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Annarita Martini
Società Italiana di Storia delle Religioni
ORCID: 0000-0002-9810-4371

THE GLAZED PARTHIAN SARCOPHAGI OF THE MUSEO ARCHEOLOGICO NAZIONALE DI FIRENZE: RITES AND THE USE OF "BATHTUB" COFFINS

Following very particular events, for which we refer to the accurate studies of Stefano Anastasio, the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze acquired a "bathtub" coffin and some unpublished coffin fragments from the excavations of the Italian mission at Qasr Shamamuk, the ancient Kilizu in Iraq[1].

In 1933, during this mission led by Giuseppe Furlani assisted by Doro Levi, a necropolis was brought to light. The *necropolis* featured Parthian burials, from which two glazed pottery coffins of the "bathtub" type with long straight walls and short walls of semi-circular shape stand out. The rim consisted of two slabs of glazed pottery placed next to each other, horizontally[2].

Coffins of this type were found in various Parthian *necropoleis* of Mesopotamia, in particular, those from Assur have a decorative pattern very similar to those from Kilizu[3]. As W.K. Loftus of the British Museum used to say, it proved particularly difficult to extract this type of *sarcophagus* intact and then transport them. For the recovery of specimens from Uruk, Loftus proceeded, after several attempts, by covering the inner and outer surface with layers of paper and glue, in order to consolidate the structure enough to transport the artefact without breaking it. J.H. Haynes

[1] S. Anastasio, *La missione archeologica italiana in Mesopotamia del 1933 e lo scavo di Kilizu (Qasr Shamamuk, Iraq): I materiali conservati a Firenze*, "ASAtene" 2005, 83, series III, 5, tome II, 2005, pp. 555-592; *idem*, *Qasr Shamamuk: storia dello scavo e della collezione fiorentina,* [in:] *La Collezione orientale del Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze. I materiali di Qasr Shamamuk*, I, eds. S. Anastasio, F. Conti, L. Ulivieri, Rome 2012, pp. 5-70; *idem*, *The Italian Archaeological Expedition to Qasr Shamamuk-Kilizu, Iraq, 1933. Notes on the Excavation Finds at the Iraq Museum in Baghdad*, "Ash-Sharq" 2017, 1, 2, pp. 275-285.

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[2] G. Furlani, *Sarcofaghi partici di Kakzu*, "Iraq" Apr. 1934, 1,1 p. 91.

[3] S.R. Hauser, *Weinreben und das Frühe Christentum in Assur*, [in:] *Übergangszeiten. Altorientalische Studien für Reinhard Dittmann anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstags*, ed. K. Kaniuth, D. Lau, D. Wicke, Münster 2018, pp. 370-451.

used the same method for the *sarcophagi* from Nippur to transport them to the Penn Museum in Philadelphia at the end of the 1800s[4]. The Italian mission also, thanks to the method adopted by the engineer Fausto Franco, was able to transport the *sarcophagi* intact. Unfortunately Furlani did not provide further details on the recovery of the artefacts, and therefore the method used by the engineer Franco remains unknown even today[5]. Two coffins were characterized by decorations of racemes alternating with niches in which figures in relief were impressed. According to the legislation in force in 1933, one of them was left to the Archaeological Museum of Baghdad, today Iraq Museum (*sarcophagus* n. 262 of the burial n. 24[6], fig. 1) and another (*sarcophagus* 109 of the burial n. 5, fig. 2) was taken to Florence to the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze, where it is still today[7].

According to R. Ricciardi Venco, on the basis of the other objects found in the necropolis that can be traced back to the Parthian period, the Florence *Sarcophagus* can be dated to the 2nd-3rd century AD[8]. The Baghdad *Sarcophagus* can also be traced back to this chronological period.

In the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze, in addition to the aforementioned *sarcophagus*, there are also 8 glazed pottery fragments (Inv. 57959 A-H) pertaining to "bathtub" coffins and their lids.

Unpublished fragments preserved in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze

The provenance of the fragments is unknown, but it is very probable that they were found during the excavations of the Parthian necropolis of Kilizu, although they do not appear in the preserved inventories[9]. Furlani's words: "In order to bring to light the necropolis, the excavation of the ground between trenches C and D began. A piece of glazed earthenware with floral decoration was found in the ground"[10] could describe one of these fragments as inv. no. 57959 G or inv. no. 57959 H.

