

Unique Sheep's Head Round Carved Han Portrait Stone

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Abstract:

The circular carved stone relighting in Han dynasty has its unique artistic style, which is the product of the unique cultural concept and aesthetic concept in the Han dynasty. Although it is one of the manifestations of funeral culture, it gives the later generations a taste of the unique artistic creation of the Han dynasty, and provides much inspiration and reference for the modern sculpture art.

Keywords:

Round Carving, Han Dynasty Stone Reliefs, Artistic Features

1. About the Round Carving

In the Zhucheng Museum in Weifang, Shandong, there is a unique set of Han portrait stones (as shown in Figure 1): there are more than a dozen round carved sheep's heads, the complete expression of their installation method, and the exhibition hall is marked as "round carving", which attracted the author's attention out of professional sensitivity.



Figure 1. Collection of Zhucheng Museum.

Regarding the carving techniques of Han portrait stones, many scholars have conducted in-depth research and detailed classification. Due to the different classification methods based on each household, the names of various carving techniques are different, and the names of the same carving techniques are also inconsistent. In 1937, Teng Gu first divided the carving technique of portrait stone into two parts: “quasi-painting” and “quasi-relief”, which had a far-reaching influence. [1] Yu Weichao's “Introduction to Chinese Portrait Stones” is based on Teng Gu's two major classification principles, and is further divided into six techniques: Yin line carving, concave line carving, subtractive plane line carving, bas-relief, high relief carving and open-cut carving. [2] Later, Jiang Yingju, Wu Wenqi [3], Yang Boda [4], Li Falin [6] and Xin Lixiang [5] and other gentlemen each had their own ideas, which were similar, but none of them mentioned the “round carving” method of Han portrait stone carving. Only Zheng Jun divided it into six types in “Han Dynasty Decorative Arts”: Yin line carving, bas-relief, convex carving, intaglio carving, high relief, open-cut carving, and round carving [7], which is only an example of the inverted double dragon next to the octagonal pillar arch in the Han portrait stone tomb of the Yinan and Northern Zhai Han. Wang Tonghai and Wu Zhifang gave a brief introduction to the carving works and assembly methods in the collection of the Zhucheng Museum in their book “Weifang Han Portrait Stone”, which is considered to be a unique Han portrait stone carving method, which is currently only found in Weifang Zhucheng, but there is no detailed research [8].

After reading a large number of art history books, the author believes that Mr. Liu Fengjun's explanation of the “round carving” carving technique is more reasonable: “Round carving, also known as three-dimensional carving, is a completely or relatively three-dimensional sculpture art, and it is also the most direct expression of physical beauty. It has a sense of the power of the living body, suitable for observation from all angles, and each surface represents a certain spatial relationship, which can give the audience a more perfect feeling. Round carving art is a difficult expression technique in sculpture art, which not only requires the shape of each part of the sculpture to be lifelike, but also causes different artistic effects with the movement of light. It is characterized by a solemn shape, perfect shape, strong realism, and is more suitable for expressing the shape of people and animals. Because the round carving works are very three-dimensional, vivid, realistic and expressive, the selection requirements for stone are relatively strict, and from length, width to thickness the works must have an appropriate proportion with the real thing [9].

However, this installation method visually gives people the feeling of high relief, of course, it is two completely different carving methods from high relief:

High relief is a form of relief sculpture with a deep shovel and a very high floating image. It is characterized by thicker starting position and less compression of the body, and often uses the undulating turns of the body in three-dimensional space to express its three-dimensional sense and spatial depth, so its spatial structure and shaping characteristics are closer to round carving, and even local treatment is completely using the treatment method of round carving. The high relief technique accounts for a relatively small proportion of the portrait stones of the Zhucheng Han and is only found on the door of the tomb of the former Liangtai Han. Portrait stones in other regions have more such carvings, mainly concentrated on doors, lintels, bucket arches and foundation pillars, such as Anqiu Dongjiazhuang Han tomb interior wall pillars and Linyi Wubaizhuang Han tomb, there are a large number of high relief carving techniques.

According to the current data, the author believes that the area where round carved portrait stones have been unearthed is not only Weifang Zhucheng (Figure 1), but also in the neighboring Yishui [10] (Figure 2).

