark /the Ark of the Covenant/the Temple. Jerusalem itself is called the Lion of God (Ariel) in Isaiah 29:1. The lion thus symbolizes the Messiah, who will come from the tribe of Judah (according to Genesis 49) to restore Jerusalem and to rebuild the Temple. The unfinished work and lack of symmetry may signify that the messianic era is still to come.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, present and future hopes are bound together as one, through the centrality of the image of the Temple, revealed through imitation of real cultic objects from a contemporary synagogue interior which function as eschatological symbols. Thus, cave 4a room 7 at Beth Shearim represents the transfer of the sanctity of Jerusalem to the catacomb in Galilee. The tombs appear as a part of a space which symbolized metaphorically the eschatological ideas connected with the rebuilding of the Temple while stressing the symbolic connection between Jerusalem and the Diaspora (taking in account the Palmyrene origin of the owners), past and future, memory, and eschatological hope.

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Edinburgh, 2000, 133.

47 b.Kethuboth 111a.

48 Tosefta Avodah Zara 4 (5), b.Kethuboth 111a; 53. Gafni, "Bringing Deceased," 116-119; Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora*, 86-89.

49 E.g., II Esdras 12:31; lions appear in a Messianic context as early as the 3rd-century Dura Europos synagogue, where they adorn an empty lectern for reading the Torah. This motif, together with the tree of life, corresponds to the earliest stage of synagogue decoration. H. L. Kessler, "Program and Structure," in Weitzmann and Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*, 161-162. Lions flanking a Torah shrine appear on 4th-century Jewish gold glasses. Revel-Neher, *L'Arche d'Alliance*, 103, fig. 21, 22.

50 E. M. Meyers, J. F. Strange, C. L. Meyers, "The Ark of Nabratein: A First Glance," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, vol 44.4. (1981), 237-243.

51 R. Hachlili, "Late Antique Jewish Art from the Golan," in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research*, Ann Arbor 1995, 183-212 (esp. 186-187).

52 Many of the artistic designs in Beth Shearim appear to have been left unfinished deliberately. The lack of symmetry in detail contrasts with the generally symmetrical organization of burial spaces, and perhaps intimates its special significance as lack of perfection, in contrast to the meticulous symmetry in Hellenistic and Roman aesthetics which were taken further in Christian art. Some scholars have suggested that the asymmetry and imperfection that were coming ever more to the fore in Jewish art were in homage to the memory of the razed Temple. J. Klausner, "The Source and Beginnings of the Messianic Idea," in *Messianism in the Talmudic Era*, ed. L. Landman, New York, 1979, 37.



## SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST AS REPLACEMENT OF JEWISH MESSIANIC HOPES

Jewish burials contribute to an understanding of the Christian burial complex in Shefar'am, which is situated just about 15 km from Beth Shearim. The group of five rock-cut tombs is located inside the modern Christian neighborhood of Shefar'am, south of the ancient city. Three of the five tombs are decorated with sculptural carvings on the outside, and two present a combination of various symbols which appear on either side of the corridor leading to the entrance and on the arched entrance to the tomb. The decoration of these tombs is unique, both in terms of technique and choice of motifs. Since the tombs were never excavated, their dating is based on stylistic and iconographic analysis of the carvings. The carvings of the façade and the inner space of Tomb 5 are the earliest.<sup>53</sup> The arch is decorated with two vines inhabited with small birds (fig. 15). The vines themselves grow out of two vases and meet at the top, twined around a stylized flower enclosed in the circle. Acanthus leaves protrude from the upper corners of the façade. Above the entrance is a small cross flanked with birds. The inscription in Greek (almost illegible) can be found on both sides of the entrance to the tomb: "Lord Christ, save Sall[o], and have pity on me and my children."<sup>54</sup> This is the only inscription found at the site.

The inner space of the tomb was entirely carved with vines and pomegranates inhabited with birds, of which only traces are now visible (fig. 16, 17). The ceiling and the upper parts of the walls are decorated with flower-shaped and cross-shaped rosettes (fig. 18).

