

FUNERARY ART

The following apply to the Haskov cemetery, which is situated outside Istanbul, but the cemetery of Rhodes has similar characteristics:

Materials used for tombstones:

- Chalk stone (gypsum) is the oldest material
- Limestone
- Marble

The writing of letters is simple for the average citizen. Embossing is more costly because of the work that needs to be done and is for people with a higher economic status. Thicker relief is commonly used in marble. The 18th and 19th century are embossed. At the beginning of the 20th century begins the use of deeper and wider relief (wedge) made by mechanical means.

Vertical tombstones are older and are often found deep in the ground for stability.

Limestone in the 1630s is cut into a triangle shape for stability and the use of less material, where the bottom is placed on the ground. It is also common for the tip of the triangle to be placed on the ground so that the wide end looks like an inverted trapezoidal shape. During the medieval period the tombstones of the sephardic were horizontal and placed on the ground.

In the 17th century tombstones were shaped differently whether it was a rabbi or an important person.

During 1610-1820 graves were used in the shape of a coffin made of limestone and later marble. These are placed on the ground and in the case of the use of marble, the question arises whether the influence is from the Hellenistic columns.

FUNERARY SYMBOLS

- **Star of David** - the six-pointed Star of David, a symbol of Judaism, is frequently found on Jewish tombstones.
- **Cohanim Hands – Priestly Blessing** : two hands with outspread fingers indicated that the dead man was descended from priestly stock (Cohanim) who blessed the people in this fashion

- **Ewer** - Levite pitcher (and bowl)
- **Key** – Gates of Heaven, Paradise
- **Open book** – People of the Book, Book of Life, an open book indicates the presence of a rabbi, an officiating minister, or just a scholar
- **A round niche** - carved into the tombstone was used for birds when filled with water. Other niches were used to fill with oil and a wick as a candle.
- **Menorah** - one of the oldest symbols of Judaism
- **The ‘hilye’** - a framed oval shape with text which originated in Islam, depicting the virtues of the prophets, was adapted to show the virtues of Sephardic Jews.
- **The cypress tree** - a Turkish symbol for eternal life and in Sephardic funerary art pointing the way to Gan Eden, was a common motif. The cypress, rose and tulip symbol represent Paradise.
- **Fruits and open shell** - femininity
- **Fig or pomegranate** – abundance and fertility
- **Pear** – shape of woman
- **Open shell** – female sex organ
- **Open hand** – on woman’s grave invokes womanhood
- **Rosette** – originally referred to sun, but became part of Moorish or Sephardic design
- **Pointing hand or hand holding staff** – hand holding single implement such as hammer, knife, scissors refers to Hand of God – Blessed be the shaper of destiny
- **Boat, car, luggage** – symbols of Journey to next world
- **The shofar** (ram's horn) - indicating that the deceased was a blower of the shofar
- **Deer** - people whose name is Zvi, Hirsch or Naftali (deer representing the tribe of Naphtali)
- **Lion** - people whose name is Aryeh, Judah, Leib or Loew (lion representing the tribe of Judah)
- **Bear** - people whose name is Dov and Ber.
- **Wolf** - representing the Tribe of Benjamin

- **Bookshelves** - groups of books, sometimes arranged in an open bookcase, or on shelves.
- **Fish** - zodiac sign for the month of Adar
- **Candles** - one of the most accepted symbols of the woman. The candle was lit by the Jewish woman. Most of the candlesticks have three branches but there are ones with two, five and more. A broken candle on a gravestone symbolizes an early death, at a young age.
- **Tree** - a broken tree or branch is a sign that the deceased was young at the time of death
- **Bird** - appears on the gravestones of many women
- **Grapes** - cluster of grapes is an emblem of Israel.

OCCUPATIONAL TOOLS SYMBOLS

- **Inkstand (escrivania)** – male, symbolizing intellect
- **Scissors, thimble and measuring tape, iron and scissors** - (these will be in combination of two or three) – tailor
- **Razor or shaver** – barber
- **Hammer, pliers, sometimes nail** (combination of two or three) – shoemaker
- **Trowel and saw** – builder
- **Axe and saw** – carpenter
- **Cleaver and butcher knife** – butcher or shochet
- **File and compass** – tinsmith
- **Shoes and shoe stand** – shoe shiner
- **Fish** – fisherman
- **Scales** - merchants

**Source*

From publications of Professor Minna Rozen of the university of Tel Aviv