

Dependencies and Inequalities in Etruscan Funerary Painting

Abstract: *Die etruskische Grabmalerei dient in erster Linie der Selbstdarstellung einer Elite. Daher ist es fast nicht möglich, innerhalb ihrer Bildprogramme die vielen Sklaven und anderen Abhängigen zu erkennen, ohne die eine solche Gesellschaft nicht funktionieren konnte. Andererseits berichten die spärlichen Schriftquellen aus Griechenland gelegentlich, dass die Etrusker sich durch eine besonders hohe Zahl an Sklaven auszeichneten. Daher werden die zahlreichen „Nebenfiguren“, die bei Tanzszenen, akrobatischen Aufführungen, Sportwettkämpfen, beim Gelage oder in Beamtenaufzügen auftreten, in der bisherigen Literatur zumeist ohne nähere Begründung als Sklaven angesprochen. Der Beitrag versucht aufzuzeigen, dass diese Einordnung vorschnell ist. Kleidung, Haartracht, Nacktheit, Namensbeischriften, Figurentypen sowie Unterschiede in den Figurengrößen („Bedeutungsgröße“) werden danach befragt, ob sie die genauere Erfassung und Beschreibung sozialer Schichtung erlauben.*

It is well known that Etruscan epigraphy has been dominated for a very long time not by a (social) historical, but mainly by a linguistic approach, by linguistic enquiries and methods. Enrico Benelli recently called this approach “un errore tragico” and even accused these studies of their “garrula vacuità,” adding that they had degenerated into a “sterile palude neotimologista.”¹ Fortunately, as a classical archaeologist, I can leave open the question of whether this characterization is appropriate or perhaps exaggerated. But there should be no doubt that a more “historical” epigraphy can still contribute a lot to the reconstruction of Etruscan social history and the study of Etruscan society. In view of the total loss of Etruscan literature, this cannot be overstated. The same applies – *mutatis mutandis* – to the interpretation of the Etruscan wall painting. It is important to bear this methodological connection in mind in the following attempt to use Etruscan tomb paintings as a source for dependency, in the course of which I will occasionally even combine the epigraphic and pictorial traditions.

Since funerary painting in Tarquinia came to an end around the late third century BC – its main flowering was in the late archaic and late classical periods – my study will focus on the earlier monuments, which give no direct indication of the status of the figures depicted in them. One can only try to find a key for deciphering them in the paintings themselves. In doing so, one must keep in mind the wide variety of images

¹ Enrico Benelli, “La società etrusca: il contributo dell’epigrafia,” in *Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Etrusker: Akten der internationalen Tagung, Wien, 8.–10.6.2017*, ed. Luciana Aigner-Foresti and Petra Amann, Phersu. Etrusco-italische Studien 1 (Vienna: Holzhausen, 2018): 219.

and their respective contexts. Then one must always consult and collate the very different historical documentations that have been produced over the past three centuries. And finally, when looking at an original painting, a drawing, or a photograph, one cannot always rely on what one sees, because the painted tombs are often damaged and the paintings fragmentary; in many cases large areas are covered by white salt layers (calcium carbonate) or even by the roots of plants that grow above the tomb. In addition, one should also always be aware of the sections of a painting on which restorations may have been carried out over many decades.² So trying to read the images is always a risky undertaking.

Let me illustrate this with an example: During the 2016 *Studi Etruschi* (Austria) conference, organized in Vienna by Petra Amann, I undertook to determine whether the depictions of small figures next to large ones were meant to represent the slaves or the children – i.e. descendants – of the gens.³ In the *Tomba degli Scudi*, there is a fragmentary inscription of which only two letters remain. They are very close to the back of the young girl who holds a fan for the noblewoman, Velia Seithiti, who is shown at a banquet with her husband Larth Velcha. The two letters, which turned out to be a lambda and a chi, had been overlooked in the CIE. I suggested that they were part of the name of the gens Velcha, and therefore part of the girl's name. Because she is shown wearing a fine, diaphanous dress, a mantle, and the same type of shoes as the lady Velia Seithiti, and is adorned with a golden necklace and golden earrings as well as an elaborate fashionable hairstyle, I argued that she ought to be read as a relative or a daughter of the family of Larth Velcha, and not a slave girl.⁴

Only a few months later, the paintings in the tomb were restored completely and the white salt layers removed, so that additional letters came to light.⁵ I had been right that the lambda and the chi belonged to the name of the gens Velcha, but the first name was revealed not to be the expected name of the girl, but the name of Larth Velcha.⁶ So, to cut a long story short, the girl remains nameless.

2 Adele Cecchini, "Le tombe tarquiniesi riprodotte nelle copie della collezione Morani: conservazione e restauri," in *L'Etruria di Alessandro Morani: Riproduzioni di pitture etrusche dalle collezioni dell'Istituto Svedese di Studi Classici a Roma*, ed. Astrid Capoferro and Stefania Renzetti (Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 2017): 179–95.

3 Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, "Kinder oder Sklaven? Zur Darstellung kleiner Menschen in der etruskischen Kunst," in *Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Etrusker: Akten der internationalen Tagung, Wien, 8.–10.6.2017*, ed. Luciana Aigner-Foresti and Petra Amann, *Phersu. Etrusco-italische Studien* 1 (Vienna: Holzhausen, 2018): 267–77.

4 Weber-Lehmann, "Kinder oder Sklaven?": 269–71.

5 For the inscription after restoration see Maria Donatella Gentili and Lorella Maneschi, eds., *Tarquinia: La Tomba degli Scudi* (Arcidosso: Effigi Editori, 2019): 39, fig. 6, and https://domenicovventura.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/004_DSC6645-1080x1440.jpg [accessed 13.05.2024].

6 Massimo Morandi Tarabella, "Novità sui Velcha di Tarquinia," *Archeologia Classica* 47 (1995): 287, fig. 22–24, had instead guessed correctly that the letters should be considered part of the name of Larth Velcha, since the inscriptions on the window frames would always refer to the "titolare della

There are other unnamed persons in the Velcha Tomb paintings: all of the musicians – the players of kithara, aulos, cornu and lituus –, the *apparitores/lictors* and the boy carrying the stool (*sella curulis*), as well as the two naked boys with a jug and a strainer, the cupbearers for the two banqueting couples. All other adult persons have their names inscribed beside or above their heads. Some of the women are given only their family name, like Velchai, Aninai, or Alvethnai.⁷ It is not clear why their first names are missing. Maybe they were still unmarried daughters, or perhaps only the protagonists – the adult men and married women – were interesting enough to be fully named.⁸

Although we are as yet not in a position to decide whether namelessness was an indication of – lower or dependent – social status, one gets the impression that different grades of dependency can be discerned within the group of nameless personages: i.e. between slaves and freelance artists, or between slaves of the household and men working for the state or community. Can we identify any further distinctions? Which kind of criteria could be applied to address the problem?⁹

I already mentioned that apparel and hairstyle can be informative – at least one can notice some differences, especially in terms of footwear.