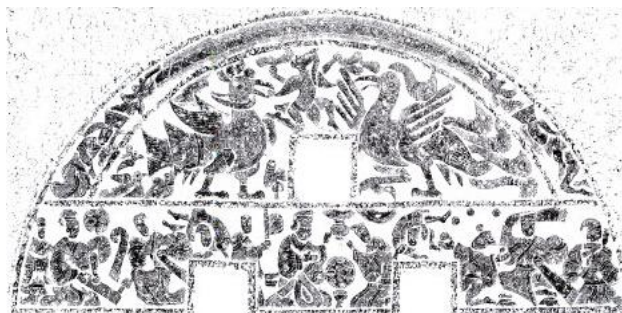


Figure 2. Collection of Yishui County Museum.

Excavated in 1972 in Yishuidao, Tuo Hanjiaqu, bas-relief (Figure 4). The stone is 82 cm long and 183 cm wide, and the pattern is exquisite. The picture is half-moon-shaped and has two floors. On the upper level, there is a double-headed arched dragon in the outer circle, with an open mouth spraying water, and a person under the faucet head is covered with a top basin to receive water. The inner circle has a feather grass and a phoenix bird, and a square hole in the middle; On the lower floor, the middle is the guest and host banquet, the left and right are handstands, dancing pills, a woman with a waist and long sleeves dancing, a man with long sleeves stepping on the drumming and stroking the piano, playing the flute, and 2 square holes. The author believes that these three square holes in the shape of “pin” should be the place where the three round-carved sheep's heads are placed. Of course, there are no detailed information to support this view, and this idea is only an opinion.

Through the above information, it can be seen that the round carving portrait stone is a unique one of the Han Dynasty portrait stone carving techniques, and its excavation and discovery not only enrich the research content of the Han Dynasty portrait stone, but also indicate that the architectural art of the Han Dynasty has been further matured and improved: architectural design and construction began to have a clear division of labor.

2. The Aesthetic Characteristics of Round Carving Art

2.1. Generalization and wholeness

Generality and wholeness are one of the basic characteristics of sheep's head round carving, and Han Dynasty carvers excavated the original appearance of the stone shape and used simple and concise artistic techniques to make the artistic conception of the carving work vivid and natural. For example, the style of the round carving in front of the tomb of Huo Qubing in the Han Dynasty is also rough and summarized, which is related to the aesthetic orientation of the Han Dynasty, combined with the background of the era and the existing sculpture works at that time, it may also be related to the immaturity of early carving technology and the constraints of carving tools. The sheep's head round carving portrait stone is carved from general sight, grasping the main characteristics of the sheep, and the horns are carved above the stone, and the outline of the snout are carved in the front part, and the original shape of the stone basically maintains below, and this kind of complex and simple carving technique, invisibly increase the integrity of the round carving, making it have a simple and natural, thick and simple artistic taste.

2.2. Expression of dynamic and static combination

Sheep have a deep relationship with ancient rituals. “Spring and Autumn Dew” said: “Fanxiang, Qing uses lambs.” Lambs have horns and are different, like the benevolent. He who does not speak, who kills without slander, who is like death and righteousness, who drinks his mother, kneels, and who knows the rites. Therefore, the sheep are auspicious. So I thought it was a shame. This means that the sheep have a gentle, patient, indisputable temperament to death, and a righteous manner. Therefore, the image of the sheep was more common in Han dynasty portraits, mainly used to express the concept of filial piety, the idea of ascending immortals, and sacrificial rites. The round carved sheep’s head discussed in this article and the Rui Beast portrait stone engraved with auspicious meaning has been found for the first time so far, which may be related to the idea of ascending immortals or auspicious meaning, reflecting the religious beliefs and life ideals of the Han Dynasty. Therefore, the carver tried to show a static beauty in the portrayal of the sheep carving like a stone statue, so as to reflect its gentle and patient character characteristics. The portrait on the portrait stone has a strong sense of movement, outlining the movement and vitality of life, and the sheep carving head is in stark contrast to the flying and flowing portrait on the portrait stone. In addition, the heavy texture and rough carving technique of the stone used in the sheep carving head are combined with the portrait stone, and this artistic treatment method is obviously related to catering to the psychology and requirements of the tomb builders, because integrity and perfection were important concepts at that time, which could express an eternal formal theme, and also interpreted the Han Dynasty's cognition and understanding of life.

