

RESEARCH PAPERS

Visible Proofs of Valour: The Trophy in South Italic Iconography of the Fourth Century BC

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In the regions of southern Italy known to the Romans as Campania and Lucania, there are numerous tomb and vase paintings of warriors from the fourth century BC. A recurrent theme in these paintings is 'the return of the warrior', in which a warrior, who is often mounted, arrives home carrying a trophy of spoils stripped from defeated enemies over his shoulder. The image of the victorious warrior in these scenes has often been interpreted as an idealistic image created to flatter the martial pretences of the aristocracy and not a reality of warfare. This paper discusses the ideology behind the iconography of the trophy and attempts to understand the heroic ethos of the south Italic warrior. Using evidence from literary and archaeological sources, this study concludes that the heroic iconography was far from being just an ideal of the elite. Spoils taken from enemies were seen as visible proofs of a warrior's prowess and valour in battle, and were a way in which even the most humble warrior could acquire prestige and honour in south Italic society.

Introduction

In recent years there has been renewed academic interest in the study of ancient warfare and conflict (*e.g.* Carman 1997; Cornell *et al.* 1996; Martin and Frayer 1997). These studies include not only the examination of how wars were fought, but also the motivations which encouraged men to fight them. In the regions of southern Italy known to the Romans as Campania and Lucania, there are numerous painted tombs and vases dating from the fourth century BC. The iconographic images from these tombs and vases are thought to express the ideals and aspirations of the society which produced them. Warriors, in various situations, are the most common images depicted, giving the paintings a sense of the heroic. Particularly evocative are the scenes which present warriors returning victorious from battle. An important element which enables us to understand the meaning of the iconography is the trophy carried over the shoulder of the warrior. As will be shown, the peoples of southern Italy venerated the personal bravery and martial prowess of the warrior, and there was no better proof of valour than the spoils stripped from the body of a slain enemy. But how close to reality was this heroic image, and what do these paintings tell us about the society and warriors they depict? To investigate this topic, the iconographic representations of trophies in south Italic art are examined and compared with later literary sources and the existing archaeological record.

The largest concentration of tomb paintings depicting warriors with trophies comes from Paestum, in what was once Lucania, but is now in the modern region of southern Campania (Pliny III.71; Strabo VI.I.3). Pontrandolfo and Rouveret's (1998: 73) study of the Paestan tomb paintings attributes them with dates that span from 400-300 BC. The Campanian evidence is based on several tomb paintings from Capua and Nola, which are contemporary with those in Paestum (Johannowsky 1971: 375-382; Weege 1909: 99-162). The evidence for Campanian and Lucanian red-figure vases, which are sometimes found in the same tombs as the frescoes from Capua and Paestum, suggests

that they date to 420 BC -300 BC (Trendall 1967). Although other sites in southern Italy lack the copious pictorial records of Capua and Paestum, there is a wealth of armour and weapons consistent with the equipment depicted on vases and tombs and which is found in contexts dated to the fifth to fourth centuries BC.

Before investigating the trophy in south Italic iconography it is important to address the use of terms such as Campanian, Lucanian and Samnite. These ethnic terms carry with them many implied meanings when used by both ancient and modern writers. In modern usage, ‘Campanian’ often encourages the misconception that we are dealing with a nation-state or a single bounded entity that identified itself by this name, but this is by no means clear. The history of the Italic peoples is a complex subject where issues of identity, culture and political status were in a continual state of development and change. It is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into a discussion about the nature, or very existence, of the peoples of pre-Roman Italy posited in ancient literature. For the purposes of this paper Campanian, Lucanian and Samnite are used as convenient terms which correspond to the geographical areas known to the Greeks and Romans during the period in question.

The Return of the Warrior: An Iconographic Image of Valour

The image of the returning warrior is a recurrent theme in south Italic iconography and is characterised by a structured format. Typically, the warrior approaches a woman, presumably his wife or mother, who holds out a *phiale* or *skyphos* in her right hand and sometimes an *oinoche* in the other. These are vessels used for offering libations and they imbue the scene with connotations of ritual significance. The warrior, who is often on horseback, faces her, his left hand grasping two spears or javelins from which a trophy is suspended. He is often fully clad in the panoply characteristic of the south Italic warrior: a triple-disc cuirass, bronze belt, short tunic, greaves and a crested helmet. The trophy hangs or is pierced by the warrior’s spears and comprises military equipment and bloodstained clothing which have been taken from his foes in battle (Figs. 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Return of the warrior with a shield and belt as a trophy. Tomb 12 Andriuolo necropolis, Paestum, 380-370 BC (Paestum Museum).

