

The "heroization" of the Tyrannicides:

Iconographic Analysis of their Images.

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Introduction

The Tyrannicides are two aristocratic citizens; Aristogeiton and his younger lover Harmodios. They are regarded as having overthrown Tyrant who ruled over Athens, and of establishing democratic rule and *isonomia*, equality before the law, in the polis¹. The Tyrannicides group statues were made by Sculptors Kritios and Nesiotes at public expense, and were erected in 477/76 at the Athenian Agora².

The motives or poses of the sculptures by Kritios and Nesiotes can be traced back to the late 6th century BCE, and appeared in archaic Attic vase paintings and architectural sculpture³. In the Archaic period, how were these images used in different media, and why did Athenians use them to represent the iconography of the Tyrannicides? In this paper, these points are considered based on archaeological evidence and literary sources.

1. Iconographic origins of Tyrannicides

Around 500, the poses and characters, which adopted in the portrayal of Tyrannicides by Kritios and Nesiotes had appeared as a new kind of visualization of Apollo and Athena in the depiction of the battle of Gigantomachy, between the gods of Olympus and the Gigantes. Thomas Carpenter argued that the origin of this new visual representation of the two gods could be traced back to a *peplos* design, which featured a depiction of the Gigantomachy, and was dedicated to Athena at the Panathenaia⁴.

On Stamnos in a painting by the so-called Tyszkiewicz painter, which dates to around 490, Apollo was fighting against Gigantes and was depicted in a similar form to Harmodios⁵. On a Calyx-Krater, which dates to 460, Apollo and Athena appear in a similar form to Aristogeiton⁶.

Although there is some evidence for Carpenter's interpretation, it has been difficult to corroborate. The depictions of the Tyrannicides were used for not only Apollo and Athena but also Herakles and Telamon in the late Archaic period⁷.

We can take 3 Attic vase paintings and an architectural sculpture to demonstrate this. On an amphora made by Euphronios, which dates back to 510, Herakles and Telamon are depicted fighting Amazons⁸. Herakles wears a lionskin, and holds a bow in his left hand, which extends forward. His right hand, with which he grasps a club, is raised over his head. Apart from the positioning of his right arm, the depiction of this character is similar to that of Aristogeiton.

Behind Herakles, Telamon attacks a dying Amazon. He is clad in armor and holds a shield in his left hand. His right arm is raised as he is poised to give the dying Amazon a coup de grâce. The pose is similar to that of Harmodios, and Euphros used this design for Herakles on the Munich Kylix 2620, which is dated circa. 550 BCE⁹. Herakles is also depicted in this manner on an amphora in the Metropolitan Museum, which is dated 530¹⁰.

The depiction of Telamon, namely that of Harmodios, was also used to depict Herakles on a *metope* of the Athenian treasury in Delphi, constructed sometime between 510 and 490.

On the resemblance of Herakles and Telamon to the depiction of Aristogeiton and Harmodios by Kritios and Nesiotes, Michael Taylor plausibly suggests the following: "Through the medium of pose, the artists may have been attempting to assimilate the Tyrannicides into the prestigious heroic tradition of Herakles"¹¹.

This suggests the following points; 1. The poses of Kritios and Nesiotes' Harmodios and Aristogeiton were already being employed for at least, the depictions of Apollo, Athena, Herakles, and Telamon in the Archaic Period. 2. In the Archaic period, the poses of Tyrannicides were well established as ways of representing various heroes and gods in the 6th Century BCE. 3. The depiction of the Tyrannicides derived from neither peplos designs nor from traditional representations of Herakles.

2. The cult of Harmodios and Aristogeiton

The reason why the Tyrannicides shared similarities in appearance with that of gods and heroes seems to be a connected with the cult of the Tyrannicides. Writings from Aristotle, Philostratos and Demosthenes provide fragmentary information about the existence of this cult and its context. Describing the duties of the Athenian military head, the archon polemarch, Aristotle wrote. "The polemarchos makes the sacrifices to Artemis Agrotera and to Enyalios, and he arranges the funeral games for those who have died in the war, and he makes *enagismata* to Harmodios and Aristogeiton"¹². For this sacrifice, Gunnell Ekroth says that the *enagimata* "were especially connected with recipients who were dead and seem to have functioned as a marker of the recipient's "deadness"¹³. According to Thucydides, after killing the Tyrant, Harmodios and Aristogeiton were themselves killed violently¹⁴. Thus, this sacrifice would be appropriate for them. Philostratos also referred to the cult of Tyrannicides in his "Life of Apollonios", writing that Apollonios said that Harmodios and Aristogeiton were

celebrated by song at the Attic Panathenaia¹⁵. Based on two passages, Julia Shear posits that the *enagismata* and the song were dedicated to Tyrannicides in the Attic Panathenaia festival. According to Demosthenes, they were celebrated by songs and honored equally to Heroes and Gods¹⁶.