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[4] J. Lawson, *Conservation Notes: The Resurrection of Seven Clay Coffins from Nippur*, "Expedition Magazine" 2006, 48, 3 (http://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/?p=9811), pp. 46-48.

[5] G. Furlani, *op. cit.*, p. 93, note 1.

[6] The sarcophagus has been published in two guides of the Iranian Archeological Museum, cfr. S. Anastasio, *La missione archeologica italiana…*, p. 17.

[7] *Ibidem*, pp. 16-17.

[8] R. Ricciardi Venco, *La cultura partica e il sito di Qasr Shamamuk*, [in:] *Egeo Cipro Siria e Mesopotamia,* ed. M.C. Guidotti, F. Lo Schiavo, R. Pierobon Benoit, Livorno 2007, p. 238.

[9] S. Anastasio, *La missione archeologica italiana…,* pp. 555-592; S. Anastasio, *The Italian Archaeological Expedition…*, pp. 275-285.

[10] G. Furlani, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

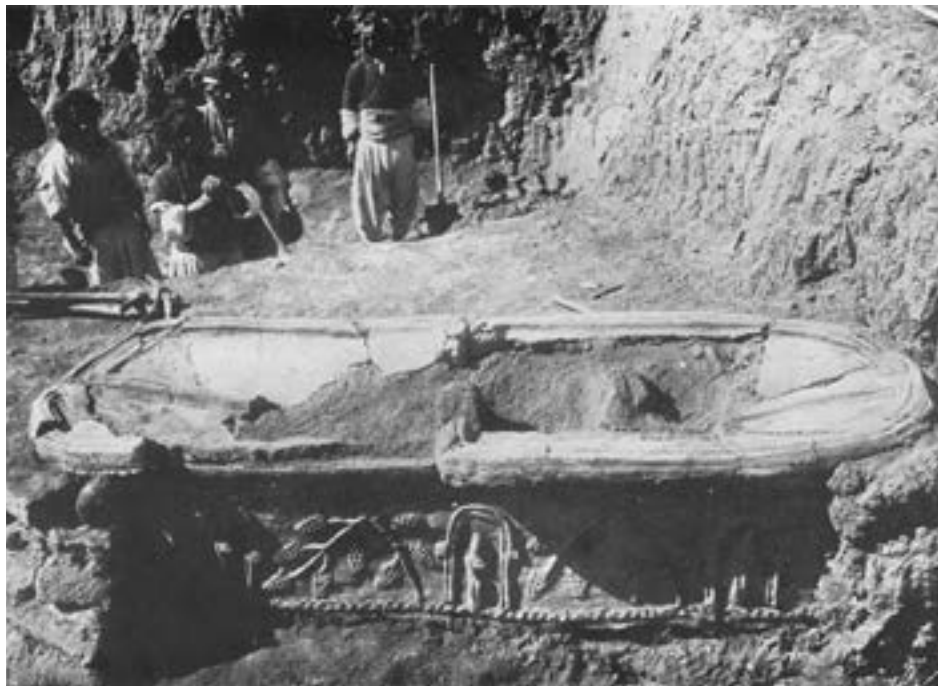

Fig. 1: Glazed Coffin preserved in Baghdad (Inv. n. IM 15418), still *in situ*; the small differences in the decoration of the two sides are visible (from G. Furlani, *Sarcofaghi partici di Kakzu*, "Iraq" Apr. 1934, 1,1, Tav. XII)

Fig. 2: Glazed Coffin preserved in Florence (Inv. n. 93805, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze; photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Description of the Fragments Inv. No. 57959A-H

Rim fragment of a "Bathtub" Coffin (Inv. No. 57959 A), Figs. 3a-b

H. 15.5 cm, w. 28.0 cm, max. thickness 5.3 cm, min. 3.2 cm; glazing up to 2 mm thick.

Rim everted, enlarged, triangular section. Slightly curved wall, must have corresponded to one of the short, rounded sides of the coffin. On the flat top of the rim runs the typical band decorated with the impression of fingers, a similar band also runs below the rim along the wall.

A clay lens with a diameter of 1.9 cm is at the right end of the wall, which must have belonged to a more complex decoration, perhaps racemes.

Both the inner and outer surfaces appear polished. Traces of clay can be seen above the glazing, but it could be the mortar used to set the coffin in the ground.

The clay used for the mixture is of a pale pink colour and seems more purified than the other fragments, having vegetal temper in a smaller number and of rather reduced dimensions. For example, a 2 mm limestone inclusion and a 1.5 mm gravel granule are visible.

