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An Anatolian Perspective for Lycian Art? Remarks on the Historiography of Lycian Art Studies (19th – 21st Centuries AD)

Lycian art is an interesting case study to reflect on the contemporary perception of historiography. Such a reflection occurs within the frame of Anatolian studies and the approach of intercultural contacts during Antiquity. This paper aims at focusing on carving style and iconography, and developing three main themes: the impact of the 19th-century European cultural history on the reception of Lycian stone monuments and sculpture; the impact of traditional academic fields on the way of studying Lycian art; an emerging, new and broader perspective that restores importance to the Anatolian background. It will be based on case studies, notably the so-called “Harpy tomb” and “Nereid Monument” from Xanthos, which also lead to an interest in the history of the British Museum’s collections in London.

Ancient Lycia was located in Southern part of Anatolia. This Anatolian area is known for its spectacular stone monuments, especially tombs, which could be adorned with reliefs and sometimes with freestanding statues. Lycian art is mainly composed of sculpture, with an important corpus dating to between the 6th and the 4th centuries BC¹. Recent studies on Lycian art have clearly shown how an Anatolian background was ingeniously mixed with borrowings from Greek and Oriental visual cultures². Other sources are also available, such as ancient Greek texts, Greek and Lycian inscriptions, coins, ceramics, which allow us to understand the history of Lycia. Thus, we know that Lycia was included in the Persian Empire from the middle of the 6th century BC to the conquest of Alexander the Great, and throughout this period maintained relations with the Ancient Greek world³, with signs of an outward-looking attitude to Greek culture, for example in the carving style.

The main questions while studying Lycian art are the following: how to study areas of contacts through visual arts and how to study visual arts produced or created in areas of contacts? They lead to reflect further on methodology, theory, usable concepts, and historiography.

The reception of the aesthetic of Lycian sculpture during the 19th and 20th centuries AD

During the 19th century, Lycian sculpture attracted European scholars’ attention and large pieces of Lycian sculpture have been moved to European museums: reliefs and freestanding

¹ See for example: [4; 22, pp. 246–278].

² For example about hybrid beings: [7].

³ Generally about Lycian sources and history, see: [5; 17].

statues from Xanthos to London (British Museum in the 1840s), reliefs from Trysa to Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum in the 1880s).

At the same time, the 19th century constituted an important period for archaeology, as the academic fields were being defined for this emerging discipline: Oriental archaeology (with important sites in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the discovery of Assyrian civilization and Sumerian civilization), and Classical archaeology (with important sites in Mainland Greece, Italy and Asia Minor). Scholarly interest and research on main archaeological sites in Anatolia began too, for Hittite civilization (for example Bogasköy, before the first excavation campaign of the first decade of the 20th century) and Neo-Hittite art (for example, the beginning of the excavations at Zincirli in 1888)⁴. While the archaeology of many areas of Anatolia, for the 2nd millennium and the 1st millennium BC has been associated with a large “Oriental” field, from a Western European point of view, Lycian art studies and specially Lycian sculpture (6th–4th century BC) have been mostly associated with Classical studies.

The sculptural style of Lycian greater monuments, Europeans scholars were interested in, is close to the Greek one. Even if originality was perceived in Lycian architecture, the sculptural style could be seen as Greek. The classification of Lycian sculpture in the Museums’ collections made during the 19th century is significant, as it joined Greek antiquities (for example, Lycian monuments kept in the department of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the British Museum).

The reception of the carving style impacted the study of the Lycian iconography. The names given, during the 19th century, to the most famous Lycian monuments from Xanthos (partly moved to the British Museum), the so-called “Harpy Tomb” and “Nereid Monument”, are relevant. They express a way of studying Lycian art which promoted a “classical” approach, by proposing Greek mythological names for Lycian figures. The fact that the carving style was close to the Greek one has led to such interpretations. Moreover, at that time, archaeology was closely linked with philology (in particular with the use of ancient Greek texts to understand iconography). The classical culture of scholars was still mainly based on ancient texts.

