

THE ORIGINS OF
ROMAN HISTORICAL
COMMEMORATION
IN THE VISUAL ARTS



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CHAPTER ONE

IMAGES OF TRIUMPH

But Caesar then in triple triumph rode
Within the walls of Rome, making immortal
Offerings to the gods of Italy –
Three hundred princely shrines throughout the city.
There were the streets, humming with festal joy
And games and cheers, an altar to every shrine
To every one a mother's choir, and bullocks
Knifed before the altars strewed the ground.

Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.965–72 (Fitzgerald translation)

If military victory was the most important way for Roman aristocrats to secure *laus* and *gloria*, the triumph awarded to a successful military commander, Roman society's most spectacular and esteemed celebration, provided unparalleled means for fashioning an auspicious public image. The long history of the triumph traces a fundamental transformation in Roman mentality. Originally a purification ritual that cleansed the city and the soldiers of Rome from the blood guilt of war, the triumph gradually developed into a purely honorific ceremony. Its chief purpose lay in the *auctoritas* and consequent political power it bestowed upon the victorious general and the *laus et gloria* it brought his family and his troops.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRIUMPH DURING THE REPUBLIC

By tradition Romulus celebrated the first triumph (Plutarch, *Romulus* 16). Indeed, linguistic, archaeological, and literary evidence trace the origins of the rite to the earliest history of Rome, before the sixth century B.C., and Roman antiquarians affirmed its venerable history through the connection of many details with Etruscan precedents.¹ During the early Republican period triumphs were infrequent and simple. Gradually, however, the influence of extravagant Hellenistic rites, such as the famous procession of Ptolemy II Philadelphos at Alexandria, transformed the earlier observances into the numerous and

increasingly impressive celebrations at Rome.² Between 220 and 70 B.C. spectacular celebrations occurred approximately once every year and a half.³ It was during this phase of development, when the triumph's outward changes were consonant with the greater luxury and power of Rome, that the practice of commissioning paintings to commemorate Roman victories flourished. To fully appreciate the significance of such historical commemorations, the changing meaning of the triumph itself during the Republican period must be understood.

The Roman triumph served three primary purposes. First, and probably oldest, as a victory rite the ceremony not only purified but also acknowledged military success. Second, the triumphal ceremony appeased and honored the gods. Third – and most crucial for the development of historical commemorations – the rite justified military campaigns to the Senate and people who had remained in Rome. Triumphal celebrations centered on a magnificent parade whose route, choreography, and participants responded to each of these purposes.

The earliest Romans celebrated military victory by acclaiming the triumphant hero who brought home the *tropaeum* of arms taken from the enemy defeated in a single combat (*tropaiophoria*).⁴ The *triumphator* did not carry the *spolia* himself, although he did personally dedicate part of the spoils to the gods; this confrontation between *imperator* and the divine persisted into the latest phases of the triumph.⁵ According to tradition, Romulus (Plutarch, *Romulus* 16), as the founding father of Rome, had carried out the first consecration of *spolia* to the gods, the *spolia opima (prima)*.⁶ Thereafter any political leader who aspired to appear as *parens patriae* imitated this symbolic act: Caesar, Augustus, and all succeeding emperors, including the striking *tropaiophoria* of Constantine when he founded the new Rome in the East.⁷

Not every victory was worthy of a triumph. Tradition required that the *triumphator* possess *imperium*, or act as commander of the forces (Livy 28.9.10). The war had to be fought against foreign enemies, not fellow Romans in a civil conflict.⁸ At least 5,000 enemies had to be killed in a single battle (Livy 37.46), and that battle had to lead to unequivocal success (Livy 26.21; 30.29). The army was the first to acknowledge victory by acclaiming the general as *imperator* on the battlefield. He then sent his report to the Senate, which, after considering it, decreed that a ceremony of public thanksgiving (*supplicatio*) be held. On arrival home the general made his request for a triumph at a meeting of the Senate held outside the sacred city boundary (*pomerium*) in the Campus Martius, usually in the temple of Bellona or Apollo. The Senate jealously debated the merits of the general's claim to the honor (Polybius 6.15; Livy 33.23); if rejected, he was sometimes granted a minor triumph (*ovatio*) instead.⁹ Sacred law decreed that the general would forfeit his chance for a triumph if he entered the *pomerium* before the vote was taken.¹⁰ Sometimes political rivals obstructed the aspirations of victorious generals, indicating that the ambition for a triumph also held dangers for political advancement. Upon his return from Cilicia, Cicero lingered outside the *pomerium* day after day, dragging about his lictors from

one place to another in the vain hope of receiving a triumph. According to Plutarch (*Lucullus* 37), Lucullus waited three years for authorization to enter Rome upon his return from Asia.