Larth Velcha's brother and nephew, Arnth and Vel, on the left-hand side of the rear wall, and the father of Larth and Vel, Velthur, who is sitting on the stool, are wearing sandals, as are the two nameless musicians on the right-hand wall and most probably also the cupbearers. By contrast, the man who walks behind Velchai on the right-hand wall, whose inscribed name is no longer legible, has no shoes at all. It is also quite astonishing that on the adjacent entrance wall one of the *apparitores* wears the same high, black boots as Larth Velcha in his role as magistrate, while the second *apparitor* is barefoot just like the small bearer of the *sella*. Both *apparitores* and the

cella su cui la finestra si apre." For the several inscriptions naming Larth Velcha and the genealogy of the family see Massimo Morandi Tarabella, *Prosopographia Etrusca*, vol. 1, *Corpus 1: Etruria Meridionale* (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 2004): 180, 3.

7 CIE II, 1:3, 230 no. 5396, 5397, 5399.

8 Olav Danielsson in CIE, II, 1:3m, 223 no. 5381 (Velchai) interpreted this inscription as follows: "Hanc mulierem, quae aetate iunior videtur et gentilici solo nuncupata est, priorum filiam virique tit. 5395 commemorati sororem fuisse ver similitudo est. cf. etiam tit. 5397." Danielsson and others identified her as the daughter of Larth Velcha and Velia Seithiti, and the man walking behind her as her brother. But she could just as well be the daughter of Velthur I and Ravnthu Aprthnai, i.e. Larth Velcha's sister. Since I am inclined to interpret the scene on the right-hand wall and the adjacent entrance wall as a wedding scene, Velchai – as Velia's sister-in-law – would play the role of the bridal attendant.

9 Matthias Grawehr, "Of Toddlers and Donkeys," in *Ubi servi erant? Die Ikonographie von Sklaven und Freigelassenen in der römischen Kunst*, ed. Andrea Binsfeld and Marcello Ghetta (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2022): 121, gives the following iconographical markers (most of which were already described by Nikolaus Himmelmann, *Archäologisches zum Problem der griechischen Sklaverei* [Mainz: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1971]: 5–49): "reduced scale to indicate inferior status, indecorous posture, hairstyle and attire, scenes of servile labor, ethnically differentiated appearance and an isolated position in the picture."

small bearer of the *sella* are dressed in a completely white himation – unlike the one worn by the magistrate, which has a red border.¹⁰

It seems that the painter of the tomb wanted to be very precise about the different statuses of the individuals he depicted. We know from some Roman republican authors that the dress of the Roman lictors corresponded to that of the magistrate himself.¹¹ In the *Tomba degli Scudi* this is obviously not the case. Only the man walking ahead wears the same type of black boots as the magistrate. We must admit that literary tradition about the Roman republic does not correspond to what is painted in the Etruscan tomb. It is certainly possible that the differences in costume between the individual *apparitores* might reflect their various different dependencies on a magistrate,¹² and most probably they had a special significance. However, there are only five Tarquinian tomb paintings that show processions of magistrates, and most of them are missing important details because of their poor condition. It is therefore problematic to build extensive hypotheses at this point. While the Romans emphasized the uniform appearance of the lictors of Roman officials, in Etruria greater variations seem to have been tolerated or even deliberately used to indicate differentiation in rank.

Instead, I want to go back to earlier periods for which the same question has been discussed, namely if the apparel of a figure can tell us something about social status. So the young cupbearers, who are never absent from any of the numerous banqueting scenes, are always naked except for their sandals and a wreath on their head, which indicates that they are taking part in the feast. They have always been considered as slaves, mainly because of their nudity and their serving activities.

This type of cupbearer appears on Attic vases only from about 530 BC onwards, and one may assume that it came to Etruria via Athens. By contrast, the cupbearers on archaic monuments in Ionia are mostly dressed in a short chiton.¹³ In Athens they were referred to as *paides* (“boys”), as they were children and served not only during

¹⁰ In the scholarship, the mantles were mostly referred to as togas or *togae praetextae*, and before the restauration the details were also described wrongly: the garment worn by the *sella* bearer was seen as a tunic, and Larth *Velcha* was thought to wear a tunic beneath his mantle. The authors obviously had the Roman dress code in mind. But the apparently rounded hem, which could give the impression of a toga, is due to the way the cloth is draped.

¹¹ Theodor Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, repr. Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt Graz, 1952): 358–59; Karl Kübler, “Lictor,” in *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 13.1, ed. Wilhelm Kroll (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1926): 507–18.

¹² Antonio M. Colini, *Il fascio littorio di Roma* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1932): 23, no. 4: for example, in Rome the principal lictor (*lictor proximus*) exercised a supervisory function and therefore had a higher status than his companions. He was expected to wear the same garb as the magistrate.

¹³ Burkhard Fehr, *Orientalische und griechische Gelage* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1971): 38–39, 44. The earliest nude cupbearers can be found already in the second quarter of the sixth century on some Laconian drinking cups, but as a fixed component of symposium scenes they appear

banquets, but also in the palaestra or the stables. They are drawn idealized as beautiful boys without any barbarian traits, typical for early slave iconography in Athens, and they resemble their athletic masters, so that we cannot tell if they were intended to be slaves or possibly *eromenoi* from middle-class or even upper-class families. Perhaps these families assigned auxiliary and service tasks at the symposium or in the palaestra, the wrestling ground, to their sons to familiarize them early on with those situations in which they would later have to prove themselves as young men or adult citizens. For such ambivalent representations Nikolaus Himmelmann has emphasized slavish activity as a distinguishing feature.¹⁴

In any case, in the Tarquinian paintings the nude boys at banquets are surely meant to be servants, but their depictions cannot tell us more about their exact social status. They are never shown with barbarian traits or in humiliating or indecent situations, or engaged in clearly slavish activities.

In addition to the boy servants, there are also adult or at least taller servants at the banquet, such as in the sixth-century *Tomba del Frontoncino*¹⁵ and *Tomba delle Iscrizioni*,¹⁶ where they are not naked but dressed in short chitons. The tombs of the fifth and earlier fourth centuries, such as the *Tomba della Scrofa nera* (Fig. 1), *Tomba del Letto funebre* (Fig. 2), Tomb No. 5513,¹⁷ *Tomba della Nave* (Fig. 3) and *Tomba del Guerriero* (Fig. 4), show the taller young men wearing a waistcloth or with their mantle wound around their hips, which may also be due to their older age, and perhaps also their different function. We know this kind of waistcloth from the depictions of men of the working class on some Attic vases, where they are distinguished from the Athenian citizens who are always shown in a long himation.¹⁸ In the Tarquinian paintings, by contrast, the men with the himation around their waists are always taking part in the banqueting scenes. They seem to have had a more important function than the boy servants, as they appear twice in the centre of the banqueting scene, (Fig. 1, 4) and

regularly only after 530 BC on Attic vases, which were used in large quantities by and well known to the Etruscans.

