



Figure 1. "Tomba di Nerone," third century A.D., Via Cassia, Rome. Proconnesian marble, length 2.84 m, height 1.33 m, depth 1.48 m (chest). Front face, from the southwest. Photo: author.

# “Nero’s Tomb” and the crisis of the third century

## *Roman sarcophagi as public and private monuments*

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Five miles north of the center of Rome, with its back to the modern Via Cassia, and obscured on the other side by a clump of trees, stands a marble sarcophagus mounted on a brick podium (fig. 1). On the night of February 23–24, 2008, the rear and left sides of this sarcophagus were indecorously sprayed with black graffiti.<sup>1</sup> The removal of this mark, which had seemed to be the culmination of the longstanding, gradual neglect of the monument, and the restoration of the structure, celebrated in a small public ceremony on November 15, 2010, provide an opportunity to reflect on the origins of a sarcophagus which, as we shall see, is remarkable not only in its form and location, but also for its unique perspective on Roman history.<sup>2</sup> As the orientation of its main decorated face indicates, the monument originally overlooked the ancient Via Cassia, from a steep rise now shrouded in trees, and the topographical analysis of the British School at Rome’s South Etruria Survey has shown that it stood near the junction of this road with the Via Veientana.<sup>3</sup> The monument’s elevated position was even greater in antiquity: It stands above the river valley of the Fosso della Crescenza, where a first-century mausoleum had been submerged by two meters of river silt by the early third century and plundered for later structures,

which in turn were submerged by a further three meters of alluvium.<sup>4</sup> Otherwise, little is known of its specific ancient context. As Giuseppe Tomassetti lamented a century ago, the precious evidence of ancient culture—scattered columns, coins, and heads of Pentelic marble—were subjected to mechanical ploughing techniques typical of what he called “the systematic devastation of the Roman *campagna*.”<sup>5</sup>

In the early modern period there was little such nostalgia for this derelict zone. Medieval Christian tradition had it that the emperor Nero’s spirit wandered from the Vatican amphitheatre where his persecuted victims had met their deaths, proceeded to roam restlessly through that area outside the Porta Angelica which already by the sixth century was known as “Nero’s Meadows” (*Prata Neronis*), and settled only in the northern outreaches of the medieval city.<sup>6</sup> An early map of Rome labels an ancient tomb on the Via Flaminia as “the tower where Nero’s spirit stopped for a long time.”<sup>7</sup> It was also known, however, from classical sources that the emperor had been buried in the Gardens of the Domitii on the Pincio hill.<sup>8</sup> So a second legend developed around the Madonna del Popolo directly below that family monument, designed to protect the

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1. A. Montesanti, “Romano-Italica: i limiti mentali di un popolo,” *InStoria: Rivista online di storia e di informazione* 5 (May 2008), [http://www.instoria.it/home/romano\\_italica.htm](http://www.instoria.it/home/romano_italica.htm). The graffito on the rear (east side) read: “CUCCA TVB [ti voglio bene] AXEL” (Cucca, I love you. [signed] Axel); on the left (north) face was sprayed a single word: KORN.

2. A. M. Colini, “La tomba di Nerone,” *Colloqui del Sodalizio* 5 (1975–1976): 35–40; E. Equini Schneider, *La “Tomba di Nerone” sulla via Cassia: Studio sul sarcofago di Publio Vibio Mariano* (Rome, 1984).

3. J. B. Ward-Perkins, “Notes on Southern Etruria and the Ager Veientanus,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 23 (1955): 45. The raised position is strikingly captured in Jean-Charles Joseph Rémond’s “Vue du Tombeau de Néron” (1829–1831): Rome, Biblioteca dell’Istituto di Archeologia e Storia dell’Arte, Roma XI.III.44.29750, reproduced in Equini Schneider (see note 2), p. 38, fig. 17a.

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4. S. Judson, “Erosion and Deposition of Italian Stream Valleys during Historic Time,” *Science* 140, no. 3569 (May 24, 1963): 898–899, and cover photo; J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Landscape and History in Central Italy*, Second J. L. Myers Memorial Lecture (Oxford, 1964), pp. 14–15.

5. G. Tomassetti, *La campagna romana: antica, medioevale e moderna* (Rome, 1910–1913), updated edition, ed. L. Chiumenti and F. Bilancia (Florence, 1979), vol. 3, p. 42.

6. A. von Reumont, *Geschichte der Stadt Rom* (Berlin, 1867), vol. 1, pp. 380–381. *Prata Neronis*: Procopius, *Gothic War* 1.19.28–29, 2.1.2.

7. G. B. De Rossi, *Piante icnografiche e prospettiche di Roma anteriori al secolo XVI* (Rome, 1879), pl. XII: “la torre dove stette gran tempo il spirito di Nerone.”

8. Suetonius, *Nero* 50: “He was buried at a cost of 200,000 sesterces, in the white robes embroidered with gold that he had worn on the first of January. His remains were deposited by his nurses Egloge and Alexandria and his mistress Acte in the family tomb of the Domitii, which is set on the Collis Hortulorum and can be seen from the Campus Martius. In that monument a trough of porphyry, with an altar of Luna marble above, is enclosed by a balustrade of Thasian stone.”

district from the infestations of the ghost of the Antichrist Nero.<sup>9</sup> But by the early seventeenth century it was the sarcophagus monument on the Via Cassia that was singled out as “Nero’s tomb.”<sup>10</sup> This tradition might be simply an extension of the earlier one to the road continuing northwestward from the Via Flaminia at Ponte Molle (Ponte Milvio). Alternatively, it might have been inspired by the report that the emperor had died at his freedman Phaon’s villa in the suburbs between the Via Nomentana and the Via Salaria, near the fourth milestone;<sup>11</sup> Nero had taken refuge there, entering it by a back route through thickets of brambles.<sup>12</sup> The tree-covered monument at the fifth milestone of the Via Cassia may have seemed suitably evocative of the place where Nero’s spirit had finally left his body.<sup>13</sup>

The attachment of this site to the legend of Nero persisted. In 1922 it was recounted in an Italian hunting journal how an Englishman called Knight, renowned as the winner of many steeplechases, had taken part in a fox hunt in this area. He fell when jumping a fence near the tomb and passed out under the weight of his horse. Two struts of the fence and the stirrup straps of his saddle were seen wondrously to form a stretcher on which he was brought to a house beside the tomb, and he lived, bedridden, for another two years; the miraculous incident was recorded in an oil painting. In 1939 *Il Messaggero* reported the birth of the suburb of “la Tomba di Nerone” and the inauguration there in October 1938 of the Casa Littoria, the community’s only public building; the houses built there were half-hidden in the trees. In 1940 the inhabitants resisted an attempt to call the community the “Borgata or Vico di Vibio,” after the actual identity of the monument, rather than after the “Tomba di Nerone.”<sup>14</sup> The administrative district still keeps the false name today.

9. *Mirabilia Rom[ae]*, printed by E. Silber (Rome, 1507). The legend is fully recounted in G. de Albericis, *Historiarum sanctissimae et gloriosissimae Virginis Deiparae de Populo almae urbis Compendium* (Rome, 1599) and O. Panciroli, *Tesori nascosti dell’alma città di Roma con nuovo ordine ristampati e in molti luoghi arricchiti* (Rome, 1625). For apocalyptic visions of Nero among early Christians, see Commodianus, *Carmen Apologeticum* 1.41.

10. In 1516 the property is called “Casalis Saraceni seu Sepoltura,” and in 1622 “Casal Saracino ditto Sepoltura di Nerone.” Tomassetti (see note 5), vol. 3, p. 43.

11. Accounts of Nero’s death: Tacitus, *Histories* 2.8.9; Suetonius, *Nero* 57; cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 21.10; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 64.9.3; Josephus, *Jewish War* 4.6.5.

12. Suetonius, *Nero* 48–49. For the remains of the villa, see A. M. Colini, “La Villa di Faonte,” *Capitolium* 33, no. 4 (1958): 3–5.

13. A papal milestone was placed beside the monument in 1824: Ward-Perkins (see note 3), p. 45, n. 1.

14. Tomassetti (see note 5), vol. 3, pp. 43–46.

The curious episodes and legends surrounding this monument partly result from its unusual character, of a sarcophagus displayed not inside a tomb, but in the open air. This outward mode of display highlights the capacity of a sarcophagus to be a public as well as a private monument. In antiquity too it was an enigma. The sarcophagus is unusually substantial: 2.84 meters long, by 1.33 meters high, by 1.48 meters deep, with a base molding 3.12 meters wide. It rests on a high pedestal, now 2.30 meters high and heavily restored with bricks, but originally consisting of large blocks of travertine becoming smaller toward the top.<sup>15</sup> Limited soundings in front of the monument in September 1982 revealed the ancient ground level as well as fragments of an ash urn and funerary cippus.<sup>16</sup>

The sarcophagus itself probably started out as a half-fabricated export of Proconnesian marble, which had been prepared with a roof-like lid with large corner acroteria like big flapping ears, a ledge-like base for a base molding, and bosses perhaps for figures on the ends of one side. In the middle of the main face (fig. 2), and dominating the front, is not a pictorial relief, but a large framed panel with “handles,” a *tabula ansata* with rather narrow *ansae*, apparently more like the exterior of a tomb monument than a sarcophagus, and packed with writing.<sup>17</sup> Here the true identity of the deceased is clearly laid out in ten lines of uncial script:

D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / P(ublīi) Vibi P(ublīi) f(ili)ii  
Mariani e(gregiae) m(emoriae) v(iro), proc(uratori) / et  
praesidi prov(inciae) Sardiniae, p(rimo) p(ilo) bis, / trib(uno)  
coh(ortium) X pr(aetoriae), XI urb(anae), IIII vig(illum),  
prae(ecto) leg(ionis) / (5) II Ital(icae), p(rimo) p(ilo) leg(ionis)  
III Gall(icae), (centurioni) frument(ario), / oriundo ex Ital(ia)  
Jul(ia) Dertona, / patri dulcissimo / et Reginiae Maximae  
matri / karissimae / (10) Vibia Maria Maxima c(larissima)  
f(emina), fil(ia) et her(es).