2.3. Both form and god

Having both form and spirit has always been the ideal pursuit of aesthetics in traditional Chinese painting and plastic arts. Painting theories throughout the dynasties have placed the question of form and god in the first place to explain, as early as the pre-Qin period “Zhuangzi Zhubei Tour”: “Fu Yuan was born in the underworld. Youlun is born of formlessness, spirit is born of Tao, form is born of essence, and all things are born of form. “Huainanzi Say Mountain Training” in the Han Dynasty: “Painting the face of Xi Shi is beautiful but cannot be said; The eyes of the rulers are big and fearless, and the monarch is dead”. These discourses on form and god had an impact on both aesthetic thought and artistic creation in the Han Dynasty. At this time, the creator has been able to grasp the spirit, temperament, personality of the object, in the shaping of the form, pay attention to the form that can reflect the god to emphasize, such as in the treatment of the sheep carving head, the creator deeply understands that only the pursuit of the form is impossible to meet people's aesthetic pursuits, only the picture with an extra-physical can be vivid and attractive. Therefore, in terms of creative techniques, the entire round carved head features the significant appearance characteristics of the sheep without detailed portrayal, and uses concise carving language to make the quiet and gentle personality characteristics of the sheep more distinct, and the more important point is to inject the thoughts and feelings of the creator into the work, directly express to the viewer their true feelings about the objective world, and at the same time it is the result of their own life literacy and technical cultivation.

2.4. Plain and natural

Chinese aesthetics highly respects the beauty of simplicity, and Zhuangzi called it “simple and the world cannot compete with beauty”. Just as the round carving Han portrait stone is expressed, the upper part and outline of the stone are slightly processed, retaining the simple nature of the original stone, the majestic beauty of the rugged shape without losing the solemnity, the simplicity and non-artificial, the pure beauty of the sky, and the realization of the life rhythm containing the beauty of heaven and earth.

The artistic characteristics of the round carving of sheep’s head are in line with the overall style of the entire carving art of the Han Dynasty, and the atmosphere is delicate, and the roughness reflects the superb skills of the carvers. The whole round sculpture is similar to the well-known carving “Horse Stepping Xiongnu” in front of the tomb of Huo Qubing in the Han Dynasty, which is simple, seemingly uncarved, but showing irreproducible artistic skills everywhere. This is a unique style of artistic expression in the Han Dynasty, which is not only reflected in large stone carvings, but also in smaller stone carvings such as portrait bricks.

The sheep’s head round carved portrait stone reflects the simple and natural era style of the Han Dynasty, without losing its unique regional characteristics. After the baptism of the times, the gentle characteristics of the sheep can still be perfectly reflected in the round carvings, and like other portrait stone art of the Han Dynasty, its natural unadorned beauty is still amazing today, thousands of years later.

2.5. Combination of relief and round carving

In the treatment of space, because round carvings have certain limitations in expressing the volume of space, the background building or the carvings on it can supplement the meaning. This is much expressed in religious art, and this art of combining plastic painting makes the work more space-oriented, whole-hearted, and more far-reaching. This round carved sheep’s head should be used together with the components on the building to express the religious beliefs and life ideals of the Han people. In terms of artistic characteristics, the modeling methods of relief carving and round carving play a role together, showing the overall momentum.

3. Conclusions

The Han Dynasty round carving portrait stone is the product of the Han people’s emphasis on filial piety, life and death, and the carver uses the knife to give life to the emotionless stone, and combines it with the entire tomb to form the unique artistic expression of the Han Dynasty and the Han people’s cognition and understanding of the concept of time and space. Although the round carved Han portrait stone is thick and clumsy, it is majestic and simple, capturing the form and demeanor of the object, and still has important reference significance for today’s carving art.

China has a long history, and there are many excellent works of art in ancient times that are worth learning from today’s people, and Han Dynasty portrait stone art is one of them. For today’s artists, instead of hovering between Western modern art and the national issue of art, and unable to find a way out in confusion, it is better to find inspiration in excellent ancient art, find the cultural roots of the Chinese nation, and create works that reflect the style and spirit of the times like sheep’s head round carvings and stones.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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