A central arcosolium is framed in an architectural setting, while the back-wallsoall three arcosolia are decorated with crosses in high relief.

Obviously, vines, flourishing trees and other motifs in the tomb are long rooted in the Hellenistic-Roman world, based on a vocabulary of motifs well-known in the area and used by pagans, Jews and Christians alike. In the Christian context they represent the Garden of Eden or Paradise. But the ornamentation of the tomb is also of a transitional type. Thus, the central rosette of the row of three

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53 The site is variously dated from the 4th to the 7th century. I propose that Tomb 5 can be attributed to the 4th century, while Tomb 3 is slightly later, perhaps the beginning of the 5th century. Maayan-Fanar, "Word Incarnated in Stone."

54 F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie (DACL)*, Paris, 1907-1953, Vol. III, 1265; G. B. De Rossi & E. Germer-Durand, "Épigraphie chrétienne de Palestine," *Revue Biblique*, vol 2. (1893), 202-214, esp. 207; *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, Vol. VIII, 6, no. 17. The last two letters of the name are uncertain and can be read as  $\mu$  or double  $\lambda\lambda$ , and the final letter is illegible. My analysis of the inscription is based on the opinion of Leah di Segni that the name should be read "Salw" or "Sallou." The name is of Semitic origin, deriving from the Aramaic-Hebrew name Saul.



on the ceiling was turned in the course of work into a cross. Similarly, rosettes on the upper part of the eastern arcosolium, whose overall design mirrors the western one, are turned into crosses as well. All this emphasizes the wish to express strengthening of the owners' Christian identity. At that point niches were filled with numerous crosses, designed differently from the other motifs hence corresponding to another model.



*Fig. 15 Shefar'am tomb 5 facade  
(Photo Dror Maayan)*



*Fig. 16 Shefar'am tomb 5 inner space  
(Photo Dror Maayan)*





*Fig. 17 Shefar'am tomb 5 inner space detail (Photo Dror Maayan)*



*Fig. 18 Shefar'am tomb 5 inner space ceiling (Photo Dror Maayan)*



All these motifs together stress the primitive Early Christian message: numerous crosses protect the deceased from evil spirits,<sup>55</sup> and the burial space is thus turned into a joyful Paradise where Christian souls dwell.<sup>56</sup> Using pictorial elements from the façade of Tomb 5 as a model, the Tomb 3 carvers rearranged them into a well thought-out composition (fig. 19 cf. fig. 15).<sup>57</sup> The arch of the façade is decorated with two vines growing from two vases, which meet at the top to form a stylized flower-rosette emphasizing a cross with the addition of Alpha and Omega above the entrance. Birds are taken from the vines on the façade to the walls of the corridor, while new motifs are added to the already known. The corridor decorations are symmetrically organized though they differ in details (figs. 20, 21).

The pomegranate tree surrounded by birds and a fish, a huge face inserted into the wreath, and a lion (a lioness on the western wall) followed by a cub are assembled together on each wall.<sup>58</sup> All the elements are directed toward the façade and centered on the cross with Alpha and Omega, and the rosette above it, expressing through this compositional arrangement a clear Christian message.

A number of motifs composing visual vocabulary used in Shefar'am tombs are well known from the early Christian stock, for instance, vases with growing vines and perched birds, fishes, and a cross with the letters Alpha and Omega. Others, such as pomegranate trees, are rare but can be paralleled to another late 4th or early 5th century Christian tomb near Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetta'ot (near Acre, about 20 km from Shefar'am),<sup>59</sup> referring perhaps to a local vocabulary of

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55 R. Viladesau, *The Beauty of the Cross, The Passion of Christ and the Arts, from the Catacombs to the Eve of Renaissance*, Oxford, 2006, 41-42.

56 C. D. Sheppard, "Byzantine Carved Marble Slabs," *Art Bulletin*, vol 51. (1969), 65-71 (esp. 65-66).

57 Both the façade and the corridor carvings of Tomb 3 are executed in the same style, very stylized and flat, though they still attain some sense of volume, especially in grapes and lions. The vases, depicted exactly on the conjunction of the façade and the corridor, suggest that the whole composition was planned and executed by a single hand.