“Sacred to the divine spirit of Publius Vibius Marianus, son of Publius, a man of exceptional memory [i.e. of equestrian rank], procurator and governor of Sardinia, twice *primuspilus*, tribune of the Tenth Cohort of the Praetorian Guard, the Eleventh Urban Cohort, and the Fourth of the Vigiles, Prefect of the Second Italian Legion, *primuspilus*

15. This is evident from the early representations: A. Lafiréy, *Speculum Romanae Magnificentiae* (Rome, 1551); B. Breenbergh (ca. 1630) in London, British Museum (fig. 11); Claude Lorrain (ca. 1630–1640) in Vienna, Albertina, inv. 11518; P. S. Bartoli, *Gli antichi sepolcri ovvero mausolei romani ed etruschi* (Rome, 1697), pl. XI; P. Schenk, *Roma Aeterna* (Amsterdam, 1705), pl. 5.

16. Equini Schneider (see note 2), pp. 71–76.

17. The epigraphic field of 1.14 meters by 0.90 meters is almost filled by the text.



Figure 2. "Tomba di Nerone": detail of front face, from the southwest. Photo: author.

of the Third Gallic Legion, centurion of the *Frumentarii*, in origin from the Julian colony of Dertona in Italy, set up to the most gentle father and most beloved mother Reginia Maxima by Vibia Maria Maxima, a most distinguished lady [i.e. wife of someone of senatorial rank], daughter and heiress.<sup>18</sup>

This is the monument, then, not of Nero, but of Publius Vibius Marianus, an equestrian from the colony of Dertona (modern Tortona) in northern Italy.<sup>19</sup> It is undated, but the information it provides has enabled scholars to place it in the third century A.D., with estimates ranging from ca. 210 to the early 270s.<sup>20</sup> A number of indications allow this to be narrowed down more precisely. According to the text, listing his posts in the conventional

reverse chronological order, Marianus began his career in the *frumentarii*, a police-like force in the city of Rome, which was accountable to the emperor and had by this time acquired an unsavory reputation.<sup>21</sup> Holding the rank of centurion, he may have been the *princeps* or *subprinceps* of the *Castra Peregrina* on the Caelian hill where the unit was based (now under the church of S. Stefano Rotondo).<sup>22</sup> That position enabled him to aspire to the highest equestrian rank, and he was then promoted to a succession of high-level military posts. As *primuspilus* of the Third Gallic Legion in Syria, he might have more than quadrupled his salary;<sup>23</sup> he rose to prefect of the

18. CIL 6.1636 = H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (Berlin, 1902), vol. 1, no. 1361. See also G. Alföldy, in CIL 6.8.3, ed. G. Alföldy (Berlin, 2000), pp. 4723–4724.

19. *Prosopographia Imperii Romani, saec. I. II. III.*, ed. E. Klebs (Berlin, 1897–1898), vol. 3, V 387.

20. Ca. 210: B. Dobson, "The Primipilares of the Roman Army" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Durham, 1955), vol. 2, p. 336; H.-G. Pflaum, *Les carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous le Haut-Empire romain* (Paris, 1960–1982), vol. 2, pp. 705–706, no. 263, and vol. 3, p. 1045. Between 220–230 and 230–240: Alföldy (see note 18), p. 4724, from the style of the lettering. Ca. 260–273: Equini Schneider (see note 2), p. 64.

21. For their use as spies or assassins, see e.g. SHA, *Macr.* 12; Dio 78, 17.1 (spies); SHA, *Comm.* 4.5; *Iulian.* 5.8; *Pesc. Nig.* 2.6; Herod. 3. 5.4–5 (assassins). See further J. C. Mann, "The organisation of *frumentarii*," *ZPE* 74 (1988): 149–150; N. B. Rankov, "Frumentarii, the *Castra Peregrina* and the provincial officia," *ZPE* 80 (1990): 176–182; *ibid.*, "The origins of the *frumentarii*," in *XII Congressus internationalis epigraphiae Graecae et Latinae. Provinciae imperii Romani inscriptionibus descriptae. Barcelona, 3–8 septembris 2002* (Barcelona, 2007), 1169–1172; P. Faure, "Les centurions frumentaires et le commandement des castra peregrina," *MEFRA* 115 (2003): 377–427.

22. For the career of such *centuriones frumentarii*, see M. Clauss, "Untersuchungen zu den principales des römischen Heeres von Augustus bis Diokletian: *cornicularii*, *speculatores*, *frumentarii*" (Ph.D. thesis, Bochum, 1973), pp. 109–113.

23. B. Dobson, "Legionary Centurion or Equestrian Officer?" *Ancient Society* 3 (1972): 198; *ibid.*, "The Significance of the Centurion

Second Italian Legion in Noricum and subsequently, in an unusual career turn,<sup>24</sup> returned to Rome to hold the position of tribune in the Praetorian Guard, the Urban Cohorts, and the Vigiles. Then, after there receiving his second primipilate in the *numerus primipilarius*, that select body of senior officers, or “General Staff,” created by Augustus, he became governor of Sardinia, a ducentarian post of the second echelon.<sup>25</sup> The unusual aspects of his career make it hard to calculate the dates of his various appointments according to the expectations of a regular equestrian career. However, his command of the Second Italian Legion should be no earlier than 260, when equestrian prefects instead of senators took command of legions;<sup>26</sup> and the fact that, as governor of Sardinia,<sup>27</sup> he was not only *procurator*, but also had the prestigious title of *praeses*—no longer in a purely honorific sense, but reflecting a real extension of power—suggests that he cannot have attained this peak of his career before the 260s.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, the sarcophagus might date from this time onward. I shall return to the implications of this later.

On either side of the text are the figures of two young male horsemen, recognizable from their *pileus* caps as Castor and Pollux (the Greek *Dioskouroi*), and,

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and ‘Primipilaris’ in the Roman Army and Administration,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, vol. II.1 (Berlin, 1974), pp. 392–434, reprinted in *Roman Officers and Frontiers*, ed. D. J. Breeze and B. Dobson (Stuttgart, 1993).

24. He might normally have expected to become *procurator centenarius*: Dobson (see note 20), vol. 2, p. 336.

25. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 261; H.-G. Pflaum, *Les procurateurs équestres sous le Haut-Empire romain* (Paris, 1950), p. 284.

26. M. Heil, “Der Ritterstand,” in *Die Zeit der Soldatenkaiser: Krise und Transformation des Römischen Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert n. Chr. (235–284)*, ed. K.-P. Johne, U. Hartmann, and T. Gerhardt (Berlin, 2008), vol. 1, pp. 754–755. See also note 102.

27. The former senatorial province of Sardinia had become an imperial province under Commodus or early in the reign of Septimius Severus.

28. The normal title for governors of Sardinia was *procurator* until the 270s, after which they are called simply *pr(a)eses*. The latter term is used earlier only twice. It is first used for L. Baebius Aurelius Iuncinus (governor ca. 193–198) in a laudatory sense (*praesidi rarissimo*) (as for the governors of other provinces from the Antonine period) on a dedication by his personal aide (*strator*), separately from his official title of *proc(urator) Aug(usti) praef(ectus) prov(inciae) Sard(iniae)*: *CIL* X. 7580 = Dessau (see note 18), no. 1358; B. E. Thomasson, *Laterculi praesidum* (Göteborg, 1984–1990), vol. 1, p. 9, no. 25. It is also used for T. Licinius Hierocles (governor before 227: *ibid.*, no. 27): *CIL* 8.20996 (Caesarea-Cherchel) = Dessau, no. 1356; here the recurring layout on the stone ([*pr*]aesi . . . /*praesidi* . . . , lines 2–3) and location of the inscription (Mauretania Caesariensis, where *praeses* had by then become more familiar) give sufficient reason to explain the unusual use of the title. See note 108.

framing these, two fluted pilasters with Corinthianizing capitals with smooth leaves and Attic bases. On the short sides of the sarcophagus are two winged griffins, in low relief, shown in movement, one of them flying over (or severing?) the head of a bull (figs. 3–4); the back is undecorated. The lid is richly carved: In the gabled central element of each side stands a figure in military dress with spear, shield, and helmet, identifiable as Mars; in each of the four lateral antefixes is an eagle with a serpent between its claws (fig. 5); in the large corner acroteria on the front, winged Victories are erecting trophies (fig. 6).

Such house-shaped Proconnesian sarcophagi with high lid and acroteria were widely distributed across the Empire and common in Rome.<sup>29</sup> The style and arrangement of the decoration, however, are unusual in the capital and closer to examples in northern Italy produced by the principal workshops at Ravenna and Aquileia, which are typically completed by simplified architectural motifs with a long central space for the inscription and two shorter lateral spaces for standing figures.<sup>30</sup> The eye-catching gazes or gestures of these figures directed the attention of passersby to the inscribed text in the center, which was commonly framed by a *tabula ansata*.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, sarcophagi in or near Rome seldom offer an inscription with lateral figures on the front face. One might, therefore, conclude that the sarcophagus was the product of a north Italian workshop. However, the widespread availability of such Proconnesian sarcophagi at Rome and the high costs of transportation from the north, in addition to the costs of the marble itself, the plot, the inscription, and the sculpture, suggest rather that the sarcophagus was carved in a workshop at Rome to the commission of the patron and to a design which was typical of northern Italy, but alien to the usual metropolitan repertoire.<sup>32</sup>

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29. For instance in Ravenna: F. Rebecchi, “Cronologia e fasi di fabbricazione dei sarcofagi pagani dell’officina di Ravenna,” *Studi Romagnoli* 29 (1978): 247–275.

30. H. Gabelmann, *Die Werkstattgruppen der oberitalischen Sarkophage* (Bonn, 1973), nos. 2–3, 11–13, 16, 59, 80.

31. See the sarcophagus from Piazza Matteotti, Modena (*ibid.*, p. 114, no. 57, pl. 25), which, if dated to ca. 170 (G. Koch and H. Sichtermann, *Römische Sarkophage* [Munich, 1982], p. 287), is one of the earliest in the hinterland of Ravenna; cf. Gabelmann (see note 30), p. 214, no. 57, pl. 25 and nos. 95–96; F. Rebecchi, “Sarcofagi cispadani di età imperiale romana: Ricerche sulla decorazione figurata, sulla produzione e sul loro commercio,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts: Romische Abteilung* 84 (1977): 114–115, pl. 55.

