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**PARADISIACAL TOMBS AND ARCHITECTURAL ROOMS IN LATE ROMAN SARDIS:
PERIOD STYLES AND REGIONAL VARIANTS**

(Taf. LXVIII–LXX, Abb. 1–10)

Abstract

La peinture murale de Sardes fournit une occasion de comparer la peinture des espaces funéraires et domestiques d'un site donné. Huit hypogées du IV^e siècle C.E. ont en commun un programme spécifique de fleurs, guirlandes, paniers et oiseaux; cette tendance de la peinture funéraire tardive à évoquer un paradis futur est aussi à l'œuvre dans les décors muraux de l'empire romain. Les espaces domestiques du Ve – VI^e siècle à Sardes sont décorés selon le modèle architectural à incrustations et également selon le schéma à réseau. D'une façon générale, tous ces modèles correspondent à ce que l'on observe à la même époque dans tout le monde romain. Cependant, les parallèles les plus proches viennent d'Anatolie occidentale, d'Ephèse, Alaşehir-Philadelphia, Perge, Zeugma et Hierapolis. La peinture de Sardes semble exprimer un langage visuel régional commun à l'orient romain. Cependant, bien que la peinture de Sardes reflète clairement les styles d'une époque, ils apparaissent ici plus tard que dans des sites comparables, tels qu' Ephèse.

Established as the capital of Lydia, Sardis is located about 100 kilometers to the northeast of Ephesus along the Izmir-Ankara highway (formerly part of the Persian Royal Road). After first falling to the Persians, Sardis became a Greek and then a Roman city. As part of Diocletian's reorganization of the empire in 296 AD, Sardis became the capital of the new Roman province of Lydia. The city was likely at its most prosperous in the 3rd century, with new building programs continuing into the 4th and 5th centuries, although deterioration in building materials and increased spoliation is evident. The city began to fall into decline in the late 6th century until its eventual sack by the Sasanian Persians in 616.

The site today is best known for its public buildings such as the temple of Artemis, Synagogue and Roman Bath-Gymnasium complex. Among the Roman-era remains are a group of painted *hypogaea* as well as painted houses, which provide an opportunity to compare painting programs from different kinds of spaces at one site. The 4th century tombs share a largely floral painting program. The 5–6th century domestic spaces are painted primarily in an architectural incrustation style. *Comparanda* for both styles are found throughout the Roman world, but with the closest ties in the Eastern Mediterranean at sites such as Ephesus, Perge and Hierapolis. However, while experimentation and the mixture of multiple styles are evident at Ephesus, by the time the floral and incrustation styles reached Sardis, they seem to have been fully codified and distinct from one another. The floral style appears to have been exclusively for funerary use, and does not appear in any houses discovered thus far.

***Hypogaea* at Sardis**

Eight 4th century AD *hypogaea* at Sardis share a common decorative program of scattered flowers, garlands, baskets and birds (Abb. 1–5). All of the *hypogaea* are remarkably consistent in their form and decoration. The structures are rectangular and barrel-vaulted, roughly 3 m long, 2,5 m wide and 2 m tall, constructed of bricks and fieldstones bound with pinkish mortar. All were equipped with built-in steps, and a removable slab covering the entrance hole into the vault. The interiors are plastered with whitish lime plaster. Broad red bands define the lunettes and the upper zones of the walls. On the lower zones of the walls, a

dado course is painted with either a trident and rinceau motif (Abb. 2) or with incrustation style marble (Abb. 4–5). The whitish plaster ground of the upper zones and vaults is painted with scattered flowers and garlands in the same shades of red and pink and green. Baskets, peacocks and smaller birds populate the paintings as well.

Three tombs have distinguishing features but are otherwise faithful to the floral painting program: Tomb 2007.03 has a head in the vault (Abb. 2–3), the “Tomb of Chrysanthios” has numerous painted inscriptions (Abb. 4)¹, and the “Painted Tomb” has a Constantinian Chi-Rho monogram (Abb. 5)². Despite the unique details in each of these tombs, they are otherwise remarkably consistent with the corpus of Sardis *hypogaea*, with birds and baskets against a ground of scattered flowers. They are also quite uniform stylistically and appear to have been painted by the same workshop, if not the same hand in many cases. Nevertheless, it is clear that the head in the vault of Tomb 2007.03 was executed by a much more accomplished artist than the rest of the tomb (compare Abb. 1 and 3). And in inscriptions from the “Tomb of Chrysanthios”, the deceased describes himself as “*zographos*”, and may have painted parts of his tomb himself³.