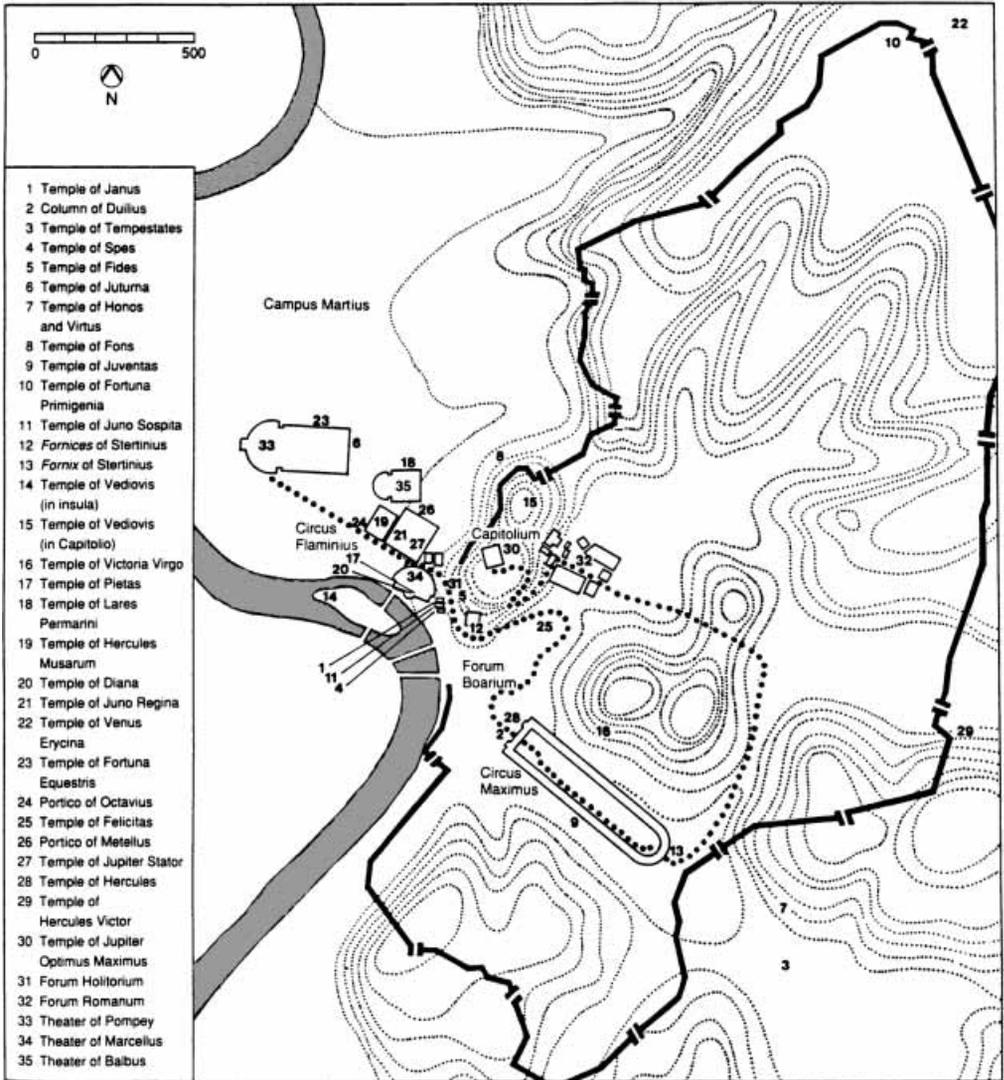
Preparations for the triumph began in the Campus Martius northwest of the city center. Lying outside the sacred city boundary (*extra pomerium*), this floodplain – significantly named for the war god Mars – had provided early Rome with a place for military exercises and remained the site for solemn purification rituals, award ceremonies, and speeches by new *triumphatores*. With great fanfare, the triumphal procession entered the city proper through the *porta triumphalis*. The fact that originally the *porta triumphalis* remained closed most days of the year, to be opened only and specifically for triumphal processions, may have underscored the gate's purificatory significance.¹¹

The expiatory nature of the triumph was evident in its every phase. The general led his troops into the city in order to accomplish the *lustratio* or purification of the army. According to Festus (104 L: 117 M):

Laurel-wreathed soldiers followed the triumphal chariot, in order to enter the city as if purged of blood-guilt.

The general then undertook a series of successive sacrifices and dedications constituting a ritual *circumambulatio*. Religious sacrifices began with *spolia* consecrated in the Campus Martius, followed by additional dedications at the *porta triumphalis* and on the Capitoline Hill.¹² The procession followed a counterclockwise route through the city, emulating the normal choreography of other sacred lustration rituals and indicating its apotropaic function (Fig. 1).¹³ After entering the *porta triumphalis*, the procession followed the foot of the Capitoline Hill on the west and curved up along the Vicus Iugarius and across the Velabrum, past the Forum Boarium. After circling the Palatine, passing the site of the Circus Maximus, it turned onto the original Sacra Via and traversed the Forum Romanum, passing in front of the Temple of Vesta and the area of the Regia. In practice, the course of the procession varied from celebration to celebration, allowing the *triumphator* to pass buildings and sites dense with personal and family associations, such as temples dedicated by an illustrious ancestor. Finally, the procession led past the ancient sanctuary of Saturn and continued up the steep Clivus Capitolinus to the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus.

The final segment of the triumph focused exclusively on its religious significance. In fulfillment of his vows, the victorious general offered *spolia* at the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. In the primitive phases of the rite the *spolia* had been offered to Jupiter Feretrius in emulation of Romulus, founder of the sanctuary (Livy 1.10). By the late Republic, however, the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus had become the primary focus of ritual activity. The general then solemnly sacrificed white oxen to Jupiter and laid a laurel branch and wreaths in the lap of the god's statue. The ceremonies closed with the *triumphator* and Senate sharing in a sacred feast.



