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1969

Review of *Der Alexander-Sarkophag*, by Karl Schefold

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Ridgway, Brunilde S. 1969. Review of *Der Alexander-Sarkophag*, by Karl Schefold. *American Journal of Archaeology* 73:482.

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DER ALEXANDER-SARKOPHAG, by *Karl Schefold*. Pp. 35, pls. 70 + 10 in color by Max Seidel. Propyläen Verlag, Frankfurt am Main—Berlin, 1968. DM. 68.

F. Winter's important work on the Alexander sarcophagus appeared in 1912; it seems surprising that since that time no other monograph should have been dedicated to this impressive monument which never fails to be mentioned in all handbooks on Greek art. But the 1958 book by Ilse Kleemann on the Satrap's sarcophagus from the same necropolis seems to have broken the spell, since not only Schefold's work, but also a still unpublished Frankfurt dissertation by V. von Graeve have now been written on the Alexander Sarcophagus, and one hopes that the example will soon be followed for the other two sculptured Sidonian caskets.

Schefold's book differs considerably from its predecessors in that, in the author's intention (p. 6), the text is intended as accompaniment and clarification for Seidel's photographs, which therefore take up most of the book and are far more numerous than ordinary illustrations. They present a wealth of details, both of the architectural and the figural decoration, and in several of them one can discern even tool marks and surface textures. They certainly differ from earlier illustrations which often gave the figures a "porcelain-like quality" (p. 24). Unusual angles and dramatic close-ups allow a more thorough analysis than even a direct confrontation in Istanbul would permit, in its present setting; only a few distant shots seem fuzzy, and some detailed views have been awkwardly split over two pages. The color photographs are superb.

But Schefold's statement of purpose should not mislead one into thinking his text unimportant. The author has some points to make and he makes them clearly and forcefully. He sets out to show that the sarcophagus must have been made during the lifetime of Alexander, and even of Abdalonymos, the supposed owner of the casket whom Alexander placed on the Sidonian throne after his victory over the Persians at Issos in 333. Abdalonymos died in 311, but Schefold convincingly suggests that his tomb would have been prepared before his death. His dating shortly after the Battle of Issos can however be supported only by stylistic analysis, and here judgment inevitably becomes subjective. He stresses the indebtedness of certain compositional motifs to traditional iconography: could this dependence largely explain the still classical flavor of the reliefs? If the six sarcophagus masters are Ionians influenced by Attic art (p. 24), could they be working in a conservative manner slightly out of pace with the latest stylistic developments? Indeed Schefold emphasizes the lack of influence by Lysippos, who at the end of the fourth century must have represented the progressive trend in statuary, even if working largely in bronze.

The sarcophagus' date has often been argued on the basis of the "historicity" of its representations, and

definite names have been given to some of the Greeks depicted in the friezes. Schefold points out instead the almost mythological quality of the scenes: not only are the Greeks often shown implausibly free of clothing, but even the Orientals, deprived of effective armor protection, appear in virtual "heroic nudity." The Macedonian element is toned down to raise the fight to the symbolic level of the perennial struggle between Greeks and Barbarians, but even the Phoenician soldiers of Abdalonymos are not clearly distinguished from the Persians, and in a war where Orientals and Greeks together fought on both sides it is difficult to determine the opposing parties. Not by chance, affirms Schefold (p. 13), Abdalonymos fighting on the side of freedom is flanked by a Greek in the typical Harmodios pose (left short side); his opponent is in turn identified as Persian by the audience scene painted on the inside of his shield. Alexander's deeds already belong to the realm of myth, and the principal side of the sarcophagus is therefore not that with the battle scene, where Abdalonymos does not appear, but that with the hunting scene, where the Sidonian ruler is shown as a friend of the Greek king. This conclusion is reached not only on the basis of iconography, but also of composition, since both short sides are carved so as to lead the eye toward the main frieze with the lion hunt. Schefold also sees the stag not as a decoy animal to attract the lion, but, in conjunction with the panther on the right end, as typical example of the fauna found in Oriental *paradeisoi*, where it is appropriate for a great ruler to sport. That the sarcophagus was found with the battle side facing the interior of the chamber tomb is of no consequence (argues Schefold in a polemic footnote where he summarizes the main points of von Graeve's dissertation), since the scene's value might have been inverted by the time of Abdalonymos' death. If Schefold's early dating is accepted against von Graeve's chronology after 311 B.C., the sarcophagus would contain the earliest known portrait of Alexander, though the Macedonian is identifiable more by his lion-skin helmet than by his features.

The author rightly stresses the "pictorial" aspect of the monument, where entire weapons, helmets and many other details are simply painted onto the background which was unusually left uncolored. Surprisingly left plain are also the elaborate moldings and architectural parts which, though partly Attic in inspiration, include such surprising features as the Isiac female heads with leaf-diadems, which appear both as antefixes and as janiform ornaments for the ridgepole, alternating with eagles. Schefold concludes his commentary with an excursus on Greek funerary art and beliefs, but to me the most rewarding section of his text is his illuminating description of single figures and scenes, often pointing out details that would most probably escape even a trained eye.

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