All but one of the tombs were looted in antiquity, and numismatic evidence from that sole *hypogaea* (Tomb 79.3) points to a 4th century date⁴. The “Tomb of Chrysanthios” and the “Painted Tomb” are dated epigraphically to the 4th century as well and all others have been assigned a 4th century date based on their close stylistic similarity. The “Painted Tomb” with its Chi-Rho monogram (Abb. 5) is the only unquestionably Christian tomb and none of the scant grave goods discovered reveal the religious beliefs of the occupants of any of the other tombs, who might have been pagan, Jewish or Christian at this point in Sardis’ history. The painting program itself is cunningly ambiguous, presenting a generic image of paradise that could serve any religion and reflects Graeco-Roman visual culture more than any specific belief system. These paintings fit into a larger late Roman trend toward prospective paradisiacal funerary imagery with related paintings found from Rome to South Russia.

Red flowers are ubiquitous in late antique tomb painting, often scattered among figural scenes⁵. However, the very closest parallels come from Western Anatolia, suggesting a regional fashion. In *hypogaea* at Sardis, Ephesus, Alaşehir-Philadelphia, Perge, and Zeugma, irregularly scattered flowers form a consistent, almost carpet-like, background. At Ephesus, the Grotto of the Seven Sleepers and *hypogaea* were decorated with scattered red and yellow flowers with peacocks and baskets interspersed⁶. A bird perched atop a basket against a scattered flower ground from an Alaşehir-Philadelphia *hypogaea* looks as if it could have come from a Sardis tomb⁷. At Perge, portraits of the deceased recline against a ground of scattered red flowers⁸. The *loculi* of *hypogaeum* TS 3 in the Kirkbayır *necropolis* at Zeugma are decorated with a scatter of painted rosebuds⁹. While there is considerable variation in these closest comparanda, all *hypogaea* are unified by a background of irregularly strewn flowers. The Alaşehir-Philadelphia tomb is stylistically closest to the Sardis tombs, and is dated to the 4th century like Sardis’ tombs. The other Anatolian comparanda date to the 3rd century and may present an incipient stage in the development of the floral tomb style that would reach Sardis and Alaşehir-Philadelphia in the next century.

The basic painting program in Sardis’ 4th century tombs is constant and discrete: The program appears in its fully-formed state with no clear precedent or experimental phase, and with little relationship to domestic painting. The only element that domestic and sepulchral painting at Sardis share is the use of an incrustation style painted *dado* course in some tombs. This can be contrasted with the mixture of styles at Ephesus. Not only did the floral style in tomb decoration reach sites like Ephesus earlier than Sardis, it also appears in domestic contexts intermingled with other styles. At Ephesus, for example, scattered flowers decorated

¹ Also known as Tomb 76.1. Greenewalt 1978, 61–64 fig. 5–7; Greenewalt 1979, 4–9 fig. 3–5; Hanfmann – Mierse 1983, 208 no.4.

² Butler 1922, 174, 181–183 ill. 18 color pl. 4–5; Hanfmann – Mierse 1983, 208 no. 3.

³ For discussion, see Greenewalt 1979, 5 f. n. 9; Hanfmann 1981, 88; Hemans 1987, 164.

⁴ Greenewalt *et al.* 1983, 22 fig. 26; Hanfmann – Mierse 1983, 208 no. 9.

⁵ See Barbet in this volume.

⁶ Zimmermann – Ladstätter 2010.

⁷ Mellink 1977, 320 fig. 37.

⁸ Deleman 2008, 378 fig. 1–2.

⁹ Kennedy 1998, 30.

hypogaea, but also *cubicula* and niches in both Hanghäuser 1 and 2¹⁰. At Sardis, the scattered flower painting of the *hypogaea* has not been preserved in any houses. One reason for this could be the relatively small sample of domestic painting preserved at Sardis, most of which is also a century or more later in date than the *hypogaea*.

Houses at Sardis

The majority of painted houses at Sardis come from the MMS quarter, a residential district built in the 4th century, after the city wall was extended to enclose the area around the Synagogue, the Bath Gymnasium complex and the so-called Byzantine Shops¹¹. Occupied from the 4th through 6th centuries, the residential complex had a long history of renovation and expansion. The north and southwest wings were originally separate residences, but were connected as part of an early 5th century remodeling that coincides with a spate of building projects in this part of the city, including repairs and improvements to the nearby Synagogue, Bath-Gymnasium complex and Marble Road. Thus, the house's most stately phase was in the 5th–6th century¹².