1. Plan of Rome: dotted line shows a typical route followed by triumphal processions. Drawing: Richard H. Abramson.

Changes in the conduct of the triumph reflect the diverse peoples Rome came in contact with throughout the period of imperial expansion. Following the Etruscan occupation of Rome, the deity that the *triumphator* faced, and that he imitated in his mode of dress,¹⁴ was Jupiter Optimus Maximus, an Etruscan substitution for Jupiter Feretrius. Within the great temple stood the terra-cotta cult statue commissioned from Vulca of Veii,¹⁵ which Romans venerated until its destruction in 83 B.C. and then replaced with an adaptation of Pheidias's chryselephantine Zeus at Olympia.¹⁶ There had been no image at all of Jupiter



2. Andrea Mantegna: *The Triumphs of Caesar: Trumpeters, bearers of standards and banners*, ca. 1484–94. Hampton Court Palace. Photograph courtesy of The Royal Collection © 2001, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Feretrius: before the end of the sixth century B.C. (when the statue of Jupiter was consecrated), the Romans had worshipped their gods without images.¹⁷ The very concept of a god so anthropomorphic that he could be depicted and confronted in person was new to the Romans. The god had two partners, Juno and Minerva, each with a cella in the temple; the combined worship of the “Capitoline Triad” was also an Etruscan contribution.¹⁸

Priests recorded each triumph awarded in the *fasti triumphales*, which, along with the lists of eponymous magistrates (*fasti consulares*) and sacral calendars (*fasti sacerdotales*), became a primary source for Roman historians.¹⁹ The archaeological and literary evidence for the development of the triumph during the later Republican period indicates the profound influences of Hellenism.²⁰ To this period belong the famous descriptions of historical triumphs. Appian’s description of the triumph of Scipio Africanus in 201 B.C. marks the beginning of a new type of celebration (*Pun.* 8.66), while Plutarch’s account of Aemilius



3. Andrea Mantegna: The Triumphs of Caesar: The Triumphal Car, ca. 1484–94. Hampton Court Palace. Photograph courtesy of The Royal Collection © 2001, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Paullus's triumph in 167 B.C. presents the innovations as already firmly established (*Aem. Paul.* 34).²¹ These accounts illustrate the unheard-of luxury triumphal celebrations introduced into Rome and the enormous personal prestige bestowed on the *triumphator*.

The precise order of the participants in the procession varied slightly over time, but during the late Republic the following groupings were fairly common. At the head came the Roman Senate led by the magistrates, visible manifestations of state approval. At the rear lumbered cartloads of booty (*praeda* as opposed to *spolia*), sacrificial animals, and captives, collectively vindicating the cost of war (Figs. 2, 3).²² Next came the *triumphator* in all his glory. Military officers, Roman citizens rescued from slavery, and the cheering troops all followed the *triumphator*.²³ The order of participants, therefore, indicates that the Roman social hierarchy itself was both embedded in and articulated by the spectacle it witnessed.²⁴

The luxury of Hellenistic rites brought a change in the triumphal costume. The ancient associations with the triumphal garb introduced in the period of the Etruscan kings, the special toga and tunic, were seen as old-fashioned and plain, and by the third century B.C. had been replaced by even more elaborate dress. The even more luxurious *toga picta*, decorated with designs in gold threads, replaced the original *toga purpurea*. The *tunica palmata*, although it kept its ancient name, changed in form and was probably decorated with a palmette design, instead of its simple border the width of a *palma*, or handspan.²⁵ The late-fourth-century B.C. portrait of Vel Saties from the François Tomb at Vulci demonstrates how elaborate the triumphal regalia had become in its final Etruscan phases (see Fig. 31).²⁶ Vel Saties wears a crown and a ceremonial purple robe, similar to the Roman *toga picta* worn during this period by generals awarded a triumph,²⁷ suggesting that he won a triumph for his own military successes. Images of warriors armed with shields and lances and engaged in some kind of ceremonial dance decorate the robe, underscoring the allusion to triumphal celebrations.²⁸

Vel Saties's actions indicate that he also held priestly offices, for he follows the tradition of the *etrusca disciplina* of augury and bird lore. A servant, identified by the inscription as Arnza, attends Vel Saties and carries a leashed bird perched on his left hand. Vel Saties reads the public omens or *auspicia* from the flight of the birds already released by the dwarf Arnza, omens that might even refer to the battle for which he won the triumph.²⁹ (Showing Vel Saties performing his priestly duties also underlines the profound religious character of triumphal celebrations.) All these iconographic details do more than enhance the Etruscan viewer's recognition of Vel Saties, already assured by his inscribed name. Rather, dress and attitude indicate through visual means the honors and titles usually preserved textually in honorary inscriptions and epitaphs. They provide an allusion to some kind of laudatory theme, akin to a Roman *elogium*, that was historically based and befitting a distinguished personage.³⁰ It is surely no coincidence that the first paintings of men in triumphal dress and the first painted battle scene publicly displayed in Rome date to the first quarter of the third century B.C., shortly after this Etruscan work was completed.³¹

Another feature of later Roman triumphs was the enormous personal exaltation of the *triumphator*. New religious connotations replaced the old idea of the purification or sacred protection of the city. The procession, now identified with Dionysiac *thiasoi* accompanying the god's triumphant return to Olympus, specifically glorified the victorious Roman general and his troops.³² The *triumphator* rode into the city in a quadriga, or chariot, drawn by four white horses,³³ having gained so much booty and *gloria* that he had to be carefully protected from the envy of the gods. Hence the apotropaic significance of the gold *bullae* worn round his neck, the insults hurled at him along with the cries of *io triumphe*, and the state slave (*servus publicus*) who traditionally stood behind the *triumphator* in the triumphal chariot.



