



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 16, No. 2 2014

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Executive Director's Column

Only two more months before Bones Fest XVIII, and we invade Grand Rapids, Mi. I don't think any of our members need reminding what an excellent musician and all around good guy this year's host Bill Vits is. Bill is well connected to the musical community in Grand Rapids and has a number of amazing events planned.

But here's some facts about Grand Rapids you might not be aware of: Grand Rapids won 2013 Beer City USA vote! With a surging population of Craft beer pubs and breweries, it's sure to appeal to a vast majority of RBS members!

Grand Rapids was named "One of America's coolest towns" by Men's Journal in April 2010. Did we have any doubt as it's the home of our own extremely cool Bill Vits!

Grand Rapids is the second largest city in Michigan, but it still retains the homeyness of a small town! This is sure to be a great city to run around and play the bones! This will be the first time a Bones Fest has been sponsored in Michigan.

Ann Arbor, Michigan was the home of Percy Danforth, and he inspired many people in Michigan to play bones, including Bill Vits, Kenny Wolin, and Sandor Slommovits. We can only imagine the bone

(Continued on Page 3)

Nacchere in Etruscan Paintings

[Translated from Italian by Adam Klein. His comments noted by '-AK.']

Having some interest in ethnomusicology and ethnography regarding the history of the "nacchere" (pronounced "NYOCK-keh-reh") of Maremma and Tuscany (Italy), and suspecting that not much has been published [about them] and possibly also some degree of imprecision about the most ancient available documentary materials, I thought I might condense in these pages a bit of reflection with reference to the evidence that has been left to us by the Etruscan civilization. I have therefore examined the PARIETAL paintings of the archaic and classical epochs, not having found any documentation for any periods preceding those.

The most well known and published evidence of nacchere (pronounced "NYOCK-keh-reh" translated as "castanets" in some dictionaries) in antiquity would be that which exists (?) in

the Tomb of the Lionesses, dated at 530-520 B.C. in the Necropolis of the Monterozzi, loc. Calvario, Tarquinia, and rediscovered in 1874, "a paradigmatic example of Tarquinian art in the Ionic style" with "greco-oriental characteristics" (Steingraber 1984). The female dancer portrayed on the right in the large frieze above the false door at the bottom of the sepulchral chamber (on the left in the image detail above) "seems" to be grasping two long objects about 13 cm (5 3/4 in.) judging from the length of the thumb, (Continued on Page 4)



Figure 1. Tomb of the Lionesses

Editorial

I try to make contacts around the world both to find out where rhythm bones are played and to get stories for our newsletter. This issue has a wonderful article from Mario Galasso from Sardinia, Italy. The text is interesting, the photographs magnificent and the translation from Italian to English was done by member Adam Klein. Mario we thank for your sharing your work and Adam for translating.

There are definitely more rhythm bones playing now than when RBS was formed. Recently my wife's best friend from our days in Birmingham, Alabama called her. Seems two of her best friends had just returned from a festival in Mississippi where they encountered a rhythm bones player who sold them a set of rhythm bones and an instruction booklet/CD written by Sue Barber (originally with a cassette tape). They told my wife's friend that they wanted to learn more. She said, "Do I ever know someone you should meet." They all came to Chattanooga and we had a great weekend of rhythm bones playing. By the way, the rhythm bones player was member Randy Seppala.

I am so looking forward to the Grand Rapids Bones Fest and what Bill Vits has in store for us. Last year, I did something that I had been thinking about for years, I played to recorded music with circada in the background. I have two groups of trees in my background, and the circada recording had a nice stereo effect with their slow pulsating rhythms going in and out of synchronization. To top it off, circada have a 17 year cycle of life and it was our seventeenth Bones Fest.

Letters to the Editor

On April 5th, 2014 I competed in the Brunswick Rotary Midcoast Maine's Got Talent Show, which took place in Brunswick High School's Crooker Theater. I played the rhythm bones to a rendition of "Sweet Georgia Brown." My performance was well received by the judges and the audience. Contestants competed in the following categories: Youth-vocalist; Teen -vocalist; Adult-vocalist; Dance; and Miscellaneous. Judges awarded priz-

es (trophy) for each category. The judges then selected the evening's three finalists from all the categories. The audience then voted for their favorite performer from the three finalists. Each judge (three of them) also presented a "judge's choice" trophy to any contestant who they believed deserved recognition. I was the recipient of one these (12" high). Sincerely, *Claude Bonang*

I have a new web site for my Triskele Rhythm Bones: <http://triskelerhythm-bones.com>. Thanks again. Hope to hear from you again. *Jim Hesch*

I am always amazed at the strange places where one comes across references to bones or bones players! I'm currently reading a book by Richard A. Mathels entitled "Captured, a W W II experience of Air Force P.O.W.s in Germany." He related this story which occurred toward the end of the war.