32. Equini Schneider (see note 2), p. 66. This fits the model for sarcophagus production proposed by B. Russell, “The Roman



Figure 3. "Tomba di Nerone": detail of left face, from the northwest. Photo: author.



Figure 4. "Tomba di Nerone": detail of right face, from the southeast. Photo: author.



Figure 5. “Tomba di Nerone”: detail of right face: acroteria of the lid with Mars, eagle, and serpent. Photo: author.



Figure 6. “Tomba di Nerone”: detail of acroterion with winged Victory erecting a trophy. Photo: author.

Three examples from Rome and Ostia confirm that similar forms were occasionally displayed there: in the Villa Borghese, the sarcophagus of the Christian imperial freedman Marcus Aurelius Prosenes, from the Via Labicana (fig. 7);<sup>33</sup> in the Villa Celimontana, the

Sarcophagus ‘Industry’: A Reconsideration,” in *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, ed. J. Elsner and J. Huskinson (Berlin, 2011), pp. 119–147.

33. *CIL* 6.8498 = Dessau (see note 18), vol. 1, no. 1738 = *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*, ed. E. Diehl (Berlin,

sarcophagus of a married couple;<sup>34</sup> and, in nearby Ostia, the sarcophagus of Sextus Carminius Parthenopeus,

1925–1931), no. 3332 (A.D. 217); *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* 1 (1967), no. 929, pl. 148; attributed to a Campanian workshop by G. Rodenwaldt, “Ein Typus römischer Sarkophage,” *BJ* 148 (1942): 217; H. U. Instinsky, *Marcus Aurelius Prosenes. Freigelassener und Christ am Kaiserhof* (Wiesbaden, 1964); P.

McKechnie, “Christian Grave-Inscriptions from the Familia Caesaris,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 50, no. 3 (1999): 430–431, 433–434.

34. L. Quilici, *Collatia, Forma Italiae* 1.10 (Rome, 1974), p. 771, no. 673, fig. 1760.





Figure 7. Sarcophagus of M. Aurelius Prosenes, Rome, Villa Borghese: front face. Photo: German Archaeological Institute Rome, Inst. Neg. 66.2303.

equestrian and decurion at Ostia, and his wife, set on a bulky travertine base outside the Porta Romana.<sup>35</sup> These show basic resemblances to the sarcophagus of Marianus in structure and composition: The examples in the Villa Borghese and at Ostia have analogous acroteria at the corners, and the former has similar griffins on the side faces, although shown not flying, but at rest (fig. 8). Yet none of these has the stark monumentality of the "Tomba di Nerone."

The imagery of the lid is more unusual and must certainly have been due to the patron's individual choice. The decoration here is strikingly linked to

imperial iconography. The kneeling victories with military trophies on the acroteria of the front (fig. 6) recall those of the Basilica Ulpia frieze and the standing victories with trophies on imperial cuirasses, without, however, being precise repetitions of either.<sup>36</sup> The figure of Mars in military dress on the aedicules of the lateral faces, in its attitude with spear and shield (fig. 5), is a

35. *CIL* 14.314; R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia* (Oxford, 1973), p. 211.

36. Basilica Ulpia, frieze from the lower interior order: J. E. Packer, *The Forum of Trajan in Rome: A Study of the Monuments in Brief* (Berkeley, 2001), pp. 158–159, fig. 145. A possibly Julio-Claudian cuirass from Corinth: C. C. Vermeule, "Hellenistic and Roman Cuirassed Statues," *Berytus* 13 (1959): 57, no. 197, pl. XVI, fig. 49; a Hadrianic cuirass from Salonica: *ibid.*, "Hellenistic and Roman Cuirassed Statues: A Supplement," *Berytus* 15 (1964): pl. XXI.9.

35. *CIL* 14.314; R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia* (Oxford, 1973), p. 211.





Figure 8. Sarcophagus of Prosenes: right face. Photo: German Archaeological Institute Rome, Inst. Neg. 66.2303.

cruder, but recognizable version of official images of Mars Ultor.<sup>37</sup> Such allusions to imperial imagery lend a further meaning to the representation of the eagle struggling with the serpent, which elsewhere has been interpreted as a token of the spiritual salvation of the deceased,<sup>38</sup> but here appears in unusually direct manner

37. F. Panvini-Rosati, "Il tipo di Marte Ultore sulle monete romane," *Numismatica* 12 (1946): 97–105; E. Simon, "Die Kultstatue des Mars Ultor," *Marburger Winckelmann-Programm* (1981): 3–18. For the archetype from the temple in Rome, in its Flavian version, now in the Capitoline Museums, see H. G. Martin, "Die Tempelkultbilder," in *Kaiser Augustus und die verlorene Republik* (Berlin, 1988), p. 256, fig. 151.

38. For example on a third-century sarcophagus at S. Lorenzo fuori le Mura, Rome. For the symbol in a wider sense, see R. Wittkower, "Eagle and Serpent: A Study in the Migration of Symbols," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2, no. 4 (1939): 293–325, reprinted in *ibid.*, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (London, 1977), pp. 15–44; J. M. C. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art* (London, 1973), pp. 242–243.

on the antefixes of the lateral faces of the sarcophagus, on either side of the images of Mars. The image is unmistakably a figure of military triumph,<sup>39</sup> but it is also a symbol of Marianus's personal career and life, working almost on the level of a biographical narrative.<sup>40</sup> The griffins on the short sides are broadly recognizable as the animals of imperial apotheosis, and the apotheosis of the dead, but there are peculiarities in their execution which makes the identification questionable.<sup>41</sup>

In what is still the only detailed discussion of the monument, Eugenia Equini Schneider recognizes that the symbolic language here is derived from official commemorative monuments. However, the moderate artistic quality of the reliefs led her to believe that such language had lost its original meaning by the mid third century and shifted into generic themes of political and military allegory to express a common funerary symbolism of individual felicity, spiritual salvation, and immortality.<sup>42</sup> Such an interpretation is no longer fashionable and does not, in any case, adequately explain the extraordinary aspect of this monument. It should be recalled that, while the deceased himself was only an equestrian, his daughter Maria, the heir and dedicator of the monument, had married into the senatorial order. As is so often the case among the funerary monuments of Rome, the memorial tells the story of social mobility, and the imagery contributes to that narrative.

The representation of Castor and Pollux on the sarcophagus front (fig. 2) is also more than an evocation of generic symbolism. The Dioscuri are indeed common in Western funerary iconography, perhaps because of their celestial symbolism, and, as protectors of horses

39. Cf. the soffit of the Arch of the Sergii at Pola: G. Traversari, *L'arco dei Sergii* (Padua, 1971), pp. 54–55, fig. 30.

40. For the image as a symbol of the *cursus honorum* in private funerary art, see Rebecchi (see note 31), pp. 116–117, on the Matteotti sarcophagus in Modena (ca. 160–190); also M. P. Speidel, "Eagle-bearer and Trumpeter: The Eagle-Standard and Trumpets of the Roman Legions Illustrated by Three Tombstones Recently Found at Byzantium," *BJ* 176 (1976): 123–163. For biographical narration, see N. Boymel-Kampen, "Biographical Narration and Roman Funerary Art," *AJA* 85, no. 1 (1981): 47–58.

41. Equini Schneider (see note 2), p. 56, attributes this detail to an apprentice assistant, the inexperienced hand of a principal sculptor, or a later addition, and notes that in southern Gallic production the griffin is "banalized," accentuating the grotesque, and is often associated there with the theme of apotheosis, frequently together with the eagle.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 64; cf. J. Engemann, *Untersuchungen zur Sepulkralsymbolik der späteren römischen Kaiserzeit* (Munster, 1973), pp. 78–79; R. Turcan, "Les sarcophages romains et le problème du symbolisme funéraire," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* vol. II.16.2 (Berlin, 1978), pp. 1726–1728.

and the army, are often connected with the theme of military victory, being a natural image for equestrians in particular.<sup>43</sup> However, the classical form of the figures adopted on many sarcophagi, with sharply bent knee, energetically pulling the bridle of the horse toward them (as in the famous sculptures on "Monte Cavallo" in Rome), differs from the position here, where the horsemen are shown standing at rest.<sup>44</sup> This static form is seen in several sarcophagi of the first half and middle of the third century, both on western examples as at Tipasa and in products of Docimian workshops such as the sarcophagi from Silifkeh-Seleukeia and Sidamara.<sup>45</sup> Yet, whereas in these last cases the horsemen appear in a secondary capacity as the end figures of column sarcophagi supporting the principal cast, on the monument of Vibius Marianus they are the leading figures in their own right, framing the inscribed text in a stance that mirrors that of Mars. The inscription's *tabula ansata* frame also often has military associations, as in the following cases:<sup>46</sup> the triumphal placards shown in relief on the Arch of Titus, and a wooden original from the Flavian fort at Carlisle;<sup>47</sup> legionary dedications, or the letter of Antonine Praetorian Prefects on a city-gate at Saepinum;<sup>48</sup> and, *mutatis mutandis*, the spiritual triumph of Christian "soldiers," whose prayer for safe return in the afterlife echoes the prayer for Roman soldiers setting

43. Their appearance as terminal figures of the front face is common in Italy: M. Albert, *Culte de Castor et Pollux en Italie* (Paris, 1883), pp. 156–157; F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des romains* (Paris, 1942), pp. 35–38, 82–83. Their increasing use during the imperial period has been seen as a symbol of eternity and resurrection. In Western iconography, they always both look inward and wear the *pileus*.

44. G. Bendinelli, "Sui Dioscuri del Quirinale," in *Hommages à Albert Grenier*, ed. M. Renard (Brussels, 1962), vol. 1, pp. 259–273; e.g. the Medici-Riccardi column sarcophagus in Florence.

45. Tipasa: M. Lawrence, "Columnar Sarcophagi in the Latin West," *Art Bulletin* 14, no. 2 (1932): 182, no. 47; A. M. McCann, *Roman Sarcophagi in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1978), p. 126, fig. 160. Silifkeh and Sidamara: H. Wiegartz, *Die kleinasiatische Säulensarkophage* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 156–157 ("Istanbul A and B"), and p. 80, n. 31, contrasting the concrete significance on Asiatic sarcophagi with the allegorical meaning on Roman sarcophagi; M. Waelkens, *Dokimeion* (Berlin, 1982), p. 90, no. 131, and p. 93, no. 157.