Like the woman’s libation vessels, the trophy is an indicator of the ritual nature of the warrior’s return. However, the trophy is more than just a male counterbalance to the female’s objects. Frederiksen, in discussing the origins of Campanian cavalry, felt that “nothing was more revealing about the ethos of the Campanian warrior society” than the images of

warriors returning with spoils (Frederiksen 1968: 5). Cipriani and Greco, believed that the ‘return of the warrior’ scenes from Paestum were an “emblematic image of military valour, a fundamental value for this Lucanian community” (Cipriani and Greco 1996: 45). It is clear that spoils taken in battle were central to the ideals, aspirations and self-identity of the warrior; they were confirmations of his bravery and prowess on the field of battle. In these paintings it is the warrior who is the focal point. The woman, who welcomes him from the periphery of the painting, is there to bear witness and honour the visible proofs of valour, which the warrior has returned with over his shoulder. The warrior’s valour and martial skill are manly attributes, which are celebrated in south Italic iconography through expressions of military might. A modern reaction to such a stark and one-sided image is often to regard this as “an extreme case of sexism, the polarisation of gender” (Shanks 1999: 134). The contrast between the masculine warrior and the feminine domestic sphere characterise gender relations within Campanian and Lucanian societies. Schneider-Herrmann’s study of south Italic iconographic evidence summarises that, “a coherent image emerges of the warrior and his wife. It is a man’s world, a warrior’s world” (Schneider-Herrmann 1996: xxxi).



Figure 2. Return of the warrior with a tunic and belt as a trophy. Tomb of the warrior’s return, Nola, circa 330 BC, inv. 9363 (Capua Vetere, Museo Campano).

The Trophy in Ancient Warfare

In ancient warfare it was common practice for victorious warriors to strip the dead of their arms and armour. As well as the heroic undertones often attached to this act, there were also obvious economic benefits. Worked metal was a valuable commodity in the ancient world and even badly damaged equipment could be salvaged for repair or melted down and recycled. Indeed, Livy disparages the splendid equipment of the Samnites as, “not arms so much as spoils of war...as a rich enemy was the prize of the victor, however poor he might be” (Livy IX.40). Although this is a largely rhetorical passage, intended to eulogise the austerity of the ancient Romans, it reinforces the fact that warfare was considered a form of economic activity. However, the profit that could be gained from weapons and armour was probably limited, and far more monetary wealth could be expected from livestock, slaves and

other forms of plunder. It is interesting that bound prisoners are sometimes depicted following in the wake of the returning warrior. A tomb painting from Capua shows a triumphant mounted cavalryman carrying spoils before a bearded captive in a *himation* (Schneider-Herrmann 1996: pl. 10; Weege 1909: pl. 104-105, no. 7), and in a similar

scene from tomb 1937 of the Andriuolo necropolis in Paestum, a man and woman follow their captor with their wrists tied (Pontrandolfo and Rouveret 1998: 204-205). The true worth of captured military equipment in fourth century BC Italy could be found in its symbolic value and the prestige this bestowed upon the victor.

The spoils of battle were often used to adorn temples and public places, such as the *agora* or *forum*. Livy states that the Roman commander Papirius, after defeating the Samnites in 293 BC:

...embellished the temple [of Quirinus] with enemy spoils. These were captured in such quantities that they provided ornaments for the forum as well as the temple, and were also shared out among the allies and neighbouring colonies for decoration of their temples and public places.
(Livy X.46)

Arms and armour recovered from temple sanctuaries sometimes show evidence of being secured as part of a trophy. At the Samnite sanctuary of Pietrabbondante, helmets, belts, weaponry and 33 cheek-pieces were found dating to the fourth century BC. More than half of the cheek-pieces have square nail holes, a strong indicator that they had been fixed firmly to a wall or post as part of a trophy.