The Jewish P.O.W.'s were being singled out. "We had two Jewish roommates. They were told to be ready to move elsewhere. All the Jewish members in camp were segregated and left the compounds with no know destination.

One of my Jewish roommates was on a lower bunk near me. The night before his being shipped out, I knew he was awake all night. Earlier he had written a letter to his parents and had given it to another of our roommates to be delivered when the rest of us returned home.

He was musician of sorts. He played the "bones." I believe sometimes they are referred as clavals. They consisted of two pieces wood held between his fingers which he could rattle to a rhythm. They were very effective. That last night he was with us he rattled those bones in a very slow and sad beat throughout the evening. The next morning he was gone."

He goes on to say that the commandant of the camp challenged the decisions of his superiors, housed the Jewish P.O.W.s in another barracks, and they were still there when the camp was liberated. *Jean Mehaffey*

I just did a performance at the Irish National museum with storyteller, Nuala Hayes and the two harp players Anne-Marie O'Farrell and Helen Davies.

Rhythm Bones Player

Rhythm Bones Society
Volume 16, No 2
Second Quarter 2014
ISSN: 1545-1380

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The Rhythm Bones Player is published quarterly by the Rhythm Bones Society. Non-member subscriptions are \$10 for one year; RBS members receive the Player as part of their dues.

The Rhythm Bones Players welcomes letters to the Editor and article on any aspect of bones playing. All material submitted for consideration is subject to editing and condensation.

Rhythm Bones Central web site: rhythmbones.org

While rehearsing they wanted to do a small teaser for Facebook, so they recorded a short version of one of the ancient Norwegian tunes called Gorrlaust, with me playing bones and bone flute.

I made a quick upload on YouTube, and I thought that I might be of some interest for you and maybe some of the bone-enthusiasts you know.

So I send you this link to the fresh video together with my best regards.

Yours, *Poul Hoxbro*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yq_RJxU-5pI

Bones Calendar

Bones Fest XVIII. August 7-11, 2014, Grand Rapids, MI, Bill Vits, Host. See this newsletter and website for more details.

NTCMA Bones Contest. August 25-31, 2014, LeMars, IA. Bones Contest will be on Sunday.

(Continued from Page 1)

playing characters who populate the state and will surely show up at the Fest!

Please make the effort to get out there to Grand Rapids for Bones Fest XVIII! We will hoist a beer together!

This summer will see the second marriage spawned by a Bones Fest. In August, Jessye Weinstien, and Sky Bartlett, who met at Teri and Kenny Wolin's Bones Fest in Alexandria, Va, will be married in New Hampshire. Some of you might remember that Teri and Kenny were married at the Bones Fest in Alexandria after having met at a Bones Fest in Chattanooga, Tenn. We want to wish Jesseye and Sky the very best in the future, and give them a heartfelt congratulations! So if you are looking for the perfect mate, you might try Bones Fest XVIII, bones players are just lovable!
Steve Brown

Mario Galasso Biography

Mario Galasso was born in Fasano (Brindisi), Italy in 1941. In 1952, he moved to Florence where he remained until 1962. He moved to the Salento in 1963 as officer of the Italian Air Force before moving to Rome. Since 1992, he has been living in Alghero (Sassari).

His cultural background moves from ethnography to archaeology, to music and in general, to the study of ancient cultures and populations. Since 1995, he has been working entirely in the fields of scientific research and underwater archaeology.

He saved from destruction the ruins of the ancient Roman road that lead to Florentia in the 2nd century A.C. He walked down in the excavation site and sat there, stopping the work of the building contractors.

Since 1992 in Sardinia, he started his cooperation with the Department of History of the University of Sassari, and is a Visiting Professor in History of Archaeology. His chronological sector of studies started with the Late Bronze Age and moved gradually to the post-medieval age.