The outside is glazed bright, light blue and the inside, also, but darker. Both the inside and outside have a uniform thickness of max. 2 mm.

Rim Fragment of a "Bathtub" Coffin (Inv. No. 57959 B), Fig. 4

H. 19.0 cm; length 15.4 cm; thickness max. 5.5 cm, min. 2.9 cm.

The enlarged, triangular-section rim is slightly recessed on the inside. A band of finger-impressed lines runs on the flat top of the rim, and a similar one is arranged in a garland along the wall.

The colour of the clay is pale pink-yellow, rich in vegetal temper. Both the inner and outer surfaces are polished and covered with a glaze up to 1 mm. thick, dark blue colour.

Rim Fragment of a "Bathtub" Coffin Lid (Inv. 57959 C), Fig. 5

Width 8.0 cm; length 21.0 cm; thickness 5.2 cm.

Enlarged rim with a trapezoidal section and slightly arched course. On the upper part of it there are two parallel grooves made by running two fingers side by side on the fresh clay. Laterally there are two grooves of the same type but less deep. This type of rim and decoration was typical of coffin lids as showed in the photos of "burial 24"[11] (*Sarcophagus* n. 262) made in 1933.

[11] S. Anastasio, *Qasr Shamamuk…*, p. 43, fig. 36.

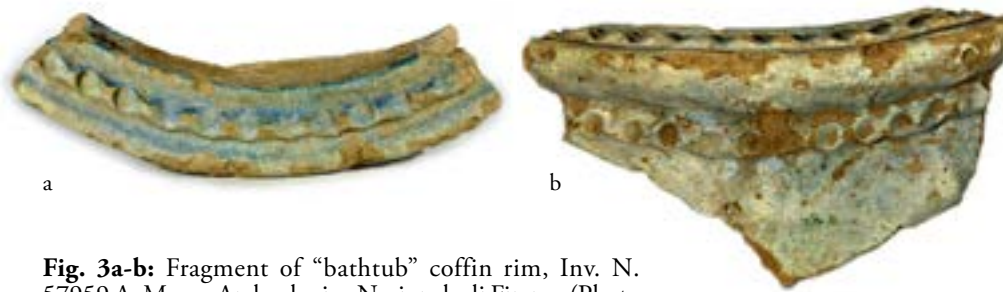

Fig. 3a-b: Fragment of "bathtub" coffin rim, Inv. N. 57959 A, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 4: Fragment of "bathtub" coffin rim, Inv. N. 57959 B, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 5: Rim fragment of "bathtub" coffin lid, Inv. 57959 C, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

The clay paste consists of a pale yellow depurated clay rich in traces left by organic material (grass and/or straw). There are also rare fragments of mica and gravel granules, only one of which is over 6 mm thick.

While the outer part is smoothed, the inner part has been left irregular.

The light blue iridescent glazing tends to yellow inside; its thickness in some places reaches 1 mm.

Rim Fragment of a "Bathtub" Coffin Lid (Inv. No. 57959 D) Fig. 6

H. 10.0 cm; w. 16.3 cm; max. thickness 5.5 cm, min. 1.9 cm.

Fragment of the rim with projecting frame decoration characterized by two parallel grooves on the top made by running two fingers side by side on the fresh clay.

The pinkish paste is rather porous and has numerous large vegetal temper, including one 3.3 cm long. The surface on the outside is smooth, while the inside is rather irregular and rough.

Outside, the bright green glazing is up to 2 mm thick; inside it is pale teal, very thin and in many places lacunose.

Fig. 6: Rim fragment of "bathtub" coffin lid, Inv. N. 57959 D, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 7: Rim fragment of "bathtub" coffin lid, Inv. N. 57959 E, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Rim Fragment of a "Bathtub" Coffin Lid (Inv. No. 57959 E) Fig. 7

Width 11.0 cm; length.10.0 cm; max. thickness 4.3 cm, min. 1.6 cm.

Fragment of a rim with an applied frame decoration, characterized by two parallel grooves on the upper part made by running two fingers side by side on the fresh paste. The rim bends at right angles. The fragment belongs, in all probability, to the central part of a *sarcophagus* lid, sometimes consisting of two slabs placed side by side, as in burial n. 262[12].

The pinkish yellow mixture is very porous and has numerous vegetal inclusions. The outer surface is smooth and the inner surface rough and slightly blackened, but there do not seem to be traces of combustion.

The pale green-blue glazing is present only outside, while inside there are just few drips.

