

FORMAL ANALYSIS

Marble Cinerary Chest with Lid, Ancient Rome (ca. AD. 90-110)



The marble cinerary chest with a lid is a three-dimensional stone sculpture. The chest was constructed using marble. It measures 54.5 cm by 33.5 cm by 27cm. The chest belongs to the Roman culture. The chest dates back to the imperial, Flavian, or Trajanic periods (*Metmuseum.org, nods*). An object is a three-dimensional form and it contains the elements and principles of art such as lines, shape, mass, voids, balance, proportion, texture, and emphasis among others.

The top of the chest contains a lid. The lid contains various patterns and iconology. The lid was made in such a way that it could be separated from the main block. These are signs of life. The lid's top part contains patterns resembling fish fins. A contour separates the designs from the center to give

identical patterns on the surface of the lid. The chest resembles roman buildings and uses some elements of roman architectural features such as pediments on the top part, columns, and iconology on its support. The chest size suggests that it might have been carved from a single stone. For instance, the front section of the lid shows a pediment with birds feeding their young ones, and on the corners of the end, there are fish. These birds are feeding their young ones in a nest which shows the continuity of life.

The back of the lid and the chest has no designs and is left rough, which probably shows that it was not visible to people and thus was not important to be decorated. The chest is hollow, which indicates that it was used to store various items. The sides of the chest display iconology of a tree with fruits and birds. The front part is the most dominant part of the chest due to the variety of figures, iconology, inscription, and design. The center of the composition depicts a reclining figure on a couch surrounded by flowers. The figure is formed by the intaglio technique in which some parts of the marble are removed to leave the sculpture raised from the background. The flowers are signs of life-giving forces. Columns of the chest are made up of flaming touches, which can be associated with light or destruction. The figure's position and size show that it is on a higher rank than the surrounding figures.

The figure can be summed up as a divine figure due to the symbols of life, nurturing, and destruction that surrounds it. Next to the divine figure is another figure standing on a pedestal and offering certain gifts to the divine figure. Its position shows that it has to stand or pass a certain level to communicate with the seated figure, which shows that it is on a lower hierarchy than the divine being. Chests were used to put the deceased's ashes and protect valuable items from destruction; perhaps the figure standing on the pedestal was the chest owner.

The chest is hollow, meaning it was to hold items belonging to the owner. Besides, the chest is made of marble, a valuable, available and durable material. In addition, it has a smooth effect and translucent appearance when finished. Below the figure stands two figures on the left and the right holding various items. These figures can be seen as servants due to their level and the items they hold. Below the figures are written inscriptions in Roman. The inscriptions are carved in intaglio. The inscription is located below a series of decreasing rectangles to give focus and depth to the inscription. From the iconography, the chest displays both aesthetic and utilitarian purposes. The chest is ornamental due to its design variety, combining elements of nature, the divine, and human beings. The functional role can be established in the use of the chest, which includes storing valuable items and ashes of the deceased.



Figure 1: Front view



Figure 2: side view (2-point perspective)

Work cited:

Metmuseum.org. (n.d.). Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/252917>