AN ANTIQUE SARCOPHAGUS LID USED BY THE BYZANTINES

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In 1949 when the Bayazid İmaret (kitchen for the needy) was being repaired for use as a Library three plain Byzantine sarcophagi and one sarcophagus lid were discovered buried under the floor of one room1. They were transferred to the Museum of Ayasofya, and are now on exhibition in the courtyard. The lid is particularly remarkable (Figs. 22, 23, 24, 25).

It is still in good condition, and in spite of diverse alterations reveals good workmanship. The lid is in the form of a ridge-shaped roof with wide and flat tegulae covered at the junctions with long and narrow imbrices. On the top and at each side of the pediments, are plain acroteria with four small holes in each. On the top of each acroterion is one large hole. Of the middle acroteria one is completely, and the other partly broken off. On each side of the roof the flat tiles are represented in two rows, as indicated by the middle latitudinal line. The long and narrow tiles are arranged in four vertical rows, not including the two ends. Each row is ridge-shaped, about one centimeter higher than the surface of the lid. Round the borders a deep line was rather carelessly added at a later date. On one side of the roof four rows, and on the other side two rows are terminated by a relief cross. On the ridge of the roof are three holes designed to hold metal objects. The edges are broken. On each side of the roof are two large circular holes, at regular intervals, designed to hold thick metal bars. On each side of the roof are large circular holes spaced regularly intended to hold erect thick metal rods. On the tympani of the pediments and on one of the long sides are series of small holes drilled to hold pins for attaching metal plates. On each long side are three clamp holes designed to join the lid to the body above the architrave. Although most objects found in Istanbul are made

1 This finds has been briefly mentioned in Archaeological Museums of Istanbul, Fourth Report, 1950, p. 61, No. 4.
of Proconnesian marble, this lid is made of marble from the Aegean Islands².

At first sight the relief crosses on the long sides seem to indicate a Christian object, but on a closer examination it is easily understood that the lid belonged originally to a pagan sarcophagus. It differs from Christian sarcophagi by its fine, elegant and symmetrical proportions, and careful workmanship, and it is entirely in the form of an antique temple. On examining the crosses at the end of the long and narrow tiles we can see that they were shaped by chiselling the antefixes which should be at the end of the tiles, as seen on the lids of pagan sarcophagi. Traces of the antefixes are clearly seen at the end of each long row (figs. 26, 27). Traces indicate that two tenons similar to those extant on one long side existed on the other long side (Fig. 23), and one on each end, and that they were chiselled away at a later date. In the tympanum of each pediment are traces of an erased cross. We can suppose that in the place of those crosses was formerly a circular shield or floral decorations, but no traces of such exist. Nor on the acroteria can we see any traces indicating clearly that motifs were erased. On the surface of each acroteria are four small holes designed to fix metal crosses. All this reveals that we are in presence of a pagan sarcophagus lid, in the form of a ridged-shaped roof covered with tiles. It is doubtless similar to the lids of sarcophagi of the "Pamphylia type". Sarcophagi with lids of that shape have been found in Side and Perge³. The most perfect examples of similar lids are seen in the three small sarcophagi discovered together with the Alexander Sarcophagus⁴.

The peculiarities indicated above show that the lid was used by the christians with some alterations. But traces seen on it show that it changed hands again in the christian period, and after being used for the first time by a christian was used at least once more by other christians. After having been used a second time with the crosses sculptured on the long narrow tiles and in the pediments it was later again used with one of the long sides as the principal façade.

² I am indebted to Ord. Prof. H. Mobius (of Würzburg), who saw this lid, and kindly informed me that the marble was probably from the Island of Thasos.
⁴ G. Mendel, Catalogue des Sculptures, I, nos. 72-74.
erased so as to obtain a surface 38 x 14 cms. in size, and a metal plate bearing an inscription was placed instead. At the same time the crosses on the pediments were chiselled away and replaced on one pediment by a rectangular metal plate measuring 52 x 15 cms., and on the other by a metal plate measuring 26 x 29 cms. (figs. 23, 24). These plates may have belonged to different persons. It is frequently seen that in the Byzantine period sarcophagi and hypogeums were used as a family sepulture for generations, and bore diverse inscriptions, also that inscriptions were erased and replaced by new inscriptions, or only the names were changed.

There is another similar sarcophagus lid from the Roman period used by Christians (figs. 26, 27) which was found south of the Bodrum Mosque (Myrelaion), and is now in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul⁵. The acroteria are decorated with floral scrolls, and the pediments have sculptured shields. Small holes indicate, that a cross and a metal plate with inscription were fixed on one side, and there are circular holes designed to fix erect metal crosses. We can also infer from this lid that the holes designed to fix the erect and applied crosses, and the inscribed metal plates, similar to those on the first lid, were used the same time.