He is currently involved in the study of the abandoned human locations in Sardinia, with particular focus to the villaggi

a muristenes used only for short periods of time and on occasion of religious recurrences.

He is also very interested in local popular, jazz and country music and he often plays and organizes workshops and concerts. He plays squeeze box, accordion, 5 and 4 strings banjo as well as rhythm bones.

To see him play rhythm bones for some interesting street dancing, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ilm-MK5h-jII>.

Bones Fest XVIII Preliminary Program

Bones Fest XVIII is just around the corner (see Fest Graphic below), and host Bill Vits announced the preliminary program. The final program will be completed as attendees turn in their Registration Forms indicating what workshops and clinics they want to participate in.

Here are some highlights. On Thursday, there is a kick off party for early arrivers at One Trick Pony Restaurant. Hosts Dan & Lisa Verhil featuring Sean and Seamus O'Tool

Friday features another flash mob (first one at BFXVII last year), clinics and workshops, performances and jamming, catered Polish dinner with Kielbasa, sauerkraut & pierogies and more jamming at the hotel.

Saturday features more workshops and clinics, preparation for the public performances, General Membership meeting, Dinner, our public performances with local musicians Jay Round

& Tom Devries, and an afterglow at the hotel.

There are other surprises including Sue Barber who with Percy Danforth wrote a history of rhythm bones that is on our website as well as an instructional booklet/CD that is still available today.



Doug Danforth sent this photographs of a placque that his father, Percy, received.



(Continued from Page 1)

one between thumb and index finger and the other between the ring finger and the pinkie (little finger). The illustration has divided scholars: in 1958 Massimo Pallottino interpreted the objects as CRO-TALI, followed by Steingraber in 1984 (Annotated Catalog of Etruscan Art), ed. Jaca Book, Italian edition Milan 1985, p. 322 Tomba #77) which describes it as “young woman with tunic and crotali” (Figure 1, Page 1)

For a definition of crotali one is referred to the esteemed study done by Paolo Casini (P. Casini, *Nacchere toscane – Tuscan castanets*, in the booklet of the CD of the same name, produced in 2007 by Semper SNC, Florence in their Pegasus series, in Italian and English – and in that language published in the Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society (USA), Vol. 9 No. 4, 2007.



Figure 2a

The Florentine School (Giovannangelo Camporeale, chair of Etruscology, University of Florence) in the 1980s preferred to interpret this detail as extended index and little fingers, as the thumb, middle and ring fingers are closed to the palm. Thus no “crotali.” Camporeale has called such a gesture apotropaic {to ward off evil - AK} (or as the vulgar ex-



Figure 2b

pression “to make the horns” {cuckold - AK}) – despite the fact that nowadays, in such a gesture of exorcism or contempt the thumb is held closed over the middle and ring fingers, while in the fresco the thumb is extended and even pointing backward (Figure 2 a-b, right column). Thus there are two possibilities: either the “horns” gesture has changed over the millennia as regards the position of the



Figure 3

thumb, or such a gesture as represented and interpreted by Camporeale had a different meaning in the Etruscan period.

To those who would base [their interpretation] solely on the length of the two fingers (“crotali” if one accepts the interpretation of Pallottino and Steingraber) it should be pointed out that in the female figure to the left in the same frieze the right hand (Figure 3) is depicted with fingers abnormally bent back and long, and the same pictorial rendering is found in various other contemporaneous wall paintings in the tombs of Tarquinia (for example: Tomb of the Augurs, Tomb of Hunting and Fishing, Tomb of Flogging, Cardarelli Tomb, etc.)

From the analysis of an enlargement of the painting one can deduce other details: a hand with open thumb, index (?) open, middle and ring closed to the palm and open little finger – or perhaps bent toward the palm but with a distended end joint. If that’s the case, the apparent nacchere would be one between the thumb and index (but then where’s the index?) and the other between ring finger

and little finger, the latter bent toward the thumb and sitting on the nacchera.

But holding the nacchere in this way, is it possible to play them? The answer is no, the nacchere are held diverging from each other more more than meeting each other and so the possibilities are only two: either the incorrect interpretation is that of Pallottino, Steingraber, Casini and all those who have wanted to see crotali or the Maremman gnacchere here (they’re not nacchere or crotali but something else, probably only the fingers of the dancer); or it’s an error by the fresco’s creator, who wanted to depict a dancer in the act of playing crotali, but did not know how they were played.