14 Himmelmann, *Archäologisches zum Problem der griechischen Sklaverei*: 25.

15 Mario Moretti, *Nuovi monumenti della pittura Etrusca* (Milan: Lerici Editori, 1966): 84–85.

16 Stephan Steingräber, ed. *Catalogo ragionato della pittura etrusca* (Milan: Jaca Book SpA, 1985): no. 74.

17 Steingräber, *pittura etrusca*: 373, fig. 175: The two young men on the right-hand wall of Tomb No. 5513 as well as the boy following the aulos player on the left-hand wall all wear scanty waistcloths painted in red, which are therefore hard to distinguish from the colour of their skin. In the other cases a himation of normal size is folded and draped around the hips. In the *Tomba del Letto funebre* the only female servant also wears it like this, but with her chiton underneath; as does the lyre player in the *Tomba della Scrofa nera* who sits on the *kline* in the center of the rear wall. This seems to support the interpretation as a garment of people at work.

18 Himmelmann, *Archäologisches zum Problem der griechischen Sklaverei*: 36–38, fig. 59, 62a; Annika Backe-Dahme et al., eds., *Von Göttern und Menschen: Bilder auf griechischen Vasen* (Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth, 2010): 88, fig. 45.

in the *Tomba della Nave* the adult servant seems to be supervising the wine vessels on the buffet table. (Fig. 3) What we can learn from these observations is that the nudity of the boy cupbearers is an important indication of their childhood – no more and no less.

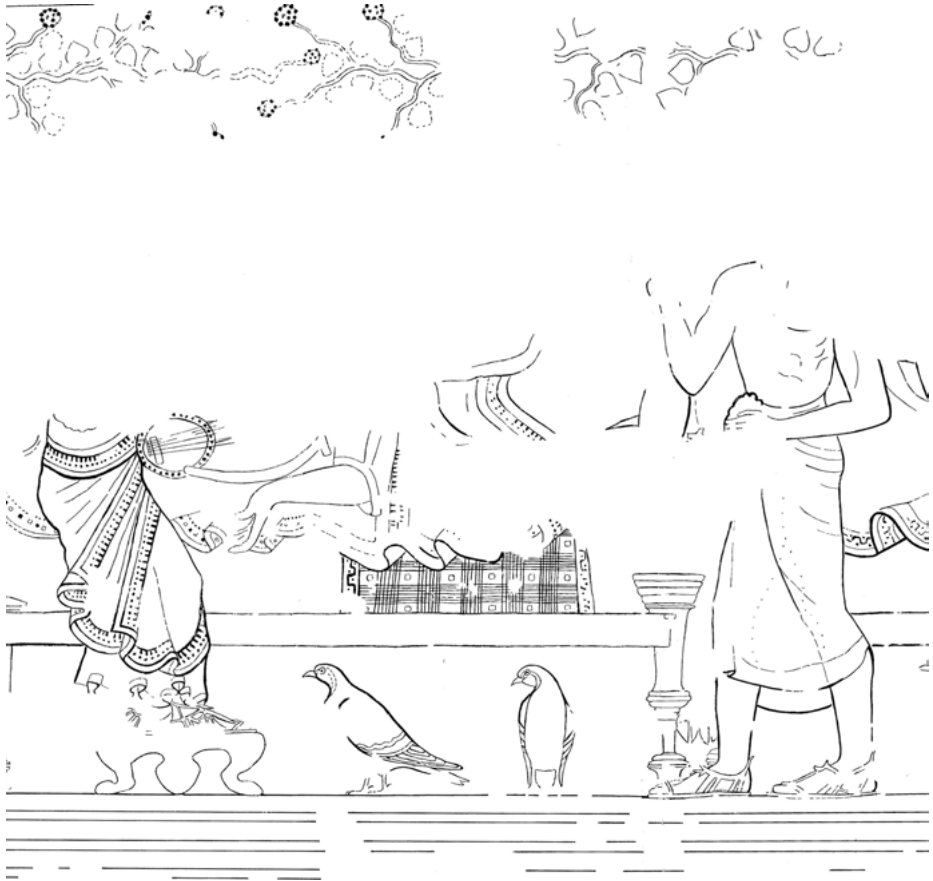


Fig. 1: Tomba della Scrofa nera, rear wall, detail.

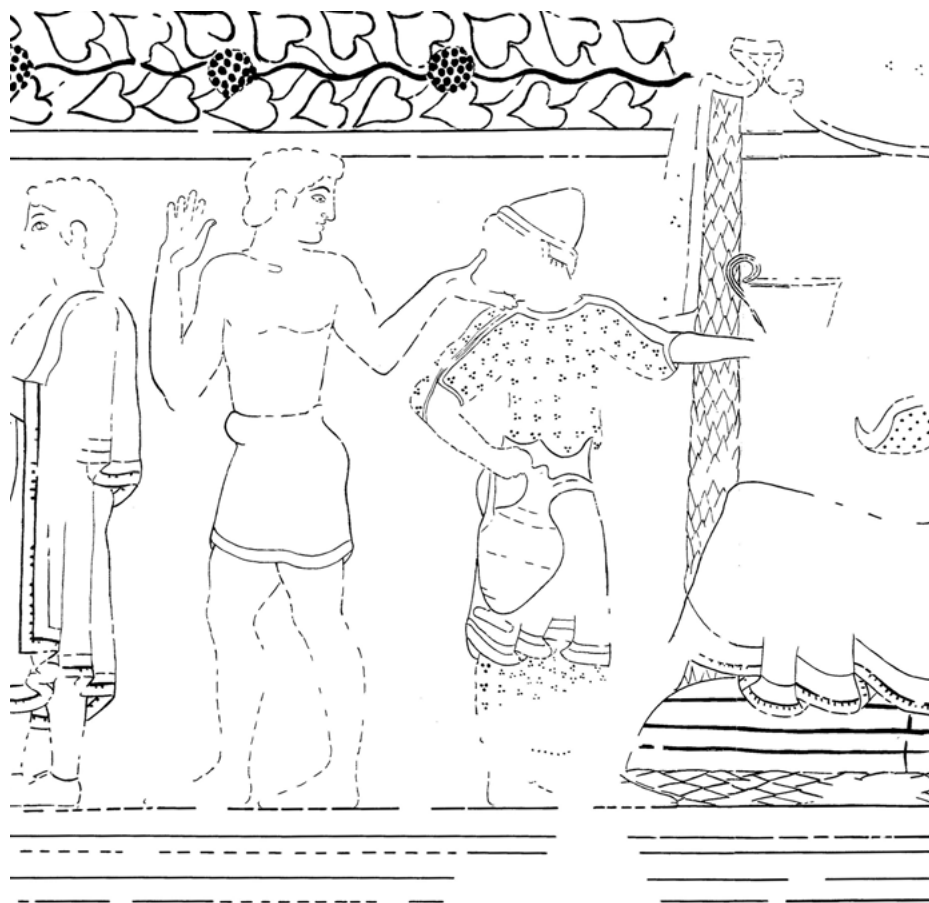


Fig. 2: Tomba del Letto funebre, left wall.