58 The carvings on the corridor walls in Tomb 5 were in turn copied from Tomb 3, although number of motifs and their position were altered. A lion leaping over a pomegranate tree towards the entrance is depicted on both sides. Facing in the opposite direction is a lion cub, and a bird is visible only on the eastern side of the corridor.

59 G. Foerster, "A Painted Christian Tomb near Kibbutz Lohamei Ha Geta'ot," in *Kadmoniot HaGalil HaMa'aravy* (The Antiquities of the Western Galilee), ed. M. Yeda'ia, Match Asher 1986, 416-29 (Hebrew); T. Michaeli, "Wall-Paintings from Roman and Early Byzantine Tombs in Israel," PhD Thesis, Tel Aviv University 1997, vol. I, 215-254; II, pls 161-187 (Hebrew with English summary); T. Michaeli, "Elysium or the Garden of Eden? The Case of an Early Byzantine Painted Tomb in Galilee," *Asaph*, vol 10-11. (2005-6), 365-380. See my forthcoming article on this tomb: "An Early Christian Tomb at Lohamei HaGetaot, Formation of Christological







**Fig. 19 Shefar'am tomb 3 facade**  
(Photo Dror Maayan)



**Fig. 20 Shefar'am tomb 3 courtyard western wall**  
(Photo Dror Maayan)

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Symbolism," *Eastern Christian Art* (2009).





**Fig. 21 Shefar'am tomb 3 courtyard eastern wall**  
(Photo Dror Maayan)

symbols.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, in Shefar'am some motifs atypical of Christian funerary art appear alongside the common symbols.<sup>61</sup> Lions followed with cubs and faces enclosed in wreaths belong to such an unusual vocabulary of symbols.

Although lions were a well-known motif throughout the ancient world, frequently used in the burial context as guardians and protectors,<sup>62</sup> their use was very uncommon in Christian funerary art. By contrast, in the Jewish funeral context lions were widespread. Moreover, the motif of two lions flanking an object is so frequent in the Jewish context that some scholars have proposed that it originated there.<sup>63</sup> In Beth Shearim, lions are quite frequent, perhaps as homage to regional iconography combined with special Jewish significance of the

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60 Pomegranates appear in early Christian church pavements, connected among other things to martyrdom and the Garden of Eden. M. Avi-Yonah, *Excavations at Shavei Zion. The Early Christian Church*, Rome, 1967, 53-54.

61 Among those are rosettes in Tomb 5 which recall those from Jewish ossuaries of the Second Temple period.

62 E.g., Roman tomb H-60 at Abila. Robert W. Smith and W. Harold Mare, "A Roman Tomb at Abila of the Decapolis," *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, vol 10. (1997), 307-314, esp. fig. 4. See also B. A. Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Fribourg-Göttingen 2005; D. K. Money, "Lions of the Mountains: the Sarcophagi of Balbura," *Anatolian Studies*, vol 40. (1990), 29-54.

63 Avigad, *Beth Shearim III*, 140; R. Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel*, Leiden, 1988, 321-328.

motif<sup>64</sup> Other examples can be given from the burial stone-doors found at El Buqei'a (Peqi'in) in Upper Galilee, attributed to the late Roman period.<sup>65</sup> To this must be added the distinction of gender between lion and lioness, uncommon in Christian art but found in Jewish art (cf. the "lion's sarcophagus," Catacomb 20). Moreover, in Jewish tradition lions are firmly linked to Messianic and Temple symbolism through the words of Genesis 49:9,<sup>66</sup> as reflected in the carvings in Beth Shearim, cave 4a room 7, already discussed.

The Messianic symbolism of the lion motif seems to have been well understood in Shefar'am; it was placed in a Christian context perhaps on account of the words of the Book of Revelation: "Look! The Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has been victorious so that He may open the scroll and its seven seals" (Rev. 5:5).