Wall Fragment of "Bathtub" Coffin (Inv. No. 57959 F) Fig. 8

H. 10.5 cm; w. 12.00 cm; max. thickness 5.3 cm. Thickness of *applique* relief max. 1.9 cm.

Wall of a *sarcophagus* decorated *en applique* with a column with fluted shaft surmounted by a molded capital, from which an arch departs. To the left of the column there are traces of a bunch of grapes applied in relief of about a dozen grapes. Where the decoration is detached, it is possible to check how the wall was smoothed before the application of the relief.

The clay paste is similar to that of the fragment inv. 57959 C and consists of pale yellow, purified clay, rich in traces left by organic material (grass and/or straw). Rare fragments of mica and gravel granules are present.

[12] G. Furlani, *op. cit.*, Tav. XII, a.

The glazing is externally green/blue, arranged on a smooth surface and can reach 1 mm in thickness. Inside, the layer of the glazing is less thick and pale yellow/green, arranged on an irregular, unsmoothed surface.

Wall fragment of "Bathtub" Coffin (Inv. No. 57959 G) Fig. 9

H. 11.00; w. 18.0; thickness 3.2 cm. Thickness of applied relief max. 4 mm.

The fragment is characterized by *en applique* decoration representing two parallel and opposing bunches of grapes, one of which has a preserved petiole.

The relief decoration adheres to a smooth surface. The inner surface of the fragment is instead partly smoothed and partly left irregular. The mixture of pale pink-yellow clay is rather purified but rich in fragments of vegetal elements. Outside, the blue-green glazing is thinner and inside the wall more yellow.

Wall fragment of a "Bathtub" Coffin (Inv. No. 57959 H) Fig. 10

H. 8.5 cm; w. 18.0 cm; thickness 3.0/3.7 cm. Thickness of the applied relief max. 9 mm.

The decoration consists of applied curvilinear bands that can be interpreted as racemes, which, however, lack clusters and leaves.

Fig. 8: Coffin wall fragment, Inv. 57959 F, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 9: Coffin wall fragment, Inv. N. 57959 G, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 10: Coffin wall fragment Inv. N. 57959 H, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico nazionale di Firenze)

The pale pink-yellow mixture, similar to the previous ones, is also characterized by the presence of traces of vegetal inclusions of consistent size. The inner surface appears rather smooth.

The glazing is present both inside and outside and also in this case outside is blue/green iridescent and quite thick, while inside it is very thin and tends to yellow.

The wall fragments described seem to belong to different coffins while the lid fragments could belong to burial no. 24 (*sarcophagus* no. 262) and burial no. 5 (*sarcophagus* 109).

An analysis carried out by the laboratory of the Center for the Analysis of Archaeological Materials (CAAM) on some fragments of glazed sarcophagi from Nippur and preserved at the Penn Museum in Philadelphia[13] as well as in those made on the fragments of the sarcophagi of Warka preserved in the British Museum in London[14], shows that the mixture may contain vegetal inclusions, probably cereal straw, and minerals such as quartz and feldspar. The glazing consists of a soda lime silica composition coloured with copper[15].

The mixture and glazing of the Florentine fragments appear from a macroscopic analysis not at all dissimilar to those of Nippur and Warka, but only specific analyses could better define the relationships between these productions.

Given our present knowledge and considering the weight and fragility of these finds, it seems more plausible to assume that they came from local manufactures.

The decorative elements present on the fragments: racemes, bunches of grapes, architectural elements and frames are found in a more developed form on the intact coffins, which allows a greater understanding.

It will be appropriate to briefly recall the characteristics of sarcophagi from Kilizu and preserved in their integrity.

The Baghdad *Sarcophagus*

The Bagdad *Sarcophagus* (IM 15418, Fig. 1) is slightly larger than the one from Florence (length 1.90 m, width 0.63 m, height 50 cm) and the shape and dimensions of the lid are known (the two halves are 1.08 m and 0.99 m long and 0.66 m wide

[13] For the annals of *CAAM* cfr. M.C. Boileau, *Analyzing Slipper Coffins from Nippur*, "Expedition" spring 2018, 60,1, pp. 98-99.

[14] *Ibidem*, p. 98; A. Middleton, St J. Simpson, A.P. Simpson, *The Manufacture and Decoration of Parthian Glazed "Slipper Coffins" from Warka*, "The British Museum Technical Research Bulletin" 2008, 2, pp. 31-32 e 35; St J. Simpson, *Partho-Sasanian Ceramic Industries in Mesopotamia*, [in:] I. Freestone, D. Gaimster, *Pottery in the Making. World Ceramic Traditions*, London 1997, p. 75.