There can be little doubt that these trophies were a great source of community pride. Livy relates that in his home town of Padua there were many people living in the first century BC, who had viewed the spoils from the defeat of the Spartan king Cleonymus in the fourth century BC, which were nailed to the walls of the old temple of Juno. Every year, in commemoration of that naval battle, a re-enactment was staged in the centre of town (Livy X.2). These types of trophies, however, were collective commemorations of martial valour and prowess. The spoils carried by the warriors in south Italic iconography have a much more personal significance. In these paintings the setting of the warrior's return is a domestic one, as indicated by the presence of the wife or mother. Polybius informs us that in the second century BC it was the custom of the Romans "to hang up the trophies they have won in the most conspicuous places in their houses, and to regard them as proofs and visible symbols of their valour" (Polybius 6.39).

The Significance of the South Italic Trophy

It was previously believed that the trophies in the 'return of the warrior' paintings were flags or streamers (Connolly 1981: 105-6; Saxtorph 1972: 162). In AD 1770 a description of the warriors' return fresco from Nola was given by an English traveller in southern Italy:

You will see by the standards, or colours carried by the horsemen, that even in those very early days, such distinctions as we imagine to have been an invention of the crusaders were already in use, and may be called a kind of blazon.

(d'Hancarville vol. I 1770: 162, cited in Borriello and De Caro 1996: 51)

This misinterpretation is understandable, considering the poor condition and vague details of many tomb and vase paintings. The trophies carried by these warriors seemed to be similar, both visually and contextually, to the modern concept of military standards or flags.

The variety of spoils illustrated in the ‘return of the warrior’ paintings seems limited when compared to the types of equipment found in the archaeological record and described in the ancient sources. This may have been due to an artistic convention, which sought to create a stylised representation of the trophy, or perhaps to emphasise the importance of certain items from the warrior’s panoply. The iconography reveals that the most frequently carried trophies were comprised of tunics, bronze belts and shields. Although some trophies consist of a single item of spoil, most are carried in paired combinations, *e.g.* belt and tunic, belt and shield or shield and tunic. From a sample of 29 tomb and vase paintings from Capua, Nola and Paestum, the types of trophies carried by warriors can be broken down into combinations as indicated in Table 1.

	Tunic	Belt	Shield	One Item	All 3 Items	Total
Tunic	-	10	04	02	02	18
Belt	10	-	05	01	02	18
Shield	04	05	-	03	02	14

Table 1. Items of equipment carried as trophies depicted in 29 paintings.

The most common trophy combination is the belt and tunic, with 10 examples. The belt and tunic are also the most prevalent items of spoil, each with 18 examples, whereas the shield appears in only 14 of these paintings. Overall, however, the numbers of tunics, belts and shields make it seem that they were of comparable prestige value. The shield, while depicted in fewer paintings, emerges as the item of spoil carried most often on its own. It is interesting that other items of the warrior’s panoply, such as helmets, cuirasses and weaponry do not enter the iconography as part of the trophy. Exactly why the tunic, bronze belt and shield have been selected as trophies is not clear. Possible answers may be ascertained from examining the items individually to determine some sense of their significance.

The Tunic

In the semi-mythological legend of the Horatii, two pairs of triplets, the Horatii from Rome and Curatii from Alba, fought a duel on behalf of their respective cities. This story, which allegedly takes place in the seventh century BC, is interesting for its details in which the surviving Horatius returns to Rome victorious, at the head of the army, carrying his ‘triple spoils’ taken from the slain Curatii. As the story goes, the sister of Horatius bursts into tears at the sight of the cloak she had made for her lover, one of the Curatii, which her brother carries over his shoulder as a trophy (Livy I.26). This is an intriguing detail, and one which relates well to the ‘return of the warrior’ image found in south Italic iconography of the fourth century BC. The historicity of this story is questionable. What is certain is that Livy, writing in the first century BC, believed that this tale took place in Rome’s heroic past. The particulars from Horatius’ return

described by Livy are drawn from heroic images which existed in the fourth century BC, but which may have been much earlier. It also suggests that the 'return of the warrior' image was recognised among other Italic peoples outside southern Italy, although archaeological examples have not yet been found.

It appears that from an early date the clothing of a defeated enemy was deemed an appropriate item of spoil for a trophy. A fragment survives from the third century BC poet, Ennius, a non-Roman from southern Italy who served in the second Punic War. It describes the aftermath of battle, and refers to, "those they despoil and leave bodies bare" (Ennius *Varia* 18). The imagery of stripped corpses is powerful and would have brought shame and humiliation to the vanquished. Xenophon, recounting a battle between two rival factions from Athens, thought it significant to point out that "the victors took possession of their arms, but they did not strip off the tunic of any citizen" (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.19). It is evident that stripping the tunic from one's enemy had some deeper meaning than removing other items of the panoply. The reluctance to despoil the dead seems to imply that this was an indignity reserved for enemies from other communities. The iconographic evidence from Capua and Paestum suggests that a similar attitude was held among the peoples of southern Italy. The colours and patterns of tunics carried as trophies usually differ from those worn by the victorious warrior, and may be representative of another community.

