ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

Συγγραφή : *di Napoli Valentina*
Μετάφραση : *Βελέντζας Γεώργιος*
Για παραπομπή : *di Napoli Valentina , "Roman Sarcophagi at Asia Minor", Εγκυκλοπαίδεια Μείζονος Ελληνισμού, Κωνσταντινούπολη*
URL: <http://www.ehw.gr/l.aspx?id=9081>

Περίληψη :

The largest number of sarcophagi in the entire Roman Empire comes from Asia Minor. The earliest Asia Minor sarcophagi appeared in the Hellenistic period, before the mass production of the 2nd c. AD. However, they were isolated works, whose decoration is markedly different from later examples.

Χρονολόγηση

Roman period

Γεωγραφικός εντοπισμός

Asia Minor

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1. Introduction

The word ‘sarcophagus’ may be connected with the phrase ‘sarcophagos lithos’ (Greek: flesh-eating stone) evidenced by writers of the Hellenistic and Roman years: it was a stone extracted near Assos of the Troad, which could quickly dissolve the dead body enclosed in it. The custom of placing the dead in sarcophagi, that is, boxes of stone, pottery or marble, often decorated, was not widespread in the Roman world of the 1st c. BC and the 1st c. AD. However, the inscribed clay Clazomenian sarcophagi as well as stone examples, such as the ‘sarcophagus of Polyxena’, were known in Asia Minor already from the archaic years. The sarcophagi spread over the entire Roman Empire from the 2nd until the 4th c. AD. Approximately 12,000-15,000 items have been recorded so far, many of which are in fragments. Taking into account that the preserved sarcophagi represent only a small percentage of the overall production (2% - 5%), it could be estimated that between 120 and 310 AD, in their heyday, 300,000 to 750,000 sarcophagi were produced. That is why the sarcophagi are a type of artistic production necessary for studying the history of the Roman art in the imperial period, as well as for studying the Roman society and its commercial transactions. Their importance is also increased by the fact that the sarcophagi were extremely widespread in the Mediterranean basin. Besides, the study of the sarcophagi offers the opportunity for analysing the burial customs and religious convictions of the society and period when they were used.

There were few stone sarcophagi. Most of them were made of marble with relief decoration. There were three important marble sarcophagi production centres in the Roman Empire, mainly in the 2nd and the 3rd c. AD: Rome, Athens and Dokimeion of Phrygia. The sarcophagi produced by the marble workshops of those centres were exported to the entire Mediterranean. Apart from the above, there were also smaller workshops producing sarcophagi for local needs.

The marble used for sarcophagus production was mainly imported from distant regions. The most famous and important quarries were in Carrara (northern Italy), Dokimeion (Phrygia), Mount Pentelicus (Attiki) and Proconessus (the Propontis). The marble imported was either undressed or roughly dressed, in case the workshop was near the quarry. It is worth mentioning that several marble sarcophagi were destroyed in Late Antiquity because the marble was necessary for lime production.

The sarcophagi that carried inscriptions were rare. Those inscriptions are of particular interest, since they provide information about the persons who had given the commission and their social position. The largest number of sarcophagi in the entire Roman Empire comes from Asia Minor. The earliest Asia Minor sarcophagi appeared already from the Hellenistic period, before the mass production of the 2nd c. AD. However, they were isolated works, whose decoration is markedly different from later examples.

2. Sarcophagi of Smaller Workshops

A first category of Asia Minor marble sarcophagi are those produced by local small workshops, which had special features and their decoration was very different from the decoration of sarcophagi produced in other provinces of the Roman Empire. At the same time,

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all local workshops in Asia Minor produced sarcophagi with special features, which did not follow the standards established within the geographical boundaries of their Roman province, but ensured the continuity of earlier local cultures. The most widespread types of sarcophagi in Asia Minor were the following:

a) Sarcophagi with tabula ansata (inlaid panel usually with an inscription). It was the type with the simplest decoration. Particularly famous in Bithynia.

b) Box-like sarcophagi. They occasionally had relief decoration on the front side, which was divided into three zones. They were widespread mainly in Bithynia, Pisidia and Lycaonia.

c) Sarcophagi with grooves. In Asia Minor they were adorned with vertical rather than devious grooves, as it happened in the rest of the Roman Empire.

d) Sarcophagi with relief garlands. They were very common. They often had three garlands usually accompanied by representations of Eros or Nike. The most typical example of Asia Minor included garlands on semi-columns or pilasters.

e) Sarcophagi with relief figures. Most of them were not of Asia Minor origin and often imitated the Attic style. Their themes (family fables, battles, hunting, weddings) dropped subtle hints about death.

