

On the Murals of Han Dynasty Tombs in Shiyuan

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Abstract:

The murals of the Han Dynasty Tombs in the persimmon garden are the earliest painted, frescoes and frescoes of the highest level in China. The whole mural is composed of auspicious patterns and frame patterns such as dragon, rosefinch, white tiger, monster, Ganoderma lucidum grass and cloud pattern. Death turns imagination into visible and touchable objects through the artistic technique of mural, which reflects people's pursuit of immortality, their nostalgia for human life and their cognition of immortal soul in the early Han Dynasty. Moreover, the mural not only has exquisite composition, smooth lines and skilled techniques, but also shows high painting skills and artistic level.

Keywords:

Mural, Content, Production Technology, Design Idea, Artistic Value

1. Introduction

The Western Han Dynasty was a peak of the development of the whole feudal society in China. During this period, the development of economy, politics and culture reached a peak. As a great vassal state in the Western Han Dynasty, Liang was located in a fertile place at that time, so the local economy, politics and culture were slightly higher than other vassal states in the Western Han Dynasty. Liu Wu, king of Liang Xiao of the Western Han Dynasty, migrated from Huaiyang to Suiyang in 168 BC and was buried in Mangdangshan after his death. Since then, the tombs of the king of Liang have been located in Mangdangshan. Shiyuan Han tomb is one of the few tombs in Mangdangshan tomb group. After expert research, the owner of Shiyuan Han tomb is Liu Mai, king of Liang Gong.

Many valuable cultural relics have been found in Shiyuan Han tomb, of which the most striking is the mural of the four gods cloud diagram in the tomb. The mural consists of two parts: the central theme pattern and the auxiliary decorative pattern of the surrounding frame. According to the archaeological excavation briefing, the murals are located on the roof of the main room, the south wall and the north and south sides of the west wall gate crossing, and are painted with color murals, a total of three. Among them, the murals on the top of the main room are most completely preserved. When they are found, the color is as new, and the damage below the

middle of the south wall is more serious. The mural has been permanently collected by Henan Museum and is now regarded as one of the nine national treasures of Henan Museum.

2. The content of murals in the Han Dynasty Tombs in Shiyuan

The mural of the four gods and clouds is the earliest, well preserved and highest level painted mural in China. The picture is 5.14 meters long from north to South and 3.27 meters wide from east to west, with an overall area of about 16.8 square meters. The whole mural is composed of “four gods”: dragon, rosefinch, white tiger, monster, *Ganoderma lucidum*, cloud pattern and border pattern. The theme pattern is based on vermilion red, and then painted in white, green and black (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Murals in the Han Dynasty Tombs in Shiyuan.

The dragon is painted in the middle of the whole picture, across the north and south ends of the picture, accounting for more than half of the whole mural. The dark green dragon body is covered with exquisite red dragon scales. The dragon head has two corners, and its tongue is a black-and-white monster. The dragon mouth is large. It wants to swallow the image of the monster in front of it. The dragon has two wings and lotus colored four feet, one of the first two feet steps on the cloud and the other on the wing; The rear two feet are connected to the tail of a rosefinch, and one foot is connected to a flower. There is a flower growing at the tail of the dragon. The dragon body is magnificent, and there is a floating image against the background of cloud patterns. The rosefinch is painted on the east side of the middle of the dragon body, with the head facing north and the tail facing south; There is a dragon horn in the mouth, a flower on the neck, two cloud patterns on the tail, and black dots on the wings of the body. The white tiger is located in the west of the middle and stands opposite to the rosefinch. The white tiger steps on the cloud pattern. There are two flowers on his head. He looks up and opens his mouth. He wants to swallow a *Ganoderma lucidum* in front of him. There is a running image. The monster is painted in the middle of the southernmost end of the whole picture and held by the Dragon tongue. Its head is duck beak, long neck, long feather, body is decorated with fish scale patterns, with huge thorns on its back, and the image of its tail is fish tail. *Ganoderma lucidum* is painted in the blank space between dragon and tiger and grows on cloud pattern. The cloud pattern is in the middle of the picture to show the visual effect of the whole picture in the fairyland universe. The mural has full composition, vivid shape and elegant lines, showing the painter's accurate grasp of structure, high generalization ability and exquisite observation ability.

3. Production Technology of Murals in the Han Dynasty Tombs in Shiyuan

The mural is painted on the stone wall attached to the rock mass. Shiyuan Han tomb is a stone cliff tomb. The tomb chamber was chiseled by the mountain. After the tomb chamber was chiseled, the wall was not polished, and the rock mass wall was uneven. Before making murals, first paint a layer of fine mud on the uneven stone wall, and then paint on the smoothed mud texture. The production of ground warfare is divided into two categories. One is where the rock mass is flat and the fine mud ground is thin. The other is to embed some wood chips when making the mud layer in the deep depression of the rock mass, so as to reduce the weight of the mud layer and prevent the mud layer from falling off before drying. Therefore, the thickness of the ground battle is also different. The thin place is about 2-3 mm, and the thick place can reach several centimeters.