In a very basic and graphic sense the bloodied tunic is a testimony to the expertise of the warrior, showing exactly where and how often he had struck his foe in battle. In the *Iliad* there is an almost obsessive concern for minute details describing where an enemy had been wounded, with what type of weapon, and most importantly the killing blow. These are undoubtedly fine points the listeners were interested in and were felt to be important to the retelling of an act of skill and bravery. The bloodstained tunic would have brought great prestige to the warrior, serving not only as visual proof of his valour, but as a point of reference from which the deeds performed in battle could be recounted with accuracy to others. It seems clear that the tunic had tremendous significance as a trophy in a very real and personal way.

The Bronze Belt

The bronze belt was an important item of personal equipment that seems to have had both social and military significance. Many of these belts have incised, or *repousse* decoration, or are embellished with applied metalwork. Examination of these belts shows that their value went beyond their actual monetary cost, as they were often repaired many times. Although we do not know the exact meaning that was attached to these belts, it is clear that they had some symbolic worth, perhaps to do with social class.

In Virgil's epic poem the *Aeneid*, many of the images have been drawn from the iconography of earlier periods in Italic history. The belt, for example, plays a significant role in the poem. In a duel between champions, Turnus "planted his foot on the lifeless Pallas and tore from him his heavy, massive sword-belt. Such was the trophy which Turnus rejoiced and gloried to have won" (Virgil X.492-498). At the

climactic conclusion of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas defeats Turnus in a duel, and is on the verge of sparing him, when he suddenly spots the belt of Pallas. “The trophy was fatal to him. Aeneas’ eyes drank in the sight of the spoils which revived the memory of his own vengeful bitterness” (Virgil XII.940). Suano notes that occasionally bronze belts:

...might be buried as a trophy at the dead man’s side. When this happens, the dead man has one belt round his waist; the second one at his side may be symbolic reproduction of the situation of the returning warrior, who comes back from battle with one belt on and another in his hands as a trophy.
(Suano 1986: 34)

This interpretation is questionable however, since the warrior may simply have possessed more than one belt.

The Shield

The shield is mentioned repeatedly in literary sources as an item of spoil which was regularly dedicated at temples and public places (Livy IX.40). The possession of such a trophy would be of significant worth in a society where visible symbols of valour were valued. There are many accounts of shields being cast aside by defeated troops, to facilitate their escape. Mamercus, the Campanian tyrant of Catana in Sicily, defeated a force of Timoleon’s troops and dedicated their shields as trophies with the inscription: “These shields, purple painted, decked with ivory, gold and amber we captured with our simple little shields” (Plutarch *Tim.*31). Unfortunately, the shield is an item of equipment from the south Italic panoply which was not normally included in warrior burials. Nor do any examples survive from temple sanctuaries. In iconographic sources, the round hoplite shield is most frequently depicted as a trophy, although a number of different shield types, such as the oblong *scutum* and a variant type with a raised centre are also present.

If the depictions of trophies are accurate, then the vast majority of south Italic warriors’ enemies seem to have been other south Italic warriors. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the nature of warfare in southern Italy, ancient sources indicate that until the second half of the fourth century BC, most conflicts were local affairs. It was not until the Samnite wars (343-293 BC) that conflict increased in scale and duration to include almost every community in peninsular Italy. The intensity of interaction between the various Italic peoples, with their distinct military traditions, had tremendous implications on the adoption and development of new equipment and tactics (Burns 2003). It is interesting that with the conclusion of the Samnite wars, and the establishment of Roman hegemony, south Italic tomb and vase paintings gradually die out. Perhaps, with the loss of their freedom to wage war, the elites of Campania and Lucania were forced to find new ways to express their ideals and aristocratic status. The iconography of the fourth century BC would slowly lose its significance and meaning if the images no longer reflected the beliefs and ambitions of the warriors it was meant to represent.