It is worth pointing out that the right hand (Figure 4, below) is not rendered like the left; one can see a bend in the wrist, and the sum of the digits, held and seen laterally, is rendered with one red contour line without any details. It would seem, however, that the dancer was not (also) holding nacchere in her right hand, if in fact she was using just one pair in the left hand.



Figure 4. Enlargement from Figure 1, Page 1.

But it’s interesting to reflect on the general placement of the images: both dancers {in Figure 1 - AK}* have one leg very high and flexed, the other half-extended but with a flexed foot, right leg against left; also, they are mirrored in their arm movements.

If we combine the placement of the [Figure 1] dancers with the use of nacchere, we think immediately of a

dance which those well educated in the history of art would define as “orgiastic” – but with little of the literal meaning of “orgy”.

The nacchere are used as accompaniment up until the *cadenza* in demisemi-quavers {32nd-notes –AK}; in other words up until an unrestrained {“free” – AK} dance. If we remember that in Etruria for centuries already the importation of ceramics decorated in Greek style, and the presence of Greek, Magn-Graecian† or culturally Greek painters, was very important (it’s sufficient to recall, aside from the painted tombs, Etrusco-Corinthian ceramics); and if we remember that in Magna Graecia itself and specifically in Apulia the Classic authors made reports of free dance which is the forerunner of the tarantella and the *pizzica tarantata* (at Taras, then Tarentum, then Taranto in the south of Italy, Puglia), we can, with a fair approximation, suppose that dance was also imported from the zones of Greek influence and assimilated by the Etruscans. It’s not by chance that in the female figure at left in the large frieze (Figure 3, Page 4) the forward movement with raised arms reminds one very closely of that movement which even to this day is executed during the tarantella dance.

In conclusion, we have two “official” interpretations (crotali vs. “horns”), and in-depth examination only yields doubt.

If fingers: either the gesture with the left hand is a making of the horns, deformed from the actual sign, or it has a different meaning which is unknown to us.

If nacchere: only in the left hand (is she left-handed?) – or also in the right?



Figure 5

An odd way – to us – of depicting these two elements, which doesn’t allow for sound production, and which leads to the conclusion that the artist is not familiar with this musical instrument, but has been charged with depicting it. In any case, we are not talking about a realistic representation.

In the opinion of the author, following close study of the fresco, this is not a depiction of crotali or nacchere, but of fingers; and it’s no accident that the little finger is rendered shorter than the index.

The slightly more recent (520-510 B.C.) Tomb of Hunting and Fishing is located in the Necropolis of the Monterozzi, loc. Calvario, Tarquinia, and was rediscovered in 1873. Very distinctive and atypical in its wall decorations, in the first chamber we see scenes of a “forest sacred to Apollo” with “little dancer figures”, now quite deteriorated; and “with grotesquely swollen features” who “are performing an animated ritual Dionysian dance” (Steingraber 1984).

Today the PARI-ETALI frescoes are much deteriorated, but fortunately we have available to us some 19th-century reconstructions.



Figure 8 - Tomb of Hunting and Fishing. Enlargement from Figure 7, Page 8.



Figure 6

Above is a recent photo of a detail showing a female dancer (Figure 5), its recent graphic reconstruction (Figure 6) and the 19th-century watercolors (Figure 7, Page 8) of the complete relief on the left side of the first chamber. At the bottom of the left column is an enlargement of the detail from those same watercolors (Figure 8).

From the photo of the painting in its present condition one can deduce that the dancer is playing nacchere with both hands; the graphic reconstruction supports the hypothesis at least for the right hand (raised) and possibly for the left, but the watercolors by Gregorio Mariani done the year of the rediscovery (1873), in the archives of the Germanic Archeological Institute of Rome, removes any doubt: they are hands (Figure 7, Page 8). The pictorial rendering of these hands is very similar to that used in the Tomb of the Lionesses with a strong eastern Greek influence.

The Tomb of the TRICLINIUM is perhaps the most famous Etruscan tomb; discovered in 1830, in the area of Calvario, necropolis of the Monterozzi, Tarquinia, and is dated to 470 B.C. The “strong imprint of Greek style with a prevalence of the Attican component”, induces one to hold the images to be “the work of a Greek painter or, if Etruscan, one who developed his style in a Greek environment” (Steingraber 1984).