4. Denarius of Sulla showing the *triumphator* in his quadriga, 82/1 B.C. Photograph courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

The *servus publicus* was charged with two offices. His primary duty was to hold the heavy gold oak leaf crown (*corona Etrusca*) above the *triumphator*'s head (Pliny, *N.H.* 33.4.11). At this moment of near apotheosis, his other charge was to whisper in the *triumphator*'s ear: "Look behind you and remember that you are a man," a cautionary reminder that the general was a mere mortal who acted on behalf of Rome.³⁴ Monuments and coins depicting triumphal processions either omit his function altogether or assign it to a winged Victoria. In 82/1 B.C., for example, Sulla struck a coin on which he was shown in a quadriga in explicit reference to his triumph (Fig. 4).³⁵ The emergence of the *imperator* on his own coinage had a propagandistic value not lost on Pompey, who placed his image on a triumphal issue of 61 B.C.³⁶ Both of these coin types show Sulla and Pompey crowned by flying Victories, indicating that this iconographic possibility was already a standard option in late Republican commemorations.³⁷ The quadriga statuary groups that adorned some of their triumphal monuments probably provided the precedents for the later statuary groups that stood on various arches of the imperial period, where a winged Victory stood in for the *servus publicus*. A monument in the precinct of the Temple of Vulcan that the Romans thought had been erected from the booty of Romulus's second triumph over Camerina, although probably dating to the second century B.C., may originally have inspired or sanctioned these statue groups and coin types. It featured a bronze quadriga, a statue of Romulus in or by it, crowned by the goddess Victoria.³⁸ Of course, the image of a goddess holding up the *corona Etrusca* behind the *triumphator* would not function as a reminder of mortality or human limitation but rather the opposite. It performed as a further panegyric to the extrahuman status investing the *triumphator* accompanied in this epiphany by the goddess Victory herself.³⁹

The didactic nature of the triumph is especially telling. Over the course of several days extravagant processions flowed past the teeming spectators, drawn from Rome and throughout Italy.⁴⁰ A panoply of tendentious displays accompanied the general and his celebrating troops. Romans not only learned

about the prowess of their armies and generals, they were also taught about the people, art, architecture, flora, and fauna of newly conquered lands.⁴¹ Exhibits of captured exotica, ranging from jewel-encrusted furniture to elephants and other wild beasts, awed but also educated the audience about the expanding territory Rome controlled.⁴² Statues personifying conquered cities and regions brought home to the Romans the increasing size of their empire.⁴³ The triumph of Lucius Scipio (the elder brother of Africanus)⁴⁴ for his Asiatic victory in 189 B.C. was exemplary. It included 224 military standards, 134 *simulacra* (painted or sculpted effigies), 231 ivory tusks, 234 gold crowns, 137,420 pounds of silver, and equally impressive quantities of gold, metal vases, coins, and prisoners (Livy 37.59). For his triumph of 61 B.C., Pompey had gathered so much material that he could not show it all in the two days allotted (Plutarch, *Pompey* 14.45). Historical paintings commemorating the achievements of the *triumphator* and his troops became an integral part of this didactic display.

REPRESENTATIONS OF ROMAN TRIUMPHAL CELEBRATIONS

Although Virgil has Vulcan proleptically fashion a depiction of Augustus's triple triumph on the shield of Aeneas, actual works of art commemorating the rite first appeared in the third century B.C., during the period of Roman expansion throughout Italy. Festus (*de verb sign.*, *Epit.* 228) mentions two of the earliest Roman historical paintings commissioned by victorious commanders to commemorate their triumphs:

The toga which is now called "the painted" was previously called "the purple" and was at that time without painting. A representation of this object . . . is depicted in the temples of Vertumnus and Consus; M. Fulvius Flaccus in the former and T. Papirius Cursor in the latter are depicted celebrating their triumphs. (Pollitt translation)

T. Papirius Cursor celebrated his victory over the Samnites and Tarentines in 272 B.C. He may have built the Temple of Consus on the Aventine where he later exhibited his painting, demonstrating a characteristically Roman crossing of private ambition with public action. Similarly, Fulvius Flaccus, who triumphed in 264 B.C. over the Volsinii, built the Temple of Vertumnus on the Aventine and commissioned its decoration. Since the paintings recorded by Festus date from the first half of the third century B.C., they would have reflected only the most ancient elements of the rite.⁴⁵ In the context of his testimony, Festus specifically cites these paintings to point out the initial use of the *toga purpurea* by the *triumphator*, later supplanted by the *toga picta*. The compositions were probably friezelike, depicted only the most important features of the triumph in its early stage of development, and therefore lacked the iconographic complexity of later representations.

These two patrons had no intention of commissioning ephemeral works. The paintings might prove useful in contemporary electoral campaigns, but their presence in temples donated by the *triumphatores* ensured that their achievements would be remembered as notable *exempla* by future generations. The theme of the triumph was consonant with the mentality of Romans to secure the record of victory in both its civic and religious exaltations. Like Fabius Pictor's paintings in the Temple of Salus, the dedications of M. Fulvius Flaccus and T. Papirius Cursor commemorated historical events in sacred buildings resonant with family associations. The riches of war booty, including captured arms, elegant objects, and works of art displayed in the processions, struck the Romans with wonder and filled them with pride: Roman might had conquered these older civilizations, and their wealth and refinement would now serve Roman needs. Roman expansion fed the increasingly spectacular nature of triumphal displays. For example, of the triumph of Curius Dentatus over Pyrrhus in the Tarentine War (275 B.C.), Florus (1.13.26–7) wrote:

Scarcely ever did a fairer or more glorious triumph enter the city. Up to that time the only spoils which you could have seen were the cattle of the Volscians, the flocks of the Sabines, the wagons of the Gauls, the broken arms of the Samnites; now if you looked at captives, they were Molossians, Thessalians, Macedonians, Bruttians, Apulians and Lucanians; if you looked upon the procession, you saw gold, purple statues, pictures and all the luxury of Tarentum. (Forster translation)

Other paintings decorating the walls of Republican temples commemorated aspects of triumphal celebrations in addition to the procession. For example, literary sources recall two episodes related to victories in the Hannibalic Wars. Varro noted a picture of horsemen with a caption that called them *ferentarii* in the ancient temple of Aesculapius on the Tiber Island.⁴⁶ The *ferentarii* incorporated a select group, the light-armed cavalry first used in the battle before Capua in 211 B.C. (Livy 26.4); Q. Naevius received credit for their formation and employment. Varro, however, does not describe a battle scene. Rather, it seems likely that the painting represented yet another friezelike composition, this one of parading cavalry, the *ferentarii*, to publicly commemorate their successful deployment in war.⁴⁷