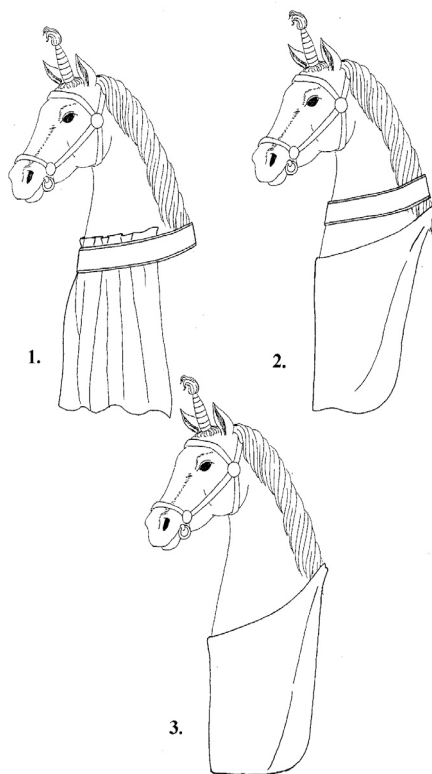


Figure 3. Three types of horse-borne trophies.

when depicted on un-armoured horses (Head 1982: 176). Close examination, however, reveals that bronze belts, the same colour and width as those worn and carried by the warriors, can be seen around the horse's neck. On an example from Nola, (Fig. 4) which is exceptional for its detail, the clasps on the belt and the blood-stains on the tunic are clearly visible (Borriello and De Caro 1996: 245).

An interesting contemporary parallel can be found with Gallic warriors, who are described as having severed heads suspended from their horses. At the battle of Sentinum "some Gallic horsemen came in sight, carrying heads hanging from their horses' breasts and fixed on their spears" (Livy X.26). The severed heads offer a cultural comparison of how spoils were displayed prominently, and conveniently, from the cavalryman's mount. In a south Italic context, the horse-borne trophy reiterates the significance of the tunic and bronze belt as items of spoil carried by warriors, and the importance of the cavalryman within this society.

The Importance of the Cavalryman in Southern Italy

The iconographic images from Capua and Paestum stress the importance that the ruling elite placed on military activities. But how capable and effective were these warriors in a wider sense? Did other peoples regard them as warlike and successful as they

Horse-Borne Trophies

A previously unrecognised type of trophy are those which are depicted secured around the neck of the warrior's horse. The horse-borne trophy usually takes the form of a bronze belt around the horse's neck with a tunic suspended underneath it, draping down over the horse's chest. Alternative forms include those which have a tunic tied or pinned below the bronze belt, as well as those which consist of only a tunic hanging from the neck (Fig. 3). To date, horse-borne trophies have only been found in iconographic sources from Lucania and Campania, but this may have been a more widespread Italic custom.

These horse-borne trophies have previously been mistaken for some form of protective or decorative feature. Connolly describes the trophy depicted on a wall painting from tomb 86 of the Andriuolo necropolis in Paestum as "some form of peytral" (Connolly 1981: 112), while Head interprets bronze belts as collars, which "can only be decorative"



Figure 4. Warrior with horse-borne trophy. Tomb of the cavalryman, 330-320 BC, inv.224929, Nola (Capua Vetere, Museo Campano).

viewed themselves? The majority of warriors that carry trophies in Campanian and Lucanian art are cavalymen, and these depictions glorify their role and status in society. We know from literary sources that the prowess of the Campanian cavalry was held in high regard, not only by the Romans in the fourth and third centuries BC, but also the Syracusans and Carthaginians in the late fifth century BC, who sought them out as mercenaries. In 411 BC, for example, the Carthaginians hired 800 Campanian cavalymen. These soldiers had originally been recruited by the Athenians, but arrived too late to take part in their expedition against Syracuse (Diodorus XIII.44). Although provided with high pay and horses, the Campanians quarrelled with their Carthaginian employers after two years of service. Diodorus tells us:

The Campanians, who bitterly complained to the Carthaginians that, though they had been the ones chiefly responsible for Carthaginian successes, the rewards they had received were not a fair return for their accomplishments.
(Diodorus XIII.62)

The Campanians subsequently deserted the Carthaginians and hired themselves out to their enemies. Despite this incident, when the Carthaginians again found themselves on the eve of a major campaign in 406 BC, they did not hesitate to hire more Campanian cavalry, “For they knew that their aid would be of great assistance to them and that the Campanians who had been left in Sicily, because they had fallen out with the Carthaginians, would fight on the side of the Sicilian Greeks” (Diodorus XIII.80). It is clear that the Carthaginians regarded it as absolutely necessary to acquire more of these troops as mercenaries, and it also implies that they felt the only suitable counter to the Campanians, was more Campanians.