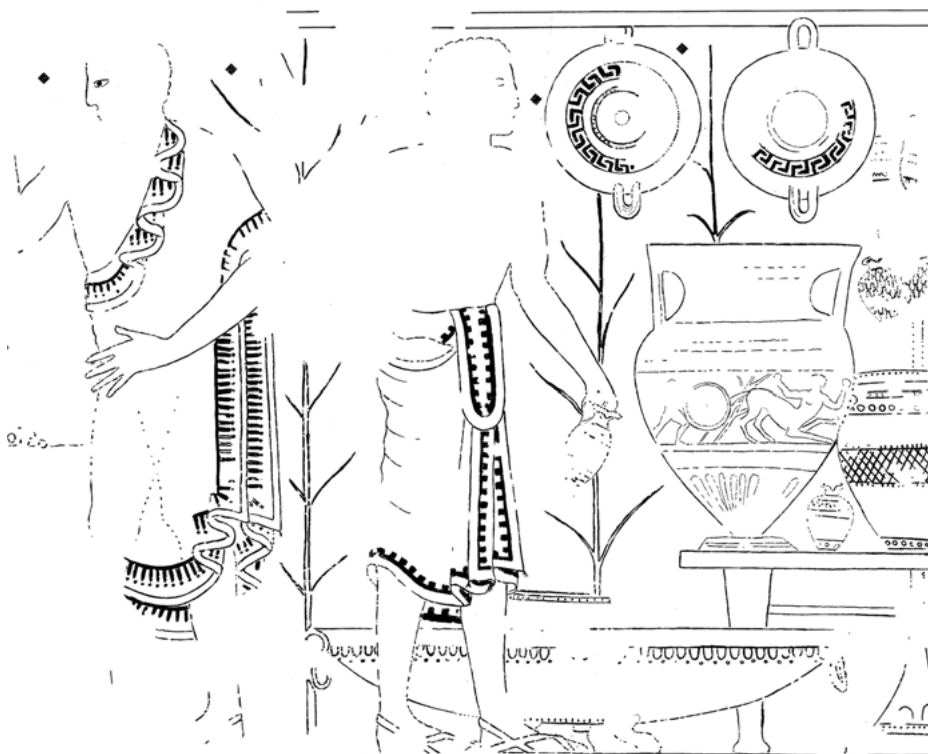


Fig. 3: Tomba della Nave left wall.

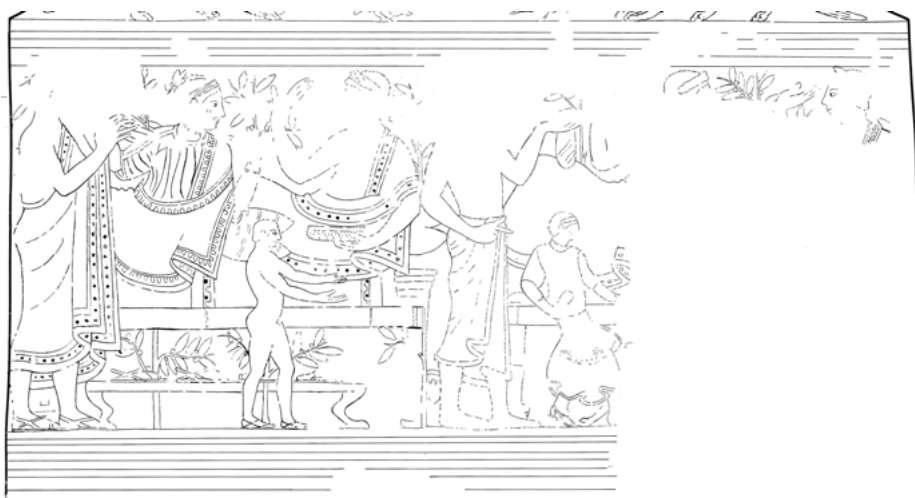


Fig. 4: Tomba del Guerriero, rear wall.

In the *Tomba del Guerriero*, which shows one of the latest examples of the traditional banquet scenes in Tarquinian painting, we can observe a further phenomenon: on the rear wall, there are four attendants: the canonical flute player at the foot of the couch (*kline*) to the left, then a very small, naked boy stretching out his hands as if to offer something to the banqueters, who however seem to ignore him; on his right there is an adult man with the himation wrapped around his waist who holds an alabastron in the right hand. At the foot of the right-hand *kline*, we can discern a very small dancing woman in the traditional costume of the crotalist¹⁹ (Fig. 4). Is her smallness intended to signal the dancer's immaturity and childishness? Is she therefore a very young girl? Or should she not rather be classified – despite her smallness – as one of the other, elaborately dressed adult crotalists?²⁰ A similar phenomenon occurs in Tomb no. 808, where the flute player is even smaller in relation to the banqueting figures.²¹

Such a difference in size may be intended to indicate hierarchic scale (*Bedeutungsgröße*), whereby personages of a lower social status or less importance were depicted on a smaller scale than the protagonists. As Nikolaus Himmelmann pointed out in his pioneering work about the depiction of slaves in ancient visual art, this could be a way to indicate the social difference between master and servant, as can be seen, for example, on Attic grave stelae such as between the freeborn girl Kallistion and her unnamed slave playmate, who is shown at third the size of her mistress; or the boy Deinias, shown as a large baby, and his half-sized *pais* (boy slave).²² Differentiation by scale became increasingly important in Greek art as a status marker from the fourth century onward, and I think that the appearance of hierarchic scale in Tarquinian paintings cannot be explained without some Greek influence.

So far we have seen that it is very difficult and complex to distinguish social inequality by the choice of clothing, the relative size or proportions of the figures, and by the use of name inscriptions which were added to some figures but not to others.

If we look back in time – to the archaic and late archaic periods – we see the same practice already in the *Tomba delle Iscrizioni*, where the *hetairoi* – the friends and family of the dead – are depicted moving towards the false door on the rear wall in a *komos*. Their names are written next to them, except for the aulos player and the

¹⁹ Moretti, *pittura Etrusca*: 240–41.

²⁰ The crotalist appears almost regularly – as far as we can tell in view of the many destroyed wall sections in the tombs – from the second quarter of the fifth century onwards. As a rule, she is wearing the garb of the professionals performing at an event, i.e. a chiton and a red *ependytes* (sleeveless overgarment), the same as the acrobat women balancing a *thymiaterion* (incense burner) on their head, and some of the musician. For the status of the performers see also below.

²¹ Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, “Zur Datierung der tarquinischen Grabmalerei des 5. und 4. Jhs. v. Chr.,” in *Die Aufnahme fremder Kultureinflüsse in Etrurien und das Problem des Retardierens in der Etruskischen Kunst: Referate vom Symposium des Deutschen Archäologen-Verbandes, Mannheim, 8.–10.2.1980* (Mannheim: Deutscher Archäologen-Verband, 1981): 169, fig. 9: drawing after Moretti, *pittura Etrusca*: 89.

