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"Military" Lekythoi: Private vs. Public Mourning of Athenian War Dead

This paper examines "military" lekythoi, fifth-century bc Attic white-ground funerary lekythoi decorated with scenes that include a soldier, indicating that the vessels were used in funerals of men killed in war. This paper places these lekythoi in their historical and social setting, as far as this can be reconstructed, to reach a better understanding of the interplay between public (the war) and private (the funeral) that these lekythoi represent.

The existence of the "military" lekythoi implies an interesting dynamic. We know from Thucydides 2.34 that it was Athens' *patrios nomos*, its "ancestral custom" (probably going back to Kimon) that citizen soldiers killed and missing in action were honored with a public funeral each year, and the bones of all the recovered dead were grouped by tribe in common coffins and interred together in the *dêmosion sêma*. In other words, the "military" lekythoi were not used in actual funerals (since soldiers killed in action were buried by the *dêmos*) but in parallel "memorial services" conducted by those close to the deceased, in the first instance their families, who somehow felt unsatisfied by the public ceremony. For our "military" lekythoi to survive, these "memorial services" must have included a cenotaphic "re-burial" which preserved our lekythoi among the grave goods.

It is clear from the large number of surviving "military" lekythoi that private cenotaphic "re-burial" of individual war dead was a fairly widespread practice, not the idiosyncratic behavior of one individual or family. Further, the grave sites of these private "re-burials," even without a body, supplied a more personal focus for memories of the dead that the collective *dêmosion sêma* could provide. More generally, the "military" lekythoi and the private "re-burials" of individual soldiers which they imply reflect a view of death in war severely at odds with the "official" view represented by the collective funeral and burial described by Thucydides.

The paper explores the possibility that the "military" lekythoi were used by Athens' socio-economic Élite whose self-image was at odds with the egalitarian ideology implicit in the *patrios nomos*, and who were also most likely to resent the intrusion of the *polis* into an area, that of funerals, which was normally the concern of the *oikos*. It also contrasts the view of death in war represented in the images on the lekythoi with the heroic view reflected in the speeches of the public funerals of the *patrios nomos* and the epitaphs of the *dêmosion sêma*.

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