

This mask sarcophagus from catacomb 20 illustrates a motif of Roman art brought into the Jewish context by the families of the deceased. It resembles depictions of Roman gods, but here is treated merely as an artistic motif. The excavator noticed that the head was modeled on Near Eastern heads of Zeus, Serapis or Hadad. Scholars were astonished to find such pagan motifs on Jewish coffins in a catacomb where so many rabbis were buried.