²² Himmelmann, *Archäologisches zum Problem der griechischen Sklaverei*: 40–41, fig. 65–66.

cupbearers. The latter are not small boys in this case, but adult men dressed in short chitons and barefoot; they carry the drinking vessels and a big krater. Only a single name is given for each, presumably their first names.²³

Surprisingly, the two nude revellers in the *komos*, in the corner where the rear and right-hand walls meet, show full first and last names. This would contradict the assumption that males depicted nude are slaves. The figures were reproduced as nude immediately after their discovery in drawings made by Joseph Thürmer in 1827²⁴ and by Carlo Ruspi in 1835,²⁵ but the area around their hips had obviously already been disturbed in both cases. In the Copenhagen copies – made some seventy years later with the aid of “Zauberwasser” (i.e. a mixture of turpentine oil and water, used by the restorers of the 19th century)²⁶ – these areas are a little blurred, probably because the facsimile painters were not entirely sure whether or not there may have been red *perizomae* (waistcloths).²⁷ We might even think so when we look at Mosconi’s black-and-white photograph.²⁸

In a related tomb, the *Tomba del Morto*, Carlo Ruspi also drew the revellers as naked, but the first drawing by Gottfried Semper, made three years earlier,²⁹ shows extensive damage both to the rear wall and to the right-hand wall down and around the men’s waists. (Fig. 5) So they most probably also wore a *perizoma*. In the same

23 For the inscriptions of the *Tomba delle Iscrizioni* (CIE II,1,3 nos. 5336–5353) see Gerhard Meiser, ed. *Etruskische Texte: Editio minor* (Hamburg: Baar, 2014): 473 Ta 7.13–29. It is quite astonishing that the aulos player, who is wearing the same boots and *perizoma* as the *komasts* (revellers), is nameless, while at least one name was given for the aulos player on the left-hand wall of the tomb, who plays for the boxing competition (ET, Ta 7.28).

24 Horst Blanck and Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, *Malerei der Etrusker in Zeichnungen des 19. Jahrhunderts: Dokumentation vor der Photographie aus dem Archiv des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts in Rom* (Mainz: Zabern, 1987): 70, fig. 12–13. Copy from these drawings by Georg Friedrich Ziebland: <https://mediatum.ub.tum.de/image/936469> [accessed 13.05.2024].

25 Blanck and Weber-Lehmann, *Malerei der Etrusker in Zeichnungen*: 62–63, fig. 3–4.

26 Mette Moltesen and Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, *Etruskische Grabmalerei: Faksimiles und Aquarelle: Dokumentation aus der Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek und dem Schwedischen Institut in Rom* (Mainz: Zabern, 1992): 8.

27 Moltesen and Weber-Lehmann, *Faksimiles und Aquarelle*: 63 no 1.56 and 65 no. 1.59.

28 Fritz Weege, *Etruskische Malerei* (Halle an der Saale: M. Niemeyer, 1921): pl. 74. As the inscriptions above the heads of the two naked men identify them as Laris Farunus and Larth Matves (the latter was probably the founder of the tomb), it seems quite implausible that they were depicted in this way. The figures on the other side of the tomb, a boy named Velthur – obviously a child – and the winner of the horse race, Laris Larthia – the son of Larth Matves – as well as the other participants in the horse race are naked. Unlike the bearded men on the opposite wall sections, they are all beardless, i.e. younger. For the name of Laris Larthia see Giovanni Colonna, “Discussion,” in *L’écriture et l’espace de la mort: Épigraphe et nécropoles à l’époque préromaine*, ed. Marie-Laurence Haack (Rome: École française de Rome, 2016): 199.

29 Blanck and Weber-Lehmann, *Malerei der Etrusker in Zeichnungen*: 70–71, fig. 12–13; see also http://isv.digitalcollection.org/islandora/object/MORANI-SKETCHES%3A333?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=0ceff179e673fc67b56a6&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=3&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=2 [accessed 13.05.2024].

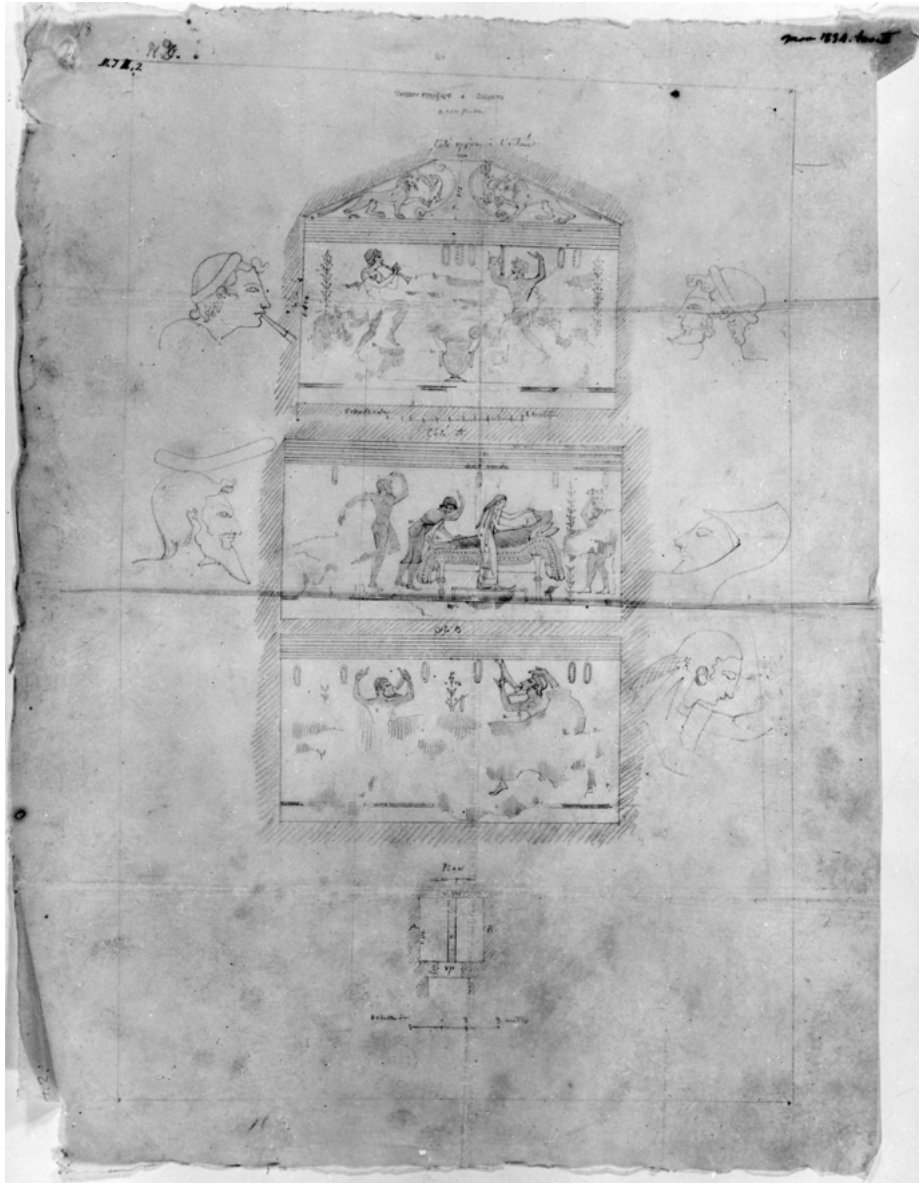


Fig. 5: Tomba del Morto.