46. G. G. Pani, "Segno e immagine di scrittura: la tabula ansata e il suo significato simbolico," *Miscellanea Greca e Romana* 10 (Rome, 1986), pp. 429–441.

47. M. Pfanner, *Der Titusbogen* (Mainz, 1983), p. 53, fig. 36, pl. 66.4: decorated above with serpents or sea creatures; I. Caruana, "A Wooden Ansate Panel from Carlisle," *Britannia* 18 (1987): 274–277.

48. For example Caerleon, Roman Legionary Museum, 35.118, dedication from Isca by the Legio II Augusta to the emperor Trajan, A.D. 100. Saepinum, Porta Boiano: *CIL* 9.2438 (A.D. 169–172).

out to war, as on a sarcophagus from persecuted Lyon.<sup>49</sup> Although during the second century the form had been used on public buildings and tomb monuments, and by the third century could express a civic ideology on sarcophagi,<sup>50</sup> the combination with the imagery of the sculpture reinforces its military character here.

But what was most unusual at Rome was the physical form of Marianus's monument. The roadside position was typical of the city's cemeteries, but the display of the sarcophagus as an independent monument, on a high pedestal of travertine, on a raised site, and in the open air rather than inside a tomb, was exceptional, even daring. The sarcophagus of Parthenopeus at Ostia, tucked in at the corner of a busy necropolis, is a rare counter-example, and the form of that of Prosenes (fig. 7) may also suggest an exterior location, but the patron of Marianus's monument was not so constrained by either space or money.

To be sure, for all the hundreds of sarcophagi recovered from across the city, only in a very few cases is anything known about their original locations.<sup>51</sup> Too little is known about the burial places associated with wealthy villas in the *suburbium* to be certain that sarcophagi there were not displayed in the open.<sup>52</sup> But what we *do* know paints a very different picture. For example, a series of engravings by Pietro Santo Bartoli shows the Tomb of Caecilia Metella on the Via Appia in its early eighteenth-century state, or at least as it was imagined then to have looked. A section shows the small room within the podium where the sarcophagus was stored which was later taken to the Palazzo Farnese.<sup>53</sup> Its counterintuitive inaccessibility and almost forgettable anonymity within that massive stone monument are striking. But then the tomb of Metella was almost

49. J. Carcopino, *Le mystère d'un symbole Chrétien: l'ascia* (Paris, 1955), pp. 81–82, pl. 6.1; E. V. Thomas, *Monumentality and the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2007), p. 193, fig. 163.

50. Public buildings and tombs: Thomas (see note 49), pp. 74, 82, 192–193. Sarcophagi: Gabelmann (see note 30), nos. 57, 95–96; R. R. Smith, "Sarcophagi and Roman Citizenship," in *Aphrodisias Papers 4: New Research on the City and Its Monuments*, ed. C. Ratté and R. R. Smith (JRA Supplement 70; Providence, 2008), p. 389.

51. For evidence of sarcophagi in context, see J. M. C. Toynbee and J. B. Ward-Perkins, *The Shrine of St Peter and the Vatican Excavations* (London, 1956); R. Cohon, "A Muse Sarcophagus in Context," *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1992): 109–119; and especially J. Dresken-Weiland, *Sarkophagbestattungen des 4.–6. Jahrhunderts im Westen des römischen Reiches* (Rome, 2003).

52. I owe this point to Bert Smith. A detailed study of the contexts of suburban sarcophagi by Barbara Borg is in progress and may reveal more on this question.

53. Bartoli (see note 15), pl. 37; cf. L. Canina, *La prima parte della Via Appia* (Rome, 1853), vol. 1, p. 87, n. 25.

certainly not originally designed to hold sarcophagus burials, and a later member of the family deposited the sarcophagus found there.

After the practice of inhumation became more widespread at Rome, the sarcophagus could be expected to play a large part in those commemorations of the life of the deceased that are attested on birthdays, anniversaries, and other events of remembrance.<sup>54</sup> The epigraphic evidence for regular festivals throughout the year, celebrated by members of a household, a collegial organization, or, in some cases, a whole community, might seem to imply that the sarcophagi in which the remains of the deceased were interred were put on public or private display as objects of reverence and aesthetic viewing. But the archaeological evidence for this is limited. Much that is inferred from the objects themselves is proven to be unreliable. For example, it is assumed in a respected handbook that Asiatic sarcophagi worked on all four sides were placed “well out from the walls on the floor of the chamber where they could be walked round and the backs as well as their fronts and sides appreciated.”<sup>55</sup> Yet, in one case where there is evidence for the original position of such sarcophagi, this claim can be refuted. The famous Melfi sarcophagus seems to have been set against the rear wall of a tomb, so that the figures on the back face were entirely concealed.<sup>56</sup>

In the Antonine period, funerary monuments in the tomb streets of Rome seem to have been designed to combine the housing of the deceased’s remains with the social activities of the living. The “Barberini Tomb” on the Via Latina is a well-preserved but problematic example. It originally contained three separate stories: the two visible today, of equal height, and a basement story below, presumably the burial vault.<sup>57</sup> An engraving of 1697 by Bartoli shows an entrance in the northern extremity of the funerary precinct leading to a stairway, from which a corridor led to the basement of the tomb. However, no trace was found in the nineteenth century or thereafter of this access to the subterranean story

or the surrounding precinct, and, as other details of Bartoli’s drawings are at odds with the visible remains, their reliability is questionable.<sup>58</sup> The intermediate, ground-floor room, lined with niches apparently for more funerary urns, was entered from the rear; the upper room, probably decorated with paintings along the walls, was roofed by a stuccoed cross vault and lit by a large thermal window which dominated the front façade. Access to this imposing space was by a staircase in the ground-floor room, immediately to the right of the entrance, which was approached from the rear. However, information about the subterranean story, from which the beautiful Barberini sarcophagus (now in the Vatican) must have been removed, is remarkably deficient. It is no longer accessible, and the only evidence for its existence is a row of vents at the foot of the building’s wall. If the sarcophagus, so costly because of the marble and its figured sculptures, was stored within this subterranean space, under what circumstances was it put on public show or even made visible to a private audience? The eight sarcophagi of the nearby “Tomb of the Pancratii” were located in the inner room of an underground crypt; one is so large that the tomb-building was most likely constructed around it.<sup>59</sup>

Things were not altogether different in the East, although there was a greater tendency to outward display. Most evidence from Roman Asia Minor shows a situation similar to that of Rome, but in earlier Greek traditions of display, there was a greater element of public visibility. The grandest classical examples, such as the “Alexander” and “Mourning Women” sarcophagi, have been reconstructed as standing within the higher colonnades of an imposing aedicular monument, visible from below; in the latter case, the simulated Ionic colonnades of the sarcophagus could thus have acted in dialogue with the larger monumental column setting.<sup>60</sup> Extensive areas at Termessus in Lycia and Hierapolis in Phrygia show the continuation of this tradition of exterior display of sarcophagi into the Roman period. But even

54. M. Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead* (Oxford, 2006), p. 42.

55. J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Ithaca, 1971), p. 270.

56. O. Ghiandoni, “Il sarcofago asiatico di Melfi: Ricerche mitologiche, iconografiche e stilistiche,” *Bollettino d’Arte* 89–90 (1995): 6, with fig. 1, citing R. Smith, “Ragionamento sopra un antico sarcofago scoperto in via Macera, nel distretto di Melfi, Provincia di Basilicata, Regno di Napoli,” D.A.I. Archive, Rome, partially published in G. von Hentzen, *Bollettino dell’Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* (1856): 158–164.

57. M. L. Riccardi, “Il sepolcro ‘Barberini’ sulla Via Latina,” *Palladio* 16 (1966): 151–182.

58. Cf. the plans by Luigi Canina (1848) and, following excavations, Lorenzo Fortunati (1857–1858).

59. M. de Angelis, “La via Latina: documenti inediti per servire alla storia degli scavi,” in *Dagli Scavi al Museo: come da ritrovamenti archeologici si costruisce il museo* (Venice, 1984) p. 96, fig. 8 (engraving of the interior); Russell (see note 32), p. 140. For the arrangement of sarcophagi in the Licinian Tomb on the Via Salaria, see K. M. Bentz, “Rediscovering the Licinian Tomb,” *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 55–56 (1997–1998): 63–68.

60. J. Borchhardt, “Sarkophage der Klassik und ihre Aufstellung in Lykien und Karien,” in *Bildergeschichte: Festschrift Klaus Stähler*, ed. J. Gebauer (Möhnesee, 2004), pp. 45–50, with p. 58, fig. 10.

in this region the sarcophagus could be an element of interior space.<sup>61</sup> Most famously, at Ephesus, the garland sarcophagus of Celsus Polemaeanus, proconsul of Asia, was kept within a vault under the library dedicated in his name; however, by contrast with the building's ostentatious façade, the location of the sarcophagus was most unceremonious.<sup>62</sup> Given the constricted access to the vault, through a doorway half a meter wide into a space barely higher than the sarcophagus itself, the building was most probably constructed around the sarcophagus, and viewing of the vessel seemed to matter rather less than the symbolic significance of its location directly below the central apse of the library. Elsewhere in Ephesus sarcophagi and *ostothekai* have been seen as an element of conspicuous consumption, particularly among lower ranks of society.<sup>63</sup> But there is no evidence of their exterior location. At a higher social level, the sarcophagi of Quintus Aemilius Aristides and Tatiana were arranged in a structured way within the apsidal interior of a tomb.<sup>64</sup>