The so-called “Nereid Monument” (Fig. 1) is nowadays known as the tomb of the dynast Arbinas who ruled Xanthos in the beginning of the 4th century BC. The monument is dated to around 390–380 BC⁵. The name given to the monument follows the identification of the marble statues distributed among the intercolumnnations of the monument, first proposed in 1843. Because of the presence of sea animals under the moving female figures, the name of the Greek sea nymphs “Nereids” has been advanced⁶. Stylistically, these statues are reminiscent of the Greek “Rich Style” of the late 5th and early 4th centuries. In the eyes of scholars, Lycian sculpture could find a more appropriate place alongside Greek classical sculpture. Comparisons were facilitated in the context of the forming British Museum’s collection of ancient sculpture, with pieces from Mainland Greece (reliefs from the temple of Apollo Epikourios at Bassai, 1814; Parthenon marbles, 1816)⁷.

⁴ For a general presentation that includes all areas see, for example: [14].

⁵ About the monument and its sculptures, see: [6].

⁶ See [6, pp.270–277].

⁷ [27, pp.6–8, p.95 (part II) (Parthenon), p.271 (part III) (Apollo temple, Bassai)].

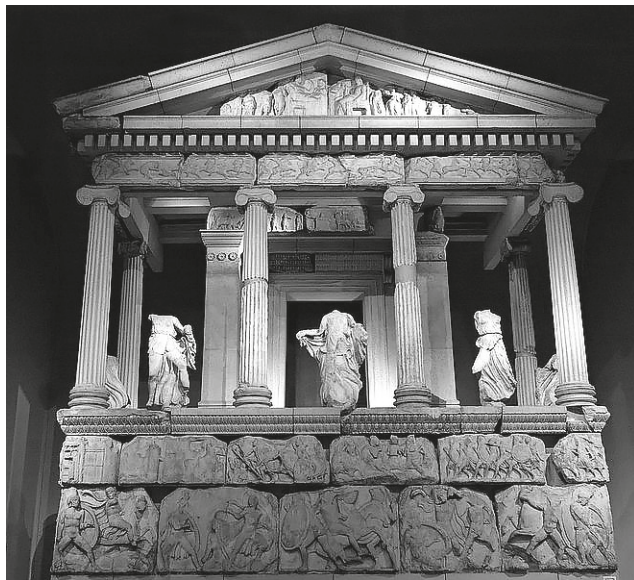


Fig. 1. "Nereid Monument", marble elevation reconstructed in the British Museum, East side. Public domain (www.commonswikimedia.org)



Fig. 2. "Harpy Tomb", Xanthos, *in situ*. © Photo by F.Colas-Rannou



Fig. 3. “Harpy Tomb”, marble relief (North side), British Museum, B 287. From: F.N. Pryce [25, pl. XXI]. Trustees of the British Museum, London

The female bird-like creatures on the reliefs which adorned the pillar tomb of another ruler of Xanthos (ca. 480 BC) (North and South sides) (Fig. 2, 3) were successively identified as Greek “Harpies” and Greek “Sirens”⁸. The name “Harpy Tomb” recalls the first identification. We find here the same phenomenon as for the previous example: a carving style close to the Greek one, a similar but different iconography.

In general, many 20th-century works have continued to give prevalence to this stylistic approach and maintained these identifications based on Greek mythology.

Lycian art, academic fields and the study of cultural contacts

The Greek-looking style of numerous Lycian reliefs or freestanding figures has conducted many scholars to classify Lycian art in the field of Greek art. Furthermore, it is again important to note the traditional propensity toward a division of Anatolian studies between Classical and Oriental studies: generally associating Central and Eastern part of Anatolia and earlier periods (Bronze Age, Iron Age) with Oriental studies, while associating Western part of Anatolia for recent periods — Hellenistic and Roman periods — in some cases for a couple of centuries before the conquest of Alexander the Great (6th, 5th, 4th centuries BC) — with Classical ones. Studies on Lycian art fall in this latter category, due to the stylistic proximity with Archaic and Classical Greek sculpture. It can be explained from a geographical point of view (proximity with Greek cities of the Western coast) and from a cultural point of view (area of cultural openness to Greek culture which impacts archaeology: the archaeology of Lycia knows for example stone theatres and temples which join the objects of study of Classical archaeology⁹).