In 214 B.C. the elder Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus succeeded in driving back the Carthaginians and liberating Beneventum with an army composed of freedmen and slave-volunteers. About 4,000 of the latter, however, had fought with less spirit and were therefore fearful of punishment. After presenting military decorations to those who had distinguished themselves, Gracchus announced that he preferred to have all his men, both the worthy and unworthy, praised rather than punished. To distinguish between valor and cowardice, however, he ordered that those who had refused to fight should take food and drink standing at a banquet the Beneventans prepared in the streets of the city to celebrate their liberation. According to Livy (24.16.19):

The scene was so impressive that, after he returned to Rome, Gracchus ordered that a representation of that day's celebration be painted in the temple of Liberty, which his father had built and dedicated on the Aventine with money from fines. (Pollitt translation)⁴⁸

In the era when the Attalids celebrated their victories with monumental baroque sculptural donations at Athens, Delphi, and Pergamon and with the allusive Great Altar at Pergamon, Gracchus chose to commemorate a seemingly anecdotal scene of freedmen and slaves banqueting. He complied with Roman practice by displaying a painting commemorating his victory in a public building abounding in sacred and family associations. Rather than commissioning still another battle or processional scene, however, he chose a theme that had direct and profound relevance to his diverse Roman audience. The subject – an army of *libertini* celebrating victory – reinforced the meaning of the temple, while the temple itself heightened the ideological significance of the painting. It commemorated the *clementia* Gracchus had shown his troops while still distinguishing – as did Gracchus himself – those who had fought from those who had fled. (The painting undoubtedly represented some soldiers standing while others reclined to eat.) Gracchus ingeniously fashioned a public image extolling his generosity and virtue while indirectly recalling his military achievements. He provided an *exemplum* for both contemporary Romans and posterity whose subject crossed the lines dividing order and social status.

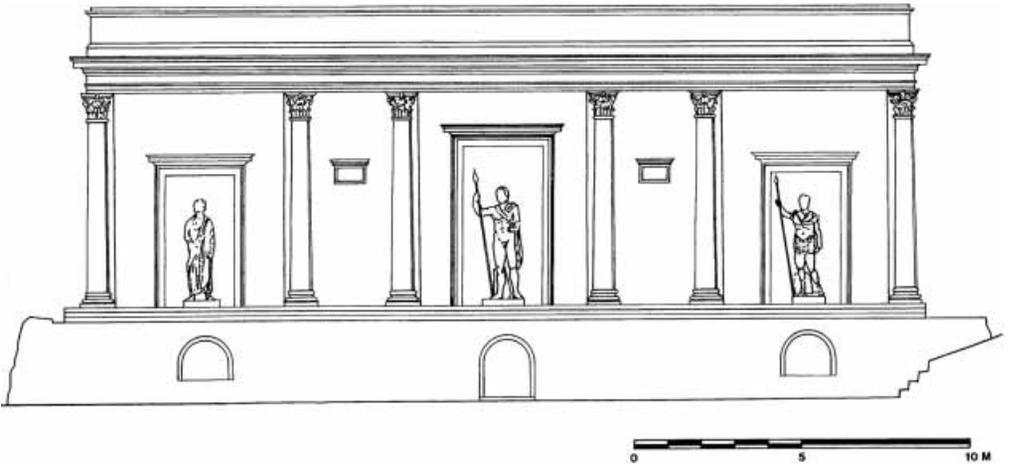
Representations of triumphal celebrations not only continued into the second century B.C., the practice also seems to have evolved to embrace new Roman tastes inspired by currents appropriated from Greek art. The resulting works raise important questions about the “Roman-ness” of Greek painters working in Rome. The evidence regarding the temple of Hercules in the Forum Boarium, for example, suggests an expression of philhellenism characteristic of factions of the elite (Pliny, *N.H.* 35.19). L. Aemilius Paullus restored the temple and hired the artist Pacuvius to decorate it with paintings. Pacuvius, the son of a sister of Ennius, came to Rome from Brindisium and achieved greater renown for his poetry, written in an affected and Hellenized Latin. Nevertheless, the *gens Aemilia* also patronized him for his literary abilities and commissioned a commemorative play (*fabula praetexta*), *Paullus*, in honor of Aemilius Paullus's victory in the Third Macedonian War.⁴⁹ Pacuvius's paintings for the temple undoubtedly represented an event intimately associated with the family, most likely Aemilius Paullus's triumph in 167 B.C. for his victory over Perseus the previous year. For this triumph Paullus also brought from Athens the neo-Attic artist Metrodoros to design a suite of paintings to commemorate his military prowess (Pliny, *N.H.* 35.135).⁵⁰ The pictorial language of Pacuvius the artist probably resembled that of Pacuvius the writer, that is, one honoring local custom but cast in the idiom of the pervasive influences of Hellenism. This would correspond with the tastes of his illustrious patron, who returned to a Rome enthusiastic for the culture and art of contemporary Greece (Plutarch, *Aem. Paul.* 6.9).

Historical paintings such as those by Pacuvius and Metrodoros are Roman, even when painted by artists from outside the city, not only because they were produced in Rome for Roman patrons, but also because their subjects were truly local in nature. The literary evidence suggests that their manufacture represents a manifestation of what some scholars refer to as an “Italo-Hellenistic” artistic culture: one in which theme and iconography were consonant with Roman needs, while the formal language reflected the acquisition and assimilation of Hellenistic practices by artisans working in central Italy.⁵¹ Historical commemorations commissioned for contemporary Roman tombs provide corroborating physical evidence.