[15] M.C. Boileau, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99.

respectively). The decoration on the two sides is similar but not identical. On each of the long sides are three niches with relief figures inside. The niches consist of two small columns surmounted by capitals on which rests an arch in the round, separated by a vine-shoot that from the bottom right of the viewer goes towards the upper edge of the *sarcophagus* and then bends down towards the lower edge of the wall. "On either side of the vine-shoot and at the top are attached bunches of grapes, eight in all, of which one is at the top of the vine-shoot and almost touches the lower rim." While the grapes (17 to 20) are easily recognizable, the leaves are missing altogether. Below the rim of the *sarcophagus* and along the lower margin, runs a band decorated with the impression of fingers. The figures represented in the niches have been interpreted by Furlani as a "female figure, probably a goddess"[16]. The two sides of the *sarcophagus* differ "in the shape of the niche, the curvature of the vine-shoot, the position of the clusters and the woman or goddess"[17]. On one side, in the applied images, the woman is naked or "clothed in a very light dress"[18]. She wears as a headdress a "cylindrical tiara", from which "perhaps a veil falls over the person"[19]. The left arm is bent and the left hand is on the chest, the right arm is stretched along the side, and the hand rests or is on the thigh. The figures on the other side do not wear the high tiara, but a smaller one and the right hand rests on the left thigh.

The Florence *Sarcophagus*

The Florence *Sarcophagus* (Inv. 93805, fig. 2[20]) is slightly shorter and smaller (length 1.88 m, width 0.62 m, h. 0.40 m) than the one preserved in Baghdad. Under the rim and along the base there is also here a band decorated with the impression of fingers.

Also in this artefact on each of the long sides there are three niches separated by racemes, consisting of fluted columns, capitals and molded bases.

The vine shoots start from the bottom and go to the right and to the left, they are therefore double. Besides bunches there are also little leaves in the shape of small circles, the number of bunches and leaves per shoot and their position varies from one to another. They have 15 to 19 grapes[21]. Inside the niches there are figures with bent

[16] G. Furlani, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
[17] *Ibidem*, p. 91.
[18] *Ibidem*, p. 91.
[19] *Ibidem*, p. 91.
[20] The photos of coffin fragments (inv. nn. 57959 A-H) from the Italian Mission at Qasr Shamamuk (Kilizu) and that of the "bathtub" coffin (inv. n. 93805) from the same site have been reproduced by concession from the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Direzione regionale Musei della Toscana) and further reproductions or duplications by any means are forbidden.
[21] *Ibidem*, pp. 91-92.

legs, the right arm turns to the left to carry the hand on the left leg, while the left arm is bent with the hand on the chest, on the head there is a high conical headdress. They have been generally interpreted as female images, probably of a deity, previously by Furlani, and it could be the Aphrodite *pudica* as R. Ricciardi Venco has suggested, a representation "widely spread in Mesopotamia in Parthian period"[22]. Of the same opinion also is A. Cellerino, who suggests a further interpretation. According to the scholar it could in fact be the "representation of ancient religious concepts related to fertility always expressed in Mesopotamia in the naked female figure"[23]. However, Furlani, in addition to four possible comparisons with representations of female images, also proposed a male image, which was not given any space, perhaps undeservedly, in subsequent studies, but which could prove to be the most fitting.

The first of the four comparisons proposed by Furlani, and therefore perhaps the most relevant for the scholar, is the graffito found in a house in Dura Europos (Fig. 11), which represents "under a canopy or a niche […] a seated personage, probably a king of Persia". In a note Furlani recalled that, according to C. Hopkins, the graffito represented the *simulacrum* of the god inside the temple of the Palmyrene gods, perhaps Zeus-Ahuramazda. Furlani considered this hypothesis likely, despite the perplexity of F. Cumont. The niche, in fact, would recall the aedicule at the centre of the *naos* of the temple, in which was "a seat or a throne"[24].

The position of the character at Dura Europos is always found in the representation of two male figures seated on a throne inside niches, painted on the sides of the central apse of the *mithraeum*, where the altar and *tauroctonies* were located (Fig. 12). The two figures resemble *Magi* for the clothing and the Iranian features of the face. Vermaseren interpreted them as *patres* of the community of Dura Europos[25], while for Cumont they represented the prophets Zoroaster and Ostanes[26].

