

The Niches Where Carved Out On the Lycia Tombs And Comment of the Ritual Meanings from Ancient Times to Modern Times

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Abstract: The Niches that have got for a long time past in the Anatolian tradition are carved out generally oriented to the religious usage in both spatial and outside spatial. Rather the firstly meaning of the niches seems that symbolic also are used for the functional causes into inhabitancy. The niches are known for at the endings of the 9th B.C. - beginning of the 8th B.C. in Urartu Religious architecture. Following periods for example in the Roman times we see in the Cilicia region necropolis. Determining such a ship, wine, wreath, flower and peacock motives which are related to the death cult painted to the niches in Anamourion necropolis. Generally the dead presents to put in the niches where are carved out Kline grave chambers. The niches also engraved to set the owners of the tombs. Particularly this practice was common in the Roman period.

Key words: Lycia, Tomb, Olympus, Niches, Sarcophagi

1. Introduction

Niche word is derived from French language. It's meaning a hole, hollow into the wall. The niche is used various build from homes to place of worships like mosques and churches for thousands years all over the world.

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2 Lycia Niches

The niches are also found in the tombs which are named as "carved buried" in Patara ancient city. It is suggested to skull cult because of to discovering the skulls into niches¹. The tombs with niches that are related to death cult also found in Termessos, Sagalassos cities of Pisidia region². Generally observing the terracotta figurines set into

¹ H. İskan – N. Cevik, III. Nekropol Kazıları, Patara 1997, *Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı* XX-II, 1988, pp. 159–178, p.163. Res. 11.

²A.Machatschek, *Die Nekropolen und Grabmaler im Gebiet von Elaiussa Sebaste und Korykos im Rauhen Kilikien*, Wien, 1967, p.114, n. 532.

the niches of the tombs³. These findings could be represented the gods who are connecting with the death cult also the votives that are given by the relations of dead to gods.

Above mentioned, the niches which are carved out into graves sometimes must be used during burial. The dead are moved to the tomb in the night and by the torch's lightings in ancient Greek and Roman periods⁴. Funeral procession that came to burial to grave could be set the niches to brighten the tomb. It is found such a kind of in situ lambs⁵ which verified that aim. A trace burned lamb which is found in a tomb niche in Hierapolis. B. Sogut has suggested that this example had burned into tomb then closed the lid of grave⁶.

2.1 Example of Olympus Niches

The niches are very common architectural objects in vaulted tombs of Olympus Necropolis in Lycia region⁷. 95 niches are found in the vaulted tombs in Olympus. Generally they formed as a rectangular. Some of them are arched on the top. The widths of niches are change 35-40 cm. Changing the heights of niches which carved out to the side walls is 35-40 cm. The back wall niches heights lower than side walls and preferred about 20 cm. The depths of niches are 25-40cm except one example. The arcosolium which are very common in Cilicia vaulted tombs is not expansive in Olympus. The number of niches where in tombs is

generally one or two in Olympus and the other cities of Lycia.

Above mentioned, the niches are actually carved out to the side walls and close to the entry of tomb. We don't have enough evidences for why the niches are carved out into the tombs in Olympus and the other cities in Lycia.

3 The Meaning of the niches in ancient times

We consider that a commentary for an arrangement of the niches into the tombs. We suggest that the niches where carved out to the side walls and close to the entry of tomb to brighten for the grave. People, who came for burial, could be set the lambs into the niches on entry after opening the sliding door. These parts are seems more practice. The niches which are the side walls of grave could be carved out to put dead presents for dead or cremation pots. Because of the depths of niches generally 35-45 cm. it is reasonable to put cremation pots. Considering these niches are carved out not functional but symbolic meaning by reason of the measures of back wall niches are small and the arched form of some niches. These niches which probably related to dead cult could be carved out to place various votives to offer the gods or the statues of the god.

Some niches are carved out outer of the tomb. Generally these niches are worked up to the entry of grave and top of the linto block. The measures of these niches are smaller and arched of the top. A people, who visited to tomb probably is set an offering object into the niche. Other plausibility is these niches could be a symbolic transition between underworld and earth.

We see actually such that kind of openings in the earlier dated sarcophagi in Lycia region⁸. These openings which

³Y.Boysal -M.Kadioğlu, 1997 Yılı Stratonikeia Nekropol Çalışmaları, *Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı*, XX-II, 1999, p.215-228, p.220.

⁴ Only child have buried before day light. See: J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, Cornell University Press, 1971, p 46.

⁵ B. Sogut, Dağlık Kilikia Bölgesi Mezar Nişleri, *Olba* VII, 2003, pp. 239-260, p. 253, 255, n.70.

⁶ B. Sogut, Dağlık Kilikia Bölgesi Mezar Nişleri, *Olba* VII, 2003, p. 255, n. 70.

⁷ E. Ugurlu *Olympos Nekrolu*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Anakra Uni, Ankara 2006,p.161.