TRIUMPHAL IMAGERY IN ROMAN TOMBS

The Tomb of the Cornelii Scipiones stands between the Via Appia and the Via Latina, near the Porta di San Sebastiano, with its façade facing the Via Appia.⁵² Prominent in antiquity, the impressive monument was celebrated by several ancient authors.⁵³ It was rediscovered in 1780, and A. M. Colini and Federico Gismondi undertook the systematic archaeological study and restoration of the tomb complex between 1926 and 1929.⁵⁴ Its earliest phase dates to the first decades of the third century,⁵⁵ and was built by either L. Cornelius Scipio Barbatus (consul 298 B.C.) or by his sons, L. Cornelius Scipio (consul 259 B.C.) and Cn. Cornelius Scipio Asina (consul 260 and 254 B.C.). The large sarcophagus of Scipio Barbatus, derived from prototypes from Magna Graecia or Sicily, takes the form of a monumental altar. It stood deep in the tomb’s center on axis with the entrance; its type and placement signify an attempt to heroize the founder of the family, following a practice perhaps Greek in origin but also found in Etruscan monuments.⁵⁶

In the middle of the second century B.C. the family modernized and enlarged the tomb to create a series of methodically placed galleries forming a fairly regular square (14.5 × 13.5 m), with four great supporting pillars of tufa. During this second architectural phase craftsmen cut a podium in the rock, creating a new façade whose arches and engaged Corinthian columns purposefully recalled models from the eastern Mediterranean, one site of recent Scipionic victory (Fig. 5).⁵⁷ On the façade were statues of Scipio Africanus, Scipio Asiaticus, and (somewhat surprisingly) the poet Ennius, their forms probably echoing the types of the togate citizen and heroic general.⁵⁸ During the Republic, such portrait types are best known in the realm of honorific dedications rather than funerary art, but the prominence of this tomb elevates its function to that of a public monument.⁵⁹ Including the portrait of a man of letters with those of family members served two functions. First, it transformed a family memorial into a monument celebrating Roman history that suggested the Scipiones stood at its highest point.⁶⁰ Second, it engendered a kind of “distinction by association,” ensuring that the status of the Scipiones as learned patrons of culture would not be lost on passersby.⁶¹



5. Tomb of the Corneli Scipiones, reconstruction of the façade, mid-second century B.C. Drawing: Kevin W. Davis after Coarelli (1988b), p. 13.

During this phase, workers plastered and painted the entire façade, originally 23 m in length by 2.10 m in height.⁶² The fresco formed a long frieze divided into two registers, a deep red socle with a figured zone above, and was renewed several times in antiquity. A few years before the tomb's restoration, Nicorescu distinguished at least three layers of paint on the podium; in his recent investigations, Filippo Coarelli confirmed the existence of these three levels. The first two layers (the oldest) featured figured paintings of a commemorative nature, whereas the last (the most recent) shows a simple decoration of stylized waves painted red. Only a few fragments of the figured paintings remain at the extreme right of the podium (Fig. 6).

The fragment of the upper register and the corresponding watercolor of 1928 indicate the remnants of figures generally preserved from the waist down. They have ruddy bodies, and wear black boots and short red tunics (the *tunica cincta*) with white stripes and yellow waistbands. Traces of fasces seem to be present, suggesting that the frieze depicted a solemn procession of a group of officials. The details of their costume suggest a martial theme: lictors only wore red tunics when accompanying a magistrate invested with *imperium* abroad or a *triumphator* (Appian, *Bel. Pun.* 66; Silius Italicus, *Pun.* 9.41ff.). The procession could therefore represent either the departure or return of an army and its commander (in Roman terms, a *profectio* or an *adventus*), but it is more likely that the scene commemorates a triumphal procession granted to one of the Scipiones buried in the tomb.

It is difficult to judge the quality of the painting based on the evidence of the watercolor; however, its handling of the details seems accurate when compared with the remnants of the original. A notable simplicity of means distinguishes this work from earlier tomb paintings.⁶³ Here the artist uses a limited palette; red dominates the painted figures lined across the stark white ground. A dark



6. Tomb of the Corneli Scipiones, painted processional frieze. Photograph courtesy of the Museo Nazionale Romano.

brown brushstroke outlines the bodies, which are quite slender and elongated, shown in profile or frontal views. There is little attention to anatomy and few internal details, although in a few passages small brushstrokes suggest modeling and the effects of light, revealing some technical experience.

Although it is difficult to argue from such damaged images, the fresco from the Tomb of the Corneli Scipiones appears to belong to a new manner of expression: the figural language of neo-Atticism.⁶⁴ Other products of central Italy, such as late Etruscan tomb paintings, contemporary relief sculpture,⁶⁵ and coins produced by Roman and Italian mints,⁶⁶ share the general classicizing tendency in painting during this period. From the middle of the second century B.C. on, Rome not only dominated the political and economic life of Greece, Romans were also the primary patrons of Greek philosophy, literature, and art. In an intellectual atmosphere of retrospection and nostalgia, the achievements of Classical Greece appeared to be the products of a golden age. Romans especially viewed the works created by Greek masters between ca. 480 and 340 B.C. with awe and reverence. This philhellenism is closely associated with the support and patronage of a group of Roman nobles known in modern scholarship as the “Scipionic circle.”⁶⁷ Scipio Aemilianus (185–29 B.C.), the second son of L. Aemilius Paullus and the adoptive son of Scipio Africanus,⁶⁸ was its most influential figure; he was also the dominant figure in Roman politics and foreign affairs between 150 and 130 B.C.

