Monument - Tomb for a member of the Moro family

Object: Monument

Place of origin: Venice (city)

Date: ca.1500-1550

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Carved stone

Museum number: 455-1882

Gallery location: Medieval & Renaissance, Room 50a, The Paul and Jill Ruddock Gallery, case WS, shelf EXP

Public access description

It is not clear for whom this tomb was commissioned. It was purchased from the church of Santa Maria della Misericordia in Venice in 1881. The shield indicates that it belonged to a member of the Moro family, who historically had rights over the church. The multi-coloured inlaid marble, and the classical and maritime motifs of the sarcophagus and dolphins reflect its Venetian origins.

Descriptive line

Funerary monument for member of the Moro family, Venica, ca. 1500-1550

Physical description

The tomb monument was a wall tomb, with the sleeping effigy of an unknown member of the Moro family. He lies on a bier dressed in a long gown with a sword on his side. Traces of paint can be seen on the fringe of the cushions under his head. Traces of gilding appear on the leaves underneath the sarcophagus at the corners and middle. The bier is supported on lion feet and is on top of a sarcophagus. The roof of the sarcophagus is carved to resemble tile. The front and the sides are inlaid marble and a small porphyry disk flanked by a pair of wings is in the center. The lower level of the sarcophagus is covered with a vines and leaves. The heads of two griffins whose lower halves terminate in leaves appear on either side of the Moro family shield. The sarcophagus rests on brackets, which frame a panel decorated with dolphins whose tails become vines. The underside of the sarcophagus, which can be seen when standing directly below it, contains floral emblems. Below this section is a rectangular area which may once have contained an inscription, flanked by two roundels of black and white marble. The lowest section terminates in a triangular bracket filled with dark red marble.

Dimensions

Height: 425 cm, Width: 249 cm, Depth: 60 cm, Weight: 155 kg part 21 only

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Object history note

The tomb was purchased in 1881 in Venice for £100. In a letter to the Times of 24 October 1883, Robinson took pains to assure the reader that this was a legal purchase made at a time when he felt the Venetian government was not doing enough to protect its architecture and monuments. The tomb monument came from the sale of objects from the deconsecrated church of Santa Maria della Misericordia, which was the church of the scuola (or confraternity) of the same name. Though there is no direct evidence that this tomb is for a member of the Moro family, their role as the legal patrons and caretakers of the church makes it likely that it belonged to one of them.

Historical significance: The subject of this tomb has yet to be identified. When Robinson advised its purchase in 1881, he believed it to be the tomb of “Moro Lin,” whose name, he claimed, was “a household word in Venice.” The tomb was purchased at the same time as the relief of the tympanum of the entrance to the scuola (V&A 25:11-1881). It was believed to be the tomb of Gasparo Moro (1584-1650) when it was purchased but as noted by Cicogna, Maclagan and Longhurst and Pope-Hennessy, a seventeenth century date is too late for the style of tomb. Pope-Hennessy noted that the tomb could be that of either Cristoforo Moro (1443-1518) or Gabriele Moro (d.1546) (Pope-Hennessy, 527).

The suggestion that the tomb was that of Cristoforo Moro comes from the 1824 work of Cicogna, who transcribed inscriptions from Venetian churches. In his six volume tome, Cicogna described a tomb (likely this one) in the church of Santa Maria della Misericordia. Cicogna noted that this was not its original location, and that it was in the style of two other tombs found in San Zaccaria and SS. Giovanni e Paolo. He stated that when he was collecting inscriptions it was on the wall to the left of the main door, and close to a side door, but that it recently had been moved to the right hand side of the church. Cicogna further noted that there was an area readied for carving an inscription that for some reason was left blank. The V&A tomb has a similar section in which an inscription would fit on the lowest area above the bracket. Cicogna’s description of the effigy also suggests that he was describing the V&A tomb, as he noted that the figure was wearing a long toga, a beret and had a sword by his side.

Cicogna believed it to be the tomb of Cristoforo Moro, based on the description given by Gasparo Moro in his will of 1649. In the will Gasparo
stated that he intended to be buried in the church of Santa Maria della Misericordia, near the tomb of the Doge Cristoforo Moro. Cicogna suggested that Gasparo had probably heard older relatives describing the tomb of Cristoforo Moro and mistakenly understood it as a monument to the Doge of the same name, who is actually buried in San Giobbe.

Pope-Hennessy also noted a drawing of the tomb in a manuscript by Grevembroch held in the Museo Correr in Venice. In the drawing, Grevembroch captioned the tomb as that of Gabrielle Moro based on an inscription in the church. However, as noted in another source, this had disappeared by 1663 (Pope-Hennessy, 527). It is therefore not clear to which inscription Grevembroch was referring, as he created his collection of drawings nearly one hundred years later and could not have directly seen the inscription.

**Historical context note**

Monumental wall tombs were common features of Venetian churches – a necessity in a city built on water and lacking deep land for crypts. Large funerary monuments gained popularity in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when tombs in honor of civic leaders and royalty were erected in France, England and Italy. In Italy, members of leading professions such as professors and lawyers were also commemorated with monumental tombs; in order to honor the city as well as the men. In Venice, ducal tombs were concentrated in the two major mendicant churches of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari and SS. Giovanni e Paolo. SS. Giovanni e Paolo in particular was seen as the Pantheon of the Doges due to the high number of ducal tombs found in the church. Most were in the area of the high altar, as that was the favored place for burial, but by the fifteenth century the nave and entrance wall were also filled with tombs. In contrast, private citizens and families buried their dead in their local parish churches, the churches attached to the scuole to which they belonged, or in those churches over which they held patronage rights.

The classical motifs in this tomb such as the sarcophagus and grotesques are typical of the Italian Renaissance. The use of multicolored marble and maritime imagery (the dolphins in the center and the rope motif around the brackets) are common in Venetian Renaissance architecture and monuments, and can be seen on the facades of both secular and religious buildings. It has been suggested that the multicolored marble stems from the Byzantine influence in Venice, and the maritime imagery of course refers to Venice’s status as one of the great maritime republics.

**URL**

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O127346/tomb-for-a-member-of-monument-unknown/