Thus, Lycian studies are mainly concerned with the study of the impact of Hellenism during Antiquity. The historiography of Lycian studies during the 20th and 21st centuries AD is punc-

⁸ British Museum Inv. B 287. See [27, pp. 58–59; 25, p. 122–129].

⁹ See for examples the sites of Xanthos, Myra, Limyra, and the Letoon.

tuated by terms or concepts using in historical studies in general, that have led to a current reassessment which better appreciates the balance between external elements and local context.

One of the most widely used terms during the 20th century AD was “influence”. The way of using it often implied a unilateral relationship, between a “dominant” culture and a “subdued” one, and a collective dimension. This concept has been discussed in the broad field of ancient history in a useful and relevant way¹⁰. The notion of “periphery” could be associated with it. For example, it constituted the main guideline of the 8th International Congress of Classical Archaeology in the 1960s¹¹. The question of Lycian sculpture was presented by Pierre Demargne in that way; according to him, ancient Lycia was an “intermediary zone” within the “periphery” of the Greek world¹². The concept of “Hellenization” could be used in that way as well.

During the 1970s and 1980s, another term emerged and was still used during the 1990s in Lycian studies: “acculturation”¹³. It aimed to focus on the borrowing of cultural features from Greek culture, in particular, questioning their assimilation in the Lycian culture. It introduced the idea of bilateral relationship, and “resistance”. In Lycian studies, the concept of “double acculturation” was developed by scholars to highlight the impact of both Greek and Persian culture¹⁴.

Current works about Antiquity point out the usefulness of the concept of “cultural transfers” which makes it possible to embrace the phenomenon of cultural contacts in all its complexity and richness, as it questions a network of elements (interaction and reciprocity, human mobility, circulation of ideas and artifacts, media and stakes of the process, selection phenomena, and “semantic change”)¹⁵. It may constitute an interesting attitude for improving our understanding of Lycian cultural history and art.

An Anatolian perspective

This approach allows to restore an Anatolian background and thus to counterbalance a view of Lycia as being “between Greece and Persia”, or “between the East and the West”¹⁶. It constitutes an important point in the historiography of Lycian art studies, and more specifically for iconographic studies. With the help of a structural analysis and a comparative approach, that aim to emphasize stable elements, borrowings and adaptations and to understand them in the Lycian context, it is possible to appreciate a traditional Anatolian cultural background in Lycia during the 6th, 5th and 4th centuries BC. This “cultural heritage” is expressed in iconography. Comparisons concern Greek, East Mediterranean, Persian (or Oriental) arts, as well as the Anatolian art from other Anatolian areas and earlier periods.

Let us go back to the so-called “Nereid Monument” and “Harpy Tomb” from Xanthos (Fig. 1, 2, 3). Such a renewed iconographic approach gives importance to iconographic gaps that exist between Lycian and Greek images. These gaps may reveal a different meaning, independently from a “Greek-looking” carving style, and evoke the phenomenon of “semantic change” that

¹⁰ For example: [29, “‘Influence’: note sur un pseudo-concept”, pp. 803–809].

¹¹ See the proceedings: [19]

¹² [12; 13, p. 753]. For a detailed analysis of Pierre Demargne’s approach, see: [8].

¹³ About this notion within historical studies, see: [28].

¹⁴ See for example, [20; 21]; see also [17, pp. 61–70; 18].

¹⁵ In the French historiography, see: [10; 11].

¹⁶ For example [1; 16].

could accompany borrowings and adaptations. The iconographic difference between Greek Nereids and the female figures from the Arbinas Tomb, is noteworthy¹⁷. The Lycian figures run above sea animals while Nereids hold fish in their hands or ride sea animals¹⁸. As it has been proposed, notably by Thurstan Robinson, these freestanding figures can be connected with epigraphic sources from the Letoon (sanctuary located near Xanthos), which reveals a close link between the Lycian dynast Arbinas, the goddess Leto, and the water nymphs named *Eliyāna* in a Lycian inscription (*Numphai* in the Greek version). These local water nymphs may be traced back to Anatolian antecedents¹⁹. The intercolumnar statues which adorned the Arbinas Tomb may rightly be called *Eliyāna*²⁰. While their style recalls the Greek style, their iconography is original²¹. A similar demonstration can be developed for the female-birds carved on the Xanthian pillar: iconographic gap can be noticed with both Greek Harpies and Sirens. The iconographic and iconological survey leads to question a Greek identity and to put forward the hypothesis of a link with older Anatolian sun-goddesses. Here, the lack of Lycian written sources or the state of our knowledge of the Lycian language, does not allow us to know their Lycian name²².