These images have in common with the images on the Florentine *sarcophagus* the three-quarter view, the bent legs typical of a seated person, the left arm bent over the pelvis with the hand that could have held something, the right arm bent over the chest that could have held another artefact and the high headdress type tiara or mitre.

Unlike the representations of female images on coffins, as in the Berlin *Sarcophagus* mentioned by Furlani, the one from Nippur (Inv. B220) at the Penn Museum in Philadelphia, and the slipper Coffin from Nippur (YBC 2259, Fig. 13) at the Yale

[22] R. Ricciardi Venco, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

[23] A. Cellerino, "Scheda n. 97 Sarcofago", [in:] *Sulla via di Alessandro. Da Seleucia al Gandhāra*, ed. V. Messina, Cinisello Balsamo 2007, p. 182.

[24] G. Furlani, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

[25] *CIMRM* n. 44.

[26] Cumont F., *The Dura-Mithraeum*, [in:] *Mithraic Studies*, I, ed. J.R. Hinnells, Manchester 1975, pp. 151-207.

Fig. 11: "Parthian *graffito* of Dura-Europos" (Photo from G. Furlani, *Sarcofaghi partici di Kakzu*, "Iraq" Apr. 1934, 1,1, Tav. XIV)

Fig. 12 a-b: Figures from the mithraeum of Dura Europos (Photo courtesy Yale University Art Gallery)

Fig. 13: Coffin from Nippur (YBC 2259), Yale Babylonian Collection, Yale Peabody Museum (Photo courtesy Carl Kaufman for photography and the Yale Babylonian Collection for permission to use the images)

Babylonian Collection in New Haven the sexual characteristics and in particular the breast are emphasized and are easily recognizable[27]. For this reason the female figure on the *sarcophagus* of Nippur YBC 2259 has been identified with Inanna Sumerian goddess who "represents the fruitful character of the earth" and in the syncretism of

[27] For the images mentioned by Furlani cfr. G. Furlani, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94; for the fragment of the *sarcophagus* in Berlin and for the *sarcophagus* from Nippur cfr. respectively F. Sarre, *Die Kunst des Alten Persien*, Berlin 1923, tav. 64; J. Lawson, *op. cit.*, p. 48; M.C. Boileau, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

the imperial age was identified with Venus[28]. The burial should belong to three glass bottles preserved in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Inv. No. 176a-c), which are dated in the second-third century[29].

Conclusions

This production of glazed sarcophagi is part of a more ancient tradition of terracotta sarcophagi made in Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and southern Anatolia from the second half of the second millennium BC until the third century AD, to which glazing was added in the second century BC. In particular, the skill of the Parthian potters of southern Mesopotamia in making glazed wares led to the creation of so-called slipper *sarcophagi*[30] and, in general, "bathtub" *sarcophagi,* characterized by a complex decoration.

In recent years, studies have been conducted in order to relate these sarcophagi to funerary practices linked to specific cults.

A recent study by S.R. Hauser in 2018 has connected a fragmentary "bathtub" *sarcophagus* from Assur with Christianity, due to the presence in the lower right corner of an applied cross with arms ending in small concave discs (Fig. 14). The *sarcophagus* has a decoration closely akin to that of the Florence *Sarcophagus* and the fragments described above. Although not glazed, it is in fact decorated with applied racemes framed by a band with small grooves produced by the impression of fingers. Even the chronological range is the same, both artefacts date to the II-III century[31].

Hauser also noted that the decoration with racemes and *aedicules* of the *sarcophagi* of Kilizu and Assur is quite unusual in the context of the tank *sarcophagi* of "alten Assyrien" and wonders if it was not influenced by Roman-Mediterranean models[32].

As for the cross, it is not clear whether it can really be considered a Christian symbol or interpreted as such in that period and in that region. According to Hauser, there could have been Christians at Assur, and certainly in the fourth century the cross decorated some burials of children in earthenware jars at Susa. Furthermore, tombs from the late Sasanian period were recognized as Christian by the presence of the cross.

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[28] For the identification of the goddess *applique* figure cfr. B. Fowlkes-Childs, M. Seymour, *The World Between Empires. Art and Identity in the Ancient Middle East*, New York 2019, pp. 246-247. For the definition of the goddess Inanna cfr., http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/inanna/.