tomb, only the dancing man at the foot of the deathbed on the left-hand wall seems to have been naked. He had been reproduced as such already in the drawings made by Gottfried Semper soon after the discovery of the tomb. As Semper drew an intact figure without any damage, it may be possible that the figure was really shown naked. But sixty-five years later, when the tomb paintings were copied again, Oreste Marozzi saw the figure as damaged, as the Copenhagen facsimile and the corresponding sketch show.³⁰ Maybe this was why Carlo Ruspi also depicted the revellers as damaged. But in 1835, when Carlo Ruspi completed his *lucidi* for the facsimiles for the *Alte Pinakothek* in Munich and the *Museo Gregoriano Etrusco* in the Vatican, he was already familiar with numerous Attic red-figure vases showing naked revellers in a *komos*. So, Attic vase painting could have provided the model here as well. Again, one cannot simply claim that nudity in adult men is a sign of their inferior status: different criteria are required depending on the case.

In the numerous athletic scenes nudity appears quite natural to us, as we are familiar with athletic nudity from ancient Greece, especially from the countless Attic vases imported into Etruria, but of course also from the many Greek monuments which were everywhere in the public eye, such as dedications in sanctuaries, honorary monuments in public squares and grave stelai in cemeteries.

The earliest example of naked athletes in Tarquinian tomb paintings is the well-known pair of wrestlers on the right-hand wall of the *Tomba degli Auguri*. They have short inscriptions next to them: the word “teitu” on the left, the word “latithe” on the right. The words have been taken for proper names, as the name Latithe allegedly also occurs in Chiusi and Perugia.³¹

The boxers on the opposite wall are so badly damaged that the inscriptions, which must certainly have been there, have been lost forever. In the reconstruction drawing, which I developed together with the painter Renato Roscani for the exhibition in Hamburg in 2004, we decided to use imaginary names to indicate what the original might have looked like. The well-placed inscriptions in the *Tomba degli Auguri* certainly also had a decorative function.³²

30 Blanck and Weber-Lehmann, *Malerei der Etrusker in Zeichnungen*: 75, fig. 19; 79, fig. 26. Carlo Ruspi's *lucido* (tracing) of 1835 also shows a completely intact and naked man. But as we already saw, his *lucidi* of this tomb show additions in the final facsimile for sale, and therefore do not correctly reflect the state of preservation at that time. Moltesen and Weber-Lehmann, *Faksimiles und Aquarelle*: 43 no. 1.35; for Marozzi's sketches of the *Tomba del Morto* see <http://isv.digitalcollection.org/islandora/object/MORANI-SKETCHES%3A497/datastream/OBJ/viewn> [accessed 13.05.2024].

31 Today the inscriptions on the original are barely legible: Steingräber, *pittura etrusca*: pl. 18; ET² Pe 1.1090; Cl 1.772, 1.2830, 1.1867; 1.11868; Jean-Paul Thuillier, “Un pugiliste Serviteur de deux Maîtres: Inscriptions ‘sportives’ d'Etrurie,” in *Etruria e Italia preromana: studi in onore di Giovannangelo Camporeale*, ed. Stefano Bruni and Luciano Agostiniani, *Studia erudita* 4 (Pisa: Serra Editore, 2009): 877, has proposed translating Latithe as Latinus, ‘man from Latium’.

32 Bernard Andreae et al., eds., *Die Etrusker: Luxus für das Jenseits: Bilder vom Diesseits – Bilder vom Tod* (Munich: Hirmer, 2004): 132, fig. 1–2.

It is quite interesting to observe that the names of the wrestlers were given, considering the fact that all the other figures in the tomb have inscriptions that refer to their functions. That functions, not names are intended can be deduced by the fact that each term appears twice. In my opinion, it is obvious that the inscriptions next to the wrestlers refer to individuals who were evidently famous and known by the people of Tarquinia, comparable to today's football stars or tennis champions. This was certainly the case with the boxers on the wall opposite.

Looking at the further evolution of athletic scenes in the paintings, one gets the impression that wrestling became less important than boxing, which was apparently one of the most popular competitive disciplines in Tarquinia – and not only there. Even in later tombs, down to the beginning of the fourth century, boxing is never absent wherever sporting competitions are depicted.³³

Nevertheless, it was certainly an exciting discovery when in 1990, during a second restoration of the *Tomba Cardarelli*, inscriptions were made out on the entrance wall above the heads of the two boxers, which had been overlooked until then.³⁴ No wonder, since all the other figures in this tomb are nameless, as is the case in the great majority of tombs of the late archaic period.

For my long-term documentation project of Tarquinian tomb paintings in tracings, funded by the DFG, we were able to trace these inscriptions in 1993 directly from the wall, but without really being able to understand them. (Fig. 6) Then, in 1995, Massimo Morandi presented them to the public in *Studi Etruschi*; his transcription differed from ours in a few minor details, but as it seemed plausible his reading was never questioned. Morandi himself repeated his interpretation of the letters in his opus magnum, *Prosopographia Etrusca* in 2004, and he explained it as follows: The inscription gives three names in different cases: on the left is “Velchasnas,” a genitive (i.e. “of” or “belonging to the Gens Velcha”), and on the right-hand wall two names in the nominative: the family names (*gentilicia*) Petui and Nanisieï, both with feminine endings.³⁵

Simona Marchesini, who also discussed the *Tomba Cardarelli* in the same year, 2004, in her *Prosopographia II*,³⁶ rejected the idea that the names referred to the boxers themselves, as they were all of “status servile.” In view of the genitive “Velchasnas,” Morandi also suggested that the boxer was a slave of the house of Velcha,

³³ As far as we can say at the current time, the latest example is the one on the left-hand wall of the *Tomba del Guerriero*. See also Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, “Tomba degli Auguri,” in *Die Etrusker: Luxus für das Jenseits: Bilder vom Diesseits – Bilder vom Tod*, ed. Bernard Andreae et al. (Munich: Hirmer, 2004): 134–35.

³⁴ Moretti, *pittura Etrusca*: 98.

³⁵ Massimo Morandi Tarabella, “Rivista di Epigrafia etrusca, Tarquinii 14.–15.,” *Studi Etruschi* 63 (1997): 383–85; Morandi Tarabella, *Prosopographia Etrusca*: 188, 327–28, 372.