Inscriptions from the tomb beginning in the third century B.C. undoubtedly document a tradition of interest and competence in the written language of

Greece among the Scipiones. The epigrams, starting with the *elogium* of L. Scipio (consul 259 B.C.), show further signs of Hellenistic education.⁶⁹ Exposure to the artistic and cultural centers of Magna Graecia in the late fourth and early third centuries B.C. opened Roman eyes to new forms of commemoration. Further contact with Greece in the second century B.C. spurred Romans to master Greek languages, both literary and visual, and make them serve Roman needs as they asserted their role in the larger cultural orbit of the Mediterranean. The Scipiones sought the services of an Ennius or a Metrodorus to celebrate their accomplishments in forms that would secure their *gloria* both at home and abroad.

Artists in Rome produced works in the neo-Attic style from the middle of the second century B.C. through the Antonine period. Not coincidentally, the first main phase of the style corresponded with the rise of the Scipionic Circle and lasted until Sulla's sack of Athens (roughly 150 to 86 B.C.); the second phase lasted until the Augustan period. During the first phase, Athens, where the copy industry was just getting started, remained the primary center for sculptures for export to Rome. Nevertheless, neo-Atticism became an inspiration for the figural language of central Italian workshops. Thus a dating to the mid-second century B.C. corresponds with the scant internal evidence of the painting style and the more certain archaeological evidence of the tomb. These paintings are rendered in a style consistent with the products of a local workshop under the influence of nascent neo-Atticism, a formal language shared by the nearly contemporary Arieti Tomb (see Figs. 7–13).

The historical paintings belong to the second building phase, dating from the refashioning of the façade to the time when the last sarcophagi of tufa slabs from Aniene were deposited in the added galleries (ca. 150–100 B.C.). Roman burial practices changed when Sulla, who died in 78 B.C., became the first of the Cornelii who desired cremation (Cicero, *de leg.* 2.22.56).⁷⁰ Although the immediate family eventually died out toward the end of the Republican period,⁷¹ the tomb was maintained and used by those claiming descent from the celebrated *gens*. Two members of a branch of the Nasicae, for example, adopted from other families, kept the *cognomen* Scipio, and in the imperial period the Cornelii Lentuli claimed the tomb through heredity and deposited ash urns there. Therefore, although the dating of the first layer of painting is predicated on the new architecture of the façade and the internal stylistic evidence corresponds with the archaeological record, the continued use of the tomb makes any chronology for the second and third layers less secure.

The Tomb of the Magistrates, more commonly called the Arieti Tomb (after its principal excavator, Antonio Arieti), was discovered in 1875 on the Esquiline near the churches of S. Antonio and S. Eusebio and was subsequently destroyed during the erection of a modern building (see Fig. 42).⁷² Constructed of *opus quadratum* in peperino,⁷³ its interior was elaborately decorated. The pavement consisted of courses of rough peperino, and the walls featured a socle base topped with orthostates, also of peperino, suggesting the masonry effects imitated in First Style painting, and a painted frieze that ran along the interior

walls. Only five fragments of that decoration (removed at the time of the excavation) survive today; they depicted scenes of warfare and the procession of a high Roman official.⁷⁴ The meagerness of the remains belies their complexity and significance.

At the far left of one fragment (1.30 × 0.82 m) is the hind section of a galloping horse; at the right, two armed men fight (Fig. 7). The figure to the left lacks his head but is otherwise mostly preserved. In his right hand he holds a sword aloft, ready to strike, and in his left is a large oval shield; his sheath, attached at his right side, hangs between his legs. All that remains of his adversary is a section from the waist down. He must have fought with a sword, too, for its sheath is preserved, and there are traces of red paint that may have indicated his shield. All the bodies in the program are rendered in a reddish ochre, outlined with thick, dark lines like modern cartoons. A second fragment (1.00 × 0.91 m), removed from the same wall, features a soldier who has fallen to his knees; his head and part of his torso are gone (Fig. 8). His left arm holds a large oval shield seen frontally, while his right hand brandishes a long sword. A sheath, attached at his right side, hangs between his legs. The third fragment (0.39 × 0.96 m) depicts an unusual scene of violence, sometimes interpreted as a crucifixion (Fig. 9). It features a nude, bearded male shown frontally. The middle of his right side, shoulder to knee, is missing. The remaining left arm is raised to a horizontal bar that continued above his head.

Two fragments depict elements of a procession and thereby help determine the significance of the entire program. One of these (0.51 × 0.98 m) depicts a lictor facing left (Fig. 10). The standing figure wears a short red military tunic (*sagum*) with a central white stripe (*clavus*). He carries the fasces bound with straps in his left hand; in his right remains the vestigial traces of a rod of office (*commetaculum*). Another fragment (0.97 × 1.03 m) features three additional lictors in identical dress moving from right to left (Fig. 11). The first from the right is almost entirely preserved but lacks part of his left leg and the better part of his fasces. The next lictor is even better preserved; only small breaks and a section of the *commetaculum* in his right hand are missing. Of the third lictor, only the lower portion from the waist down remains. A long oval object hangs between the head and the fasces of the central lictor, perhaps a decoration on a now missing garland.

A watercolor made at the time of discovery (which, unfortunately, leaves much to be desired) and excavation reports provide additional evidence for the decorative program. The watercolor shows a quadriga preceded by additional attendants originally depicted on other fragments now missing (Fig. 12). Lanciani's account of the tomb includes descriptions of pieces of the fresco that were destroyed when attempts were made to remove them:

On one wall: a figure of a tortured man, hanging naked by the arms from a gibbet. On another wall: four lictors with batons in their right hands and bound fasces in their left; dressed in short tunics with white stripe in



7. Arieti Tomb, scene of combat, mid-second century B.C. Museo dei Conservatori, Braccio Nuovo. Photograph courtesy of the Museo dei Conservatori.