The renown of the Campanian cavalry continued in the fourth and third centuries BC when they were found among Rome’s Italian allies. Livy, who rarely gives credit to non-Roman troops, states that during the battle of Sentinum in 295 BC, it was a flanking manoeuvre by 500 Campanian cavalry which finally broke the Gallic and Samnite battle line and secured a victory for the Romans (Livy X.29). Even as late as the Second Punic War (AD 218-202), Livy states that during the Roman siege of Capua

“the Campanians usually proved their superiority in cavalry, though their infantry was regularly worsted” (Livy XXVI.4). One thing that is certain from these accounts is that there was a long and proud tradition of service amongst the cavalry of Campania. Tomb paintings depicting the warrior aristocracy of Capua and Nola place special emphasis on their role as cavalrymen, and the literary evidence supports this image. Although the Lucanian cavalryman does not seem to have enjoyed as renowned or widespread a reputation as that of his Campanian counterpart, it is clear from the large number of depictions in Paestum that the cavalryman was esteemed among the elite there also. It is perhaps indicative of this esteem that Alexander of Epirus was killed near Paestum in 327 BC, transfixed by a javelin thrown at long range by a Lucanian cavalryman (Livy VIII.24).

Single Combat and the Spoils of Honour

The taking of spoils was closely tied to the practice of *monomachy*, or single combat. This is perhaps one of the most misunderstood aspects of ancient Italic warfare, as single combat is often associated with Homeric heroes or barbaric foes and not the reality of warfare. It is undeniable, however, that both Romans and other Italic peoples engaged in single combat on occasion (Oakley 1985: 394). These combats were not only fought by opposing commanders, but also by soldiers of humble backgrounds, who sought to earn recognition and status through feats of arms. As late as the middle of the second century BC, Polybius informs us that the Romans encouraged their young soldiers to face danger. Roman generals would assemble their troops to recognise and reward those who had distinguished themselves in battle:

To a man who has wounded one of the enemy, a spear; to one who has killed and stripped an enemy, a cup if he is in the infantry, or horse trappings if in the cavalry... These presentations are not made to men who have wounded or stripped an enemy in the course of a pitched battle, or at the storming of a city, but to those who during a skirmish or some similar situation in which there is no necessity to engage in single combat, have voluntarily and deliberately exposed themselves to danger.

(Polybius VI.39)

Those soldiers awarded prizes for stripping an enemy in single combat were not only held in great esteem by their fellow soldiers, but also by their communities and were singled out for precedence in religious processions. The fourth century BC images from southern Italy add a degree of vividness to Polybius' testimony. The victorious warrior returning home laden with spoils, accompanied by followers or well wishers, is greeted by his wife or mother and offered a cup to make a libation. It is tempting to make a connection between the cup in Polybius' second century BC account, and the fourth century BC images from south Italic iconography. It is possible that the symbolism of the cup, previously offered by women for a safe and victorious return home, had carried on into the second century BC as an institutionalised award for valour by the army. The meaning attached to the cup, recognition of bravery and success in war, remains much the same. Only the manner in which the cup is given, as a libation vessel in the fourth century BC and as a military award in the second century BC, is different.

It is worthwhile to look briefly at the relationship between the custom of single combat and the acquisition of spoils. Livy recounts that during the Second Punic War, a duel was fought between a Campanian, Badius, and a Roman, Crispinus. Badius challenged Crispinus to mount his horse and meet him in single combat, where they would see who was the better man. Initially, Crispinus declined the challenge, as Badius had once been his friend. However, Badius goaded the Roman, renouncing their ties of friendship and reviling Crispinus as a coward and weakling, daring him “if you are really a man, lay on!” (Livy XXV.18). In the ensuing duel Badius is wounded in the shoulder and unhorsed. Before Crispinus is able to dismount and dispatch Badius, the Campanian flees, leaving behind his horse and shield. Crispinus, in true Italic fashion, proudly displays “his spoils – the horse, the captured arms, and his own bloody spear – amidst the admiring congratulations of the troops” (Livy XXV.18). He is then escorted before his commander, where he is praised for his valour and prowess and handsomely rewarded.