The mural pattern uses cinnabar as the background color, and white tiger, green dragon, rosefinch, monster and cloud pattern are painted with Muscovite, malachite green and black respectively. The surrounding border is paved with ochre, lined with light ink, directly drawn with white, connected and passed through the white round wall and white moire. The Dragon uses light ink to hook the line, and the head and body are haloed with ochre and light ink. After haloing, some places show a vermilion background, and then decorated with white dots and red strips. The dragon body is haloed with ochre and light ink, and the Dragon belly is distinguished by white. The Dragon foot is hooked again with white, and the white dot pattern is pointed out. The middle of the dot is filled with cinnabar red for decoration. The Dragon wings are lined with ink and white, dotted with red and black patterns. The white tiger mainly uses ink to draw lines and white to fill in color. The tiger body is painted with black stripes, and the tail is decorated with black lines. The rosefinch also uses ink lines, with its long beak and feet filled with black and its body filled with white. The back and wings of the rosefinch are decorated with malachite green dots. The Dragon tongue rolled up the "fish woman" monster. The outline of the monster is outlined in ink and filled with white. The cloud patterns, long branch flowers, sacred mountains and *Ganoderma lucidum* decorated in the red main murals are outlined in ink, and then the local outline is re hooked in white, making the picture more comparative and infectious. The overall tone of murals in the Han Dynasty Tombs murals in Shiyuan is full of strong decorative effect. The color presents a strong visual effect in the murals. The application of mineral pigments also makes the murals keep their colors bright.

4. Design Idea of Murals in the Han Dynasty Tombs in Shiyuan

The wind of auspiciousness was very popular in the Han Dynasty, because based on the ideology of destiny, the rulers believed that auspiciousness was a good omen for God to be wise and wise to themselves and to govern the country well, and that it was the auspicious weather brought by their own merit and virtue, which was of great help to their immortality [1]. Therefore, under the influence of this social concept, we analyzed the murals in the Han tomb in Shiyuan.

First of all, in terms of layout, the dragon is the main body, rosefinch, white tiger, monster and *Ganoderma lucidum* are placed in the picture according to a certain proportion, and the cloud pattern is drawn in the blank space around. This cloud pattern is also a symbol of immortality. On a Han Dynasty bronze mirror unearthed in Cixi, Zhejiang Province, there is an inscription "riding a flying dragon and riding a

floating cloud”. It can be seen that the depiction of cloud pattern not only achieves the decorative effect of full picture and harmonious proportion, but also expresses the idea of riding the dragon to become an immortal.

From the analysis of the content of the “four gods”, although the image of the “four gods” can express the position, from the perspective of layout, the picture takes the green dragon as the main performance object, and the rosefinch and white tiger are attached to the green dragon rather than occupying a direction respectively, so it does not have the meaning of position. This may be very similar to the painted wooden coffin in Mawangdui No. 1 Han tomb. In the report on the No. 1 Han tomb in Mawangdui, it is said that the images on the Zhu Di painted coffin include dragons, tigers, rosefinches and deer, and there is no Xuanwu, probably because the purpose here is to take its auspiciousness, not to express the four directions [2]. Therefore, the image of the “four gods” in the murals does not indicate the orientation. It is an expression of auspiciousness here. Various animals use their auspicious bodies to help people become immortals and guide the soul of the tomb owner into the fairyland.

The dragon’s long beard in the mural flutters and twists, as if traveling in the sky. This is the tool used by the tomb owner to ascend to heaven. The rosefinch above the dragon is also a divine bird that guides the soul to heaven. Monsters are good wishes for the resurrection of the dead. The white tiger wants to swallow *Ganoderma lucidum* and live forever. At the same time, *Ganoderma lucidum* pattern symbolizes the auspicious spirit of immortality. According to ancient legends, this makes the tomb owner have the necessary conditions to lead from the world to heaven after death. With these conditions, the dead can ascend to heaven smoothly. Thus, these constitute a true portrayal of the tomb owner’s desire for immortality and immortality after death, and reflect the tomb owner’s ideal of transferring his rich life to enjoy after death. Moreover, there are many straight-line patterns around the edge of the mural, implying that the tomb owner can realize the separation of soul and body by passing through the round hole of jade wall, and then embark on the road to heaven and become an immortal under the escort of auspicious animals such as green dragon, white tiger and rosefinch [3]. This belief is realized through the unity of the “heaven” - the mural on the top of the tomb and the “human” - the owner of the tomb. Through the artistic technique of mural, death turns imagination into visible and touchable objects, which reflects people’s pursuit of immortality, their nostalgia for human life and their cognition of immortal soul in the early Han Dynasty.