Figure 9

In 1949, from this tomb which was in mediocre condition, the paintings were detached and are now in the Tarquinia Archeological Museum, while at the Gregorian Etruscan Museum (Vatican City) there are copies. On the right wall of the only chamber one can see “a female dancer with crotali in a light bright chiton {a kind of tunic - AK} with little red flowers and a short red jacket hemmed in blue” (Steingraber 1984 (Figure 9))

Following are details of the two hands that hold the nacchere. The fresco is greatly deteriorated. (Figure 10 and 11)

Fortunately in May-June 1832 the designer Carlo Ruspi was appointed by the Vatican Commission to make actual-size transparencies {traces - there was no slide photography in 1832 - AK} of this figure and of another in the same frieze.



Figure 10

In the transparency, the colors and proportions of the original are accurately registered. On the nacchera {singular - AK} on the right the annotation is almost illegible, but seems to read

“Rosa” relative to the color used in the translation into watercolor (Figure 12).

From this 1:1 copy (Figure 13) we can almost exactly reconstruct typology, dimensions and manner of use of the nacchere that the dancer has in her two hands.:

First of all, one notes a length of about



Figure 11

20 cm in the one held in the left hand, and slightly shorter in the other hand; the width at the gripped end is about 4 cm while at the free end it's about 7 cm (dimensions estimated based on the size of the female figure).

The player holds the two nacchere together, and the double line in red and black at their middles is simply a decoration, like the ones at the tips of the two pairs of nacchere.

The fingers are situated thus: thumb, index and middle bent inward, ring and little extended.

This supports the notion that the two components of the instrument can be bound to each other at the grip end and perhaps by a loop passing around the base of a finger (the middle?) just like in the modern nacchere of southern Italy.

That is, probably two holes in two



Figure 12

parallel points at the base, across which a cord holds the nacchere together, and possibly also binds them to the player's middle finger.

With the modes of use that go with this kind of grip, one can presume accompaniment to music that is not too fast, of the same type as the modern tarantella lenta {slow tarantella -AK} or “tammurriata”campana {tammurriata of Campania - AK} -one can presume this also from the fact that the knees are not held high



Figure 13

as in the images from the other, older tombs shown above; and this results in a more composed dance, like the already mentioned tammurriata.

It is indeed impossible to omit the connection {nexus - AK} between the Paestum area and Etruria, which already in ancient times had produced similar images (for example the diver in the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing, identical in iconography to the tomb of the same name in Paestum. Obviously in the



Figure 14 - Tomb of the Rooster

Tomb of the Triclinium the style is less archaic and decidedly more evolved.

The Tomb of the Rooster {or Cock - AK} is in the Necropolis of the Monterozzi, loc. Second Arches, at Tarquinia, and was discovered in 1961 during the excavations funded by the Lerici Foundation. It dates from between 400 B.C. and the first quarter of the fourth century, that is between 400 and 375 B.C., and thus between the Subarchaic period and the Classical period.

In the single chamber, frescoed on the inside, on the left wall there is a scene of a dance accompanied by a musician playing a double flute (Figure 14) “The dancer with crotali, clad in red-blue-white, with a florally decorated dress “ (Steingraber 1984) is firmly holding two pairs of nacchere in her hands. The style and mode {i.e. choreography - AK} of the dance exactly resembles the tarantella lenta or the tammurriata campana, even down to the precise positioning of the arms of the masked male dancer on the left, which to this day are alternately raised and lowered during the dance in tempo with the nacchere.

In contrast to the picture in the Tomb of the Triclinium, the nacchere are held with all the fingers engaged in the grip; this makes one suppose that at the less wide ends they must be attached to each other in a fairly tight way by way of a cord passing through them, but not so tight as to prevent them opening in the small arc necessary for their use (at least 20-30 degrees?)

In this way (Figure 15) it seems

useless to make the attachment string pass around a finger, and indeed the image shows a strong, secure grasp by all the fingers around the instrument. An evolution of the previous type? Or merely a different way of playing?

At the end of this brief excursus, I present a scene from a late Roman mosaic, originally not noted by me because it was found on the Internet (and used



Figure 15

as a logo by the National Association of Archaeologists (ANA) who, I hope, will forgive me this “theft”). Here the same dance scene accompanied by a double-flautist and by nacchere held by the female dancer (Figure 16).