Contrasting approaches to the aesthetics of display are shown by two tombs recently uncovered at the necropolis of Aizanoi in Phrygia.<sup>65</sup> The first contained a column sarcophagus of the "Torre Nova" type, with continuous frieze along the long sides incorporated in a columnar structure. Dated to around 160, it was made for Claudius Severinus, probably the *archineōkoros* involved in the construction of an aqueduct at Aizanoi,<sup>66</sup> and his wife Berenice.<sup>67</sup> But, despite the "micro-architectural" adornments of the sarcophagus,

there is little "conversation" between its simulated architecture and that of the tomb in which it was stored. According to the excavated context, the sarcophagus was placed on axis with the entrance, and fragments of marble latticework interpreted as belonging to a doorway have suggested that it could be viewed from outside through the marble latticework of the door.<sup>68</sup> One might assume that the door would be opened only for a few commemorative occasions, but the latticework would at least have allowed the sculptures to be glimpsed from outside; the deep relief of the sculptures and the prominent architectural frame of spiral fluted columns and palmette acroteria made it possible, even in a narrow and poorly lit interior, to acquire from afar at least some sense of the ornament.<sup>69</sup> However, if visibility was the aim, the work was upstaged by the second excavated tomb, seventy meters away along the same road, possibly a processional route to the city.<sup>70</sup> The base of a sarcophagus of the same type was found in the remains of a small tetrapylon monument, and, given the limited space inside, it has been suggested that the sarcophagus was mounted on the flat projecting roof of the tetrapylon. Like a miniature temple with its pitched roof and columnar frame, the chest acted as the culmination of the architectural monument; there was even space for a second one alongside.<sup>71</sup>

There was sometimes then an awareness of the potential of sarcophagi as public monuments at Rome and in Asia Minor. But in northern Italy the practice of displaying sarcophagi in the open air was entirely normal.<sup>72</sup> Here the tendency to place funerary inscriptions which elsewhere would usually have appeared on the exterior of a tomb building on the front face of a sarcophagus was ubiquitous by the third century, when external sarcophagi had taken the place of earlier tomb buildings.<sup>73</sup> Together with the stylistic features of Marianus's sarcophagus which find echoes in this region, the distinctive character of these sarcophagi

61. For surviving temple-tombs in southwest Asia Minor with remains of sarcophagi, see C. H. Hallett and J. J. Coulton, "The East Tomb and Other Tomb Buildings at Balbura," *Anatolian Studies* 43 (1993): 58–59.

62. M. Theuer, "Der Sarkophag des Celsus," in *Forschungen in Ephesos*, vol. 5.1, *Die Bibliothek* (Vienna, 1953), pp. 43–46, figs. 88–92.

63. C. M. Thomas and C. İçten, "The Ostothekai of Ephesus and the Rise of Sarcophagus Inhumation: Death, Conspicuous Consumption, and Roman Freedmen," in *Akten des Symposiums des Sarkophag-Corpus 2001*, ed. G. Koch (Mainz, 2007), 335–344.

64. E. Rudolf, *Der Sarkophag des Quintus Aemilius Aristides* (Vienna, 1992), pl. I, fig. 1.

65. M. Türktüzün, "Zwei Säulensarkophage aus der Südwestkropole in Aizanoi," *AA* (1993): 517–526, especially 519–525.

66. *MAMA 9, Monuments from the Aezanitis Recorded by C.W.M. Cox, A. Cameron, and J. Cullen*, ed. B. Levick (London, 1988), no. 10; S. Mitchell, *Anatolia* (Oxford, 1993), vol. 1, p. 214, n. 112.

67. The classicistic style of the sculpture would also fit a slightly earlier date. See E. V. Thomas, "'Houses of the Dead'? Columnar Sarcophagi as 'Micro-architecture'," in Elsner and Huskinson (see note 32), pp. 399–400.

68. U. Wulf, "Zwei Grabbauten in der Südwestkropole von Aizanoi," *AA* (1993): 527–541, especially pp. 526–531, fig. 5.

69. B. C. Ewald and P. Zanker, *Mit Mythen Leben: die Bilderwelt der römischen Sarkophage* (Munich, 2004), p. 32.

70. Türktüzün (see note 65), pp. 525–526, figs. 9–11. The name of the deceased is unknown.

71. Wulf (see note 68), pp. 532–541 and figs. 11 and 16.

72. Gabelmann (see note 30), pp. 5–6; F. Ciliberto, "I sarcofagi dell'Italia settentrionale," in *La scultura romana dell'Italia settentrionale. Quarant'anni dopo la mostra di Bologna. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Pavia, 22–23 settembre 2005*, ed. F. Slavazzi and S. Maggi (Borgo S. Lorenzo, 2008), pp. 153–160.

73. H. Gabelmann, "Zur Tektonik oberitalischer Sarkophage, Altäre und Stelen," *BJ* 177 (1977): 200.



Figure 9. Sarcophagus of Aelius Sabinus, third century A.D. Limestone, length 2.48 m, depth 1.03 m, height of chest 1.16 m, height of lid 0.48 m. Tortona, Museo Civico Archeologico. Front face. Photo: L'Ufficio Beni Culturali della Diocesi di Tortona, Biblioteca Civica di Tortona.

and the lack of any strong evidence for the importation to Rome of such sarcophagi from Upper Italy (or from northern or western regions of the Empire in general) suggest that contemporaries seeing the sarcophagus monument of Vibius Marianus in the northern suburbs of Rome would at once have recognized its difference from metropolitan Roman sarcophagi, both in form and in location. Anyone who had travelled in the north could easily have identified its regional character.<sup>74</sup> If they did not, literate viewers could have established his regional identity from the words inscribed in the panel, which proudly proclaimed his origin:<sup>75</sup> from Dertona, modern Tortona, about forty-five miles southwest of Milan.

A sarcophagus from this very place (fig. 9) provides an illuminating parallel to the sarcophagus of Marianus.<sup>76</sup> The front and back sides are divided into three sections

by arcades springing from spirally fluted columns: On the front, figures of Castor and Pollux frame not an inscription, as on the monument of Vibius Marianus, but a scene of the myth of Phaethon, the young hero falling from his chariot into the river Eridanus (Po), watched by a shepherd (Cycnus?) with a ram;<sup>77</sup> an inscription on the narrow band above this central scene tells us that this was the monument of Antonia Tisipho for her son Publius Aelius Sabinus, who lived “for twenty-four years and forty-five days.” Above the heads of the Dioscuri two Greek phrases are lightly incised: on the left, Θάρσει εύγενεϊ (“to noble courage?”), or, more likely, reading Θάρσει, Εύγένει (for the vocative Εύγένειε or Εύγένειε), “Be of good cheer, Eugenius,” addressing Sabinus by his *signum*; and, on the right, the consolatory commonplace, οὐδεις ἀθάνατος (“no one [is] immortal”).<sup>78</sup> On the rear, the central field is left empty and the side fields are filled by two shepherds: One playing a syrinx with a lamb on his shoulders caused the monument to be interpreted as a Christian allegory.<sup>79</sup> The

74. G. Koch, “Östliche Sarkophage in Rom,” *BJ* 182 (1982): 167.

75. For parallels, see E. Buchi, “*Veturii e Tommonii, or(i)undi e ingenui* in un’epigrafe inedita di Moniego di Noale (Venezia),” *Athenaeum* 84 (1996): 131–132 and n. 29.

76. Tortona, Museo Civico Archeologico. C. Robert, *ASR*, vol. 3.3, *Einzelmythen: Niobiden bis Triptolemos* (Berlin, 1919), pp. 432–435, no. 350; Gabelmann (see note 30), no. 56; G. Mennella and E. Zanda, “Il sarcofago di Aelius Sabinus,” in *Tesori della Postumia: Archeologia e storia intorno a una grande strada romana alle radici dell’Europa*, ed. G. Sena Chiesa and M. P. Lavizzari Pedrazzini (Milan, 1998), pp. 645–646.

77. For the story, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.750–2.400. A similar terminal figure of the Dioscuri appears on a sarcophagus fragment in Treviso, probably from the same workshop at Aquileia: Gabelmann (see note 30), pp. 36 and 88.

78. *CIL* 5.7380; Dessau (see note 18), vol. 2, no. 8169.

79. G. A. Bottazzi, *Degli emblemi o simboli dell’antichissimo sarcofago esistente nella chiesa cattedrale di Tortona* (Tortona, 1824).

two short sides show winged cupids watching a cock fight, with Medusa heads in the pediments above. The central mythological scene of the front fittingly commemorates the mother's untimely loss of her son. Together, image and text suggest that the sarcophagus commemorated a young cavalryman who plunged to his death in battle or, given the absence of opponents on the relief, simply in a riding accident, possibly drowning in the river Po, and was presumably buried nearby at his hometown of Dertona. Although Carl Robert dated the sarcophagus to the beginning of the third century, it is now thought that the portrait heads in the acroteria of the lid resemble Gallienic rather than Severan portraiture, which would place it very close in time to the sarcophagus of Marianus.<sup>80</sup> At this moment of crisis when more positive mythological models seem to have lost their attraction, the story of Phaethon was employed with almost cosmic resonance.<sup>81</sup>

The heavily equestrian imagery had particular significance at this time. Gallienus's reforms of the Roman cavalry had produced a "battle-ready" force capable of defending the Empire against internal and external threats.<sup>82</sup> A substantial cavalry army was based in



Figure 10. Coin of Gallienus (antoninianus), Roman Imperial, ca. 260–268, Breamore A hoard. Obverse: Bust of Gallienus, radiate, and cuirassed right. Reverse: winged horse, right. Copper alloy, 2.69 grams. London, British Museum, Department of Coins and Medals. Photo: Courtesy of the British Museum.

Milan under the Dacian Aureolus to face a series of northern threats.<sup>83</sup> The most serious came from Postumus the commander of the Roman army on the Rhine who, in 260, had proclaimed himself Augustus and quickly won the allegiance of the western provinces.<sup>84</sup> As the situation lurched toward a crisis, the Rome mint and the newly instituted imperial mint at Milan celebrated the importance of the cavalry here with a series of bronze coins, one of the last issues in the name of Gallienus, made in the final year of his life, showing the winged horse Pegasus on the reverse (fig. 10).<sup>85</sup> On some coins the legend ALACRITATE, "for speed," referred both to the mythical creature's most renowned quality and to the particular virtue of the cavalry.<sup>86</sup> Gold coins minted at

Refuted by F. Piper, *Mythologie und Symbolik der christlichen Kunst* (Weimar, 1847–1852), vol. 1.i, p. 202.

80. Gabelmann (see note 30), p. 89, pl. 24. The heads apparently represent the deceased young cavalryman's mother and father.