This new Messianic context is accentuated by two faces enclosed in concentric circles framed by a wreath of glory. These faces probably derive from the Late Antique Medusa,<sup>67</sup> a famous apotropaic motif, but in the context of Tomb 3 they represent, I believe, the Sun and the Moon. The distinction purposely made between them suggests that each has a different meaning. A close comparison which supports this identification can be found on the neo-Punic stele from the Roman period in Tunisia.<sup>68</sup> On these stela faces enclosed in a wreath represent celestial powers. Both the sun and moon are connected to Christian symbolism, as expressed in Christian interpretations of Old Testament verses such as Isaiah 60:19-20, "Your sun will no longer set, and your moon will not fade; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and the days of your sorrow will be over."<sup>69</sup>

The compositional arrangement of the carvings in tomb 3 emphasizes the rosette-star and the cross above the entrance. Understanding the Messiah as a star

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64 The "lions" sarcophagus; the "hunt" sarcophagus; the "eagle" sarcophagus in Catacomb 20 (Avigad, *Beth Shearim III*, pls. 40, 41); lions painted on ceiling in Catacomb I, hall 7, room 2 (Mazar, *Beth Shearim I*, pls. 12.2) and carved in Catacomb 4a room 7.

65 Y. Moshe, 'Peqi'in," *Hadashot Arkheologiyot. Excavations and Surveys in Israel*, vol 115. (2003), 7-8; Aviam, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee*, 299-304, figs. 21.54, 55, 57.

66 The tribes of Judah and Dan were both likened to the lion (Gen. 49:9; Deut. 33:22). The mother of the kings of Judah was compared to a lioness and her sons to young lions (Ezek. 19:2-9).

67 Aviam, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee*, 293. A head of Medusa was found in a grave in Jewish Vigna Randanini Catacomb in Rome. L. V. Rutgers, "Archaeological Evidence for the Interaction of Jews and Non-Jews in Late Antiquity," *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol 96.1. (Jan., 1992), 109.

68 E. F. Ghedini, "Ancora sulle stele della Ghorfa: qualche precisazione," in *L'Africa romana. Atti del VII convegno di studio, Sassari*, 15-17 dicembre 1989, ed. A. Mastino, Sassari, 1988, 233-244.

69 Also Habakkuk 3: "Sun and moon stand still in [their] lofty residence, at the flash of Your flying arrows, at the brightness of Your shining spear."



or light is based on several Biblical texts (Isaiah 9.1; Psalms 72; 110). Daniel 2.22—"He reveals the deep and secret things: he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him"—was one of the sources for interpreting the Messiah as light in both Jewish and Early Christian traditions.<sup>70</sup> Identification of the star with Christ and the cross is found in several Early Christian sources.<sup>71</sup> It seems to represent Christ as "everlasting light," or, in the words of Hippolytus, "a bright star, in whose presence, the sun and moon were eclipsed."<sup>72</sup>

Sun and moon flanking the cross or Crucified Christ are often found in Christian art, although Shefar'am's depiction seem to be one of the earliest. Here the Jewish image of the Torah Ark/Temple in Via Torlonia, discussed above, comes to mind. The Ark is flanked by sun and moon, and a star is above its gable. A rosette-star appears on top of one of the façades in cave 4a room 7 in Beth Shearim, and on other representations of the shrines in Jewish art. A clear parallelism is found, therefore, between Shefar'am image and early Jewish art—but with a significant difference. In the Jewish context the façade remains a central motif, augmented by Menorot (and other objects), celestial powers and/or lions, while in Shefar'am the central motif of the façade is replaced by the cross flanked with Alpha and Omega, while cultic objects give way to the Paradisiacal setting formed of vines, pomegranates and birds. This change is critical in expressing the Christian message.

Many of the stylistic and iconographic similarities between the Shefar'am tombs and Jewish art in Galilee, especially in Beth Shearim, may be due to their common Hellenistic/Roman background. However, the use of significant elements in Jewish art to express the Christian message suggests first and foremost a deliberate choice and perhaps even intimate knowledge of Jewish iconography.