³⁶ Simona Marchesini, *Prosopographia Etrusca*, vol. 1, *Studia II: Gentium Mobilitas* (Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 2004): 67–68.

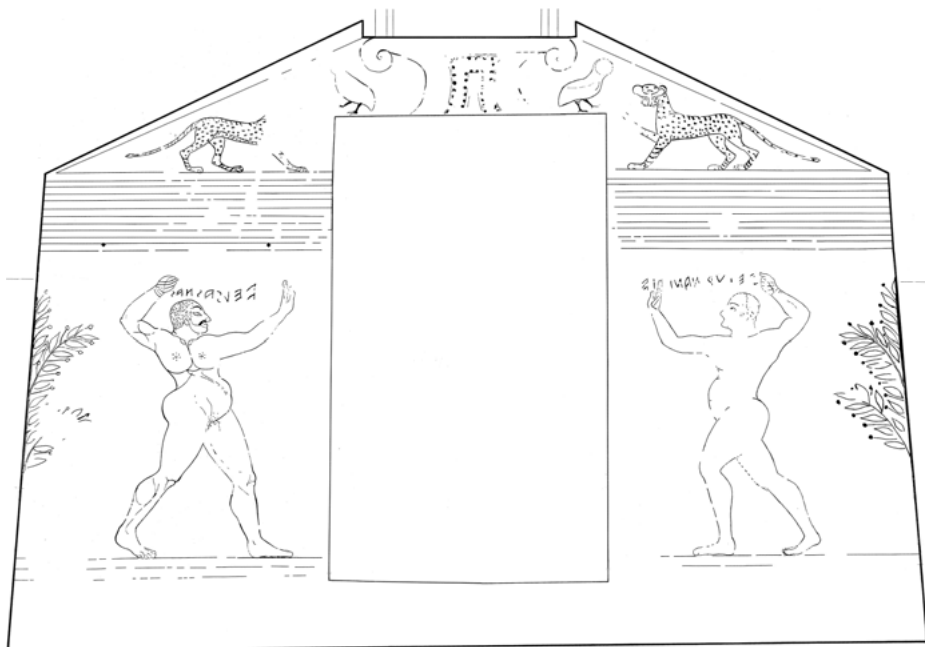


Fig. 6: Tomba Cardarelli, entrance wall.

but rightly argued that then it would have been written *Velchasnasa*.³⁷ I do not know why Simona Marchesini, Massimo Morandi and most recently Jean-Paul Thuillier and Catherine Cousin assume that the boxers were slaves. The only argument given to support this statement is their coarse appearance.

However, the rugged look is part of the boxers' profession; on Greek vases or other Greek monuments they are frequently depicted like that too.³⁸ On the other hand, we know from the Greek *poleis* that athletics were the prerogative of men who could afford it financially, i.e. either aristocrats or otherwise wealthy citizens. Boxers who returned victorious from competitions were even honoured with public statues or honorary inscriptions, and their prizes belonged to them, of course to no one else.³⁹

³⁷ Thuillier, "Inscriptions 'sportives' d'Etrurie": 878–79, postulates that *Velchasnas* should also be read as a nominative and so the three names would refer to the master or mistresses of the athletes. This hypothesis seems to me rather random. Catherine Cousin, "Typologie et fonction des didascalies dans l'imagerie funéraire étrusque," in *L'écriture et l'espace de la mort: Épigraphie et nécropoles à l'époque préromaine*, ed. Marie-Laurence Haack (Rome: École française de Rome, 2016): 182–85, however, accepts this reading.

³⁸ Jean-Paul Thuillier, *Les Jeux Athlétiques dans la civilisation Étrusque* (Rome: Scuola Tipografica S. Pio X, 1985): 561.

³⁹ Christian Mann, *Athlet und Polis im archaischen und frühklassischen Griechenland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001): 28–29, 292–95. As some of the Etruscan representations show the prizes

Why should it have been different in the Etruscan cities? In his 1985 monograph on athletic games, Jean-Paul Thuillier also assumed that the ruling classes in Etruria – in contrast to Greece – did not practise athletics or competitive sports, arguing that this could be seen, among other things, in the fact that in Etruria – unlike in Taranto – no tombs of athletes have been found.⁴⁰

But what would the painted tomb of a Tarquinian athlete look like if he had been a member of the elite? What would we expect? Would the athlete be recognizable as such, in the centre of the scene, i.e. in the middle of the rear wall, perhaps as the winner of a competition? That would seem quite strange to us. More probable is that he would not be recognized in an ordinary banquet or a *komos* scene. But it is equally conceivable that athletes were buried in some of the numerous unpainted chamber tombs.

So we must look for another explanation for the inscriptions in the *Tomba Cardarelli*. Is it not surprising that in the particularly elaborate and precise paintings of this tomb, which most likely depict the tomb owner together with his wife, only the slaves should have accompanying inscriptions?

I think it is also possible that the genitive of Velchasna and the names Petui and Nanisiei are not meant to express ownership *of*, but partisanship *for* the boxer, in the sense of “favourite of Velcha” and “favourite of Petui and Nanisiei”. Be that as it may, there is in any case no hint in the wall paintings for the hypothesis that boxers and other athletes should be classified as slaves.

Even the only literary source for this assumption, Livy 5.1.4, is ambiguous: in the year 403 BC the king of Veii, a very wealthy and presumptuous person, interrupted the sacred games at the *fanum Voltumnae* – which was a sacrilege – and withdrew the performers, most of whom were his own slaves.⁴¹ But “most” (*magna pars*) are not all: there were obviously other performers. Secondly: can we transfer what Livy relates about one extraordinary scandal to ordinary cases? Thirdly and generally: can we really trust Livy, who tells exciting stories but does not report historical facts, at least not for the fifth century BC? Finally, Livy uses the term “artists” (*artifices*), but did athletes also count as artists? Benjamin Oliver Foster in the old Loeb Classical Library Edition chose the English word “actor” for *artifex*, which in my opinion

to win very prominently, as in the Tombs degli Auguri, delle Olimpiadi and delle Iscrizioni, we should consider also what would have to happen with these prizes with dependence of the athletes on their masters.

⁴⁰ Thuillier, *Les Jeux Athlétiques*: 363.

⁴¹ Thuillier, *Les Jeux Athlétiques*: 522–29, in note 92 compiled the older scholarship and therefore assumed that Liv. 5.1.4–5 related a historical event. All subsequent authors followed him in this. Yet the fact that the name of the king of Veii is nowhere mentioned reveals the fairy-tale character of this narrative, something we encounter quite often when Livy talks about the earlier periods. So the only argument for the slave status of athletes is a priori very debatable.

is more convincing.⁴² This would raise the question of whether the athletes merely displayed their art in a dance or play,⁴³ or whether they competed in a real, serious competition.