81. P. Zanker, "Iconografia e mentalità: Sul cambiamento dei temi mitologici sui sarcofagi romani del II e III sec. d. C.," in *Iconografia 2005: Immagini e immaginari dall'antichità classica al mondo moderno* (Venezia, Istituto veneto di scienze lettere e arti, 26–28 gennaio 2005), ed. I. Colpo, I. Favaretto, and F. Ghedini (Rome, 2006), pp. 181–194. On p. 184 Zanker counts representations of Phaethon as an exception to the general decline in mythological subjects without considering the reason for the myth's later popularity; ten of the sixteen instances belong to the post-Severan period (table, p. 190).

82. E. Ritterling, "Zum römischen Heerwesen des ausgehenden dritten Jahrhunderts," in *Festschrift zu Otto Hirschfelds sechzigstem Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1903), pp. 345–349; the reform is recorded only by the Byzantine chronographers Georgius Cedrenus (*Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae*, ed. I. Bekker [Bonn, 1838–39], vol. 1, p. 454.6–7: πρώτος Ἰππικὰ τάγματα κατέστησε); and Leo Grammaticus (ibid. [1842], 78.8–9). But it is generally accepted, pace M. Springer, "Die angebliche Heeresreform des Kaisers Gallienus," in *Krise–Krisenbewusstsein–Krisenbewältigung: Ideologie und geistige Kultur im Imperium Romanum während des 3. Jahrhunderts* (Halle, 1988), pp. 97–100. See B. A. Campbell, "The Army," in *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 12, *The Crisis of Empire, a.d. 193–337*, ed. A. K. Bowman, P. Garnsey, and A. Cameron (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 115–116; Heil (see note 26), p. 754; A. Goltz and U. Hartmann, "Valerius und Gallienus," in John, Hartmann, and Gerhardt (see note 26), vol. 1, p. 278. The description as "battle cavalry" (*Schlachtenkavallerie*) is that of R. Grosse, *Römische Militärgeschichte bis zum Beginn der byzantinischen Themenverfassung* (Berlin, 1920), p. 15.

83. Zonaras 12.24, ed. L. Dindorf, III (Leipzig, 1870), 143.14–15 (τῶν βασιλικῶν ἵππων φροντιστῆς προκεχείριστο); M. Christol, "Auréolus et l'Histoire Auguste," in *Historiae Augustae Colloquium Argentoratense: Atti dei Convegni sulla Historia Augusta VI, Strasbourg, 1996*, ed. G. Bonamente, F. Heim, and J.-P. Callu (Bari, 1998), pp. 115–135.

84. Zosimus 1.40.1; Zonaras 12.25. For the narrative, see J. F. Drinkwater, *The Gallic Empire: Separatism and Continuity in the North-Western Provinces of the Roman Empire, A.D. 260–274* (Stuttgart, 1989), and in Bowman, Garnsey, and Cameron (see note 82), pp. 28–66.

85. H. Mattingly and E. A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. V.i (London, 1927), p. 155, nos. 282–284 (legend SOLI CONS AVG.); p. 162, no. 357 (with Pegasus flying left): Antoniniani made of an alloy with minimal silver content. A. Alföldi, "Der Usurpator Aureolus und die Kavalleriereform des Gallienus," *Zeitschrift für Numismatik* 37 (1927): 197–212, reprinted in *ibid.*, *Studien zur Geschichte der Weltkrise des 3. Jahrhunderts nach Christus* (Darmstadt, 1967), pp. 1–15.

86. Mattingly and Sydenham (see note 85), p. 167, no. 414 (bronze As) and p. 179, no. 545 (brass Dupondius, Pegasus flying left). Goltz

Milan around the same time show, on the reverse, the words FIDEI EQUITUM (“to the loyalty of the cavalry”) inside a laurel wreath.<sup>87</sup> The irony of this legend was to be revealed late in 267 or early in 268, when Aureolus, now dissatisfied with Gallienus, revolted against him. He did so first in the name of Postumus, issuing a series of bronzes in 267 in the latter’s name with the similar legend FIDES (A)EQUIT(um) (“loyalty of the cavalry”) and also variant, analogous forms CONCORD(ia) (A)EQUIT(um) (“the unity of the cavalry”), VIRTUS (A)EQUIT(um) (“the virtue of the cavalry”), and PAX EQUITUM (“the peace of the cavalry”).<sup>88</sup> When Postumus refused to support him, he revolted in his own name, issuing a coin type, long considered a forgery but now believed to be genuine, declaring himself “Augustus.”<sup>89</sup> Aureolus was left besieged in Milan by Gallienus. However, in late summer or early autumn 268 Gallienus’s assassination brought the elevation of the Illyrian cavalry-general Claudius, who by then was the emperor’s second in command.<sup>90</sup> When Aureolus found himself alienated from both Claudius and Postumus, Claudius II—newly proclaimed emperor by the Senate—immediately saw off Aureolus, went to Lake Garda to fight the Germani, and then returned to Rome in triumph in 268/9, on horseback, as celebrated in his *adventus* coinage, with a further issue repeating the Pegasus imagery.<sup>91</sup>

and Hartmann (see note 82), p. 282. As the sun god (Sol) is named on these issues, it has been suggested that the winged horse is not Pegasus, but one of the horses that drew the sun god’s chariot across the sky: I. Carradice, “Appendix 5. The animals on the ‘Cons Aug’ coins of Gallienus,” in E. Besly and R. Bland, *The Cunetio Treasure: Roman Coinage of the Third Century A.D.* (London, 1983), p. 188; S. Berrens, *Sonnenkult und Kaisertum von den Severern bis zu Constantin I (193–337 n. Chr.)* (Stuttgart, 2004), pp. 77–78. But it should be remembered that Pegasus himself came from the stable of the Sun (see *Scholia in Dionysium Periegetem*, in K. Müller, *Geographi Graeci minores*, 2 [Paris, 1861; repr. Hildesheim, 1965], 427–457) and so was naturally connected with Sol.

87. Mattingly and Sydenham (see note 85), p. 133, nos. 33–35, and p. 169, nos. 445–446. Alföldi (see note 85), p. 8.

88. H.-J. Schulzki, *Die Antoninianprägung der gallischen Kaiser von Postumus bis Tetricus (AGK): Typenkatalog der regulären und nachgeprägten Münzen* (Bonn, 1996), pp. 47–51, 57–58, 67–68.

89. M. R. Weder, “Der Bachofensche Münzschatz (Augst 1884). Mit einem Exkurs über die unter Aureolus in Mailand geprägten Postumusmünzen,” *Jahresberichte aus Augst und Kaiseraugst* 11 (1990): 53–72.

90. Drinkwater (see note 84), p. 33.

91. *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Divus Claudius 4–9; Zosimus 1.40.2; Zonaras 12.26. *Adventus* coinage: Mattingly and Sydenham (see note 85), p. 212, no. 13; Normanby 592, in *Coin Hoards from Roman Britain. Vol. 8. The Normanby Hoard and Other Roman Coin Hoards*, ed. R. Bland and A. Burnett (London, 1988): antoninianus, Rome mint; obv.: IMP C CLAUDIVS AVG, Radiate and cuirassed bust

Alongside these types, the mint of Milan also issued a series of coins on the model of others struck by Postumus’s mint at Trier, which show an image of a single divine horseman, Castor, in the same stationary pose as on the sarcophagi of Sabinus at Tortona and Marianus at Rome: nude but for a chlamys around his shoulders and trailing behind his back and a *pileus* on his head, holding a spear in one hand and the bridle of his horse in the other.<sup>92</sup> This type recalled a version struck under Septimius Severus to mark the appointment of his younger son Geta in A.D. 200 as the *princeps iuventutis* (“leader of the [Roman] youth”), which both indicated his status as leader of the equestrian class and symbolized his claim to be Caesar in the Empire.<sup>93</sup> Postumus may thus have claimed a right to succeed Gallienus.

The question arises where to place the two Dertonians, Publius Aelius Sabinus and Publius Vibius Marianus, in the narrative of these events. From the imagery of the Tortona sarcophagus it can be imagined that the young cavalryman Sabinus met his death in northern Italy in the later 260s, perhaps resisting one of the many Germanic raids at that time, in the conflict between Gallienus and Postumus, or even in a simple riding accident. It is harder to evaluate the significance of the monument of Marianus. But, as governor of Sardinia, he was a man of far higher political rank and influence than Sabinus, and his daughter had married into the senatorial order. Moreover, the monument’s prominent position on the road into Rome from the north invites speculation about its political message. The precise reality of the politics behind this extraordinary structure remains a riddle. But it is most unlikely that this sarcophagus, in its key public location and with its outspoken combination of iconography, was constructed in innocence and ignorance about contemporary political events. Particularly striking is the emphasis in the inscription on the north Italian origin of the deceased, set out alone in the sixth line after the *cursus honorum*. The same regional emphasis was achieved by

right. Rev.: ADVENTVS AVG, Emperor on horseback left, holding scepter and raising hand in salute. Pegasus: Mattingly and Sydenham, p. 220, no. 118.

92. D. Gricourt, “Les Dioscures sur les monnaies romaines impériales,” *Dialogues d’histoire ancienne* 20, no. 2 (1994): 214–215. Some earlier imperial coins showed both horsemen: *ibid.*, 192 (table).

93. Geta was elevated in 200 at age eleven—much younger than the usual seventeen for young equestrians. His elevation was brought forward to coincide with the seven hundredth anniversary of the original vow of the Temple of Castor in Rome in 499 B.C. (the series ran from 199 to 204). See also B. Poulsen, “The Dioscuri and Ruler Ideology,” *Symbolae Osloenses* 66 (1991): 135.