Here we come to the question of the identity of the owners of the Shefar'am tombs. We know very little about Shefar'am. The village had a strong Jewish heritage. The Sanhedrin was located there (briefly) before moving to Beth Shearim.<sup>73</sup> Most probably it was still a Jewish village in the 4th and early 5th century,<sup>74</sup> although the situation changed during second half of the 5th century when the entire area became Christian. The iconography of tombs 5 and 3

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70 "There shall step forth a star out of Jacob" (Numbers 24.17). Bar Kochba was called a star by Rabbi Akiva. Revel-Neher, *L'Arche d'Alliance*, 77, note 23. See also W. Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, London, 1998, 99.

71 B. Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision*, Jerusalem 1971, 161-162.

72 Hippolytus, *Commentary on Genesis 37:9*, *Patrologia Orientalis* 27, 3, 5-7; Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision*, 161.

73 Holder and Goldwurm, *History of the Jewish People*, vol. II, 77-80.

74 According to ethnical mapping by Mordechai Aviam the Galilee from the 2nd century BC to the 4th century AD was inhabited mostly by Jews. Shefar'am falls within these borders. M. Aviam,



represents a transition toward acceptance of Christianity. The name "Sallo" which appears in its inscription derives from a Jewish-Aramaic root and is rarely found in Christian inscriptions, though its variations (Σάλλου; Σαλώ) exist, for example, in the 5th-century church at 'Evron, not far from Shefar'am. The tombs' owners might have had a Jewish background, or even have belonged to a group of Jewish-Christians.<sup>75</sup> Jewish-Christians existed in the 3rd-4th centuries in Galilee, and some continued until the 8th century. They kept Jewish laws and believed in Christ, the Messiah, or even in Christ as the Son of God, as the Nazoreans did.<sup>76</sup> The existence of Jewish-Christian tombs, even more than purely Christian tombs near the Jewish settlement of Shefar'am may explain the use of Jewish symbols, reorganized, however, to reflect new beliefs.

## **TWO WAYS TO THE "WORLD TO COME": NATIONAL SALVATION THROUGH UPHOLDING THE LAW VIA PERSONAL SALVATION THROUGH THE BODY OF CHRIST**

Many stylistic and iconographic elements link the tombs in Shefar'am with the Beth Shearim necropolis. However, the relation of the inner and outer spaces is intentionally reversed. In Beth Shearim the eschatological message is kept inside the tomb, close to the dead. It is revealed only to those who enter the cave. And so it is in Shefar'am tomb 5. However, in tomb 3 the message is intentionally placed outside the cave. All the symbols are squeezed together in a small space before the entrance, creating of a sense of horror vacui. Tomb owners revealing their identity through visual symbols was typical in the Western Galilee, especially when a Jewish tomb was located in a mostly Gentile region.<sup>77</sup> This phenomenon is attested in Shefar'am, most of whose inhabitants were Jewish, suggesting a "visual dialog" with Jewish neighbors, with the emphasis falling on the idea of resurrection through Christ. The appearance of motifs used in both religions, such as pomegranates and rosettes, highlights the sense of dialog. The intensive use of lions may be viewed as a challenge to Jewish messianic hopes.

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"Distribution Maps of Archaeological Data from the Galilee: An Attempt to Establish Zones Indicative of Ethnicity and Religious Affiliation," in *Religion, Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Galilee: A Religion in Transition*, eds. Zangenberg, Jurgen, Attridge, W. Harrold and D. B. Martin, Tübingen, 2007, 115-132.

75 On this highly problematic issue see J. E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places, the Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins*, Oxford, 1993.

76 M. C. de Boer, "The Nazoreans: Living at the Boundary of Judaism and Christianity," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. G. N. Stanton and G. G. Stroumsa, Cambridge, 1998, 239-262.