[29] L. Ulivieri, *Il catalogo dei materiali*, [in:] *La Collezione orientale del Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze. I materiali di Qasr Shamamuk*, I, ed. S. Anastasio, F. Conti, L. Ulivieri, Roma 2012, p. 145-146.

[30] A. Middleton, St J. Simpson, A.P. Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[31] S.R. Hauser, *op. cit.*, pp. 369-385.

[32] *Ibidem*, pp. 376.

Fig. 14: Coffin from Assur (Photo from S.R. Hauser, *Weinreben und das Frühe Christentum in Assur*, [in:] K. Kaniuth, D. Lau, D. Wicke (ed.), *Übergangszeiten. Altorientalische Studien für Reinhard Dittmann anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstags*, Münster 2018, p. 451, Tav. 8)

The connection of the cross with the vine-shoots of grapes also leads back to a Christian context, even if the racemes are not lacking in the pagan context as well as in contemporary mystery cults. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the presence of this decoration in *applique* form in the cultic vase found in the *mithraeum* of Hawarte in Syria[33].

With regard to the image of the cross, Hauser himself recalls how it is widespread in Sasanian art for example in the glyptic as an alternative to the stars or the crescent moon.

The scholar also admits that the one on the *sarcophagus* of Assur would be the oldest evidence of the presence of Christians in Assur and would dispel doubts about the historical validity of the Syriac chronicles that attest to the early second century the presence of a bishopric in this city[34].

However, it is worth asking if in the late second century-early third century the cross already represented a Christian symbol as an alternative to the *Chrismon* and if, evoking cosmic elements such as the stars and the moon, it was not more generally a magical symbol (*charakter*), such as the star with eight rays and the x ending in circles present in some amulets such as the one with the representation of King Solomon in the Musée d'archéologie nationale in Saint-Germain-en-Laye in France[35]

[33] M. Gawlikowski, *Excavations in Hawarte 2008-2009*, "Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean" 2012, 21 (Research 2009), fig. 7 a, p. 488.

[34] R.S. Hauser, *op. cit.*, pp. 380-381.

[35] Ribichini S., *Magia e divinazione nel mondo antico*, "Archeo Monografie" febbraio 2018, 23.

and in the Archaeological Park of Ostia Antica, inv. No. 4168[36]or as with the Capitoline phylactery[37].

Magical symbols and images of magicians in the niches could allude to another religious sphere closer to Zoroastrianism. Marek Jan Olbrycht seems to be of the same opinion, having recently related the spread of these *sarcophagi* in Mesopotamia, from the first half of the first century BC onwards, for soldiers and Parthian rulers and their families who used Zoroastrian funerary rites[38]. The scholar also brings as an example the *sarcophagi* of Kilizu[39]. Observing the decoration of intact *sarcophagi*, one can exclude that they housed the mortal remains of warriors, such as the specimens of Warka[40] and, as has already been explained, of women. Considering instead the affinities with the iconography of Dura Europos, the *sarcophagi* could have belonged to Zoroastrian believers or even *magi*.

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[37] M. Moriggi, *Una* lamina *bilingue dal Medagliere Capitolino: considerazioni sul testo ebraico*, "*BCom*" 2006, 107, p. 165.

[38] M.J. Olbrycht, *Slipper Coffins and Funerary Practices in Parthia*, "Anabasis. Studia Classica et Orientalia" 2017, 8, pp. 301-313.

[39] *Ibidem*, p. 308.

[40] Cfr. A. Middleton, St J. Simpson, A.P. Simpson, *op. cit.*, fig. 8a, p. 34.

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Illustrations

The photos of "bathtub" coffin fragments (inv. nn. 57959 A-H) from the Italian Mission at Qasr Shamamuk (Kilizu) and that of the "bathtub" coffin (inv. n. 93805) from the same site have been reproduced with a concession from the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Direzione regionale Musei della Toscana), and further reproductions or duplications by any means are forbidden.