Figure 11. Bartholomeus Breenbergh, *The So-Called Tomb of Nero*, ca. 1614–1659. Black chalk, with grey-brown wash, 13.1 cm x 20.6 cm. London, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, reg. no. 1871, 1209.6286.

the style and position of the sarcophagus, characteristic of northern Italy. The prominent figures of the Castores promoted an equestrian ideology, which was reinforced by the openly imperial imagery of Mars, with victories and trophies on the lid and the military associations of the *tabula ansata* frame. In this context, it would be no surprise if contemporaries, like later viewers (fig. 11), interpreted the large griffins on the sides—which in their peculiar execution and unusually outstretched flying posture with raised front legs resemble the reverse images on the coinage of Gallienus and Claudius—as representations of the equestrian symbol Pegasus.<sup>94</sup>

We cannot know exactly how or when Marianus died. Equini Schneider's dating of the sarcophagus to the period between the reign of Gallienus and the early years of Aurelian, an era of rapid political change, leaves multiple possibilities.<sup>95</sup> Because of his unusual

94. See note 41. The figure on the left side is also drawn as a winged horse in an anonymous, early-seventeenth-century engraving: Rome, Biblioteca dell'Istituto di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte, Roma XI.28.3; Equini Schneider (see note 2), pp. 29–30 and 56. Even today it is sometimes interpreted as Pegasus, while the figure on the right side with a bull's head is seen as a griffin: Montesanti (see note 1).

95. Equini Schneider (see note 2), p. 64. Its form fits the chronological context of the second half of the third century, perhaps between Gallienus and Aurelian.

career path, his age at the end of Gallienus's reign cannot easily be calculated. If he was still alive in 268, this equestrian from Dertona can hardly have been blind to the goings-on in Milan and their imminent impact on Rome. Alongside the distinctively north Italian style of the sarcophagus's design and decoration, the emphatic link to an area so critical in contemporary politics and warfare can hardly have been accidental. For whom was this potentially regionalist statement intended as a reminder?

A clue is offered by the monument's topographical context. Standing beside one major road, and close to another, it fits the pattern of tombs of wealthy landowners in the Roman *suburbium*, built within or at the limits of their estates (*praedia*).<sup>96</sup> In 1948 the remains of a suburban villa of the third century were tantalizingly uncovered between this monument and La Storta.<sup>97</sup> Its most remarkable feature was a gallery of portraits of emperors including Commodus, Septimius Severus, Caracalla, and, a great rarity in imperial portraiture,

96. G. A. Mansuelli, "Programmi funerari e monumentalizzazione suburbana: esempi di urbanistica romana," *Studi Romagnoli* 29 (1978): 347–354. The monument is recognized as having stood on Marianus's estate by Alföldy (see note 18), p. 4724.

97. *Il Messaggero*, October 21, 1948, quoted in Tomassetti (see note 5), vol. 3, p. 40.

Gallienus.<sup>98</sup> It was suggested in the brief newspaper report, without further reasons, that the villa might have belonged to a freedman, but by the same token the villa might equally have belonged to an equestrian family rising up the social ladder. Although the villa cannot definitely be linked with Marianus, the inclusion of Gallienus in the display of imperial busts close to a monument of that period seems more than coincidence. His unusual promotions arouse suspicions that he was the beneficiary of direct imperial favour. Marianus was no typical career soldier. His first, metropolitan posting as *frumentarius* already suggests relatively high status and contacts. He was then “fast-tracked” to *primuspilus*—the senior centurion—of the Third Gallic Legion, despite never having been a legionary centurion. This appointment stands every chance of having been “centrally inspired.” It has been suggested that it was made after the defeat of Elagabalus in 222 in order to help ensure this unit’s allegiance to Alexander Severus, as it had previously been loyal to his predecessor.<sup>99</sup> His further posts at Rome might then be explained in terms of the military garrisoning of the city at a time of civil war in 238 and the 240s. But the Third Gallic Legion disappears from our record until the 250s when it was deployed in Syria,<sup>100</sup> and this period better suits the chronology of Marianus’s subsequent appointments. Did Marianus go to Syria? If so, it cannot have been for long, because his next appointment was as Prefect of the Second Italian Legion in Noricum. This was the legion which Gallienus, at the start of his sole rule in A.D. 260, granted the titles *VII pia*, *VII fidelis*.<sup>101</sup> Marianus’s appointment as commander of the legion is unlikely to have occurred before this time, when Gallienus replaced senators with equestrians as legionary commanders, and he may very well have been one of the first equestrians to hold such an office.<sup>102</sup> But his return to Rome soon afterwards to hold a prominent position in all three of

the main military bodies at Rome—the Praetorian Guard, the Urban Cohorts, and the Vigiles—securing his second appointment as *primuspilus*, indicates his importance to the regime. The villa’s gallery of imperial portraits might then be taken as a statement of political allegiance. If he died in 268, his monument might also be seen as serving the ideology of Gallienus, triumphant after a great victory over the Goths, with the rest of his cavalry and cavalry generals about him, closing in on Aureolus in Milan.

Yet Marianus had mixed loyalties. By the mid-260s Gallienus’s continued creation and promotion of equestrians like Marianus had alienated him from the Senate; but Marianus, who was not himself a cavalryman, married his daughter to a senator. Moreover, the nature and location of the sarcophagus must have been as much the work of Marianus’s daughter Maria as his own design. If he survived Gallienus, as the chronology of his appointments seems to indicate, the monument’s message must have been focused elsewhere. Events were probably unfolding too quickly in 267–268 for Maria to commission and erect the sarcophagus as a political gesture in favour of Aureolus. Perhaps then the sarcophagus favored Gallienus’s successor, Claudius II.<sup>103</sup> The image of dynastic continuity celebrated in the sculpture gallery of portraits uniting Gallienus with Commodus and the Severans was also that pursued by Claudius, who, unlike Gallienus, assumed the names Marcus Aurelius at the head of his titlature, and might have helped to legitimize Claudius’s rule.<sup>104</sup>

Marianus’s monument, situated on the northern fringes of Rome, could have projected a similar political message. It was constructed in a visibly north Italian style, highlighted by the emphasis in the inscription on Marianus’s birthplace. It was adorned with an iconography of imperial triumph, victories with trophies, Mars Ultor, and the eagle with serpent (fig. 5), as well as prominent equestrian imagery in the figures of the Dioscuri and the Pegasus-like griffins. These features did not suit Marianus, who was no imperial claimant and whose service had been spent entirely in the infantry, so well as the horseman Claudius II. Situated on the route from Etruria and the northwest, the monument seemed strategically placed to welcome the new emperor when he entered Rome in 268 or 269. Even the mysterious representation of the griffin/Pegasus

98. The site of the monument was also allegedly the provenance of the full-length statue of Cleopatra VII now in the Museo Pio-Clementino in the Vatican. I have not been able to trace the whereabouts of the Gallienus portrait.

99. Equini Schneider (see note 2), p. 47; B. A. Campbell, “The Severan Dynasty,” in Bowman, Garnsey, and Cameron (see note 82), p. 25. An even earlier scenario was imagined by Dobson (see note 20), p. 336.

100. E. Baltrusch, “Die Juden Palästinas,” in John, Hartmann, and Gerhardt (see note 26), vol. 2, p. 964.

101. Silver antoninianus struck at Milan: *RICV*.329.

102. Y. Le Bohec, “Gallien et l’encadrement sénatorial de l’armée romaine,” *Revue des Études Militaires* 1 (2004): 123–132. For an instance from ca. 260–262, see *L’Année Épigraphique* 1993 (1996), no. 1231b.

103. I owe this suggestion to John Drinkwater.

104. U. Hartmann, “Claudius Gothicus und Aurelianus,” in John, Hartmann, and Gerhardt (see note 26), vol. 1, p. 299.

with bull's head (fig. 4) had allegorical meaning. The winged creature's defeat of the bull may allude to the recent demise of the Urban Prefect and former general L. Petronius Taurus Volusianus—a great bull of a man, as his *agnomen* suggested—who, like Marianus, had benefited from the patronage of Gallienus in 260, was made a senator and then co-consul with the emperor in 261;<sup>105</sup> some have suspected that such a trusted member of Gallienus's inner circle would not have escaped the purge that followed the death of Gallienus.<sup>106</sup> As Prefect of Rome in 267–268 he would have been known to Marianus, who in these circumstances might also have seemed implicated in Gallienus's regime. But Marianus was less powerful and not so obvious a target. On her father's monument, Maria nailed her colors to the mast, emphasizing his north Italian heritage and the equestrian ideology of Gallienus which Claudius himself best represented, but distancing her family from Gallienus himself and his closest associates whose end had been reportedly initiated by Claudius.<sup>107</sup>

To resolve these speculations, the precise date of Marianus's final appointment, as governor of Sardinia, is crucial. Modern historians place it only between the reigns of Severus Alexander and Aurelian.<sup>108</sup> But, given the probable duration of Marianus's successive posts at Rome in the 260s, and particularly the recent argument that during the "crisis" years between 260 and 268 the province joined the empire of Postumus,<sup>109</sup> the unavoidable conclusion is that he owed this appointment not to Gallienus, or even to Claudius, but to Aurelian. His remarkable title of *procurator et praeses* may have been designed to highlight the fact that, as a result of the administrative reorganization of the provinces under Aurelian, he was the first equestrian procurator

105. A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, and J. Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 980–981, s.v. "Volusianus 6"; R. Sablayrolles, *Libertinus Miles. Les cohortes de Vigiles*, Collection de l'École Française de Rome 224 (Rome, 1996), pp. 514–516. I owe this suggestion to Roger Tomlin.

106. J. J. Bray, *Gallienus: A Study in Reformist and Sexual Politics* (Adelaide, 1997), pp. 307–308.

107. Zosimus 1.40.2–3, based on Dexippus; Claudius is exculpated by Scriptores Historiae Augustae, *Gallienus* 14.1–9. See Goltz and Hartmann (see note 82), pp. 289–290.

108. Thomasson (see note 28), vol. 1, p. 12, no. 49 ("Vix ante Severum Alexandrum, haud post Aurelianum"); *ibid.*, *Laterculi praesidium*, vol. 1, ex parte retractatum (Göteborg, 2009), p. 6; T. Gerhardt and U. Hartmann, "Fasti," in Johnes, Hartmann, and Gerhardt (see note 26), vol. 2, pp. 1176–1177, no. 20.

109. R. Zucca, "Valeriano e la sua famiglia nell'epigrafia della Sardinia," in *Epigrafia di confine, confine dell'epigrafia*, ed. M. G. Angeli Bertinelli and A. Donati (Faenza, 2004), pp. 369–370.

to hold the grander title of *praeses*.<sup>110</sup> If, as seems likely, he should be identified with the *P. Bibio proc(uratore)* named on a milestone found in the 1970s from the road between Carales and Olbia, this may be confirmation that it was later during his office that the governor's title was changed.<sup>111</sup> The appointment of Gallienus's former man to Sardinia might in fact have been as much a retirement as a promotion, but it had the added prestige of an enhanced title. The possession of an estate in the northwestern suburbs of Rome, with close access to the province, may also have been a consideration.