77 E.g., tomb doors from Peqi'in and Kafr Yasif. Aviam, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee*, fig. 21.54; 21.55; 21.57; 21.58



In Judaism, the idea of a Messiah centers on a human figure.<sup>78</sup> The Messianic era will come, and the Messiah (or God himself) will (re)build the Temple. Eschatological hopes are focused on the real Jerusalem, and the real Temple, which will be rebuilt as God promised Abraham and His chosen people.<sup>79</sup> In the funeral context these hopes are necessarily bound up with the promise of resurrection made to all Jews. These ideas seem embedded in Beth Shearim: this was the place chosen for his burial by Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi, a prominent political and religious ruler who bears the title of the Messianic king (Ezekiel 37:24-5) and who was himself (though in a later source) identified with the Messiah (b. Sanhedrin 98b).

In Shefar'am, the eschatological hope envisioned as the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, which we saw in Beth Shearim, is replaced by the hope of salvation through death and resurrection of Christ. Jewish Temple symbolism, expressed through the architectural setting, disappears, making way for the symbolism of the body of Christ, the New Temple (John 2:19-21), an idea variously discussed by the Church Fathers.<sup>80</sup> In Shefar'am tomb 3 the image of the cross is a clear substitute of the Temple façade, placed between sun, moon and a star, and led to by lions and lion cubs. It signifies the true Messiah: Christ.

This is even more emphasized due to the appearance of Alpha and Omega, the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet, which symbolize the perfection of God, who dwells in all things (Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). The pictorial program of the Shefar'am tombs reflects the complex ethnic and religious environment of Galilee in the Late Antique and early Byzantine periods, presenting what is surely a visual response to Judaism on matters of resurrection, immortality, and messianic hopes.

With the spread of Christianity the gap between Jewish and Christian Messianic hopes deepened, and the columned façade was pushed back into a more general funeral temple/tomb context, well known in Roman art. This transition is evident in the Via Latina catacomb. In the scene of the Crossing of the Red Sea, in Cubiculum C, the columned façade represents the Temple as a

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78 J. Neusner, "Messianic Themes in Formative Judaism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol 52.2. (1984), 357-374; J. Neusner, "One Theme, Two Settings: The Messiah in the Literature of the Synagogue and in the Rabbis' Canon of Late Antiquity," *BTB*, vol 14. (1984), 110-121. For a critique of Neusner's ideas see C. A. Evans, "Mishna and Messiah 'In Context': Some Comments on Jacob Neusner's Proposals," *JBL*, vol 112. 2. (Summer, 1993), 267-289; C. A. Evans, "Messianic Hopes and Messianic Figures in Late Antiquity," *JGRChJ*, vol 3. (2006), 9-40.

79 R. L. Wilken, *The Land called Holy, Palestine in Christian History and Thought*, New Haven and London, 1992, 41-45.

80 N. Hiscock, *The Symbol at Your Door. Number and Geometry in Religious Architecture of the Greek and Latin Middle Ages*, Burlington, VT and Aldershot, UK, 2007, 129-147.



symbol of the Promised Land. The same composition is copied in the later Cubiculum O,<sup>81</sup> but its meaning has changed. The figure of Lazarus has been introduced into the façade's doorway, turning it into Lazarus' tomb and stressing even more strongly the message of resurrection by and through Christ.<sup>82</sup>

Even more intriguing is a depiction on the 5th/6th century ampulla from Asia Minor.<sup>83</sup> On its one side the cross is depicted within two columns topped by an arch. On the other side the same columned structure has a door reached up steps. The door is slightly ajar, revealing a standing human figure. The figure can be identified as Lazarus, or as Christ himself coming out of his tomb. The structure closely recalls the Temple façade. It is not the Temple but a tomb. The open door reveals the truth about real Messiah, and God who overcomes death and brings salvation to all. The tomb of Christ, which may appear on this ampulla and certainly appears on several other objects from the *loca sancta*, reflects a change in perception of Jerusalem among Christians. It is no longer the place of the Jewish Temple but a reminder of Jewish fault. According to Christian point of view the Temple of the Jews lies in ruins, and will never be rebuilt, as punishment by God for their crucifying the Messiah. The Holy Sepulcher built by Constantine becomes a common reference not only to Christ's tomb but to Jerusalem.<sup>84</sup> The Temple façade was deliberately substituted by that of the Church as the New Jerusalem replaced the old.<sup>85</sup>

