

Commentary on Four-gods Dermatoglyphic Patterns —Take Tang Dynasty Epitaph as an Example

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Abstract. The decoration of four-gods is an important traditional auspicious pattern in ancient China, which is decorated on many utensils. Not only can we see the four-gods decoration on the stone, tile, murals and bronze mirrors, but also on the four sides of the epitaph and the four inclined brakes of the cover, we can see the exquisite four-gods decoration carved, of which the four-gods decoration on the epitaph of the Tang Dynasty is the most splendid. But why decorate the four-gods on ancient utensils? What are the four gods? What are the auspicious implications of the four-gods decoration? This article will take the four-gods decoration of Tang Dynasty epitaph as an example to analyze its hidden cultural significance.

Keywords: four-gods decoration, Tang Dynasty epitaph, cultural significance.

1. The Origin of the Concept of the Four Gods

The four-gods consist of four kinds of gods and beasts: Qinglong, Baihu, Suzaku and Xuanwu. They originally refer to the four stars in the sky. Later, they represent the four directions of east, west, South and North respectively. They also represent the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter and the four colors of green, white, red and black. Eventually, the four-gods have become an important traditional auspicious pattern in ancient China. They can be seen not only in stone portraits, tiles, bronze mirrors, lacquerware and murals, but also in epitaphs. Moreover, the images of the four-gods have their own characteristics with the different times.

The origin of the appearance of the four-gods is related to the totem worship of ancient human beings. The formation of the system of four-gods was influenced by the theory of five elements, which took place in the early Western Han Dynasty. At first, they were called "Four Spirits" and "Four Images". Only in the Sui and Tang Dynasties did the fixed name of "Four Gods" flourish in the Han Dynasty (Fig. 1) as the guardian God of happiness and auspiciousness, and became popular in the Three Kingdoms, the Jin Dynasty, the Southern and Northern Dynasties, and even in the Sui and Tang Dynasties.



Fig 1. The four-gods of the Western Han Dynasty.

2. The Change of the Image of Four-gods and Its Auspicious Meaning

With the changes of different times, the image and situation of the four-gods have their own characteristics. Han Dynasty is a self-confident, calm and energetic era, at which the image of the four-gods is often depicted concisely and forcefully, with noble and healthy vitality. When carving, the lines are fluent and unrestrained, giving people a sense of vigorous and upward strength. In the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, evasion and praying for blessings became the characteristics of the times, so the four-gods assumed the responsibility of guarding, which was usually portrayed as powerful and vigorous. By the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the use of the images of the four-gods reached its peak, especially in the mature and prosperous Tang Dynasty, which made the patterns of the four-gods very popular, and each of them was depicted abundantly, delicately and delicately. Since the Song Dynasty, the appearance of the four-gods pattern has been reduced, and its image is different from that of the previous generation, showing beautiful artistic characteristics. In different periods, the images of the four-gods have their own characteristics. Their rich and colorful forms of expression have left us a valuable artistic wealth.

The pattern of four-gods has been carved or drawn on many objects in the past dynasties. They have their unique functions and meanings. four-gods not only serve as auspicious patron saints, but also have the meaning of auspicious and peaceful, and they also have the function of town house. They can play the role of ward off evil in any corner of the earth or in the sky. Therefore, the ancients used the image of the four-gods in building cities, houses and graves to seek good fortune and ward off evil and disaster. And many imperial cities of dynasties named entrances and exits with the names of the four-gods as a sign of good luck. This shows that the ancients attached great importance to the auspicious meaning of the four gods, which is not only a spirit, but also a belief, and profoundly expressed people's strong desire to avoid danger, seek peace and turn good fortune into evil.

3. The Cultural Significance of the Four-gods Embellishment in Tang Dynasty Epitaphs

3.1 Tang Dynasty Epitaph Four-gods Embody the Spirit of the Tang Dynasty

The Tang Dynasty was the most glorious period of Chinese feudal society, and art and culture flourished unprecedentedly. Among them, the four-gods decoration on the Tang Dynasty epitaph (Fig. 2) developed to the peak period. From the four-gods decoration on the Tang Dynasty epitaph, we can feel the inclusive and open spirit of the Tang Dynasty. Because it not only absorbs the basic characteristics of the four-gods decoration in the Sui Dynasty and even before, but also integrates the unique bold and unconstrained style of this dynasty, and eventually becomes an elegant, dignified and vivid four-gods artistic image. From this, we can see that the Tang Empire has a broad and profound cultural spirit.