Marianus's potential loss of influence in his final years perhaps made it all the more necessary for his daughter to reclaim her father's memory, and his survival of the purge of 268 made this possible. She did so by means of a prominently advertised visual statement which clearly participated through its imagery in a contemporary public dialogue. The monument's iconography of imperial triumph implied that this old warrior had himself participated in the resistance to manifold threats to empire. First, the figures on the sides of the sarcophagus recalled the Pegasus symbol used as an icon of the cavalry, which under Gallienus and Claudius had crushed the usurpers Postumus and Aureolus, but it was also associated with Aurelian. The latter, like Claudius, was Illyrian by origin and a member of Gallienus's "battle cavalry"; his promotion to the head of the cavalry boosted his own imperial ambitions (as it would Probus after him), and his coins accordingly proclaimed the *VIRTUS EQUITUM*. Second, the highly original symbol on the right side of a bull overcome by a Pegasus-like griffin could be seen as a metonym for the extinction of the internal threat represented by Gallienus's associates, of whom the most dangerous was Taurus Volusianus, most likely eliminated by Aurelian, probably the *dux Dalmatarum* involved in the assassination of Gallienus

110. The two governors attested under Claudius II, including his brother and short-lived successor as emperor, Quintillus, had the title *procurator* alone: Gerhardt and Hartmann (see note 108), p. 1176. The "P. Val.," *pres. prov. Sard.*, mentioned in *Ephemeris Epigraphica*, vol. 8 (Berlin, 1899), no. 762, is unlikely to be the P. Aelius Valens who was *procurator* in 247/8. See P. Meloni, *L'amministrazione della Sardegna da Augusto all'invasione vandalica* (Rome, 1958), p. 216, and Thomasson (see note 28), pp. 10–12, nos. 33 and 48. A. Chastagnol, "L'administration du diocèse italien au Bas-Empire," *Historia* 12 (1963): 371, dates this man's governorship to the Tetrarchic period.

111. *L'Année Épigraphique* 1977 (1981), no. 34: for the identification with Marianus, see Alföldy (see note 18), p. 4724. Other milestones show that work on the same road had been conducted under Claudius II (*Ephemeris Epigraphica* [see note 110], no. 745) and four other governors under Aurelian (nos. 747, 775, 787, 796), continuing in the 280s (nos. 757–758, 776).

and his senior personnel.<sup>112</sup> To some eyes the image might even have been seen as a regionalist statement, symbolizing the triumph of the north Italian/Illyrian Pegasus (Claudius, Aurelian, and Marianus) over the Etruscan bull (Gallienus and Volusianus). Third, the conventional images of kneeling Victories with trophies on the lid referred to the successive defeats of Germanic tribes by Claudius and Aurelian. Fourth, the eagle and the serpent hinted at Aurelian's probable extermination of his rival Quintillus.<sup>113</sup> Finally, the centrally placed images of Mars Ultor on the lid were still the most appropriate to symbolize the Parthian war that Aurelian prosecuted successfully in 272–273.<sup>114</sup> But what of the prominent figures of the Dioscuri on the main face, which find a parallel on the coinage of the usurper Postumus, but not, as far as we know, on that of Gallienus, Claudius, or Aurelian?

It is still unclear when Marianus died and the monument was erected. If he became governor of Sardinia around 271,<sup>115</sup> he may not have survived for many years after that, for this combination of images is hardly conceivable much after the assassination of Aurelian in 275, and, had Marianus lived, he could have been expected to have reached higher rank.<sup>116</sup> The iconography of the sarcophagus was soon outdated: The equestrian imagery lost its meaning when the Gallienic "battle cavalry" was disbanded by Diocletian; in the East the new threat of the Sassanians superseded that of the Parthians; and the allusive references to recent internal and external events would have soon ceased to be topical or recognizable. However, the Dioscuri on the front may give a small hint of the date of the monument's erection. In 276 Castor appears as the "Preserver of Augustus" (*Conservator Augusti*) on a rare coin type of the new emperor Tacitus that was perhaps designed to appeal to the cavalry to support his accession.<sup>117</sup> If the

Dioscuri of Marianus's sarcophagus was a response to this—and the image was not one which the infantryman Marianus would naturally have adopted independently—the monument might be tentatively dated to that year. Stylistically, the flat relief and pointillist style of sculpture in some details fit the schematized style of the post-Gallienic phase of metropolitan sarcophagi better than earlier examples.<sup>118</sup> We may never know for sure. The only witness is this uncertain monument of uncertain times. But it cannot have been long afterward that what had started out on the Via Cassia as a proud and public monument of personal achievement, political allegiance, and regional pride, wholly in the face of traditions of display at Rome, was allowed to become concealed by trees and ultimately left to neglect and ruin.

The public impact of sarcophagi lives on.<sup>119</sup> A more recent example from northeastern England provides, through its well-documented historical context, an insight into the complex maneuvers and symbolisms that might surround sarcophagi as public and private monuments. Like the monument of Vibius Marianus, the public exposure of the monument to James Renforth of Gateshead (1842–1871), "champion sculler of the world," led it to become the unhappy victim of vandalism in the mid-1980s. After careful restoration in 1992, it was relocated from its original position in Gateshead East Cemetery to Prince Consort Road, where it still stands today in front of the Shipley Art Gallery (fig. 12).<sup>120</sup> Renforth's monument hinted at the popular mythology of his death, which occurred in tragic circumstances during a race against a Canadian crew in August 1871 in Kennebecasis Bay, New Brunswick. As the waves got up, Renforth failed to respond and fell back into the lap of his crewmate and former adversary Henry Kelley. He died the next morning, with Kelley holding his head.<sup>121</sup> His dramatic and unexplained

112. Zosimus 1.40.2–3 (after Dexippus), implicating Claudius and an unnamed *dux Dalmatarum* in the conspiracy; cf. *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Gallienus* 14.4, emphasizing the probably invented "Ceronius or Cecropius" (a cover for Aurelian?). Aurelian is named by Aurelius Victor *De Caesaribus* 33.21 and Zonaras 12.25. See Goltz and Hartmann (see note 82), pp. 289–291.

113. Murdered according to *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Divus Claudius* 12.5 and Eutropius 9.12; suicide according to Zosimus 1.47 (following Dexippus, writing under Aurelian) and *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Divus Aurelianus* 37.6.

114. Hartmann (see note 104), pp. 316–318.

115. Perhaps following Septimius Nigrinus, who was only *procurator*: Thomasson (see note 28), p. 11, no. 39.

116. Dobson (see note 20), vol. 1, p. 261.

117. Gricourt (see note 92), pp. 216–218; perhaps in 276 from the northern mint of Ticinum (Pavia); Mattingly and Sydenham (see note

85), p. 337, no. 111. For Tacitus, see R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 237–247.

118. Koch and Sichteremann (see note 31), pp. 257–258; F. Gerke, *Die christlichen Sarkophage der vorkonstantinischen Zeit* (Berlin, 1978; first published 1940), pp. 95–100. Pointillism: e.g. belt of Mars on right side; hair of kneeling Victories; eyes and mouth of Dioscuri.

119. H. Gabelmann, "Zur Nachwirkung der oberitalischen Sarkophage," in *Akten des Symposiums '125 Jahre Sarkophag-Corpus, Marburg 4.–7. Oktober 1995*, ed. G. Koch (Mainz, 1998), pp. 162–168.

120. Sculpted by George Burn, Neville Arcade, Newcastle. Paul Usherwood, Jeremy Beach, and Catherine Morris, *Public Sculpture of North-East England* (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 63–64. For Renforth, see P. Dillon, *The Tyne Oarsmen: Harry Clasper, Robert Chambers, James Renforth* (Newcastle, 1993), pp. 32–43, and especially I. Whitehead, *James Renforth of Gateshead, Champion Sculler of the World* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2004).

121. Whitehead (see note 120), pp. 121–122.



Figure 12. Renforth Memorial, Gateshead. Photo: author.

sarcophagi.<sup>123</sup> But the figure memorializes not conjugal union, but the bond of sporting companions. On the north face of the monument an inscription is incised in Roman capitals:

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE WE ARE IN DEATH

And on the north face of the pedestal:

ERECTED / BY PUBLIC SUBSCRIPTION / TO THE MEMORY  
OF / JAMES RENFORTH, / OF GATESHEAD, CHAMPION  
SCULLER OF THE WORLD / WHO DIED AUGUST  
23RD 1871, AGED 29 YEARS, / WHILE ROWING IN AN  
INTERNATIONAL BOAT RACE / BETWEEN THE ENGLISH  
AND AMERICAN CREWS / ON THE KENNEBECASSIS  
RIVER NEAR ST. JOHN'S, N.B.

Renforth's end is well documented. There is no such documentation, or even any evidence at all, of popular mythology surrounding the death of Vibius Marianus. But in the troubled times of the 270s it must certainly have been an event. All that remains to help us reconstruct the biographical narrative of this eminent equestrian is the sarcophagus raised on a pedestal beside the Via Cassia. The Tomb of Nero it is not, but it is, and surely was, capable of attracting just as much aura and mystery.

end—it turned out that he had suffered from epilepsy and experienced a cardiac arrhythmia—increased his celebrity. A memorial fund was raised by subscription to pay for the burial, erect a memorial over the grave, and set up a fund for his widow and daughter. Suspicions remain that his family never received the fund.<sup>122</sup> Renforth's memory had apparently become public, not private.

The monument commemorating this unfortunate champion rests on a sarcophagus decorated on each face with laurel garlands and a roundel relief portrait of Renforth on the reverse. The sarcophagus is on a pedestal decorated with relief stars and rampant lions. Two reclining figures, Renforth slumped against the bearded Harry Kelley, recall the lids of Etruscan and Roman klin

122. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

123. The sarcophagus format and the reclining figures above suggest this model, but there may also be echoes of Michelangelo's *Pietà*, as Roger Tomlin has suggested to me.