Contrary to Christianity, the Temple façade remains central in the Jewish pictorial tradition. Moreover, the Ark of the Covenant, the Torah Ark and the Temple remain theologically and visually inseparable, as clearly emerges from the 4th-7th century mosaic pavements in the Palestine synagogues, but also from much later medieval manuscripts.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps most of all, the resilience of the motif of the façade flanked by Menorot in Jewish funeral art in the Late Antique

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81 A. Ferrua, *Catacombe sconosciute una pinacoteca del IV secolo sotto la Via Latina* (Florence, 1990), fig. 67 cf. fig. 137.

82 S. Laderman and Y. Furstenberg, "Jewish and Christian Imaging of the 'House of God': A Fourth Century Reflection of Religious and Historical Polemics," *Interactions between Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art and Literature*, eds., M. Poorthuis, J. Schwartz, J. Turner, Leiden, 2009, 433-508.

83 *Rom und Byzanz. Archäologische Kostbarkeiten aus Bayern*, eds., Ludwig Wamser and Gisela Zahlhaas [Archäologische Staatssammlung, München 1998-9], Munich, 1998, 104, no. 102.

84 B. Kühnel, "Jewish Symbolism of the Temple and the Tabernacle and Christian Symbolism of the Holy Sepulchre and the Heavenly Tabernacle. A Study of Their Relationship in Late Antique and Early Medieval Art and Thought," *Jewish Art*, vol 12/13. (1986/87), 150-152; R. Ousterhout, "The Temple, the Sepulchre, and the Martyrion of the Savior," *Gesta*, vol 29.1. (1990), 44-53.

85 Wilken, *The Land called Holy*, 82-100.

86 E. Revel-Neher, "L'alliance et la promesse: le symbolisme d'erez-Israel dans l'iconographie Juive du Moyen Age," *Jewish Art*, vol 12/13. (1986/87), 135-146.



and Early Byzantine periods is an answer to the emergence of the new Christian iconography of the Cross flanked by Alpha and Omega. In contrast to the Cross, which as a symbol<sup>87</sup> of Christ the Messiah and God had traveled the long path from spiritual sign to visual, material symbol, the façade always represented material objects which could be comprehended on the spiritual level. The Tabernacle and the Temple were built through God's inspiration and at His command. The future Messianic Temple was to be built by Messiah or God himself. The façade symbolizes the house of God, but never is God. In Jewish thought, the way to eternity and Messianic times lies through continuity of keeping the Law: from the Ark of Covenant to the Temple, from the Temple to Miqdash Me'at, from the Ark of Torah and the Torah to the future Messianic Temple. Past, present and future merged in one symbol: the façade, the symbol which relied on the real objects in synagogues (although more their function than their likeness) and were inseparable from Jewish liturgical life. These objects per se functioned as an indispensable link with the Messianic future.

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87 V.Tzaferis, "Christian Symbols of the 4th century and the Church Fathers." PhD dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1971, esp. 33, 42.





## ЕМА МАЈАН ФАНАР

### **ПУТ ДО "СВЕТА КОЈИ ДОЛАЗИ": РАЗМИШЉАЊА О ИКОНОГРАФИЈИ ДВЕ ЈЕДИНСТВЕНЕ НЕКРОПОЛЕ У ГАЛИЛЕЈИ**

Овај рад разматра два јединствена фунерарна комплекса у Галилеји (Израел): јеврејску некрополу у Бет Шеариму и хришћанску некрополу у Шефар'аму. Прва је била активна током III и IV века нове ере, премда је вероватно остала у употреби све до VI века. Друга некропола је могла бити у употреби током IV и V века. Чини се да су идеје изражене сликаним програмом комплекса у Шефар'аму повезане са онима из Бет Шеарима. Могуће је, стога, да је ранохришћански локалитет структуриран као одраз јевреских есхатолошких идеја и схватања васкрсења.