5. The Artistic Value of Murals in the Han Dynasty Tombs in Shiyuan

The mural is not only large in area, well preserved and brightly colored, but also has a high identity as the tomb owner. It is the only huge color tomb mural of princes and kings in the early Western Han Dynasty. Its value is mainly reflected in the following aspects: first, it fills the gap of huge color tomb murals in the early Western Han Dynasty. So far, although many painting materials have been found in the Western Han Dynasty, most of them are sporadic and small area. The painted wooden coffin of No. 1 Han tomb in Mawangdui, Changsha, Hunan Province is about 3 square meters, which is less than one-fifth of the mural area on the top of the main room of the Han tomb in Shiyuan. Secondly, it has high artistic value. From the murals seen in the tomb, it not only has exquisite composition, smooth lines and skilled techniques, but also shows a high artistic level. Unlike the murals of the Western Han Tombs in buqianqiu, Luoyang, which are more rough than thin, and unlike the silk paintings of

the Jinque mountain Han Tombs in Linyi, the “cinnabar lines and light ink lines from the drawings are not very strict, or even scrawl”. The Han tomb murals in Shiyuan show a high technical level from composition to brushwork, and pursue the artistic effect of both form and spirit. Taking the dragon in the mural on the top as an example, not only the parts are suitable, but also the expression is well carved. The image of a flying dragon is vivid on paper.

The artistic achievements reflected in the mural are multifaceted.

Firstly, pay attention to symmetry in composition. The mural on the top takes a flying dragon as the theme pattern, with a rosefinch above the dragon and a white tiger below; The murals on the south wall and west wall are centered on Xianshan mountain peak and rosefinch. A leopard is painted on the left and a fairy grass is painted on the right (reported as *Ganoderma lucidum* grass). The symmetry of border decoration patterns is more prominent, and the patterns of semi wall shape, wall shape and flame pattern are symmetrically arranged.

Secondly, the use of whitening techniques. In order to make the picture vivid and full of changes, and achieve the artistic effect of expressing the theme of the picture - flying dragon in the sky, fill the gap of the dragon with cloud patterns, fairy grass, fairy flowers, etc. Getting rid of the rigid arrangement method since the late spring and Autumn period, painters began to pay attention to the proportional relationship and perspective relationship of the picture, so as to grasp the coordination of the overall structure as a whole. It can be seen in the murals that the green dragon, white tiger, rosefinch and monster in the picture are half of the side painting, but due to the artist’s ingenious use of lines, it also reflects the whole perspective relationship of animals. For example, the green dragon in the mural looks up into the distance, and its beard on the other side is covered by its body. Its body is divided into two parts, with separate lines and colors on the abdomen, which has a three-dimensional feeling as a whole. The image of the white tiger in the mural also uses the perspective method to reflect the whole dynamic characteristics and roaring momentum of the white tiger.

Thirdly, in terms of techniques, it mainly uses single line to outline and flat paint, and individual patterns use “boneless method”, which uses lines of different thickness to express the texture or dynamic effect of the object image. For example, in order to show the dynamic texture of the dragon's beard flying in the sky, the “high ancient hairspring” technique is used to draw arc ribbon like hair with dense black thin lines behind the dragon's head, so that the image of the flying dragon is lifelike.

Fourthly, the ingenious use of lines shows the dynamic state of objects and images, making the picture full of vitality. The use of lines has almost reached the level of perfection, completely getting rid of the rigid state of lines in early painting, reflecting that meticulous heavy color painting has developed to a high artistic level in this period. Its discovery fills the gap of large-scale color tomb murals in the early Western Han Dynasty, and has high artistic and historical value.

6. Conclusions

Murals in the Han Dynasty Tombs in Shiyuan, as the earliest mural tomb we have found, has opened the precedent of tomb mural. His painting has a very mature skill, and the theme of painting is also very directional, which can clearly reflect the social concepts and beliefs at that time. This provides a very reliable material for us to study the origin and development of tomb murals and people’s belief in auspiciousness and

immortals in the Western Han Dynasty. The discovery of Shiyuan tomb murals not only enriched our understanding of the four gods, but also provided materials for future tomb murals, and provided a reference for later tomb murals, but also made us understand the fairyland imagined by people in the Han Dynasty and people's belief in immortals and immortality, which has a high reference significance for us to understand the Western Han culture.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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