3. Columnar Sarcophagi

A separate category, the most important in Asia Minor, included the so-called architectural or columnar sarcophagi, named after their relief columns. The sarcophagi of Aphrodisias and the production of Dokimeion are among the most famous of this category. About 400 examples of Aphrodisias are known today. This group is interesting thanks to the wealth, variety and exceptional quality of decoration as well as the elegance of relief figures. According to the style of relief representations, several groups of artists may be formed, as well as various developmental phases in the production of those sarcophagi. Their heyday was in the years of the Severus dynasty (193-235 AD), when the alternation of light and shade in the reliefs was very sharp.

4. Sarcophagi of Dokimeion

The most famous group of columnar sarcophagi included the examples of the workshops of Dokimeion, which were highly widespread in several regions of Asia Minor (Lydia, Pamphylia), as well as in other regions of the Mediterranean as far as Syria. Those sarcophagi were also exported by sea to several other cities and provinces of the Roman Empire: Italy (mainly Rome), Palestine, Arabia, Rhodes, Crete, Athens and Dalmatia. The workshops producing the sarcophagi of Dokimeion were directly connected with the local marble quarries. The most known types were adorned with relief garlands, a continuous frieze or, more often, columns – a type of decoration introduced in Asia Minor. The columnar sarcophagi were adorned with reliefs on all four sides. They were named after the small columns dividing the long sides into five sections and the narrow into three. They were richly decorated: each section included a relief human figure (early examples rarely represented complexes of figures), while a false door was represented on one of the short sides indicating the entrance to the underworld. The production of those sarcophagi started in the workshops of Dokimeion circa 160 AD and was widely spread from 180 onwards. They were exported probably from the harbour of Smyrna until 260/270. Approximately 500 sarcophagi from Dokimeion have been known so far, half of which are columnar. It is estimated that from 150 until 260 AD between 10,000 and 25,000 sarcophagi were produced, which gives an annual average of 80 to 200. The quarries of Dokimeion belonged to the emperor, although the production process is not clear. Some researchers believe that there were numerous small workshops, while others claim that all sarcophagi were massively manufactured by a big workshop. However, it is certain that the production of Dokimeion sarcophagi was permanently suspended circa 260/270 AD, during a period of internal crisis in Asia Minor, which resulted to the migration of several sculptors of Dokimeion. Some of them settled even in Rome. Mythological scenes are also represented on columnar sarcophagi: Herakles, Meleager, Daedalus and Icarus, the Dioscuri and the Muses. For the most part they represent standing male or female figures, without any reference to a specific myth. In some cases, those figures, which repeat known statuary types of the 5^{th} and 4^{th} century BC, must have represented the dead as well.

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Portraits of dead people are very rare. The lids of the earliest sarcophagi of this category were gabled. Lids shaped like beds were spread from 170/180 AD onwards. They represented a couple in a supine position, often accompanied by small representations of Eros. The Dokimeion sarcophagi were so famous that they were imitated in many regions of Asia Minor, such as Cilicia.

5. The Lids of Asia Minor Sarcophagi

The lids of Asia Minor sarcophagi have some features not found in other provinces of the Roman Empire. A widespread type is the gabled lid imitating a roof with large tiles. In some cases, the crown tiles are shaped like lion's heads, while akroteria (roof ornaments) shaped like palmettes or human beings were quite frequent. The corners of the lid often included representations of Eros. Horizontal lids with full-relief figures of lying lions were widespread in some regions of Asia Minor (Pisidia, Kibyratis, Cilicia, Lycaonia and Isauria).

6. Export of Roughly Dressed Sarcophagi

Some quarries were specialised in the mass production of roughly dressed sarcophagi intended for exports. In some cases, roughly dressed sarcophagi were imported from other regions, before they were decorated according to the local style. The largest part of the roughly dressed sarcophagi included garlands, while the workshop may be verified by the decorative details. Although almost all regions of Asia Minor produced sarcophagi and the sarcophagi of Dokimeion were widespread all over Asia Minor, there were cases of sarcophagi imported from other workshops as well, such as from nearby Athens or distant Rome. Sarcophagi of local stone imitating marble sarcophagi have also been preserved; they were either imported or manufactured in Dokimeion or were roughly dressed.

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