Funus triumphale: funeral iconography and the parade of Roman leaders in the sixth book of the Aeneid

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Abstract(s):
Book six of Virgil's Aeneid concludes with the reunion scene of Anchises and Aeneas which leads to the revelation of the gens that Aeneas will father in Italy (... Romanam condere gentem, Aen. 1.33). In the scheme of a pompa, which includes elements of a pompa triumphalis, Anchises describes the victorious course of the Romans in history from their mythical origins down to the time of Augustus. However, the triumphant spirit of the parade is tempered by the greeting scene between Anchises and Aeneas that precedes the prophetic speech of Anchises, and the funus of Marcellus at the end of the procession of Roman leaders. These scenes connect the pageant with funeral iconography and the idea – Etruscan in origin – of the journey of the dead to the afterlife. Specifically, the posture of Anchises palmas utrasque tetendit (Aen. 6.685) and Aeneas' request da iungere dextram (Aen. 6.697) reminded Virgil's contemporary audience of funerary reliefs which depicted greeting postures between ancestor and deceased descendant. On the other hand, the vision of the young Marcellus (Aen. 6.878) as invincible imperator on foot or on his horse (880–881) called up representations of the general triumphator alone or as part of a pompa triumphalis or funebris on triumphant and sepulchral monuments of Rome. In the following pages I will suggest that the interweaving of triumphant and funerary imagery conjures up for the contemporary audience an image which is at once a pompa triumphalis of Rome and a procession of imagines maiorum that accompany the funus of the young Marcellus, the adopted son of Octavian. In other words, Virgil has concealed in the triumphant procession of Roman leaders the image of funus triumphale.

Keywords:
Vergil; Aeneid; iconography