Room 6, an apsed reception space (Abb. 6), is representative of the wall paintings found throughout the *domus*. It is painted in the architectural incrustation style that became popular in the Tetrarchic era and is found in numerous Roman houses, including relatively nearby in Hanghaus 1 at Ephesus and at Hierapolis¹³. Room 6 maintains the best preserved *in situ* painting with similar fragments found in most adjoining spaces, making it clear that the *domus* was decorated with incrustation style painting throughout.

In the 5th century, Room 6's primary entrance was from the east, so the visitor would be met immediately with a view of the west wall apse and its central, jewel-like painted *opus sectile* medallion. This medallion might evoke not only *opus sectile*, but also mosaic or jewelry patterns. Related motifs appear on mosaics and textiles in addition to painted examples from Zeugma, Philippi, Stobi, Kerch, Gorgippia, and Luxor¹⁴. These medallion motifs are just one example of syncretism among the minor arts in this period.

A variety of painted *opus sectile* panels fill the rest of the room, alluding to the richest marbles available and arranged in dynamic compositions. The patterns range from simple frames, to flame-like designs related to metalwork, to nested chevrons and a modelled red oval surrounded by painted coffers. In a play between illusionism and allusion, illusionistically shaded columns in the apse oppose flat columns on the south wall whose lines affirm their two-dimensionality. All of the designs play with the eye while alluding to the grandeur of public buildings decorated with *opus sectile* as well as luxury goods such as metal vessels, jewellery and textiles. These motifs and references were common at late antique sites, particularly in the Roman East, and attest to the enduring power of this visual idiom and the importance of this social space within the *domus*.

Both the floral and the incrustation styles found at Sardis have parallels throughout the Roman world and were in use for centuries. Ephesus is the most logical site for comparison with Sardis, given its proximity and outstanding state of preservation. As noted, the floral style is preserved at Ephesus in *hypogaea* and the Grotto of the Seven Sleepers as well as in the Hanghäuser. And the incrustation style is preserved in Hanghaus 1, the so-called Odeion-Hanghaus, the Akropolis-Peristylhaus and the Haus südlich des Theaters¹⁵. It is striking, however, that both styles arrive at Ephesus about a century earlier than at Sardis. For example, the floral paintings from the Grotto of the Seven Sleepers and from *hypogaea* at Ephesus dating to the 3rd century resemble Sardis's tomb paintings from the 4th century. Similarly, the 4th century incrustation painting from the *Cenatorium* b of Hanghaus 1, is comparable to Sardis' 5th century Room 6 paintings.

¹⁰ Stročka 1977; Zimmermann 2002.

¹¹ For more on the houses in this sector, see Rautman 1995 and 2008.

¹² Rautman 2008, 147.

¹³ For Hierapolis see Zaccaria Ruggiu 2007; Zaccaria Ruggiu in this volume.

¹⁴ For Zeugma see Barbet 2005; for Philippi see Pelekanidēs 1977; for Stobi see Hemans 1987; for Kerch see Rostovtzeff 1914; for Gorgippia see Alekseeva 2001; for Luxor see Kalavrezou-Maxeiner 1975; Jones – McFadden forthcoming.

¹⁵ Zimmermann 2010.

At Ephesus, one also finds experimentation and a mixture of floral and incrustation styles. Scattered flowers decorate tombs, but also domestic *cubicula* and niches, both in Hanghäuser 1 and 2. This mixing did not occur at Sardis, at least not in the MMS sector. Among the considerable 4th century fragments used as fill in the MMS houses, only two remotely resemble the floral style of the tombs, so it is highly unlikely that floral painting ever decorated these houses. The majority of 4th century fragments from MMS are painted with framed panels with birds and foliage similar to 2nd – 3rd century examples from Zeugma¹⁶.

While floral and incrustation styles are the most common and best preserved at Sardis, a pair of rooms in a house from the southern part of the MMS sector (MMS/S) preserve some very different styles whose reconstruction and arrangement remain quite tentative. From a colonnaded street one would enter Court E and proceed into the adjacent Room D (Abb. 7–10), which has been identified as a *triclinium* after the recovery of a *sigma* table in the room. Court E contains the only figural painting from a Sardis house, a woman gesturing toward a niche on the west wall¹⁷. Sadly, little else remains from the scene. Rooms E and D were likely redecorated between the late 5th and early 6th century, perhaps a generation later than the *domus* to the north.

Like Room 6 to the north, Room D has incrustation style painting. A painted marble *dado* and portions of a main zone divided by pilasters are preserved *in situ* (Abb. 7). However, two deposits of fragments slumped from the upper part of the wall or perhaps the ceiling reveal bits of at least six disparate patterns, three of which will be discussed here.