But not only that: the ditibicine {flute player - AK} is using his right foot to



Figure 16

play another instrument that seems to be equipped with a bellows, while at right a man holds a famous popular instrument bade from a branch, or better yet a piece of cane split down the middle which when shaken rhythmically behaves like nacchere.

The ballerina holds the nacchere in a way different from that used in Etruria during the Classical period: the thumb is opposed to the fingers and the nacchere are securely controlled with a cord passing through two holes in each piece and then between thumb and middle finger. Practically a modern usage, even though in Campania today there is a firmly established practice of attaching the nacchere to the back of the hand, making them sound using an outward arm movement.

In conclusion, we can only conjecture as to the material these instruments were made of in the past: though we have reports for the crepitacula {an ancient instrument resembling castanets. -AK}, sonagli {rattles - AK}, crotali and several others, to date I have found no documents referring to the material that nacchere were made of in the Etruscan period. One may suppose that they were made of wood, but which [species]?

Probably the chosen substances have always been the same as that which experience tells us of, namely oak heartwood, wood from scopa-root {Erica scoparia, a Mediterranean species of heath, also used to make tobacco-pipe bowls - AK}, [and] boxwood for obtaining darker and more powerful sounds; while for the more

silvery and tinkly tones one turns most often to beech and pine. But as always it will be a matter of personal taste, and [the Etruscans are not certain to have] avoided the use of ribs of animals both domesticated (bovine, equine, etc.), and not. Unfortunately, in archaeological research so far, the presence of nacchere has never been certified – which is the reason for archaeologists’ total lack of knowledge regarding [nacchere] material.

Especially in important funerary contexts, with depictions of dances or banquets, it is not impossible for someone to find a pair of nacchere made of bone, recognize that they are cut ribs and take them to be remains of a funeral sacrifice.

Mario Galasso

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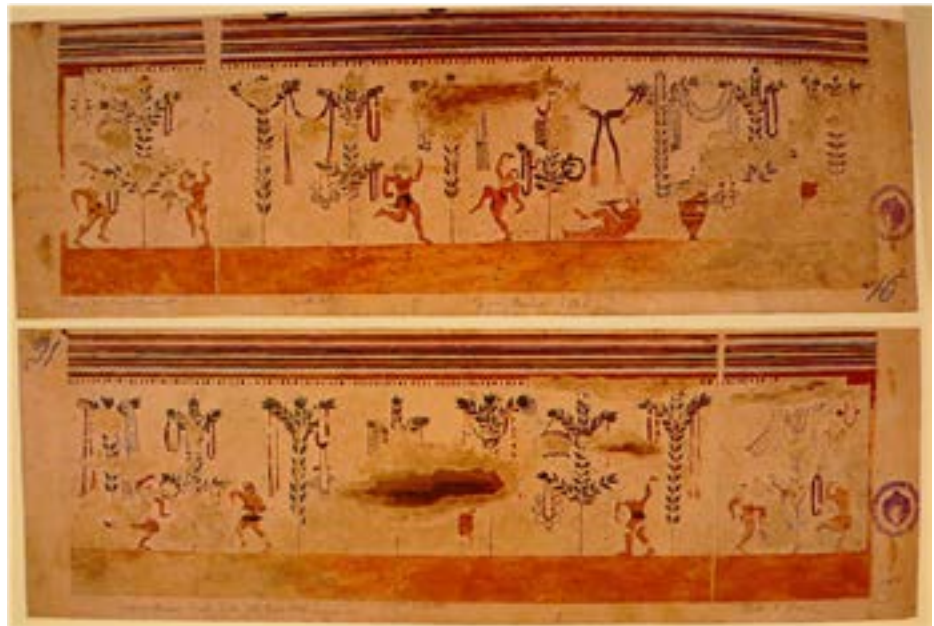


Figure 7. Tomb of Hunting and Fishing

<http://www.spinelli.it/eng/leper->

<http://www.spinelli.it/eng/leper->

Translation by Adam Klein, June 2014

Scopa info source: <http://www.trecani.it/vocabolario/scopa/>

* “i due ballerini” means that at least one dancer is male, so Mario can’t be

referring to the female dancers in Figures 1 and 3, but must mean the dancers with red and white skin in the same image, Figure 1. For that he would have written “le due ballerine”.

† magno-graecian from the region of Magna Graecia: see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna_Graecia

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested