

Abstract

The adaptation of the Achaemenid griffin in a Macedonian tomb-painting and a Sikyonian mosaic

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Iconographic forms from Achaemenid-held lands reached the western and northern Aegean areas through various means, and throughout the period of interaction between the Greek world and the ancient Persian Empire as well as after the latter's demise. Some of these forms belonged to the imperial iconographic repertoire as known through the evidence provided by the reliefs at Persepolis and similar material from other central sites, others find parallels among different classes of evidence from the east including seals and items of personal adornment. This paper focuses on two fourth-century examples of such a transferal. The first on a recently excavated Macedonian tomb, the second on a long-known floor mosaic at the northern Peloponnesian city of Sikyon. Both picture variants of a griffin of an eastern type, and although such hybrid creatures had a place in Greek iconography well before the fourth century these specific examples betray strong links with eastern prototypes. The Macedonian tomb-painting dates to the last quarter of the fourth century, while the Sikyonian mosaic has been dated to various periods within that century. The most carefully argued dating places it too in the later stages of the fourth century. The paper examines the contexts into which these griffins were adopted in Macedonia and Sikyon and the possible meanings they held for their commissioners and viewers. Furthermore, given the other known examples of "persianising" iconography and objects in Macedonia after Alexander's conquests and the role played by Macedonian dynasts during the latter part of the fourth century in the northern Peloponnese, and particularly at Sikyon, the possibility is suggested that the mosaic griffin testifies to the existence of a Macedonian conduit through which persianising elements were disseminated during the late fourth century.