Concluding remarks

An open attitude to Greek and Persian worlds did exist in Ancient Lycia, attested notably by art and visual culture. However Lycian art developed from a cultural Anatolian background, still perceptible in the 4th century BC, that can be enlightened through comparisons with Hittite art (Bronze Age) and Neo-Hittite, or Syro-Hittite, art (Iron Age). This idea argues for bringing together art studies on all ancient Anatolian areas over a long period of time, into a single field of research, instead of being inserted into Near Eastern/Oriental studies or Classical studies depending on geographical location and historical periods, or carving style.

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¹⁷ Already noted by W. Childs (however the author maintains the traditional interpretation as “Nereids”): [6, pp. 272–277].

¹⁸ For Greek iconography, see examples in: [15; 2].

¹⁹ See [24, pp. 32–33, 40, 53–54, 76–77, 114; 23, s.v. “Elijāna”]. See also: [5, p. 179].

²⁰ [26]; see also [3, pp. 359–360].

²¹ See [9].

²² See [7, pp. 91–115].

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Title. An Anatolian Perspective for Lycian Art? Remarks on the Historiography of Lycian Art Studies (19th–21st Centuries AD)

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Abstract. Ancient Lycia was located in Southern part of Anatolia. Lycian art is mainly composed of sculpture, with an important corpus dating to between the 6th and the 4th centuries BC. Lycia was included in the Persian Empire from the middle of the 6th century BC to the conquest of Alexander the Great, and throughout this period maintained relations with the Ancient Greek world. Recent studies on Lycian art have enlightened the fact that an Anatolian background was ingeniously mixed with borrowings from Greek and Oriental visual cultures. Based on this Lycian example, the paper proposes to reflect on the contemporary perception of historiography. With a focus on carving style and iconography, it aims at developing three main themes: the impact of the 19th-century European cultural history on the reception of Lycian stone monuments and sculpture; the impact of traditional academic fields on the way of studying Lycian art; an emerging, new and broader perspective that restores importance to the Anatolian background. The two monuments that served us as a basis for our reflection are: the so-called “Harpy tomb” and “Nereid Monument” from Xanthos.

Keywords: Lycia, sculpture, iconography, cultural contacts, reception, historiography, Anatolia, Harpy Tomb, Nereid monument, Xanthos

Название статьи. Анатолийский взгляд на ликийское искусство? Замечания к историографии (XIX–XXI век)

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Аннотация. Древняя Ликия располагалась в южной части Анатолии. Ликийское искусство в основном состоит из произведений скульптуры, с важным корпусом памятников, датируемым между VI и IV вв. до н.э. Ликия входила в состав Персидской империи с середины VI в. до н.э. до завоевания Александром Македонским и на протяжении всего этого периода поддерживала отношения с греческим миром. Недавние исследования ликийского искусства показали, что анатолийский фон был искусно смешан с заимствованиями из греческой и восточной культур. На основе этого ликийского примера в статье предлагается осмыслить современное восприятие историографии. С акцентом на рассмотрение стилистики резьбы и её иконографии, исследование нацелено на разработку трёх основных тем: влияние европейской культурной истории XIX века на восприятие ликийских каменных памятников и скульптуры; влияние традиционных академических областей на способ изучения ликийского искусства; появляющаяся, новая и более широкая перспектива, которая восстанавливает важность анатолийского фона. Основой для размышлений служат два памятника: так называемая Гробница Гарпии и Памятник Нереид из Ксанфа.

Ключевые слова: Ликия, скульптура, иконография, культурные контакты, рецепция, историография, Анатолия, гробница Гарпии, памятник Нереид, Ксанф