Although Livy is writing two centuries after the events he describes, his account encapsulates the imagery and ideals of *monomachy* and the importance of trophies as visible proofs of valour. One can readily imagine the shield of Badius suspended from Crispinus’ bloody spear, an image which is mirrored by the trophies depicted in south Italic tomb paintings. Another duel from the Second Punic War pits Vibellius Taurea, who is described as “the finest cavalryman of all the Campanians” (Livy XXIII.46-47), against the Roman champion, Asellus. Taurea challenges Asellus to fight it out for the spoils of honour. Although Livy’s duels always end in Roman triumph, the fact that he singles out the Campanians, as cavalier duellists with whom the Romans must contend to prove their valour and skill in combat, suggests several things. First, the Campanians, and probably other south Italic peoples, were known for their affinity for single combat. Second, this custom was fuelled almost entirely by the desire to win spoils of honour to prove oneself. Third, Campanian cavalry were regarded as formidable foes and to defeat them in single combat was worthy of considerable prestige.

While depictions of duelling warriors are common, a *hydria* from the fourth century BC tomb 125 in Cumae displays all of the imagery described in accounts of single combat, including the despoiling of bodies (Schneider-Herrmann 1996: pl. 115; Trendall 1967: pl. 202, nr. 619). In this painting two warriors fight over a fallen comrade, one trying to despoil the body, while the other tries to prevent this. Also present is the seated commander, under whose watchful gaze the warrior strives to prove his valour. Above this scene a warrior walks away from a prostrate body carrying a belt and tunic trophy on his shoulder (Fig. 5).

The Warrior’s Valour: Ideal or Reality?

Many may still regard these depictions and descriptions of bravery, honour and valour as merely ideals or colourful anecdotes used to liven up historical accounts. It could be argued that Polybius wished to lionise his Roman patrons and has therefore imbued them with the heroic ideals characteristic of ancient Greek heroes from the *Iliad* (Polybius VI.52-54). Others may regard Livy’s accounts as an attempt to glorify Rome’s past with tales of brave and honourable deeds, in contrast to the supposedly lax morals and attitudes of Augustan Rome (Livy X.31). However, if any insight or understanding,

is to be gained of the world expressed by these warrior images, we should not be so quick to dismiss or dilute the import of such heroic attitudes and behaviour. The institutionalisation of such beliefs and practices is an extremely powerful influence on

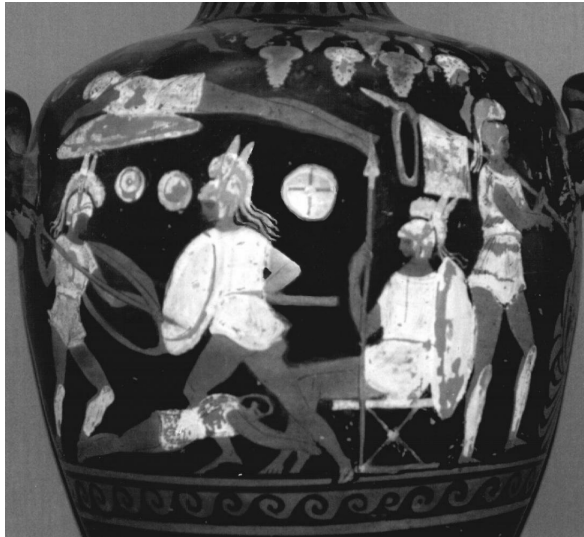


Figure 5. Triumphant warrior departing battle with trophy. Boston Ready Painter, Campanian red-figure *hydria*, tomb 125, Cumae 320-310 BC (Capua Vetere, Museo Campano).

young men, especially when society idealises and rewards such acts, and punishes those who behave in a contrary manner. Modern society has a largely negative outlook on such hyper-masculine attitudes, and such behaviour is regarded as an unnecessary display of bravado rather than a characteristic virtue of what it is to be a warrior and a man. There is, however, an episode from the fourth century BC, which goes some way in vindicating both Polybius and Livy's claims that the pursuit of honour through valorous acts was very much a part of the reality of warfare.