⁸ F. Blakolmer, Die Grabung in der Nekropole V von Limyra-Vorläufige Ergebnisse, *Lykien Symposium II*, 1993, pp. 145-152, p. 153.

closed by wooden door and a rectangular or square formed panels are designed⁹. The panels are formed as a frame but not an opening. Previously mentioned, there were pseudo doors called that “blind doors?” in roc-cut tombs in Lycia region¹⁰. It is suggested that chiefly the niches which carved out the outside of the tombs are related to dead cult. Some researchers are considered that niches which carved out to the rock and formed as a door to epiphanies¹¹.

3. 1 Painting

Some of the niches are generally painted on the tombs in Lycia. Some niches are plastered by ruddy coloured mortar. The tomb chambers are not only painted pink coloured stucco (*opus signinum*) but also the niches are painted in their original situation. It is understood from the traces of mortar and *opus signinum*, while the tomb chambers plastered and then painted; niches also have practiced as chambers. It is seen the similar practice on the vaulted tombs where in Cilicia region and Perge necropolis¹².

⁹ J. Zahle, Lykische Felsgraber mit Reliefs aus dem 4.jh. v. Chr.-Neue und Alte Funde, *Jdl* 94, 1979, pp.245–346, p.300; C.D. Levi, *Les Piliers funéraires de Lycie*, Louvain Pres, 1982, p.198; F. J. Tritsch, False Door on Tombs, *JHS* 63, 1943, p.113–115; F. Blakolmer, Die Grabung in der Nekropole V von Limyra-Vorläufige Ergebnisse, *Lykien Symposium II*, 1993, p.154.

¹⁰ J. Borchhardt- G. Neumann -K. Schulz, Das Grabmal des Sohnes des Ta aus Hoiran in Zentrallykien, *ÖJh* 55, 1984, pp.69–125, p.71, Abb.2–5; J. Borchhardt –G. Neumann, Zur Politik Der Dynasten Trbbênimi und Perikle von Zêmuri, *LYKIA III*, 1997, pp.1–23, p.72, Abb.9-10; Z. Kuban, Bir Nekropolün Siyasi ve Kültürel Boyutu: Limyra Örneği”, *Olba II*, 1999, pp.333–344, p.334.

¹¹ T. Tarhan- V. Sevin, Urartu Tapınak kapıları ile Anıtsal kaya Nişleri Arasındaki Bağını, *Belleten XXXIX*, Sayı 155, 1975, pp. 390–404, p.397, n. 27.

¹² E.A. Rosenbaum, *Anamur Nekropolü, The Necropolis of Anemurium*, TTK, 1971, p. 8, 35, 36, 47, 59, 69; E.A. Rosenbaum-G. Huber –S. Onurkan, *A Survey of Coastal Cities in*

4 Conclusions

Today, some rural regions the niches are carved in spatial either to keep a celestial object for example a religion book (The Koran) or a statue (Christ statue) (as a kind of *deux artifex*: a chant communication media) or providing the lighting to put a lamb any else to set some precious objects. It is obvious that the niches carved out in spatial¹³ and graves are similar to at the present apprehension. In Modern Greece many homes, there is a niche where icons and holy oil are displayed similar to the Anatolian houses. In Greece, The fortieth day, the day of the last memorial for dead, is the final day of the post mortem period, during which the soul still haunts the place where the man died or where his body lies. In Chios for these forty days, that a light was kept burning on the grave: the soul has not yet fully departed .These lamps are not uncommon on Greek graves: but the tombstones in Pontos always had a niche for a tiny burning lamp; the stone being often in the form of a small model of a church. With this lingering of the soul after death is connected the practice occasionally observed of laying food on the grave¹⁴.

As a result, the niche tradition which carved out for thousands year both in Greece and Anatolia is not lost nearly its meaning and seem to continue also thousands year in future.

Western Cilicia, Preliminary Report. TTK, 1967, p.50, Fig. 33; H. Abbasoğlu, Perge Kazıları, *Türkiye Arkeolojisi ve İstanbul Üniversitesi (1932–1999)*, (ed. O.Belli), 200, İst. Ün. Yay. s.241–247, Fig. 11; H.İşkan –N. Çevik, Tlos 1997, *AST XVI-II*, 1988, pp. 423–442, p. 427.; H. İşkan- N. Çevik, III. Nekropol Kazıları, Patara 1997, *Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı XX-II*, 1998, pp.159–178, p.163; E.E. Schneider, Some Considerations on Elaiussa’s North Eastern Necropolis, *Olba VIII*, 2003, pp.261–273.

¹³ H.J.Deighton, *Eski Roma Yaşantısında Bir Gün* (Cev. H.K. Ersoy), Homer Kitabevi, 1999, p.18.

¹⁴ R. M. Dawkins, Soul and Body, in the Folklore of Modern Greece, *Folklore*, Vol 53, No. 3, 1942, pp. 131–147, p. 134.