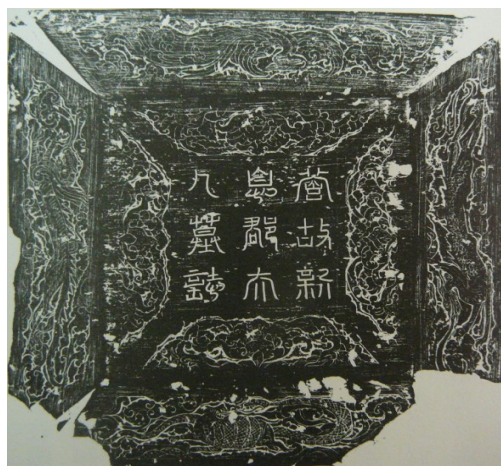


Fig 2. The four-gods decoration of Tang Dynasty epitaph (rubblings of Madame An Yuanshou's epitaph)

The four-gods decoration of Tang epitaph is created through the artistic processing of the essence of the previous generation decoration, whether in the artistic form, manifestation or content combination. A decoration carved on the stones hidden in the tomb was created by the artists of the Tang Dynasty so attentively, reflecting the active and enterprising spirit of the Tang Dynasty.

The images of the four-gods in Tang epitaphs blend into human thoughts and emotions. From the attitude and actions of the four gods, it seems that we can see their inner joy. four-gods swim freely in the clouds, mountains and flowers. In this relaxed and free fairyland on earth, there is hope for the future everywhere. Before the Tang Dynasty, the four Gods'decorations were so sacred that they placed their hopes on the gods and hoped to be sheltered. The four-gods decoration on the epitaph of Tang Dynasty changed the unchanged artistic style, dared to innovate boldly and made breakthroughs, and showed the Tang spirit of pursuing human liberation and freedom to the world.

Through the above discussion, we can see from the epitaph of the four-gods of the Tang Dynasty that the spirit of the Tang Dynasty is rare, such as tolerance, openness, courage and fearlessness, death-seeking, positive progress, and the pursuit of human freedom.

3.2 Tang Dynasty Epitaphs Embody the Aesthetic Consciousness of the Tang Dynasty

The Tang Empire was the most powerful, civilized and prosperous country at that time. Under such historical background, the Tang Dynasty formed a unique aesthetic concept, which can be embodied from the four-gods decoration on the epitaph of the Tang Dynasty. They are graceful and magnificent, plump and plump, which reflects the aesthetic concept of fat as the beauty of the Tang Dynasty. The four Gods'decorations are all vividly and vividly carved, and even the auxiliary decorations around them are magnificent and magnificent. This can show that the Tang Dynasty has the aesthetic consciousness of bold pursuit of youth and vitality. Since then, China has formed a vigorous and positive aesthetic ideology.

The four-gods decoration on Tang Dynasty epitaph also pays attention to the form aesthetic feeling of vision. (1) Beauty of lines: four-gods decorative lines are smooth, round and beautiful, dense, flexible, and full of gods and objects. (2) Texture beauty: the texture of the four-gods is real and cordial, as if every God had to jump out of the picture. The artist's unique performance techniques and delicate and accurate line depiction, the picture is both physical and spiritual, and the texture is real. (3) Beauty of volume: The image of four-gods has a strong sense of volume, and the rich and rich form fully reflects the aesthetic needs of that time. (4) Structural beauty: four-gods pattern picture structure is harmonious, symmetrical, unique composition, contrast of objects and images, prominent focus, strong sense of space.

3.3 The Four-gods Decoration of Tang Dynasty Epitaph Reflects the Development of Tang Dynasty Painting.

The four-gods decoration on Tang epitaphs is not only a decorative pattern, but also a painting form in ancient China. It not only reflects the spirit and aesthetic consciousness of the Tang Dynasty, but also reflects the development of painting in the Tang Dynasty. Chinese painting has a long history and various forms. The four-gods decoration on Tang epitaph belongs to a form of expression of stone carving painting, so it is closely related to the painting of Tang Dynasty. While appreciating the four-gods decoration, we can also understand the development of the painting of Tang Dynasty.

The four-gods decoration of Tang epitaph, combined with trees, mountains and clouds, is completely integrated into landscape or flower and bird paintings. There are four-gods running in the quiet forest, and there are four-gods running in the quiet, which have the artistic characteristics of landscape painting. There are flowers and plants growing quietly around the active four gods, and the scenery of moving and quiet also has the artistic characteristics of flower and bird painting. Thus, the four-gods decorative picture of Tang epitaph is inseparable from Tang landscape painting and flower-and-bird painting, and reflects the artistic characteristics of Tang landscape painting and flower-and-bird painting which pay attention to the combination of dynamic and static in the constitution. Tang epitaphs are decorated with four-gods and other patterns, and carved with neat and beautiful calligraphy art, concise writing, fluent sentences, such as poetry generally beautiful. This ingenious

combination of poems, books and paintings also reflects the artistic characteristics of Chinese painting.

4. Conclusion

Generally speaking, the four-gods decoration on Tang epitaphs can bring infinite aesthetic feeling to people. They can not only reflect the spirit and aesthetic consciousness of the Tang Dynasty, but also reflect the development of painting in the Tang Dynasty. This kind of four-god decoration developed under the aesthetic conception of health, expression and rhyme is the inevitable result of bold pursuit of new ideas. They developed the four-gods decoration to the peak age, and crossed the sky of ancient Chinese history with novel and unique style. Their charm will last forever.

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