8. Arieti Tomb, figure of a soldier on his knees, mid-second century B.C. Museo dei Conservatori, Braccio Nuovo. Photograph courtesy of the Museo dei Conservatori.



9. Arieti Tomb, telamon or “bound prisoner,” mid-second century B.C. Museo dei Conservatori, Braccio Nuovo. Photograph courtesy of the Museo dei Conservatori.



10. Arieti Tomb, figure of a lictor, mid-second century B.C. Museo dei Conservatori, Braccio Nuovo. Photograph courtesy of the Museo dei Conservatori.

11. Arieti Tomb, three lictors in procession, mid-second century B.C. Museo dei Conservatori, Braccio Nuovo. Photograph courtesy of the Museo Nazionale Romano.



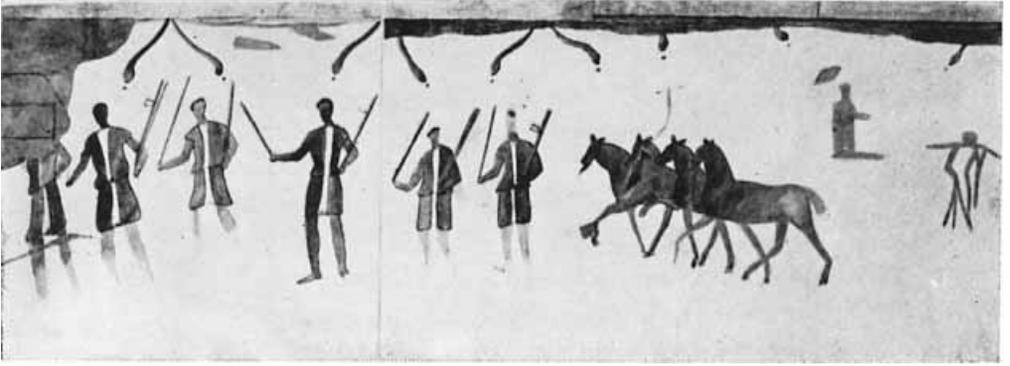
the center. Third wall: coming first two figures of lictors, similar to those described and also with batons and fasces. Four flanking and gradient horses follow, belonging perhaps to a lost quadriga. Fourth wall: two groups of warriors singly, or fighting, certainly for a funeral rite: to one side, the rear half of a running horse. The total length of these paintings is 6.22 meters, the figures are 1.00 meter high.⁷⁵

Important evidence for reconstructing the layout of the tomb complex and its painted decoration also comes from the reports of Angelo Pellegrini to the Soprintendente Generale agli Scavi e Monumenti, Pietro Rosa.⁷⁶ Pellegrini made a quick sketch (Fig. 13) of the tomb (with notations) that points to the precise location of the scenes described by Lanciani:

- AA: undecorated termini in spurs
- B: Wall painted with red figures with black outlines. Towards corner C the rear part of a horse (charging towards A). To the right a series of nude warriors with helmets, a short sword (*parazonium*) or swords, in diverse attitudes, with shields, in a kind of funeral dance. Numerous heaps of bones as well as animals.⁷⁷
- D: figure with raised arms
- EE: other plaster sections painted with figures of men with staffs in hand, outlined in black and some horses
- F: remains of another wall of the room
- G: a later wall
- H: continuation of wall in blocks

These data indicate that the scenes of combat and procession decorated two adjacent spaces and that the tortured figure adorned the short wall dividing one space from the other. Two reconstructions are possible. The spaces could belong to one large tomb with communicating rooms, in which the tortured figure decorated one of the doorways of the passage (D) between the spaces. Alternatively, the rooms were independent and had in common a more or less monumental façade, an interpretation that would seem to be supported by the traces of a wall (F) poorly documented by the excavators. According to this second reconstruction, the tortured figure would have decorated the exterior face of a dividing pilaster between the two tombs. This interpretation dovetails better with what we know about other contemporary Roman tombs. For example, such a plan would form a single complex more or less like that of the so-called Tomb of Geminus on the Via Statilia,⁷⁸ and with a painting decorating the exterior wall like the Tomb of the Cornelii Scipiones.

The discovery during the excavations of materials datable to the end of the fourth and the beginning of the third centuries B.C. establishes a *terminus post quem* for the tomb itself.⁷⁹ Mustilli dated the paintings to the first half of the second century, a chronology many still accept. He follows Lanciani's account in his interpretation and argues that the paintings depict a *pompa funebris* with



12. Watercolor after the Arieti Tomb, ca. 1875. Photograph courtesy of the Museo dei Conservatori.

games (*munera*) in honor of the deceased,⁸⁰ while the crucifixion fragment refers to some mythological episode, such as a scene with Prometheus or Marsyas.

In contrast, Ducati asserts that the iconography alludes to an illustrious magistrate's solemn journey to the Underworld. The presence of the quadriga is similar to the use of such imagery on contemporary Etruscan urns (see Figs. 14 and 15), where iconographic details drawn from the everyday world of public ritual indicated the magistrate's rank and status. Ducati also argues that the magistrate would have been responsible for offering the funerary *munera* painted on the other wall.⁸¹ Such representations were widespread during this period, drawing from Paestan, Campanian, and Etruscan traditions, and in some cases combining processional and gladiatorial scenes.

However, to interpret the combatants as participants in funeral games, although it may suggest a thematic unity among the paintings, fails to account for several carefully rendered details. For example, the presence of lictors with hatchet fascies and the *tunica cincta* suggests the representation of a magistrate clothed in *imperium*. Colini was the first to suggest that the fragments represent a curule magistrate as *triumphator* celebrating his victory in the war illustrated by the scenes of combat. Coarelli agrees with Colini and convincingly

13. Plan of the Arieti Tomb. Drawing: Kevin W. Davis after the Pellegrini sketch.

