

GUNTRAM KOCH, **Sarkophage der römischen Kaiserzeit**. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1993. 260 Seiten, 122 Abbildungen im Text.

This, the most compact book yet to appear on the subject of Roman sarcophagi, offers a convenient and reliable guide to a subject which, as the author notes, constitutes one of the defining genres of Roman artistic expression. It is one of many paradoxes of the study of Roman art that the reason for the sudden change in the early second century AD from cremation in cinerary urns to inhumation in sarcophagi remains the subject of modern speculation, for (p. 9): „in der antiken Literatur hat man keine Hinweise gefunden“. The author makes it clear that the change was led from Rome, the earliest sarcophagi being made there and in Asia Minor, the major production centres of Athens and Dokimeion (Phrygia) starting slightly later.

That the 12–15 000 surviving Roman sarcophagi, many of them fragmentary, may represent as little as 2,5 % of the total produced in antiquity is a sobering thought. No explanation is offered of the basis of this calculation, and the rate of survival may be higher than the author supposes: when the English collector Charles Townley was buying antiquities in Rome in the late 1760s–1770s, fine sarcophagi were remarkably cheap compared with much restored free-standing statues – so cheap that they could be bought as bases for displaying the smaller figures. Indeed, many forms of secondary use have been found for sarcophagi, which have often served as fountains and planters, and, in cases of chests bearing inoffensive garlands or strigillated decoration, for Christian burial.

The exquisite sketch by Gentile da Fabriano (fig. 4) illustrates the fascination of sarcophagi as sources of inspiration for Renaissance artists. In a resumé of scholarship on sarcophagi, the author does not explicitly state the influence of recently catalogued Renaissance drawings upon the scholars who in the

1860s began the daunting task of compiling the corpus, which was thereby determined to be not of Sarkophage, but Sarkophagreliefs. Though personally responsible for volumes within the corpus, and for editing much of the work of others, in this handbook the author is admirably archaeological in his approach. It is never forgotten that these chests, some of them ranking among the finest works of art produced in the Roman empire, were intended for burial; throughout the book, simple sketches (unfortunately not to scale) illustrate the types of lid, the burial positions, the appearance of the chest in section.

The author's geographical range is also comprehensive and clear. The book is divided into ten chapters, the first two and the last one concerned with general questions of the significance of sarcophagi to ancient and more recent art, material, form and technique, and the history of scholarship on the subject, while the central seven chapters are devoted to the main production centres of Rome, Athens and Dokimeion, the provincial areas of production in the western empire, the Balkans, Asia Minor and the eastern provinces. The book's single omission – astonishing in a text so insistent upon the determining effect of geography – is any map of findspots or production centres. For this, the student will have to turn to the author's earlier magisterial survey, compiled with the dedicatee of the present volume, G. KOCH/H. SICHTERMANN, *Römische Sarkophage. Handbuch der Archäologie* (1982).

As is to be expected in a work by a senior scholar who has devoted much of his career to this subject, the present handbook offers an excellent scholarly apparatus. Recent work, especially on the provenancing of marble by scientific means, is well used, though some chronological nuancing could have been introduced e.g. on p. 13, where the predominance at Rome of chests roughed out in the eastern quarries of Thasos and Proconnesus is noted, with the unsupported explanation that the more local marble from Luni (Carrara) was favoured for architecture. However, it is more likely the case that the use at Rome of marbles for architecture and sarcophagi follows a consistent pattern, the eastern quarries only gaining ascendancy over Carrara for both purposes in the third century AD, perhaps as part of a wider economic and cultural shift towards the eastern provinces (S. WALKER, *From West to East. Evidence for a shift in the balance of trade in white marbles*. In: N. HERZ/M. WAELKENS [eds.], *Classical Marble. Geochemistry, technology, trade*. NATO Advanced Scient. Inst. Ser. 154 [1988] 187–196).

Though maps are lacking, the photographic illustrations are excellent throughout, and particularly useful in the section on techniques of carving sarcophagi, where detailed shots of unfinished chests are used to good effect. The larger prints obscure the pagination.

Many puzzles remain in this subject, despite the enormous attention accorded to Roman sarcophagi in recent years. Throughout, the author warns of limitations and of questions, some of them profound, that such a book as this cannot hope to tackle as part of an introductory survey. It is to his great credit that so much information has been distilled into so accessible a format, offering ways of pursuing in depth the study of this interesting and important indicator of Roman wealth and cultural aspiration.