A rosette (Abb. 8) design appears to have come from both upper and lower parts of the wall, as the exact same design is found both on thick pieces of cement mortar and on thin pieces of plaster originally adhered to mud. This design may have functioned like similar designs found at Ephesus and elsewhere, where a ceiling pattern extended onto the lateral wall¹⁸. Indeed, the coffered panel from Room 6 (Abb. 6) is an example of a ceiling design moved to a lateral wall.

A few of the other patterns from a deposit in the southeast corner of the room have been very tentatively reconstructed. These include white crosses accented with tri-lobed flowers and divided blue globes within a black diamond-shaped lozenge surrounded by a white frame (Abb. 9). There are fragments of at least three separate crosses suggesting a repeating carpet-style pattern.

Another design from the same lot includes fragments of a brooch-like circle with blue oval cabochons and rinceau and vegetal motifs abutting square frames (Abb. 10). The flowers and vegetal motifs between the circular and square frames share the tri-lobed shape of the flowers in the white cross design of Abb. 9. This jewel-like motif is vaguely reminiscent of painted *opus sectile* medallions such as the one in the apse of Room 6, but with a more painterly quality.

Comparisons for repeating geometric network designs can be found at numerous other sites, but the mix with the incrustation style is, to the best of my knowledge, largely unparalleled¹⁹. This is the most innovative painting yet discovered at Sardis and how all of these disparate motifs fit together is unclear. There are few painted parallels for this mixture of different designs in one room. The closest examples for spatial organization come from mosaics and textiles. A mosaic from Apamea shares the tripartite division of space usually found on painted walls with a central zone that juxtaposes a figural scene with an incrustation style lozenge and a purely geometric cross and circle pattern²⁰. Similarly, the Jonah Tapestry essentially employs a tripartite division of space with a central zone depicting two figural scenes flanking a decorative roundel, even divided by columns²¹. In both of these, panels with completely different designs are placed next to one another, without concern for symmetry. Even though the comparanda for Room D come largely from mosaics and textiles, they are earlier, with the closest examples dating to the 4th century.

Against an incrustation style framework (Abb. 7), the individual motifs of Room D, such as the red and white roundels, crosses and spheres, and cabochons (Abb. 8–10), as well as the overall composition, amply demonstrate the relationship between the minor arts in late antiquity, with motifs borrowed from metalwork

¹⁶ Barbet 2005, P12.

¹⁷ Greenewalt – Rautman 1998, 483 f. fig. 11.

¹⁸ Hanghaus 2, WE 7.

¹⁹ Cf. Barbet *et al.* 1997.

²⁰ Dunbabin 1999, fig. 175.

²¹ Louvre 2010.

and textiles, combined in a manner more common to mosaics and textiles. The play with motifs here also hints at the painter's creative process and influence from other art forms. The resulting composition, though still elusive, would have added a rich visual texture to this *triclinium*, enriching the social space.

The types of painting at Sardis have parallels in the region and in the broader Roman world, though most often from earlier contexts. Painting programs seem not to have reached Sardis until fully codified and generally isolated by context. Architectural incrustation sometimes formed the *dado* course in *hypogaea*, but reached its most elaborate designs in houses. This space-specific attitude seems to be peculiar to Sardis and does not reflect the syncretic nature of domestic and sepulchral painting usually found elsewhere, but is likely a result of the late date when mature painting systems were adopted here.

The wide variety of patterns in Room D are innovative compared to domestic painting elsewhere at Sardis and the absence of clear comparanda in wall painting suggests inventiveness on the part of the painter. And yet, as with most of Sardis's painting, their closest parallels in mosaic and textiles are much earlier. But this relationship between the minor arts and borrowing of motifs between media speaks to wider trends in late antique art.

Sardis's wall painting clearly reflects the predominant styles of the late antique period, with comparanda from across the broader Roman world and even different media. However, the painted *hypogaea* have particular affinity with other painted tombs in western Anatolia and may reflect a regional style. And while the motifs arrive late at Sardis, which might be considered a peculiarity of the site style, they all fit into the broader late antique period style with its artistic syncretism and move toward planar designs.

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Abbildungen

- Abb. 1: Tomb 2007.3, west wall, © Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/President and fellows of Harvard College
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- Abb. 4: “Tomb of Chrysanthios” (Tomb 76.1), north and west walls, watercolor painting by L. J. MAJEWSKI, © Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/President and fellows of Harvard College
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- Abb. 10: MMS/S Room D, lot 15–16 fragments from the southeast corner, watercolor painting by C. S. ALEXANDER, © Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/President and fellows of Harvard College

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