Conclusion

The cult of the Tyrannicides can be regarded as part of the Panathenaia festival and aimed to celebrate them with songs and honor them as being equivalent to heroes and gods. The depiction of Tyrannicides' statues by Kritios and Nesiotes can be traced back to that of traditional heroes and gods in the late Archaic period. Both results lead us to the conclusion that the choice of iconography reflect the intention of promoting the status of two citizens to the rank of heroes and gods. This particular rendition of the Tyrannicides was deliberately chosen by the Athenian Patrons (probably the Polis as a whole) in order to promote Harmodios and Aristogeiton as heroes¹⁷. Thus, as many scholars have observed, the Tyrannicides became cult figures¹⁸.

Abbreviations

AJA: American Journal of Archaeology

JHS: Journal of Hellenic Studies

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- 1 About the story of Tyrannicides see Hdt. 5.55-56.2; Thuc. 1.20.2, 6.53.3-59.1; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 18.3–6; Ath 15.695-a-b, nos 10, 12, and 13; Ar. *Lys.* 630–35; IG F³ 502. For Their Cult see Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 58. 1; Dem. 19. 280; Cic. *Mil.* 80. About the Tyrannicides statue groups see Pliny *NH* 34. 17; Paus. 1. 8. 5; Arr. *Anab.* 3. 16. 7-8, 7. 19. 2; Val. Max. 2. 10. ext. 1; Lucian *Philops.* 18; *FGHist* 239, A54, lines 70–71.
- 2 About the style of the Tyrannicides Statues by Kritios and Nesiotes see Ridgway 1971, 12; Stewart 2008a, 406–7; Stewart 2008b, 608; Stewart 2008c, 75; Lapatin 2010, 255–257; 264–265.
- 3 Richter 1928, 7–8; Shefton 1960, 173–174.
- 4 Carpenter 1997, 171–175; Shear 2012a, 113, n. 33. Furthermore, Carpenter argued that the image and the iconography of Dionysos changed at this same time.
- 5 British Museum, London, E443 (Stamnos): ARV2 292, 29; LIMC 4 s. v. Gigantes, no. 330; Carpenter 1997, 173, fig. 2; Shear 2012a, 114, fig. 3.
- 6 Museo Nazionale Archeologico, Ferrara, 2891 (Calyx Krater): ARV2 602, 24, 161; LIMC 4 s. v. Gigantes, no. 311; Shear 2012a, 115, fig.4.
- 7 Taylor 1991, 18–19.
- 8 Museo Nazionale Archeologico, Arezzo, 1465 (Volute

- Krater): ARV2 15, 6; 1619; LIMC 7 s. v. Telamon, no. 6; Scheffold 1944, 200, Abb. 5.
- 9 Antiken Sammlungen, München, 2620 (Kylix): ARV2 16, 17, 1619; LIMC 5 s. v. Herakles, no. 2501; Shapiro 1994, 76–77, fig. 50–51.
- 10 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 56. 171. 7 (Amphora): ABV 258.11; LIMC 5 s.v. Hermes, no. 252.
- 11 Taylor 1991, 18.
- 12 Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 58. 1; Shear 2012a, 108; Shear 2012b, 33–35.
- 13 Taylor 1991, 6-7; Ekroth 2002, 88–89.
- 14 Thuc. 1. 20. 2; 6. 53. 3.
- 15 Philostr. *VA* 7. 4. 3.
- 16 Dem. 19, 280.
- 17 Keesling 2003, 170–175. Keesling argued as below. “The portraits of Harmodios and Aristogeiton may have been inspired by private portraits commemorating athletic victors, but conversely the Athenians’ extraordinary official commemoration of the Tyrannicides may have been inspired by the dedication of votive portrait statues representing athletic victors on the Acropolis. (*Ibid.*, 175).”
- 18 Taylor 1991, 5–8; Shear 2012a, 107, n. 3; Shear 2012b, 30–35.