Fig. 1: Glazed Coffin preserved in Baghdad (Inv. n. IM 15418), still *in situ*; the small differences in the decoration of the two sides are visible (from G. Furlani, *Sarcofaghi partici di Kakzu*, "Iraq" Apr. 1934, 1,1, Tav. XII)

Fig. 2: Glazed Coffin preserved in Florence (Inv. n. 93805, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze; Photo © Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 3 a-b: Fragment of "bathtub" coffin rim, Inv. N. 57959 A, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 4: Fragment of "bathtub" coffin rim, Inv. N. 57959 B, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 5: Rim fragment of "bathtub" coffin lid, Inv. N. 57959 C, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 6: Rim fragment of "bathtub" coffin lid, Inv. N. 57959 D, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 7: Rim fragment of "bathtub" coffin lid, Inv. N. 57959 E, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 8: Coffin wall fragment, Inv. N. 57959 F, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 9: Coffin wall fragment, Inv. N. 57959 G, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 10: Coffin wall fragment Inv. N. 57959 H, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze)

Fig. 11: "Parthian *graffito* of Dura-Europos" (Photo from G. Furlani, *Sarcofaghi partici di Kakzu*, "Iraq" Apr. 1934, 1,1, Tav. XIV)
Fig. 12 a-b: Figures from the mithraeum of Dura Europos (Photo courtesy Yale University Art Gallery)
Fig. 13: Coffin from Nippur (YBC 2259), Yale Babylonian Collection, Yale Peabody Museum (Photo courtesy Carl Kaufman for photography and the Yale Babylonian Collection for permission to use the images)
Fig. 14: Coffin from Assur (Photo from S.R. Hauser, *Weinreben und das Frühe Christentum in Assur*, [in:] K. Kaniuth, D. Lau, D. Wicke ed., *Übergangszeiten. Altorientalische Studien für Reinhard Dittmann anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstags*, Münster 2018, p. 451, Tav. 8)

THE GLAZED PARTHIAN SARCOPHAGI OF THE MUSEO ARCHEOLOGICO NAZIONALE DI FIRENZE: RITES AND THE USE OF "BATHTUB" COFFINS

Summary

The study is based on the investigation of some unpublished fragments of glazed "bathtub" coffins from Kilizu in Iraq and preserved in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Florence. Reflection on the use of this type of *sarcophagus* in the context of funerary practices in Mesopotamia from the first century A.D. onwards was accompanied by an analysis of the fragments in terms of their technical characteristics.
"Bathtub" or slipper coffins have been found in various Mesopotamian necropolises, some of which are characterized by *en applique* decoration and green-blue glazing. In the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze there are a "bathtub" *sarcophagus* and some unpublished fragments of other similar coffins, from the excavations of the Italian mission at Qasr Shamamuk, the ancient Kilizu in Iraq, conducted in 1933. The decorative apparatus of the sarcophagi of Kilizu seems to lead the artefacts to a religious context close to Zoroastrianism, practiced in Mesopotamia, from the first half of the first century BC onwards, by soldiers and Parthian rulers and their families, and perhaps suggest who the burials were.
Keywords: Parthian Glazed Ceramic, "Bathtub" and Slipper Coffins, Italian Excavation Kilizu (Qasr Shamamuk, Iraq)

SZKLIWIONE SARKOFAGI PARTYJSKIE Z NARODOWEGO MUZEUM ARCHEOLOGICZNEGO WE FLORENCJI: OBRZĘDOWOŚĆ I UŻYCIE TRUMIEN „WANNOWYCH"

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia badanie nad nieopublikowanymi fragmentami szkliwionych trumien „wannowych" z Kilizu w Iraku, które znajdują się w Narodowym Muzeum Archeologicznym we Florencji. Namysłowi nad użyciem tego typu sarkofagu w kontekście mezopotamskich obrzędów funeralnych funkcjonujących od pierwszego wieku naszej ery towarzyszy analiza wspomnianych fragmentów w zakresie ich charakterystyki technicznej.
Trumny „wannowe" czy pantoflowe odnajdywane były na obszarach różnych mezopotamskich nekropolii. Niektóre z nich charakteryzuje zdobienie *en applique* i zielono-niebieskie szkliwo. W Narodowym Muzeum Archeologicznym we Florencji znajduje się sarkofag „wannowy" i nieopublikowane fragmenty innych podobnych trumien, które odkryto podczas badań archeologicznych prowadzonych w 1933 roku przez włoską misję w Qasr Shamamuk (starożytnym Kilizu) w Iraku.
Zdobienia sarkofagów z Kilizu pozwalają umieścić ich kontekst religijny w pobliżu zaratusztrianizmu, który był praktykowany w Mezopotamii od pierwszej połowy I w. p.n.e. przez żołnierzy i partyjskich władców oraz ich rodziny. To może zaś sugerować, kim byli pochowani w nich ludzie.
Słowa kluczowe: partyjska ceramika szkliwiona, trumny „wannowe" i pantoflowe, włoskie badania archeologiczne w Kilizu (Qasr Shamamuk, Irak)