The battle of the Caudine Forks in 321 BC epitomises the heroic ethos and obsession with obtaining proofs of valour. It offers a perspective on the mentality of the men involved; specifically their outlook on war. In that year the Samnites trapped the Roman army in the valley of the Caudine Forks and shortly afterwards forced its surrender. What the Samnites did next has been passed down through time as one of the most humiliating moments in Roman military history. The captive Romans were not killed, enslaved or even ransomed for money. Instead, the entire Roman army was disarmed, forced to pass under a yoke and then set free. One might be forgiven for interpreting the seemingly mild punishment of passing under the yoke as a humane gesture or act of kindness on the part of the Samnites. This was, however, far from the case. Livy relates that at the Caudine Forks the Samnites:

...had won a victory which would be lasting as well as glorious, for what they had overpowered was not the city of Rome, as the Gauls had done before them, but something which demanded far more warlike effort: the Roman courage and fighting spirit.

(Livy IX.6)

There is no known depiction of the yoke from ancient sources, but Cassius Dio gives a succinct description, and the implications that it held for the victor and vanquished:

The nature of the yoke was somewhat as follows. The Romans used to fix in the ground two poles (upright wooden beams, that is to say, with a space between them) and across them they would lay a transverse beam; through the frame thus formed they led the captives naked. This conferred great distinction upon the side that conducted the operation, but vast dishonour upon the side that endured it, so that some preferred to die rather than submit to any such treatment.

(Cassius Dio V.7.17)

In Livy's account the yoke is constructed from three spears. The transverse spear was fixed low, so that the defeated were forced to bend their necks when passing beneath it. The yoke itself was symbolic of submission and servility to the power and superiority of the victors. This ritual was put into practice when one side was so completely vanquished in battle that they had no option other than a shameful surrender. The defeated army was forced to relinquish their arms and armour, agree to whatever terms were demanded and then pass under the yoke, one by one. It was, as Livy termed it, "a final confession of absolute defeat" (Livy III.28). To a warrior society which venerated the virtues of valour and skill in battle there could be no worse humiliation. The psychological trauma, both to the individual and the collective self-esteem, would have been devastating, tantamount to emasculation. Livy rates the prospect of passing under the yoke "gloomier than any death", and some committed suicide rather than endure it (Livy IX.6).

We are told the Roman army emerged from the Caudine Forks shuffling in silence and abject despair. Appian states that in Rome "the women mourned for those who had been saved in this ignominious way, as for the dead", and that all marriages, feasts and celebrations were suspended for a year (Appian IV.7). The yoke seems to have been a pan-Italic custom, as the Samnites and other south Italic peoples certainly understood and appreciated its significance. It is also notable that after the Samnite Wars the practice of passing defeated enemies under the yoke died out. The foreign peoples with whom Rome fought from the third century BC onwards probably regarded the yoke as an empty and meaningless ritual. It is unlikely that the Greeks or Carthaginians would have felt humbled into submission, or bound by any treaties imposed under the yoke. The real significance of the yoke, however, was as a mark of shame that had meaning to every Italic warrior that passed under it. This tells us that the warrior ethos, expressed in the iconography of the 'return of the warrior' paintings through the display of trophies, was not merely an idealistic image created to flatter the aspirations of an aristocratic elite. Rather, it was part of the mindset of every Italic warrior, and a reality of south Italic warfare.

Conclusion

Warrior society of fourth century BC southern Italy was characterised by a code of behaviour that expounded martial virtues through individual acts of valour. Engaging in single combat offered the warrior the opportunity to gain honour and prestige not only among his comrades in arms, but within his community as well. The trophy of blood-stained spoils, stripped from the body of an enemy, provided physical proof of the war-

rior's bravery and skill in battle. The trophy came to symbolise the positive aspects of the warrior ideal and the prestige it bestowed upon the bearer. This symbolism is clearly reflected in tomb paintings from elite burials which depict the 'return of the warrior'. The iconography, in which the display of the trophy is a prominent element, provides an essentialist view of what the south Italic peoples believed a victorious warrior should look like. Certain items of the panoply, specifically the bronze belt, tunic and shield, were selected out as representative elements of the trophy, which shows these items had special significance. This is corroborated by the mention of belts, tunics and shields in ancient literary sources, as desirable items of spoil. We may never fully understand the meaning of the ancient imagery, as we are separated from the conditions that existed when the illustrations were created, but, nevertheless, it is possible to gain some insight into a society and its ideals through these images. The warlike imagery from south Italic tomb paintings shows a society fixated with symbols of military triumph, and offers a visual ideal of what it was to be a valorous and honourable warrior.

Note: All figures are by the author.

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