

Dancing Soldiers: Representations of Warrior Dance in Etruria

This paper examines the connection between the Etruscan tradition of victory celebration in painted tombs and the act of the triumph in Republican and Imperial Rome. In Etruria the military style of dance typically appears within funerary rites, particularly during the ceremonial games that occur after the burial of the individual and the banquet that follows (Jannot 1998). Depictions of warriors dancing in the games have been associated with tomb paintings located in Tarquinia, Vulci, and Chiusi. In a ritual context, they emulate the deceased's prowess as a warrior and could also represent his victory in battle during life. In almost every instance, the dance is usually portrayed as a single warrior wearing a helmet and carrying a spear, while being accompanied by a piper.

The warrior dance theme recurs in tomb paintings most often from the late Archaic to the Hellenistic period in Italy. The dancer in these scenes is surrounded by a multitude of other performers, such as acrobats, boxers, and various modes of spectacle. The motif, however, does contain many instances of individualism in the way the armed dancers are dressed, their gestures, and overall appearance. The differences seem to arise due to regional variation, as well as by choice of the owner or commissioner. For example, in the Tomb of the Monkey in Chiusi, a young man plays the pipes for a significantly taller warrior. While, in similar scenes the warrior and piper are of equal height and stature (Steingraber 2006).

The most notable instance of armed dance iconography in Etruscan art is displayed on a fourth century BCE tomb painting of a *toga picta* in the François Tomb at Vulci. The owner of the tomb, Vel Saties, is depicted wearing the *toga picta*, which includes three visible dancers. Some studies have suggested a connection between Vel's garment and imperial triumph, which

could very well have been the first distinct example of a celebration of battle victory in this manner (Beard 2007).

Therefore, through the examination of every known, or preserved, depiction of warrior dance, it appears that there is a direct correlation between the dancing soldiers represented in the ceremonial games within various tomb paintings and the figures represented on the *toga picta* of Vel Saties. By cataloging the paintings according to region and date, there is a clear regional division and trend with regard to artistic style, which could have aided in the evolution of the Roman triumph. Since there are other examples of warrior dance in other mediums, namely vase paintings and on funerary vessels, attention will also be paid to the ways in which they are represented as well.

Bibliography

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