Like the Beyazıt lid, this lid also has two rows of tegulae. The imbrices are arranged in five rows and reach the edge of the lid. They are not terminated by antefixes. The lid of the S. Francesco sarcophagus of Ravenna⁶ resembles most closely the Beyazıt lid. It comprises similarly two rows of tegulae and four rows of imbrices. The imbrices are terminated by antefixes in the form of a lion's head. The sizes are approximate to those of the Beyazıt lid, but there is no middle acroterion. With this exception we may admit that the main shape of the Beyazıt lid is more or less similar and that it probably had antefixes in animal form⁷.

⁵ The lid was found in 1931. Dimensions are 2.54 x 1.28 x 0.60 m. Museum Inv. No. 4412, Proconnesian marble.
⁷ The lid of the S. Francesco sarcophagus belonged originally to a pagan sarcophagus (M. Lawrence, The Sarcophagi of Ravenna, p. 15). In the Ravenna sarcophagi we generally look for eastern influence, and it is believed that they were made there by artists from Constantinople or imported directly from East (M. Lawrence, op. cit. P. 30; J. Kollwitz, p. 19). Hanfmann, when he reviewed M. Lawrence’s aforesaid book in 1954, mentioned this fact, and stated that it was proved by some new reliefs discovered in Istanbul (G. M. A. Hanfmann, Speculum, XXIX, 1954, pp.
We may therefore range thus the periods in which the lid we are studying was used,

1. Period of pagan sarcophagus,
2. Period in which the lid was decorated with relief crosses (early Byzantine period),
3. Period in which some crosses were replaced by inscribed metal plates, and the lid was decorated with erect and applied crosses (Middle Byzantine period).

We may also suppose that in the last period the sarcophagus held several corpses, as indicated by the several inscriptions on the lid.

The long and narrow shape, harmonious proportions, and careful workmanship connect this lid not so much to the Pamphylia group and similar lids as to the three small sarcophagi found together with the Alexander sarcophagus. Our lid is not as perfect as those of the Alexander group and may therefore date it between the two groups, and suggest that it was made in the late Hellenistic period. In the vast Necropolis of Byzantion, beside the coarsely sculptured Roman sarcophagi with large acroteria found there in great numbers, the existence of Hellenistic sarcophagi had been previously revealed by a fragment, and is now corroborated by this complete lid.

Both lids have been found within the area of the Necropolis of Byzantion. When Byzantine monuments were being erected in that area the lids may have been taken from the neighboring Necropolis to be used in the buildings. The second lid may have belonged to the Church of Myrelaion in the vicinity of which it was discovered. It is most likely that the first lid, the object of our study, having been discovered in the Bayazid İmaret, was taken from the Necropolis which covered the area of the present Bayazid Square and its environs, and was used likewise.

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575-579). The reliefs recently discovered at Taşkasap and Topkapu, support this theory (N. Firatlı, Cahiers Archéologiques, XI, 1960, pp. 73-92). From this point of view the similarity between the S. Francesco sarcophagus lid, and the two lids discovered in Istanbul merits attention.


For the area covered by the Necropolis of Byzantion see, N. Firatlı, “Byzantion Nekropoli ve son Buluntuları”, Beşinci Türk Tarih Kongresi, pp. 193 ff. The finds connected with necropolis are mentioned there up to the year 1956.
It probably belonged to a church which disappeared when the Bayazid Mosque was being built\(^{10}\).

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\(^{10}\) It has been frequently seen that when Islamic monuments were erected material from ancient buildings was reused. Repairs in the Fatih Mosque revealed that architectural fragments from the Church of the Holy Apostles were used in the pavement of the courtyard (See, Semavi Eyice, "Les fragments et la décoration plastique de l'Eglise des Saints-Apôtres", Cahiers Archéologiques, VIII, 1956, pp. 63 ff.). Also when repairing the pavement of the courtyard of the Bayazid Mosque reliefs were discovered, and it was suggested that they might have belonged to the Church of Theotokos-Diakonissa (S. Eyice, ibid., note 1). It is most probable that the lid discovered in the same area also belonged to that church.
Res. (Fig.) 22-23 — Beyazıt imaretinde bulunan lahit kapısı.
22 - 23 — Sarcophages lid from Beyazıt
Res. (Fig.) 24-25 — The sarcophagus lid from Beyazid (observe)
Res. (Fig.) 26 — Byzantium imaretinde bulunan lahit kapı.  
26 — The sarcophagus lid from Myrelaion.

Res. (Fig.) 27 — Bodrum camii yanında bulunan lahit kapı.  
27 — The sarcophagus lid from myrelaion.