Jean-Paul Thuillier attempted to resolve the problem by suggesting that the terms *artifices* and *servi* should not be taken too literally, and that at least the boxers might be *artifices*; just as the term *servi* should not be taken to mean that they led a miserable life, but that they were not free.⁴⁴

However, what *artifices* performing and playing looked like can be seen in the appropriately named *Tomba dei Giocolieri* ("Tomb of the Jugglers"). The central figure, the first to be seen as upon entering the tomb, is an acrobat performing a complicated feat.⁴⁵ She performs together with a flute player and boy juggler who apparently are members of her company. The same applies to the camel driver on the entrance wall, of whom unfortunately only parts of the legs have been preserved.⁴⁶ The figure seated on a folding stool (*diphros okladias*), most often referred to as the tomb's owner, can be identified as a person of a higher rank by his seating furniture and his long staff.

More remarkable is the fact that an acrobat and her performance were made the main feature in the decoration of an elite chamber tomb. Does this tell us something about the social status of performers? We know this type of circus act from at least two other tomb paintings, one from the Tarquinian *Tomba delle Bighe* and the other from the *Tomba della Scimmia* in Chiusi. However, in these tombs the spectacle was not marked out by being put prominently on the main wall, but placed alongside other sporting and performing activities. In one respect, however, the *Tomba della Scimmia* is comparable to the *Tomba dei Giocolieri*, in that there, too, the tomb owner observes the performance from close by.⁴⁷ But none of the others is as focussed on the jugglers' performance as in the *Tomba dei Giocolieri*. One wonders why an obviously dependent actor is highlighted in this way.

⁴² Benjamin Oliver Foster, *Livy*, vol. 3, *Books V, VI and VII*, The Loeb Classical Library, 4th ed. (London: William Heinemann, 1960): 5.

⁴³ Kyle A. Jazwa, "A Late Archaic Boxing-Dance in Etruria: Identification, Comparison, and Function," *Etruscan Studies* 23 (2020): 29–61.

⁴⁴ Thuillier, *Les Jeux Athlétiques*: 522–26, 690–91.

⁴⁵ Thuillier, *Les Jeux Athlétiques*: 463–64; Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, "Tomba delle Bighe," in *Malerei der Etrusker in Zeichnungen des 19. Jahrhunderts: Dokumentation vor der Photographie aus dem Archiv des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts in Rom*, ed. Horst Blanck and Cornelia Weber-Lehmann (Mainz: Zabern, 1987): 115–17, fig. 68–71.

⁴⁶ Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, "Stil, Chronologie und Ikonographie der etruskischen Grabmalerei: Die archaische Periode," in *Catalogo ragionato della pittura etrusca*, ed. Stephan Steingraber (Milan: Jaca Book SpA, 1985): 52–53, 55; Francesco Roncalli, "La Tomba dei Giocolieri di Tarquinia: una proposta di lettura," in *Aeimnestos: Miscellanea di Studi per Mauro Cristofani*, vol. 1, ed. Benedetta Adembri (Florence: Centro Di, 2006): 418, suggested that the woman was engaged in some kind of Dionysian divination.

⁴⁷ Blanck and Weber-Lehmann, *Malerei der Etrusker in Zeichnungen*: 202, fig. 191.

Francesco Roncalli, discussing this scene, assumed that the woman might have died before (“la defunta”) and that her feet were therefore on the water, as though she was already *en route* to the Isles of the Blessed, whereas in the other tombs we see her performing on a platform as if acting on a small stage.⁴⁸

But let us return to the question of social status. From classical Greece we know that actors and jugglers travelled around, often organized in troupes with a director or manager who took care of the performances to be given on various occasions.⁴⁹ This is perhaps to be expected for late archaic and early classical Etruria as well. So the jugglers may have been dependent, but did they therefore have the status of slaves? If an acrobat such as the woman in the *Tomba dei Giocolieri* is displayed in such a prominent manner, there must have been something special about her and her companions.

It has been suggested that the jugglers belonged to the tomb owner’s household, which was doubtless extensive. But the fact that this troupe travelled with a camel suggests otherwise. This is something extraordinarily exotic in the last quarter of the sixth century BC,⁵⁰ so that the figures depicted on the left-hand side wall rush up to the amazing, two-humped beast. Their reactions reveal that they have never seen such an animal: the boy on the far left stops in amazement, at a safe distance, while the second one hurries over curiously in large strides, carrying his curved staff (*lago-bolon*) as a safety measure. The third, timidly hesitating, must be virtually pulled along by his pedagogue.⁵¹ If the camel and its driver belonged to the household of the tomb owner, the reaction of the boys and their pedagogue on the left-hand wall would make no sense. In that case, the only way to explain the presence of the woman in the centre of the rear wall must be her fame and the size of her fee, increasing the prestige of the tomb’s owner who by engaging her and her troupe demonstrated his economic prosperity. But even so, we are unable to learn more about the exact status of jugglers and performers.

As we have seen, there are again more questions than answers. Instead of solving problems, I wanted to look again at some of the wall paintings in order to show how open the spectrum of possible interpretations from a socio-historical point of view actually is. It is certainly much wider than the usual – in my opinion premature – iden-

48 Francesco Roncalli, “L’Aldilà: dall’idea al paesaggio,” in *Il viaggio oltre la vita: Gli Etruschi e l’aldilà tra capolavori e realtà virtuale*, ed. Giuseppe Sassatelli and Alfonsina Russo Tagliente (Bologna: Bologna University Press, 2014): 58–59; Francesco Roncalli, “Tra dimora e viaggio: La fascia policroma nelle tombe dipinte tarquiniesi di VI sec. a.C.,” in *Kithon Lydios: studi di storia e archeologia con Giovanna Greco*, ed. Giovanna Greco et al. (Pozzuoli: Naus editoria, 2017): 570–71.

49 Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, “Zwerge,” in *Handwörterbuch der antiken Sklaverei*, vol. 3, ed. Heinz Heinen (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2017): 3279–82.

50 Konrad Schauenburg, “Die Cameliden im Altertum,” *Bonner Jahrbücher* 155 (1955/56): 64–67, pl. 1, fig. 2; pl. 2, fig. 1–2; pl. 3, fig. 1; J.M. Cook, “Old Smyrna: Ionic Black Figure and Other Sixth-Century Figured Wares,” *Annual of the British School at Athens* 60 (1965): 123 no. 45, pl. 30.

51 Weber-Lehmann, “Die archaische Periode”: 52–53.

tifications of actors, athletes, and big and small servants as slaves would suggest. Of course, I am aware that this is probably not an answer, not even a preliminary one. But based on this “interim” result, we can perhaps revisit the question of the status of the people depicted in Etruscan paintings, and this time more openly. In that case we would, of course, have to include especially the representations of “real” slaves, and contrast them with those figures whose status, in my opinion, cannot be clearly determined. For there is no question that slaves must have existed in ancient Etruria – and they might have been also depicted in the paintings: think, for example, of the people under the spectators’ stands in the *Tomba delle Bighe*.

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Fig. 5 Drawing by Gottfried Semper